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No Place for Mere Entertainment:  
Religion and Popular Culture in Atlanta (1865 to 1925)

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Doctor of Philosophy

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M.A., American University 2011  
B.A., Wake Forest University 2008

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An abstract of  
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## Abstract

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An existential and theological crisis immediately followed the American Civil War causing many southerners to lose their faith in institutions, including organized religion. As white working-class and middle-class southerners in the Georgia piedmont recovered from the war, burgeoning forms of Victorian popular culture offered pleasure, meaning-making, balance, and a cessation of economic, social, and cultural anxieties.

Drawing on data from contemporary journals, personal correspondence, newspapers, commissioned reports, and preserved ephemera, this dissertation uses three case studies analyze the history and formation of the relationship between popular culture and organized religion in New South Atlanta. The first case study explores how connections between religion, leisure time, and popular culture gave Atlanta's white women more power within some traditional Victorian gender constructs, while also adding additional constraints within others. The second case argues that when white men established the Atlanta Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), they used muscular Christianity as a recruitment tool; increasingly, however, the YMCA turned to secular sports and entertainment programs for the sheer enjoyment of its members. The final case study analyzes Atlanta's 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition. It argues that although the exposition brought more lowbrow amusements and new forms of Victorian popular culture to Atlanta, the event was largely accepted by the region's white, Protestant religious establishment.

This dissertation uses an interdisciplinary approach to open a new line of investigation in the historiography, one that combines methodologies from cultural history with theories from religious studies. By studying the spread of Victorianism into the post-Civil War South, scholars can better understand culture, religion, and culture as religion

Victorian popular culture in Atlanta established and celebrated a cultural versatility, one that could accommodate participation in both cultural productions and in the practices of institutional religion. This was especially true when the amusements allowed southerners to better understand or better engage with the new times in which they were living. More than mere entertainment or mere religion, Victorian popular culture allowed for a vibrant, complex, lived experience.

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**PART I**

**“Not Mere Entertainment, That’s My Church”**

**OR**

**An Overview of Religion and Popular Culture**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **“Far More Than Mere Entertainment”**

#### **Contemporary Religion and Popular Culture**

Since the days of ancient festivals that joined public frivolity with cultural practices and religious pageantry, there has been a connection between popular culture and religion. Their intertwined histories continue today.

In Atlanta, Georgia, United Church of Christ pastor Reverend Michael Piazza, began a 2015 sermon series at Virginia-Highland Church, entitled “Faith & Film,” by saying

And [this] really is the point [of studying theology and film], actually: to send people, including all of you, out in the world to do theology with television shows and movies and theater and concerts. Because God is still speaking to us, not just through scripture, but in lots of different kinds of ways. And so this “Faith & Film” series is to invite you to start listening to God in new ways.<sup>1</sup>

The “Faith & Film” sermon series is one of many at Virginia-Highland Church that uses two large television screens on either side of the pulpit to draw popular culture into worship services, including photos, television, Broadway musicals, movies, and art. Elsewhere, at Highland Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, Reverend Lauren Jones Mayfield preached a three

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Piazza, “Faith & Film: The Avengers,” YouTube video, 16:40, posted by Virginia-Highland Church, filmed May 31, 2015, posted June 1, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5XGkfJ-nKoY&authuser=0>.



month-long series entitled “Theology of the Body.” In an interview with *Salon*, Jones Mayfield explained why pop singer and Houston-native, Lizzo, was playing a central role in the sermon series: “[Lizzo’s] message of self-love, self-preservation, and self-empowerment is relevant in all the ways. Why should a church setting be exempt from the beauty of her wisdom and life experiences?”<sup>2</sup> The *Salon* article also cites how Ryan Coatney, a pastor at Grace Story Church in Nashville, Tennessee, has leveraged Lizzo in sermons to discuss “frameworks for meaning, self-worth, significance.”<sup>3</sup> Drawing on Lizzo for sermon themes perhaps makes sense given that one music reviewer deemed Lizzo’s 2016 single, “Good as Hell,” as “essential for healthy living.”<sup>4</sup>

These examples, all taken from Protestant churches in southern cities with predominantly white congregations, are not implying that Christian theology is being replaced by worshipping popular culture. However, they demonstrate how some Americans, even religious, church-going ones, have found answers, powerful teaching opportunities, and even euthymia, in popular culture. Additionally, even though the American South is coined “the Bible Belt” and usually considered to be more religious than other areas of the United States, as these examples from Atlanta, Louisville, and Nashville, suggest, the intermixing of religion and popular culture is even a fixture in southern life.

The interconnectedness of religion and popular culture in the South can be seen in more contemporary examples than just during sermons. In 2016, Texas native and country singer, Maren Morris, broke into the *Billboard* Hot 100 music chart with a song entitled, “My Church.” Morris, who also wrote the song, sings an homage to the classic rockabilly music from her car

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<sup>2</sup> Ashlie D. Stevens, “Churches are preaching the Gospel of Lizzo now,” *Salon*, September 29, 2019, <https://www.salon.com/2019/09/27/the-gospel-of-lizzo-how-churches-are-preaching-the-good-as-hell-word/>.

<sup>3</sup> Stevens, “Churches are preaching the Gospel of Lizzo now.”

<sup>4</sup> Syra Aburto, “Let Lizzo Rub Your Soul Down With Her ‘Coconut Oil’ EP,” *Nylon Magazine*, October 31, 2016, <https://nylon.com/articles/lizzo-coconut-oil-ep>.

radio, a sacred force that gives her solace: “When this wonderful world gets heavy / And I need to find my escape / I just keep the wheels rolling, radio scrolling / ‘Til my sins wash away.... I find my soul revival / Singing every single verse / Yeah I guess that’s my church.”<sup>5</sup> Morris’s song lyrics weave a story about how she no longer finds comfort in a traditional church worship service. Her life has changed, her soul has changed, and for whatever reason, she is seeking deliverance elsewhere. Morris’s “holy redemption” comes when she “put[s] this car in drive / Roll the windows down and turn up the dial.”<sup>6</sup> She finds truth and the sacred in classic country music and the meditations of the open road.

Beyond movies and popular music, the blurred lines between religion and popular culture can also be seen in southern sports. Also in 2016, sports channel ESPN-U took its weekly *Campus Connection Gameday* series to the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia. Reporter Taylor Bisciotti spoke with students and fans across the campus about the upcoming football season, and their experiences getting ready for the day day’s big game. Gameday in Athens represents “tradition,” a middle-aged man describes to the reporter. “It felt like coming home this morning,” he says. Later, a young woman later passionately tells Bisciotti, “This is what I live for.”<sup>7</sup>

A profound sense of collective effervescence, joy, self-affirmation, and even modern relevance are being found in popular culture. Worshipers in the “Faith & Film” series are being taught to find religion in everyday life. Lizzo’s listeners are loving themselves and understanding their own power. Morris feels her soul is revived when she listens to the radio while driving. Football enthusiasts are finding a sense of community, belonging, and happiness from game day.

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<sup>5</sup> Maren Morris, “My Church,” Maren Morris - EP, Columbia Nashville, 2016, mp3.

<sup>6</sup> Morris, “My Church.”

<sup>7</sup> “ESPNU Campus Connection Gameday in Athens,” YouTube video, 2:14, posted by “ESPNU Campus Connection,” September 15, 2015, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-w\\_FYVZO50](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N-w_FYVZO50).

These are contemporary examples of a larger religious phenomenon woven into the fabric of American religious history: the creation of the sacred out of popular culture. Fans of football or popular music, or even the athletes and musicians themselves, may ascribe to a traditional religious theology, but they are also communicating sentiments about extraordinary encounters. They have found personal fulfillment and order through profound, cultural forces.

Even in the American South, the area from which these examples were both created and proliferated, there is evidence of meaning-making, self-fulfillment, and euthymia being derived from cultural elements. Despite preconceived notions about religiosity in the South and its close ties with Protestantism and evangelicalism, when the world is “heavy” or filled with anxiety and doubt, what many southerners are turning to is not limited to the structure, rules, and theology of institutional Christianity. These examples also demonstrate that most mainline and evangelical Protestant denominations are not rejecting popular culture, but rather drawing it in to worship and using these cultural productions as a conduit to teach religion and moral lessons.

The sanctification of the popular and the operation of a robust form of religious life and experience outside of traditional religion in the American South are as unmistakable as they are historical. Similar examples to these contemporary ones are evident throughout the historical record, even in southern history. Despite this, historians have not typically examined the ways in which religion and popular culture were interacting in the South during the long nineteenth century. This dissertation intends to address this gap in the historiography of religion in the American South.

I argue, southern religion and popular culture were not antithetical, but rather represented a versatility in cultural life: Victorians, even in the South, could enjoy popular culture and still be faithful, active participants in institutional religion. In fact, most white, Protestant institutions in the

South did not disavow all popular culture or forbid parishioners from partaking in the experience, just like ministers today are drawing popular culture into sermons or perhaps even attending a Saturday football game themselves. White Protestants in Georgia during the long nineteenth century also pulled new cultural productions into the faith, and in turn, brought their religious values with them as they participated in popular culture. I contend that more than merely entertainment, Victorian popular culture became so significant for making meaning in a changing historical moment that it carved out a space once dominated only by traditional religion.

### **Victorian Religion and Popular Culture**

Morris, Lizzo, and Georgia football, are all contemporary examples of the interconnected nature of religion and popular culture, but the historical record also provides plenty of examples of how the relationship between these two categories played out for Victorians in the American South. As such, in order to understand religion and popular culture during the Victorian era South, it is important to first understand some historical context.

“The years 1876, 1877, and 1878, were not only the years marking political transition and the beginning of a new era in the political life of the people of Georgia, but they also marked a period of economic change,” Walter McElreath wrote in his 1941 unpublished autobiography, aptly titled *Me and My Folks*. “My childhood was spent in a primitive country and in a period of common poverty and the beginning of my youth was coincident with the period of political and economic transition after the war,” he wrote.<sup>8</sup> McElreath’s life epitomized the first generation of southerners born in the New South: he grew up in the small town of Lost Mountain, Georgia,

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<sup>8</sup> Walter McElreath, *Me and My Folks* (Rough Draft, 1941), 16-17. MSS 154, Box 2, Folder 5, Walter McElreath Papers, James G. Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, GA.

about thirty miles northwest of Atlanta. Born just after the end of the Civil War, McElreath oscillated in and out of school, depending on if his family needed him to work. He eventually became a lawyer and moved to Atlanta, hoping to make a name for himself in the growing southern city.<sup>9</sup> His autobiography describes the time period from Reconstruction through the beginning of the Great Depression, an era that marked a dramatic social, cultural, political, and economic transformation in the American South.

By the time McElreath was born in 1867, the Civil War was over. Slavery was dead, but southerners struggled to untangle just what a post-emancipation South would be. Without a slave-based economy and social system, the region's landscape and commercial outputs showed its vulnerabilities. Meanwhile, the union began to refuse and heal.

The years from Reconstruction through the start of the roaring 1920s represented a neoteric age for the recently reunified United States. New technologies allowed goods and ideas to spread faster than in any time prior, reaching even rural and previously isolated communities. Urban modernization that had been interrupted by the war resumed by 1866 with a vibrant spirit of rejuvenation, reconstruction, and renewal. The so-called *Belle Époque* was in full swing on Continental Europe by 1871, which also influenced American tastes. The materialistic symbols of the late Victorian era seemed to articulate the values and cultural characteristics of life in the United States.

Now that the Civil War was over, Victorian fashions, innovations, and mindsets that had proliferated for years in northern metropolises reached southward. The South soon began shifting from the “primitive country” described by McElreath to something more modern, complete with all the trappings of late Victorian era's leisure time activities, amusements, and commercialism.

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<sup>9</sup> The Atlanta History Center has written a more complete biography of McElreath, which is available in the finding aid to the Walter McElreath Papers: <http://ahc.galileo.usg.edu/ahc/view?docId=ead/ahc.MSS154-ead.xml>.

Some Marxist scholars have argued that the culture of amusements that accompanied this capitalist moment was intended to lull the working classes into a false consciousness. Based on data from the historical record, however, I believe there was more at work here.<sup>10</sup>

Regional and national publications chronicled the spread of Victorianism below the Mason-Dixon Line, and how newly-introduced cultural productions captivated the South.<sup>11</sup> From the Piedmont, to the Wiregrass Gulf South, the Appalachian foothills to the Black Belt, periodicals and advertisements described new events and amusements in the same, curious way: “not mere entertainment but ...” Then each article ended the phrase by noting how that form of entertainment served some greater purpose for those willing to engage it.

“More Than Mere Entertainment: When you buy a New Edison – You Also Get Mood Music which helps you control your mental and physical well-being,” claimed an advertisement in Columbia, Kentucky’s *The Adair County News*.<sup>12</sup> “This [motion] picture is far more than mere entertainment. It is an education and an inspiration,” reported the *Morgan City Daily Review* describing a new film at the Arcade Theatre in Morgan City, Louisiana.<sup>13</sup> In a 1920 review of a local theater performance in the small southwest Georgia town of Bainbridge, the diction used by *The Post-Search Light* newspaper gives further evidence that something larger was at work than simple enjoyment:

There is a great craving at the present time on the part of the public, according to the best informed showmen, for something more than mere entertainment. Of course, diversion is always the paramount thing whenever amusement is

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<sup>10</sup> Kathy Peiss gives an excellent overview of various historical interpretations of nineteenth century leisure culture in Chapter 1 of her book: *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in the Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

<sup>11</sup> By “cultural productions,” I mean those creative or commercial endeavors that grew out of the fabric of mainstream culture, including, but not limited to, theater, fashion, food and drink, sports and games, music, literature, games, and other amusements.

<sup>12</sup> “More Than Mere Entertainment,” *Adair County News* (Columbia, KY), September 27, 1921.

<sup>13</sup> “‘Prussian Cur’ Pleases Large Arcade Audience,” *Morgan City Daily Review* (Morgan City, LA), January 23, 1919.

concerned, but at the same time, people want something big and compelling—something that will drive home a few truths without preaching a sermon...<sup>14</sup>

Films and music were not simple amusements; they had far greater effects. The use of the phrase “not mere entertainment” was exceedingly frequent in published records, narrating a definition of a southern Victorianism in which a cultural production could be entertaining while also being so much more.

Americans were looking to leisure time enjoyments for something more than amusement and temporary distraction, even in the South. Not mere entertainment, during the postbellum era of extraordinary change and growing anxieties, white southerners were finding and making meaning through popular cultural productions. I argue that more than entertainment, southerners’ increasing participation in popular culture, the reliance on popular culture to unite a community or create a new community altogether, and the joy and euthymia discovered within popular culture reveals that these cultural productions were tapping into the sort of sentimentality and sensibility once reserved only for religious practice. Southerners in the postbellum period were finding a sacred, soul-filling quality within popular culture, feelings once reserved only for institutional religious practices

As the South began to industrialize and change, I assert that participation in national and regional forms of Victorian popular culture and in religious practices were not mutually exclusive. In many cases, the spiritual niche newly occupied by popular culture, especially in the case of working- and middle-class white southerners, was met with the blessing, or at least the ambivalence, of southern clergymen and religious leaders. For example, Methodist Episcopal Bishop and Georgia native Warren A. Candler often preached on the dangers of sermons and

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<sup>14</sup> “Mary Pickford’s Greatest Play,” *Bainbridge Post-Search Light* (Bainbridge, GA), July 1, 1920. Note: The publication is still in circulation but is now known as the *The Bainbridge Post Searchlight*.

worship services that were “mere entertainment rather than edification.”<sup>15</sup> “Life at all times is a very serious thing,” he once told followers. “It is not a mere pleasure jaunt; it is a serious pilgrimage...If the pulpit is to be of any use it must be serious in its ministration. The pulpit is no place for a mere entertainment.”<sup>16</sup> Evidence from this and other sermons suggests that Bishop Candler had misgivings about the profane being pulled into a sacred space, but he rarely spoke against Christians participating in popular culture when those productions stayed in their own sphere outside the church.

Rather than rebuke Victorianism’s cultural influences, white southern Protestants pulled new cultural productions into their daily lives, creating a balance between entertainment and religious practice. Atlanta, Georgia, a city fashioning itself as the gateway to the New South, provides the perfect example for a study on the intersection of religion, culture, regional identity, and urbanization. Although pre-1925 Atlanta was a small compared to northeastern cities like New York or Boston, Atlanta envisioned itself as a new kind of southern city, one built on manufacturing, trade, and commercialism. It was the perfect incubator for Victorian modernity.

During this period of massive social, economic, and cultural change, Georgians in and around the growing city of Atlanta turned to popular culture to understand, interpret, and even escape, the challenges of the world around them. In fact, evidence suggests that Victorian popular culture became so significant for making meaning at the start of a new era that it filled a void once overwhelmingly dominated by religion. Women were encouraged to incorporate their divine roles as mothers and moral guardians into leisure time activities like clubs and social activism. Men turned to sports and men’s only clubs to reassert their masculinity. And members of both sexes celebrated a moment that encouraged a balance between the escapism of popular

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<sup>15</sup> Warren Akin Candler, *Current Comments on Timely Topics* (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1926), 229.

<sup>16</sup> As quoted in Elam F. Dempsey, *Wit and Wisdom of Warren Akin Candler* (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1922), 64.



culture on Saturday night, and the spirituality of Christian worship on Sunday morning. As I will demonstrate, religion and popular culture in post-Civil War Atlanta was deeply entangled; not mere entertainment and not mere religion, but a new, uniquely Victorian system that allowed for both.

## **Conclusion**

I aim to understand the relationship between popular culture and organized religion in the post-Civil War South, focusing specifically on Atlanta, Georgia. During a period of significant change, white, working- and middle-class southerners engaged in popular culture to make sense of the world around them, to escape from their troubles, and adapt to their new conditions. I argue that as these men and women struggled with the rapid pace of economic, social, and cultural change after the Civil War, burgeoning forms of popular culture offered pleasure, meaning-making, and a cessation of anxieties in a way that traditional institutional Protestantism did not. Furthermore, although popular culture took on a larger role in the daily lives of southerners during the late nineteenth century, I contend that in many cases, it was met with the blessing or ambivalence of southern religious leaders; for the most part, clergymen and religious leaders in mainline Protestant and evangelical religious communities did not attempt to halt or censure the majority of mainstream popular culture. Finally, I will demonstrate that, like showing movies and contemporary music are drawn into sermons today, Victorian leisure time pursuits and popular culture were often pulled into sacred spaces, creating fluidity, duality, and versatility in once dichotomous domains.

## CHAPTER 1

### **“Familiar Frameworks of Meaning [Are] Evaporating”**

#### **Overview**

In 1982, Jonathan Z. Smith suggested that nothing is inherently sacred or profane. “These are not substantive categories,” he wrote in *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*, but rather “situational or relational categories, mobile boundaries which shift according to the map being employed. There is nothing that is sacred in itself, only things sacred in religion.”<sup>17</sup> In his examples of Kafka and Plutarch, Smith goes to great lengths to argue against strict constructions of terms, “distinctions, of ‘office’” or otherwise that are just “maps and labels not substances.”<sup>18</sup> I also understand vocabulary and constructions with Smith-like flexibility. As scholarship evolves, as schools of thought ebb and flow, and even as the ideas of the individual scholar change over time, language, terminology, and theories must be redefined and rearticulated. Words are like Smith’s vessels, they must be “held pen to the possibility of significance, to be

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<sup>17</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 55.

<sup>18</sup> Smith, *Imagining Religion*, 56.

seen as agents of meaning as well as utility.”<sup>19</sup> Taking Smith’s comments to mind, this chapter establishes my understanding of several key terms and ideas within the fields of history and religious studies. I will establish my definitions, recount how I can to form those ideas, and discuss by what methods they will be employed in my research.

### **Historical Terminology**

In order to adequately examine the period from 1865 through 1925, it is important to define a few overlapping eras and establish a vocabulary for analyzing them.

The “long nineteenth century,” a term largely attributed to historian Eric Hobsbawm, is considered the period from the French Revolution in 1789 to cessation of hostilities following World War I. The theory behind the use of this term is to acknowledge that time is relative when studying history since major events are not necessarily constrained by passing days. Instead, the concept of a “long century” requires a constructed framework and a more nuanced periodization. (In the case of Hobsbawm, a historian of European politics, he defined the century by shifts in European power balances.) Using Hobsbawm’s long nineteenth century structure works for my own work because in the United States, industrialization and cultural productions were also not confined to particular dates; there was no sudden drop off or change on January 1, 1900. I am focusing my attention on the latter half of the “long” century, beginning with the end of the American Civil War in 1865. In my conception, the long nineteenth century lasted through roughly the end of World War I, although some social and cultural trends were drawn out into the mid-1920s.

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<sup>19</sup> Smith, *Imagining Religion*, 56.

Similarly, I use the term “Victorian era” with some flexibility. The Victorian era is typically considered the years of the reign of Queen Victoria of the United Kingdom from 1837 to 1901. When discussing some aspects of the culture, however, scholars generally include the years of successive Edwardian period (the reign of Queen Victoria’s son, Edward,) which lasted from 1901 until the beginning of World War I in 1914.<sup>20</sup> In the United States, the long nineteenth century (the time) and its Victorianism (social and cultural constructions) ushered in a civil war, two industrial revolutions, a boom in innovation, immigration, and change, and a turn toward modernity. It also saw the birth of social and cultural reforms that affected gender, politics, race, style, religion, and the arts.

In terms of the history of the American South, the Victorian era includes portions of what scholars traditionally call the Old South, the Civil War era, and the New South. While the Civil War caused immense social, economic, and political shifts, especially in the South, other areas of American life, for example fashion, music, and theater, did not see drastic change during the war years. Despite this, decades of scholarship have used war to bifurcate the study of American history. In fact, survey courses often cover United States history until 1865 in one course, and after 1865 in a separate course. Culture evolves slowly and studying it often requires creative periodization. By analyzing an overarching “Victorian era,” scholars can create concentric epochs in American history that break down the traditional historical structure of antebellum, Civil War, and postbellum, into which scholars have traditionally tried to fit the nineteenth century South.

The term “New South” is also in need of some contextualizing. Henry Grady coined the term “New South” to refer to the region’s spaces and people that (in his mind) were rapidly

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<sup>20</sup> For a deeper analysis of the Victorian and Edwardian date constructions, see for example: Thomas J. Schlereth, *Victorian America: Transformations in Everyday Life, 1876-1915* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), xii.

modernizing following the Civil War. Some historians date the start of the New South to 1866 when, still under Reconstruction, northern investment moved into southern spaces, rebuilding was underway, and the presence of federal troops allowed for a time of greater racial equality. Other historians place the New South as starting at the end of Reconstruction, kicked off by the end of federal occupation in 1877 when the region was left to its own devices. I take the stance of the former. By the end of Reconstruction, many of the South's urban spaces like Atlanta had already undergone significant transformations. After all, the southern railroad began its expansion through Atlanta in 1867. The Fulton Bag and Cotton Mills and Grady's *The Atlanta Constitution* newspaper began their earliest operations in 1868, and the Kimball House hotel opened its first iteration in 1870. By 1871, Atlanta had streetcars, a (white) public education system, and two colleges for African Americans. With so much modernization happening between 1866 and 1877, I do not believe Reconstruction era work should be disassociated from the rest of the New South's changes; so for my purposes, the New South began at the war's end.

There is also disagreement among historians as to what constituted the end of the New South, or if there was an end at all. Since my model of the New South is rooted in industrialization and post-Civil War regional modernization, I consider the New South to have ended in the 1920s. In urban spaces nationwide, the early 1920s shifted from Victorianism to Prohibition era flapper culture and abundance, while mitigating a reactionary rise in neo-traditionalism. The 1920s was also the first time that the population of urban-dwelling southerners outnumbered the population of rural southerners, a statistic that goes hand-in-hand with the fact that decade saw southern agricultural life forever changed by a combination of the boll weevil invasion and the beginning of the Great Depression.

The 1920s marked a change in the New South and in the history of American religion. Religion scholar Robert Handy has used the phrase “the second disestablishment” to describe the period after World War I in which white Protestantism, the “cultural glue” once connected American cultural life, was no longer holding.<sup>21</sup> The national rise of Christian fundamentalism increased the outward politicization of Protestant doctrine. Victorian gender constructs, many of which I discuss in this dissertation, were reframed to fit a new, more literalist Christian worldview. Fundamentalism took an especially strong hold in the white, rural South, and realtered many of the cultural and political shifts that had occurred during the second half of the Victorian era.<sup>22</sup> By 1925, the year of the Scopes Monkey Trial, the public nature of southern religion meant that a good portion of white, Protestant southern culture had changed once again.

### **Religion, the South, and Popular Culture in the Historiography**

Religion and cultural change often acted differently in the North than in the South during the same period. Writing about the transition to modernity in the nineteenth century New York, Jackson Lears’ 1981 book, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920*, is helpful for contextualizing the post-war South within national ideological and intellectual shifts at the fin de siècle. Using the writings of New England’s intellectual elite as his primary sources, Lears argues that secularization in northeastern liberal Protestant denominations caused Victorians to sense that “familiar frameworks of meaning were

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Handy’s quotations are pulled from a variety of Handy’s published works and included in Tony Ladd and James Mathisen, *Muscular Christianity: Evangelical Protestants and the Development of American Sport* (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 88-89.

<sup>22</sup> For more on the rise of fundamentalism, see for example: George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); or Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *Fundamentalism and Gender: 1875 to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

evaporating; they felt doomed to spiritual homelessness.”<sup>23</sup> This work is valuable and informed my thinking about religion in times of social change. However, I found myself reading texts like Lears’ or John L. Modern’s 2011 book *Secularism in Antebellum America*, and searching for voices from outside the northeast. This is a major reason why the historiography needs a study of southern religion during the long nineteenth century. The effects of losing the Civil War and the rise of evangelical and charismatic faith traditions added additional socio-cultural frameworks southern culture in ways that did not affect the northeast. If anything, the South’s extra scaffolding eroded the ennui and ambiguity that plagued the northern bourgeoisie and replaced it with anxiety and restraint.

In the field of southern studies, the work of historians James C. Cobb, C. Vann Woodward, Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Edward Ayers, Sam Hill, and Charles Reagan Wilson, have provided core foundations for my understanding what W. J. Cash called the “mind of the South.” But as with Lears and Modern, while reading books like Wyatt-Brown’s *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1880s* (2001), I wondered what average southerners thought, not just the male elites. The contributions of these scholars and others to the historiography are undeniable, but their work has made me reconsider the type of history I wanted to research and share. If the rise of the fields of social and cultural history was defined by an interest in so-called “bottom up” history, then so, too, must be the methodology for similar exercises in the field of religious studies.

Several historical texts are a guide for studying the entanglements of “bottom-up” social history with popular culture. Lawrence Levine’s 1988 book, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*, uses entertainment culture to examine how some

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<sup>23</sup> Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), xiv.

leisure pursuits became intertwined with notions of class, race, and taste. As people of all backgrounds intermixed on the streets of New York City at the turn of the twentieth century, the designations “highbrow” and “lowbrow” became ways in which socio-cultural gatekeepers could impose “moral order” on those deemed unworthy.<sup>24</sup> Despite being designated as “low,” cheap leisure and commercial culture offered a refuge to many workers, argues Roy Rosenzweig in *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870–1919*, published in 1985. Rosenzweig uses Worcester, Massachusetts, as his case study. He asserts the medium-sized industrial city “provides a building block for more general theorizing” about working-class life in the United States.<sup>25</sup> I believe the same can be said about studying industrializing cities in the New South. *Eight Hours for What We Will* uses sociological theories to discuss recreation as a means of self-development and self-control for working-class men.<sup>26</sup> That class and cultural distinctiveness can analyzed through the study of leisure time is a major scholarly intervention for both Levine and Rosenzweig.

Kathy Peiss uses a similar methodology as Rosenzweig and Levine in order to examine gender, class, and the “reorientation of American culture” and leisure time entertainment in nineteenth century New York City.<sup>27</sup> Her 1986 book, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in the Turn-of-the-Century New York*, gives an excellent overview of various historical interpretations of nineteenth century leisure culture and makes a case for including gender in these analyses. Peiss defines nineteenth century urban culturalization process as “the intensive commercialization of leisure, which defined recreation as a commodity, created new audiences,

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<sup>24</sup> Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 200.

<sup>25</sup> Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870 – 1919* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1985,) 4.

<sup>26</sup> Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will*, 143.

<sup>27</sup> Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in the Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 6.



and profited by the selling of heterosocial culture.”<sup>28</sup> Understanding this process is important to the study of history not only because of the events itself, but also because the late nineteenth century marked the start of American consumerism and mass entertainment culture.

I use a similar methodology, but to a different end. Peiss proposes, “Leisure activities may affirm the cultural patters embedded in other institutions, but they may also offer an arena for the articulation of different values and behaviors.”<sup>29</sup> I argue the same was true in the New South; amusements and leisure culture provided something that organized faith could not: a celebration of pleasure and fulfillment of the self, just as Peiss, Rosenzweig, and Levine, argue was the case in the North during the same period. In a time defined by rapid economic, social, and cultural change, organized religion added additional regulations and limitation, while amusements provided a break from the strict rules of work, family, and faith.

Like Rosenzweig and Peiss, Ted Ownby’s work has dug into issues around gender and cultural during a moment of intense change. Covering a similar period and region as myself, Ownby’s *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (1990), examines how leisure time recreations, not religion, served to quell the cultural anxieties of rural, white, southern men, in the decades following the Civil War. Ownby asserts that working-class, southern masculine culture often operated outside of the church and but was reined in by a church doctrine that was often enforced by women or educated clergymen. Recreation is a useful category of analysis, Ownby writes, because it involves those features of life that “individuals wish to replicate for enjoyment and those they wish to escape, if only briefly.”<sup>30</sup> Further, Ownby argues that his historical subjects were so affected by the additional

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<sup>28</sup> Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 187.

<sup>29</sup> Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 4

<sup>30</sup> Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 17.

constraints and restrictions placed on them by the rise of nineteenth century evangelical culture, that they turned to recreation for an escape. Rural southern men “accepted evangelical beliefs but never felt comfortable with the accompanying moral code.”<sup>31</sup> Ownby’s work aims to demonstrate this argument by comparing men’s participation in “manly” recreational activities in contrast to the view of these activities by the church.<sup>32</sup>

The search for “the good life” in leisure amusements and commercial culture led women to tie individualism, self-determined pleasure, and “self-fulfillment to consumerism,” writes Peiss.<sup>33</sup> In my own work, a refuge of self-fulfillment would prove exceedingly important as the South’s economic structure rearranged its focus from rural agricultural villages to mill towns and urban spaces, while the region’s post-slavery world altered the identity of white working-class southerners. Leisure time provided a distraction and an opportunity for joy, pleasure, and meaning-making in ways that did not have a traditional theological component.

Although many scholarly studies have addressed spectacles and amusements in major urban centers like Chicago and New York, engagement in burgeoning forms of popular cultural life was not limited to northern metropolises. Despite this fact, southern Victorianism and the importance of early twentieth century entertainment culture has largely been ignored by scholars of the American South. Studies abound about the South and twentieth century football, stock car racing, country music, and the like, but most of these analyses begin after World War II. Scholars often write off large portions of nineteenth century southern culture as too religious to move beyond. Very few scholars take seriously southern popular culture during the latter part of the long nineteenth century.

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<sup>31</sup> Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 17.

<sup>32</sup> Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 17.

<sup>33</sup> Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 188.

Historian Neil Harris has given one potential theory for this historiographical hole. In his book, *Humbug: The Art of P. T. Barnum* (1973), Harris argues that even the great showman P. T. Barnum was initially reluctant to travel south.<sup>34</sup> Despite the popularity of his lowbrow enterprises in major cities like New York and Philadelphia, Barnum limited his American travels to audiences in the North and Midwest. According to Harris, this was because Barnum believed the South was too religious and insular to appreciate his particular brand of entertainment. Harris elaborates that the process of observing and reviewing myths of the unknown would not have gone over well in a region with rigidly hierarchical structures grounded in religion and race.

As evidence for this claim, Harris cites an essay by Baltimore lawyer and politician Severn Wallis that was written in 1847 but not published until after Wallis's death in 1896. The essay lambasted both Barnum and Harriet Beecher Stowe for creating a culture of questioning the status quo and giving in to immoral entertainment.<sup>35</sup> Wallis's writing carries an air of authority, but he was by no means a dominant voice in the American South. For starters, by the time of the essay's publishing in the 1890s, Victorianism had taken hold in the South. Even Barnum's cadre of exhibits and circus folk had long since made a name for themselves as a popular attraction below the Mason-Dixon Line. Secondly, Wallis was from Baltimore which was not considered a "New South" city. There is also no evidence that the essay spread throughout the states of the former Confederacy. In contrast to Harris's assertion, deeper research into southern culture suggests that in fact, the majority of southerners were not too religious to appreciate the lowbrow entertainment Barnum offered. As I will demonstrate in Part

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<sup>34</sup> Neil Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P. T. Barnum*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 84.

<sup>35</sup> Severn T. Wallis, *Writings of Severn Teackle Wallis* (Baltimore: John Murphy and Company, 1896), 84. Digitized by Harvard University, 2009, <https://archive.org/details/writingssevernt02wallgoog>.

III, for the most part, the majority of the New South was not so Puritanistic that religion interfered with amusements to fill leisure time.

Still, white southern faith structures did undergo a transformation during the nineteenth century. Christine Leigh Heyrman's book, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (1997), is a rich analysis of how, when, where, and why evangelical Protestantism took hold in the American South. Her text begins around the 1740s when "evangelicals started actively proselytizing in the South," and continues through the mid-nineteenth century "when [evangelicals] may have won the attention, if not the allegiance, of a majority of southern whites."<sup>36</sup> Heyrman describes that the Anglican Church's retreat back to coastal towns after the Revolutionary War created a vacuum in the southern backcountry into which evangelical traditions could enter. Circuit riders, unconstrained by educational requirements for ordination or the formalities of Anglican services, could more easily venture westward to spread the Gospel. These more evangelical sects proliferated, Heyrman argues, because they appealed to the structural frameworks appearing most often in rural, white southern families.

Scott Stephan also focuses on religion and the white family structure his 2011 book, *Redeeming the Southern Family: Evangelical Women and Domestic Devotion in the Antebellum South*. Stephan places women at the center of religious life, asserting that "antebellum southern evangelism oriented itself around the family and the ways in which women took control over many of the most vital domestic rituals."<sup>37</sup> Religion gave southern women some authority in their family lives, albeit far from owning a voice equal to that of her husband, because "although evangelical clergymen increasingly circumscribed the formal authority of women in the

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<sup>36</sup> Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Knopf Press, 1997), 6.

<sup>37</sup> Scott Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family: Evangelical Women and Domestic Devotion in the Antebellum South*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 7.

meetinghouse, they increasingly acknowledged women's devotional leadership within the home."<sup>38</sup> This was especially true during the early period of instability within southern evangelicalism. I will address these sorts of nuanced gender constructs and their relationships to religion and popular culture in Chapters Five and Six.

One reason that new forms of entertainment and popular culture were able to reach New South cities was that new technological improvements allowed for an even faster and easier dissemination of goods and ideas. Thanks to technology, cultural productions from northern cities and even Europe were now unencumbered by distance or war; they flowed easily into new places. Following the Civil War, changes in work, an increase in expendable income for many workers, and the growth of urban centers, all elements previously seen in major northern U.S. cities, allowed more white southerners to participate in popular culture than ever before. Some wealthy southerners with the time and financial ability to travel or buy certain goods had always been exposed to northern ideas and cultural productions. For most southerners, however, the post-war period was the first time they could attend a circus or see a theatrical performance.

The reach of Victorian commercialism and technology is analyzed in a 2010 article by Richard Callahan, Chad Seales, and Kathryn Lofton. In "Allegories of Progress: Industrial Religion in the United States," Callahan et al. devised the term "industrial religion" to describe how allegories of modernity were accepted in the New South. This industrial religion concept proposes "the American religious study of commodity" based on evidence that "religious idiom and religious ritual were requisite to visions of industrial effort" in Appalachian coal mining towns during the long nineteenth century.<sup>39</sup> The authors go on to discuss how soap (Proctor &

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<sup>38</sup> Stephan, *Redeeming the Southern Family*, 58.

<sup>39</sup> Richard J. Callahan Jr., Kathryn Lofton and Chad E. Seales, "Allegories of Progress: Industrial Religion in the United States," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 78, Is. 1 (2010): 7.

Gamble soap in particular) became “requisite for American perfection” through the product’s careful marketing.<sup>40</sup> These “allegories of progress” describe how technological change and commercialism in the New South, even with their northern roots, were not rejected but rather adopted and reworked to fit into evolving southern culture.

The “industrial religion” theory suggests that for southerners, participation in commercialism and new consumer culture was not inconsistent with southern doctrine. I take this idea one step further. I contend that when popular culture operated within the bounds of what was considered white, middle-class, southern respectability, it was not incompatible with organized religion. I agree with Callahan et al.’s assertion that by studying some product of the culture (consumer goods in their case, popular cultural productions in mine), scholars can understand what a group of people held sacred and how that expression of religiosity fit with other organized religious practices.

Changes in technology, especially print technology and later radio, also created a boundaryless national culture that affected southern identity and its religious constructions. Many recent scholars of the New South, like K. Stephen Prince, view the “postwar reconstruction of southern identity as a national affair.”<sup>41</sup> As Prince has described, “The meaning of the South was reconfigured in conversation between sections,” making the region’s distinctiveness less timeless and more situational based on “historically specific political and cultural negotiations.”<sup>42</sup> Prince’s 2014 book, *Songs of the South: Race and the Reconstruction of Southern Identity, 1865-1915*, is a detailed history of popular print culture. He analyzes post-Civil War newspapers, journal articles, travel guides, and the writings of “storytellers.” The latter

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<sup>40</sup> Callahan et al., “Allegories of Progress,” 20.

<sup>41</sup> K. Stephen Prince, *Songs of the South: Race and the Reconstruction of Southern Identity, 1865-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 7.

<sup>42</sup> Prince, *Stories of the South*, 7.

category includes “politicians, reformers, clergy, and novelists...minstrel performers, pamphleteers, and real estate hucksters. They are northern and southern, black and white, male and female,” but all used the written word to shape the identity of the New South.<sup>43</sup> Prince shares my theory that period cultural productions are useful tools of analysis for understanding larger societal trends. Additionally, I agree with Prince that historians cannot fully understand such trends nor the nation’s past without “appreciating the shifting place of the South in the nation’s popular culture.”<sup>44</sup>

Steve Goodson also uses cultural productions in his 2002 book, *Highbrows, Hillbillies, & Hellfire: Public Entertainment in Atlanta, 1880-1930*. Goodson uses theories from Levine’s *Highbrow/Lowbrow* to argue that public entertainment in Atlanta was the result of the city’s aspiration to become a major metropolis, not just among other southern cities, but as a national destination of society and culture. Goodson is careful to incorporate religion as just one component of southern cultural life, not the sole, dominant feature that other historians describe. He covers a time and subject similar to my own, and I found his work helpful in understanding public entertainment in Atlanta. However, the majority of Goodson’s sources are newspaper articles, which give a one-sided analysis since the major newspapers around greater Atlanta were owned and controlled by New South boosters, the same wealthy, educated, white men who were heavily invested in the success of the city’s entertainment industry. By contrast, I have tried to draw out more nuanced and varied voices as my evidence, hoping to add the lives of more average Atlantans to the historiography.

Two works take a more traditional historiographical approach to analyzing New South-era Atlanta: Don Doyle’s *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston,*

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<sup>43</sup> Prince, *Songs of the South*, 3.

<sup>44</sup> Prince, *Songs of the South*, 1.

*Mobile, 1860–1910* (1990) and Franklin M. Garrett’s *Atlanta and Its Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events* (1954). Doyle’s book uses mostly quantitative data and the writings of southern political elites to argue that a new generation of southern cities boomed after the Civil War because of new economic structures and southern urban leadership. Religion plays very little role in his work, but his overall research is helpful to understanding Atlanta’s expansion and the motivations behind the city’s new generation of civic leaders. Garrett’s massive multi-volume tome, *Atlanta and Its Environs*, reads more like an encyclopedia than a monograph, but no other work comes close to describing Atlanta’s history in finite detail. Its size and scope (Volume II alone is nearly 1,100 pages), coupled with the fact that Garrett was the official historian of the city of Atlanta for several decades, means that the work is a detailed guide to stories worth exploring more deeply in my own research. However, the works of other scholars, like Elizabeth Hayes Turner and Theda Perdue, are stronger exemplars of how scholars should incorporate diverse source materials.

Elizabeth Hayes Turner’s 2009 book, *Women and Gender in the New South, 1865-1945*, uses Atlanta as its case study to examine the legacy of race, class, gender, and labor relations in the New South. Her work successfully draws out traditionally underrepresented voices, namely black working-class women, by relying on diaries and biographies (published and unpublished), institutional records from labor unions, schools, and women’s aid organizations, as well as by reexamining the sources of other historians for previously underreported narratives. I have tried to follow Turner’s reexamination methodology, often engaging similar sources as other historians but with a new lens toward religion and religious practices.

Similarly, Theda Perdue’s 2011 book, *Race and the Atlanta Cotton States Exposition of 1895*, aims to bring new light to underrepresented voices in Atlanta’s public spaces. Perdue



presents a detailed analysis of the role of African Americans at the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta. She carefully chronicles the racial, political, and commercial interests intertwined at this major event in turn-of-the-century Atlanta. Most importantly, Perdue utilizes a valuable methodology that combines written, visual, and material evidence to study what she calls “subalterns at the Cotton States Exposition,” meaning those attendees “largely without power” who left few direct records of their experiences.<sup>45</sup>

African Americans in Atlanta have a tremendously rich history, especially during the period from 1865 to 1925. Reconstruction-era Atlanta presented African Americans with a new way of life. As the region tried to move on from slavery, black and white Atlantans continued living in contested spaces, not officially segregated but surely not integrated. Despite new freedoms and universal (male) suffrage, the rise of Black Codes and eventually formalized Jim Crow laws created a drastically different system for black participation in popular culture than for white participation. Limitations were placed on black culture out of fear, misunderstanding, and sheer racism. In some instances, African Americans were not permitted to attend certain events or were heavily restricted when they could attend. In other instances, black popular culture was co-opted, and reappropriated or misappropriated by white promoters. When used by white southerners, black culture was permitted, but black culture used by African Americans themselves was often impugned. Additionally, black civic and religious leaders often warned African Americans against attending certain events, not necessarily out of a theological or moralistic view, but out of concern over safety or the general appearance of impropriety (the latter of which W.E.B. DuBois would later consider a form of “accommodationism”).

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<sup>45</sup> Theda Perdue, *Race and the Atlanta Cotton States Exposition of 1895* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 6. Perdue describes that her methodology largely derives from that of Robert W. Rydell. In his book, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (1984), Rydell explores the relationship between American world's fairs, race, and empire building.

The realities of these racial contestations present major challenges for scholars studying popular culture and entertainment. They complicate my study because it is difficult to determine the popularity and acceptance of various popular culture productions within the black community. For example, how can attendance at a theatrical performance by white Atlantans be compared to that of black Atlantans if the theater was segregated? Perhaps members of the African American community would have wanted to attend but were not permitted to buy a ticket. This creates methodological challenges and an inability to use an “apples-to-apples” comparison with sources like box-office ticket sales. Thus, the racial elements of religion and popular culture are more complicated and nuanced than I have space to include in this study. While race relations are an undercurrent in my work, when I use the term “southerners” or “the South,” I am generally referring to white southerners, typically those of the working- and middle-class, unless otherwise noted.

Despite my own omissions, there are a myriad of excellent works in history and religious studies concerning race and religion in the New South. Paul Harvey’s *Freedom’s Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era* (2005), is a thorough overview of this topic. Harvey focuses on language and racial activism within southern Christian denominations that advocated both for and against racial equality. Similarly, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham’s *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (1993), and Daniel W. Stowell’s *Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South, 1863–1877* (1998), examine how black and white southerners (respectively), tied together faith, education, economics, and politics, in the shifting landscape of the New South. Beyond religious studies, there are many works, like Perdue’s *Race and the Atlanta Cotton States Exposition of 1895*, that address racial politics or even popular

culture and race in the New South. Other scholars like Tera W. Hunter, Glenda Gilmore, and Edward Blum, have dug into the political and social history of African Americans in the New South, while Higginbotham, Anthea Butler, and Laurie F. Maffly-Kipp, have described African American religious life during the long nineteenth century.

### **Material Culture in the Historiography**

Studying institutions and movements is at the center of understanding religion and culture. However, I also contend that there is an evidentiary need to examine materiality and how people constructed the physical worlds around them. Victorians were heavy consumers. To understand them is to understand how and what they consumed.

Two texts demonstrate studies on the impact of Victorian material culture on American society: Thomas J. Schlereth's *Victorian America: Transformations in Everyday Life, 1876–1915* (1991) provides a background in social hierarchies, technological innovations, immigration, and the Gilded Age. Kenneth L. Ames's *Death in the Dining Room and Other Tales of Victorian Culture* (1992), is a largely pictorial-based work that fills in gaps concerning gender relations in the home and their connections to Victorian material culture. What is particularly helpful about using these two books in tandem is that Schlereth is in conversation with Ames. Schlereth notes his agreement with Ames's claim that because Victorians were fascinated with the material objects around them, "by studying the things that surrounded [Victorians] we can not only better comprehend their physical environment but come closer to their psychological environment as well."<sup>46</sup> I want to add to this concept by using the objects, images, and memories that surrounded southern Victorians to better comprehend their spiritual environment.

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<sup>46</sup> Schlereth, *Victorian America*, xv.

Despite similar arguments, Schlereth and Ames offer different methodological approaches. Schlereth's history is social. He observes several areas of Victorian social life including moving, working, consuming, communicating, and dying. He occasionally employs photographs to validate his points, and uses discussions of the Victorian era's three major World's Fair exhibitions (1876, 1893, and 1915) as a basis to ground the reader about national goings-on that would affect American social life during the period. Ames, who focuses more on material culture than social history, argues "that goods were critical to the workings of Victorian culture and that any attempt to understand that culture must take those goods into account."<sup>47</sup> Thus, to get an overview of consumer tendencies and social factors affecting the American marketplace, Schlereth is more effective; for an explanation concerning how these goods played a role in the family life once they were home from the department store, Ames's work is more appropriate. Both of these texts, however, locate their studies on the Northeast and Midwest.

Deborah Cohen pushes forward the conversation of Victorian material culture by intersecting it with larger social changes in the long nineteenth century in her 2006 book, *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions*. She begins her analysis of British Victorian material culture by suggesting that evangelical revivalism of the mid-1700s through early-1800s placed an emphasis on plain, pious homes in an attempt to negate the omnipresence of sin. By the 1830s, however, beauty was seen as a holy. This made consumerism appropriate because material goods could possess moral qualities and demonstrate the creations of the Lord through depictions of naturalism and Biblical lessons.<sup>48</sup> This consumeristic theory soon led to the belief

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<sup>47</sup> Kenneth L. Ames, *Death in the Dining Room and Other Tales of Victorian Culture*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 5.

<sup>48</sup> Deborah Cohen, *Household Gods: The British and Their Possessions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 23.

that wealth and material objects were not things to be hidden or given away but were the rewards of a productive life.<sup>49</sup> Objects were meant to be collected and displayed.

Cohen theorizes that changes in British home décor were made to satisfy religious and social movements sweeping through Great Britain from the 1830s to the London Blitz. She builds on the work of Colleen McDannell, whose *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (1995), was published a decade prior. Cohen's work is unique to the historiography of Victorianism because she connects "lived experiences" with material objects, rather than simply the ideals material goods represented or the decorative appearance of the goods themselves.<sup>50</sup> Although her focus is Great Britain, Cohen lays substantial foundational work for my understanding of how Victorians came to tie together popular material goods with religion. These theories are especially incorporated in Chapter Five of this study.

The 1880s increased customer demands on retailers. As Cohen argues, objects and décor took on an artistic and even spiritual quality. Throughout Britain, representing one's personality and individualism through home décor became a major driving force of consumerism and popular culture. So, too, was the case in the United States. McDannell describes how the purchase and display of everything from ornate family Bibles to cleaning products functioned as a social and class signifier. She writes, "By the early decades of the twentieth century, advertising increasingly sought to promote all material culture as numinous and inspiring...even a new Hoover vacuum cleaner could, according to one advertisement, elicit a 'worshipful expression and posture' from stylishly dressed ladies."<sup>51</sup> The expression of religion through consumerism began to fade in favor of the religiosity of consumerism or the ethics of a particular

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<sup>49</sup> Cohen, *Household Gods*, 13.

<sup>50</sup> Cohen, *Household Gods*, xvi.

<sup>51</sup> Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 101.

aesthetic. Just as the cultural productions I described in my Introduction were not mere entertainment, McDannell asserts that material goods were not mere objects.

McDannell's work is unique because it stands at the junction of religion and the history of visual and material culture. Perhaps recognizing the need to more thoroughly dig into this field, the last twenty years has seen many new studies of religion and material objects. Religion scholars David Morgan, S. Brent Plate, and Crispin Paine, among others, have done significant work to open new lines of investigation in this area. Additionally, analyses of religion and early mass media are found in works like Tona J. Hangen's *Radio, Religion, & Popular Culture in America* (2002) and Lerone A. Martin's *Preaching on Wax: The Phonograph and the Shaping of Modern African American Religion* (2014). These provide a methodology and language for studying transmission, audience, and intent, in religious cultural productions.

Also during the last two decades, religious studies scholarship has begun to more thoroughly examine popular culture. Several works even connect southern popular culture to religion. Jeffrey Scholes and David Chidester have both published articles that describe Atlanta-based Coca-Cola as a religion. A myriad of books about southern football and/as religion have been published by everyone from Mercer University Press (who has an entire series devoted to sports and/as religion) to the evangelically-affiliated Zondervan.<sup>52</sup> From West African rice balls to barbecue, scholars have mostly recently examined food and eating as a religion.<sup>53</sup> Other texts on religion and popular culture by Gary Laderman, Eric Michael Mazur and Kate McCarthy, Kathryn Lofton, and Juan M. Floyd-Thomas, Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, and Mark G. Toulouse,

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<sup>52</sup> See for example, Chad Gibbs, *God and Football: Faith and Fanaticism in the SEC* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010).

<sup>53</sup> See for example, Gillian Feeley-Harnik, "Religion and Food: An Anthropological Perspective," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 63, no. 3 (Autumn, 1995), 565-582.

have also gained the attention of the scholarly community, enriching and contesting our understanding of religion in recent United States history.

By studying participation in popular culture and the memories collected by this participation, I also want to bring a robust view of lived religion and conceptions of the sacred to the historiography of the American South.

### **Religious Studies Terminology and Theory**

Besides a vocabulary for the historical examination of popular culture and southern religion, it is equally as important to outline the terminology and theories this dissertation will pursue within the field of religious studies. I consider my approach to be interdisciplinary, so in that vein, my terms come from anthropological and sociological studies of religion, in addition to traditional theorists in religious studies.

For example, Thomas Tweed defines “religion” in cultural terms in his 2006 book, *Crossings and Dwellings: A Theory of Religion*. Tweed writes, “Religions are confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and superhuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries.”<sup>54</sup> Or to put it another way, writes Gary Laderman, “ostensibly secular aspects of social life, like sports, music, science, violence, or sexuality, can have meaningful religious dimensions in practice and experience that have nothing to do with God or religious traditions.”<sup>55</sup> Laderman’s examples can best be summarized by Tweed’s phrase “organic-cultural flows,” or the term I have chosen to employ, cultural productions. Informed by these scholars, my understanding of the term “the sacred” is used to

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<sup>54</sup> Thomas A. Tweed, *Crossings and Dwellings: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 54.

<sup>55</sup> Gary Laderman, *Sacred Matters: Celebrity Worship, Sexual Ecstasies, The Living Dead, And Other Signs of Religious Life in the United States* (New York: The New Press, 2009), xvi.

describe the meaning-making and self-fulfillment derived from cultural productions or cultural life, which may be inside or outside of theology and institutional religion.

To discover what Laderman's "secular aspects of social life" have actually taken on sacred meaning, I have relied on Raymond Williams' sociological method of analyzing the expressions of everyday, ordinary experiences that can be seen through the visual and material memory scape. For Williams, culture is an amalgam of questions "directly raised by the great historical changes which the changes in industry, democracy, and class, in their own way, represent, and to which the changes in art are a closely related response."<sup>56</sup> In his book, *Culture and Society: 1780–1950* (1958), Williams aims to demonstrate the mode of studying the popular in culture, the construction of language and literature especially, as separated from "certain and moral and intellectual activities" and process by which these actions gain wide human appeal.<sup>57</sup> By employing this process, I can define the power of cultural elements as they gain wide appeal and become "popular." If, as Clifford Geertz has posited, "all culture is essentially a system of semiotics," with religion itself being "a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men," then by studying systems of popular cultural symbols, scholars can understand what cultural elements took on a sacred meaning.<sup>58</sup> For historian Charles Reagan Wilson, these symbols are rooted in Confederate memory.

Almost four decades ago, Wilson published *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865–1920*, which used regional semiotics to bring to light a "civil religion that emerged in the postbellum South" as an "authentic religious expression."<sup>59</sup> "Southern civil religion,"

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<sup>56</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: 1780-1950* (1958; repr.; New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), xvi. Citations refer to the 1983 edition.

<sup>57</sup> Williams, *Culture and Society*, xviii.

<sup>58</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5, 9.

<sup>59</sup> Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009), 10.



rooted in the stories, memory, and material objects of the New South's Lost Cause, "offered confused and suffering Southerners [sic] a sense of meaning, an identity in a precarious but distinct culture," Wilson writes.<sup>60</sup> Chad E. Seales recently took Wilson's theory one step further. In his 2013 book, *The Secular Spectacle: Performing Religion in a Southern Town*, Seales uses community history and lived religion to demonstrate how popular culture combined with southern civil religion to create a new form of "ritual performances of southern secularism" that has lasted from the post-Civil War era to the present.<sup>61</sup>

Under these definitional constraints, it is difficult to use either "public religion" or "civil religion" to describe the process of religious culturalization that began to permeate the American landscape following the Civil War. This is in part because institutions, political or religious, were not singularly driving the cultural shift. Instead, something new was arising: a consumptive, entertainment, and production-based set of creations were remaking the American socio-cultural landscape. A cultural identity in the reunified United States was transcending the former Mason-Dixon line. Like the work of Wilson and Seales, I aim to draw out the interconnected nature of popular culture, regional identity, and religion in the post-Civil War South.

Moving beyond just juxtaposing the categories of sacred and profane, however, I again turn to Jonathan Z. Smith's assertion that sacred and profane are not "substantive" or fixed categories, but instead are fluid and relational.<sup>62</sup> Drawing on this, I assert that "sacred" organized religion and "profane" popular culture operated in largely separate spheres; however, as popular amusements became more pervasive and even sacred during the Victorian era, these silos became less concrete. One of the challenges with relying on a strict ordering system, is that it

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<sup>60</sup> Wilson, *Baptized in Blood*, 13.

<sup>61</sup> Chad E. Seales, *The Secular Spectacle: Performing Religion in a Southern Town* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 2.

<sup>62</sup> Smith, *Imagining Religion*, 55.

makes “no pretense of revealing anything about its subject matter,” while its “major justification is the relative ease” with which information may be recalled, argues Smith.<sup>63</sup> In light of this, popular culture makes sense as a category of analysis for religion because the frameworks are constantly defining and redefining each other. After all, contends Juan M. Floyd-Thomas, Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, and Mark G. Toulouse in *Altars Where We Worship: The Religious Significance of Popular Culture* (2016), humans can be connected to traditional religious communities while also spending “countless hours a week devoted to ‘what is good for me’ through fervent attention to music or sports or big business.”<sup>64</sup> Studying popular culture, how Americans “meet their deepest needs through politics, economics, sports, or sex,” allows scholars to evaluate the things a society has in common that transcend identity or structures.<sup>65</sup> “An appropriate religious response is concerned with not only what you believe but what you do and how you do it,” Floyd-Thomas, et al. note. Their study is contemporary, but the balancing of multiple religious identities was also true in the nineteenth century. As I demonstrate in Chapter Six, the Atlanta YMCA incorporated sports and entertainment acts into their programmatic offerings not just as a recruitment tool, but simply for the enjoyment of its members. Similarly, even many practicing Christians chose not to attend a Dwight Moody revival during the Cotton States Exposition because they preferred to see some other form of entertainment scheduled at the same time as Moddy’s revival. These southerners were considering “what is good for me” to “meet their deepest needs,” regardless of the theological considerations of institutional religion.

From football to music to food, the sacred and profane are not necessarily dichotomous, especially for faith practitioners. “Many Americans live in multiple religious worlds at once,”

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<sup>63</sup> Smith, *Imagining Religion*, 2.

<sup>64</sup> Juan M. Floyd-Thomas, Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, and Mark G. Toulouse, *Altars Where We Worship: The Religious Significance of Popular Culture* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2016), 186.

<sup>65</sup> Floyd-Thomas et. al, *Altars Where We Worship*, 186.

Floyd-Thomas, et al. argue, voicing a theme that will often come up in this dissertation.<sup>66</sup>

Additionally, according to Ted Ownby, the sacred and secular must be examined in context of one another in order to “illuminate some powerful tensions within a culture.”<sup>67</sup> Although the home and church were considered more sacred spaces in the nineteenth century, and the public realm was considered more of a profane space, these categories were not concrete; their delineations are blurred. The public or private spheres are not then, constructions operating in their own right. Rather, they are the collective aggregates of the individuals who make them up. The spaces may be separate, but the individuals who operate in them are not. As I demonstrate in Chapter Five, this was especially true for white women in Victorian era Atlanta.

Religion and popular culture have a related past. Religion is a cultural construction that operates in a “dialectical relationship with other cultural forms” and as such, “is necessarily entangled with secular culture,” Terry Ray Clark contends.<sup>68</sup> Through this entanglement, the boundaries of sacred and profane become unfixed; to analyze them in diametric opposition would be to create a false dichotomy.<sup>69</sup> Thus, religion and popular culture must be studied and understood together. To build on Clark’s point, I contend that since the contemporary world does not place these categories in separate spheres, scholars must assume the same regarding the past. As the New South began to industrialize and culturally expand, participation in national and regional forms of popular culture and in traditional religious practices were not mutually exclusive. Just as southerners today can find “home,” “tradition,” and even a life force in

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<sup>66</sup> Floyd-Thomas et. al, *Altars Where We Worship*, 186.

<sup>67</sup> Ownby, *Subduing Satan*, 2.

<sup>68</sup> Terry Ray Clark, “Introduction: What is religion? What is popular culture? How are they related?” in *Understanding Religion and Popular Culture*, eds. Terry Ray Clark and Dan W. Clanton, Jr. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 8.

<sup>69</sup> This is a common thread throughout Clarks’ analysis. See for example, pages 8-9.

attending a Saturday college football game, and still choose to attend a Sunday worship service, nineteenth century southerners could do the same.

Individuals move fluidly through spaces, carrying with them burdens (positive or negative) of thoughts, feelings, emotions, and trials. People are then affected by their surroundings and come to affect these spaces as well. While I do not believe this goes so far as Alexis de Tocqueville's theory that virulent individualism could undermine the American experiment in democracy, I do suggest that transformations in spatial structure affect an individual's ethos, which in turn affects the cultural and social professions of the spatial structure. And this process is bilateral and reciprocal. It would follow then that if sacred and profane spaces are not as categorically separate as was once theorized, then this can give rise to the redefining of the spaces by the individual(s) operating in them. Public spaces can become sacred, and even the home or church can become profane. Cultural productions in the public sphere can be sacred even as religious services in churches become mundane, uninspiring, or outright unappealing. The popular can fill that void. The popular can inform the sacred.

Scholarly pushback on the creation of false dichotomies can be seen in the writings of several scholars. In the endnotes to his discussion of civil religion, Robert Bellah contests Western Civilization's conception of religion that denotes "a single type of collectivity of which an individual can be a member of one and only one at a time."<sup>70</sup> Bellah celebrates Émile Durkheim's proposition that "every group has a religious dimension."<sup>71</sup> Similarly, Durkheim's "collective ideal" theory allows me to connect the personal to the collective. In his quintessential 1912 book, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Durkheim argues that

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<sup>70</sup> Originally published as: Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Dædalus*, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences 96, no. 1 (Winter 1967), 1-21. Now available online through Bellah's personal website at: [http://www.robertbellah.com/articles\\_5.htm](http://www.robertbellah.com/articles_5.htm). Accessed January 13, 2016.

<sup>71</sup> Bellah, "Civil Religion in America."

society is religion. Although most of life is spent focusing on one's individual "personal business," on feast days or during religious events, "these preoccupations are necessarily eclipsed," he writes.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, the "first effect" of religious ceremonies "is to bring individuals together...By this very fact, the contents of their consciousness is changed."<sup>73</sup> In addition to bringing societies together, religious events center group members on "their common beliefs, their common traditions, the memory of their great ancestors, the collective ideal of which they are the incarnation; in a word, upon social things."<sup>74</sup> According to Durkheim, by participating in this "collective renovation," two things occur: first, society becomes "the foreground of every consciousness; it dominates and directs all conduct."<sup>75</sup> Second, the "individual soul is regenerated...consequently it feels itself stronger, more fully master of itself."<sup>76</sup> If the collective celebration of a society foregrounds a participant's consciousness and actions and thus results in a regenerated, stronger, more fulfilled soul, then this collective effervescence becomes a religious movement in and of itself.

Chad Seales's work on religion in Siler City, North Carolina, examines such tensions by studying the blurred lines between performativity, lived religion, popular culture, and secularization. To do this, he uses Durkheim's collective effervesce and totem theories: "Southern secularism is a greasy pig," Seales flatly states.<sup>77</sup> That is, worldly items are on the receiving end of religious devotion. The totem performs as a stand-in for a being (a god or a kangaroo or a pond) whose essence has taken on a sacred quality, bestowed on it by the group. This process sets apart a totem from the profane nature of the everyday world. Because the

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<sup>72</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, trans. Joseph Ward Swain (London: Hollen Street Press Ltd., 1915), 348.

<sup>73</sup> Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 348-349.

<sup>74</sup> Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 349.

<sup>75</sup> Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 349.

<sup>76</sup> Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 349.

<sup>77</sup> Seales, *The Secular Spectacle*, 1.

society must impart significance on the totem and perform the setting apart, the totem is ultimately representative of the clan as a whole. Whether through totemism or collective effervescence, for Durkheim, all religion is communal. As such, the group can bestow sacrality, therein making the popular religious.

## **Methodology**

I have chosen to focus my research largely on the city of Atlanta, Georgia, and the surrounding area in the Piedmont region of North Georgia. Atlanta embodied, and continues to embody, the New South in all ways: from industry, to trade, to racial tension, to balancing its northern aspirations with its southern roots. Before the Civil War, Atlanta was a small railroad junction. Like other southern towns, it was dwarfed in size and prestige by port cities along the coasts and major rivers, like Charleston or Memphis. Atlanta grew somewhat during the war when it played a large role in the Confederate Army's supply chain network, but was then destroyed during the Union Army's Savannah Campaign (also known as Sherman's March to the Sea). Like the mythical creature from whom it acquired its nickname, the Phoenix City, Atlanta rose from Sherman's ashes to become stronger and larger than its antebellum precedent.

Atlanta was the result of northern investment and southern ingenuity. Business leaders and civic-minded boosters played an outsized role in attracting new capital to Atlanta. It benefited from the rebuilding and expansion of the railroad after the Civil War, and the need to more quickly and efficiently transport commodities throughout the region. The redistribution of southern agricultural products, especially cotton, drove additional investment in the South's Atlanta-based transportation network. The city also proliferated, in part, because of it was the headquarters for the media empire of Henry Grady, perhaps one of the most raucous and vocal

supporters of southern industrialization, and because the city was able to take relatively local raw materials, namely cotton, corn, coal, and minerals, refine them, and then ship out the finished goods to other growing areas.

With all of this industrialization, southerners flocked to Atlanta looking for economic opportunity. Between 1860 and 1870, during which time Atlanta became Georgia's capitol, the city's white population grew from 7,600 to almost 12,000.<sup>78</sup> The African American population in Atlanta also increased from about 1,900 to over 10,000 during the same ten-year period. The city, self-conscious and intentional in its growth, really boomed after 1880. By 1910, Atlanta's total population reached 154,839. New Orleans, the South's most populated city both before and after the Civil War, grew 101% between 1860 and 1910. By contrast, Atlanta grew 1,521% over the same fifty-year period.<sup>79</sup> "Almost everyone" in Atlanta, "shared the status of newcomer," describes historian Tera W. Hunter.<sup>80</sup>

Of course, even with all of this growth and investment, Atlanta remained a fraction of the size of New York, Boston, or Chicago. Nevertheless, however, Atlanta aspired to be a peer to the northern urban megaliths. Atlanta welcomed the influx of popular culture, highbrow and lowbrow, that would prove it should not only be considered a peer to such other cities, but also should serve as the cultural and economic gateway to the rest of the South. Atlanta always had one eye on the North even as it tightly held on to its traditionally southern roots.

In this way, Atlanta and the area around it presents a fascinating study for understanding socio-cultural change, urbanization, and religion, during the long nineteenth century. As I will

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<sup>78</sup> Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 23.

<sup>79</sup> Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 15.

<sup>80</sup> Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom*, 23.

demonstrate, life significantly changed after the Civil War for many white southerners, especially those in the working- or middle- classes who made up Atlanta's newcomers. During a moment of drastic social economic and political change, popular culture offered escapism and meaning-making in a way that even traditional institutional religion did not. For white southerners experiencing cultural anxiety as a result of this rapid change, I contend that popular culture offered euthymia, a return to psycho-emotional homeostasis and a divergence from fear.

“Euthymia” is a widely used term in modern psychology to describe a neutral status. It is a “mood of well-being and tranquility” typically in reference to the “state in patients with a bipolar disorder that is neither manic nor depressive but in between.”<sup>81</sup> However, I aim to use this term in a broader way that speaks more to a specific socio-cultural circumstance. Before the latter part of the twentieth century, however, “euthymia” was a philosophical term. According to Democritus, “euthymia” included not simply “mental tranquility” but also “valuing the present moment and whatever is sufficient for a tranquil life, rather than relying on an uncertain future.”<sup>82</sup> Other terms in philosophy, like “well-being,” are tied up with more physical definitions or promote moral perfectionism. “Happiness” implies a net positive rather than simply evenness or homeostasis. And “pleasure” can boarder on hedonism in both philosophy and psychology. I prefer to use “euthymia” to define the life element searched for by nineteenth century southerners because, whether in the psychological or the philosophical sense, euthymia has an inherent medium-ness quality to it. The philosopher Seneca the Younger translated “euthymia” as *tranquillitas animi*, a “state of internal calm and contentment,” which he also

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<sup>81</sup> American Psychological Association, “Euthymia,” *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, last modified 2018, <https://dictionary.apa.org/euthymia>.

<sup>82</sup> Sergio Starkstein, *A Conceptual and Therapeutic Analysis of Fear* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 39.



linked to psychological well-being.<sup>83</sup> I argue that these southerners turned to popular culture, not necessarily organized religion, as a way to make meaning out of life and return to *tranquillitas animi*, their euthymia, a contentment and peace with their new world.

In order to examine how religion and popular culture interacted for Atlantans, I have paid attention events and local happenings themselves, as well as the writings of those creating, engaging in, or commenting on the cultural production. The loudest voices, however, are not always those with the most common ideas. Therefore, it is important to look beyond just what a few literate elites, usually well-educated white men, may have published in local newspapers or tracts. In order to understand the permeation of cultural productions, I have examined the private correspondence and reflections of average citizens in and around Atlanta. These include letters, diaries, autobiographies, oral histories, and family papers. I also have paid careful attention to the images and artifacts that were contemporaneously collected by Atlantans participating in Victorian cultural activities. Memories shared with loved ones or emblazoned in ephemeral artifacts preserved in hat boxes or scrapbooks often speak more about ideological pervasiveness than does the published voices of a few newspaper men.

I have also relied on material objects, especially ephemera, to understand what values and events Victorian southerners held dear. Victorians derived meaning from objects and were insatiable collectors. Collected objects represented important events, memories, or feelings. Even small scraps or shards of once whole artifacts were described as having “sentiment and force.”<sup>84</sup>

In her 2013 study of public history and religion, Teresa Barnett argues that some objects,

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<sup>83</sup> Giovanni A. Fava and Per Bech, “The Concept of Euthymia,” *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics* 85, no. 1 (2016): 1-2.

<sup>84</sup> Ariel Sabar, “When Collectors Cut Off Pieces of the Star-Spangled Banner As Keepsakes,” *Smithsonian Magazine* Online, last modified June 2014, <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/when-collectors-cut-off-pieces-star-spangled-banner-keepsakes-180951436/>.

especially items connected with national symbols or figures can be “psychologized—rendered capable both of reflecting back the viewer’s inner psychological reality and of being deployed in complex negations that reworked selfhood and the past.”<sup>85</sup> Once this happens, she contends, historical objects become relics.

Barnett diverges from Clifford Geertz in this theory. Geertz describes symbols as “extrinsic sources of information,” external to the “social and psychological reality” of the self.<sup>86</sup> However, I am inclined to agree with Barnett. Relics, both visual and material, occupy a performative space. They are part of a collective past and also “implicitly circumscribe the circle of those who could lay claim to that past.”<sup>87</sup> “Sentimental tokens” can bind together their collectors by a shared experience, memory, or feeling.<sup>88</sup> In this way, they can become totems.

In her study of Christian material culture, *Material Christianity*, Colleen McDannell describes the value of studying all forms of material culture, even the mundane, pedestrian, or tacky. She does not intend to evaluate Christian material culture “by a set of ethical and theological standards,” she writes.<sup>89</sup> And therefore, she is not “drawn to criticize Christians who use Lourdes water or who wear ‘Praise the Lord’ T-shirts. I reject, however, the opinions of those who find nothing significant in these religious gestures.”<sup>90</sup> For Victorians, collection was not inconsequential. The process of collecting, displaying, or donating objects, allowed for self-reflection and self-fulfillment. Decades after participating in Victorian amusements, many southerners would donate their “relics” to local museums or historical associations. White southerners, especially those active in Lost Cause organizations, were aware of the destruction

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<sup>85</sup> Teresa Barnett, *Sacred Relics: Pieces of the Past in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 140.

<sup>86</sup> Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 92-93.

<sup>87</sup> Barnett, *Sacred Relics*, 75.

<sup>88</sup> Barnett, *Sacred Relics*, 8.

<sup>89</sup> McDannell, *Material Christianity*, 13.

<sup>90</sup> McDannell, *Material Christianity*, 13.

done to antebellum objects and records. In some cases, they intentionally sought to establish a new historical record for the South. They wanted their mementos and experiences to live on, preserved by history and enjoyed the public. Some even wrote to curators asking for additional context or information about an event so the memory could be properly recorded in family documents. I would even go so far as to argue that the act of collecting and interpreting one's experiences was itself a sacred act for Victorians. This is evident in archives' large nineteenth century "ephemera collections."

Most historical archives have "ephemera collections," a term that seems almost oxymoronic because these are objects that are typically thrown away. The University of Oxford's History of Science Museum provides perhaps the best definition of archival "ephemera," describing the category as small printed objects and "literature more lowly even than a pamphlet."<sup>91</sup> They are, as their name describes, ephemeral, temporary. But the museum is quick to point out that artifacts that make up ephemera collections are "printed by-products of historical activity."<sup>92</sup> Objects can come to have a larger meaning when they are collected and preserved in such a deliberate way, whether because they are part of a cultural phenomenon, a significant experience, or simply an illustration of daily life. When deliberate preservation happens, artifacts can be contextualized as relics, evidence of the sacred in everyday cultural experiences. By tracking these symbols and their collection and display, scholars can understand the conception and formation of what the collector held sacred.

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<sup>91</sup> "Printed ephemera," History of Science Museum (Oxford, EN) website, accessed February 28, 2020, <https://hsm.ox.ac.uk/printed-ephemera>.

<sup>92</sup> "Printed ephemera," History of Science Museum.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, the aim of my dissertation is to analyze the history and formation of the relationship between popular culture and organized religion in New South Atlanta. I want to understand how white, working- and middle-class southerners mitigated a period of rapid social, cultural, and economic change by immersing themselves in a new world of popular culture. Most of all, I want to better understand the deep engagements of Victorian culture and southern religion.

Since culture is permeative and pervasive, not necessarily linear, I move thematically, not chronologically. The chapters in Part I (the Introduction and Chapter One) are an introduction and orientation to establish my line of thinking. Here, I place my scholarship in the fields of history and religious studies, and establish what will inform the work I plan to do in the rest of the text. Part II (Chapters Two, Three, and Four) is historical positioning. It describes the long-term effects of the Civil War on the American South, especially how racial and economic reconstruction resulted in mammoth regional change. In particular, Chapters Three and Four underscore the existential and theological crises that followed the war. I argue that economic, soci-cultural, and familial changes caused the growth of white southerners' cultural anxiety, and thus precipitated a search for meaning during a turbulent time.

Part III (Chapters Five, Six, and Seven) is series of case studies dedicated to more deeply exploring the intersection of religion and popular culture in New South-era Atlanta. Chapter Five examines how religion and popular culture intersected in the lives of white women in Atlanta. I argue that in some ways, religion and culture worked together to constrain women within traditional Victorian gender constructs, while in other ways, they granted women more power in the private and public spheres. Chapter Six discusses the establishment of Atlanta's Young

Men's Christian Association (YMCA) chapter. While the YMCA initially used muscular Christianity to draw in members, as the Victorian era progressed and the city of Atlanta had increasingly more amusement options, the YMCA inculcated more secular sports and entertainment into its programmatic offerings. Chapter Seven analyzes the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition, and other concurrent activities happening around Greater Atlanta during the exposition. Although the Cotton States Exposition brought lowbrow amusements and the opportunity for Atlantans to engage in new forms of Victorian popular culture, the event was largely accepted by Atlanta's Protestant religious community, especially those cultural productions that adhered to accepted codes of white, Victorian respectability. Additionally, I will explore how the exposition showcased new forms of secular Christianity that began operating in the public sphere during the Victorian era. The case studies in Part III center on the theme of how popular cultural forms became "more than mere entertainment," even as they interacted with Atlanta's white, largely Protestant, religious establishment.

Finally, the Conclusion chapter covers the lasting relationship between religion and popular culture. It is my hope that by studying the spread of Victorianism into the post-Civil War South, scholars can have a better understanding of culture, religion, and culture as religion.

As white, southern men and women struggled with the rapid pace of economic, social, and cultural change that flooded into their region after the Civil War, burgeoning forms of popular culture offered pleasure, meaning-making, and a cessation of cultural anxieties in a way that organized religion did not. By studying participation in these amusements and the memories collected by this participation, I aim to bring a robust view of lived religion and conceptions of the sacred to the historiography of American religion and southern studies. Furthermore, although popular culture took on a sacred meaning during the late nineteenth century, I argue

that in many cases, it was met with the blessing, or at the very least ambivalence, of southern religious leaders; for the most part, Protestant churches did not stop or censure the majority of mainstream popular culture. By the turn of the twentieth century, most Protestant clergymen and religious leaders accepted that parishioners could be both Victorians enjoying leisure time and faithful practitioners of Christian religion. Participation in both the sacred and the profane was fluid. Even as institutional religion burrowed deeper into the soil of southern culture, southerners were Victorians first. The region's preoccupation with amusements and popular culture was meaningful and consequential, not merely entertainment.

**PART II**

**“A Certain Pain Called Nostalgia”**

**OR**

**How the Decline of Old South Gave Way to New South Victorianism**

## CHAPTER 2

### **The Nineteenth Century South: “A State of Change”**

#### **Introduction**

“The South is in a state of change,” engineer, industrialist, and cotton mill, owner D. A. Tompkins announced during a speech in 1900.<sup>93</sup> Tompkins was on a speaking tour through northeastern cities. He was one of many southern advocates who travelled north after the Civil War, attempting to secure financial investments in Atlanta’s new industrialization enterprise. Tompkins believed the entirety of the South should (and with more investment could) embrace its industrialized destiny and move forward into the new era. After centuries of slave-based agriculture, “a condition of civilization based upon the new conditions imposed by the results of the late war has commenced to grow,” Tompkins explained to potential investors. “The people who have adapted themselves to the new conditions imposed by the results of the Civil War

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<sup>93</sup> George Tayloe Winston, *A Builder of the New South: Being the Story of the Life Work of Daniel Augustus Tompkins*, (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1920), 84. To the extent possible, Winston wrote this Tompkins biography using Tompkins’s own words from speeches, letters, diaries, and the like. Not all of the quotations in Winston’s book are dated, but based on Tompkins’s published writings, this speech was likely given sometime between 1899 and 1901.



constitute what we are beginning to hear called the New South.”<sup>94</sup> Now, several decades out of the war, the region was being reinvented.

The American South did not industrialize at the same time or in the same manner as the North. By the end of the eighteenth century, the northern region of the newly formed United States was transforming itself into an industrial and manufacturing center that rivaled its English counterparts. Southern states, however, remained decidedly agrarian, entrenched in the social and economic structures of chattel slavery. These regional conditions continued steadily throughout the first half of the nineteenth century: immigration and industry grew and changed the North’s urban centers, while the South continued its focus on agriculture. In the northeast, a large uptick in urban population (defined as ten percent or more of the population being urban-dwellers) began in the 1820; the same did not occur in the South until the 1880s.<sup>95</sup> This delay has often caused historians like C. Vann Woodward to consider southern agrarianism and the South’s connections between its collective memory and its land as significant aspects of southern distinctiveness.

When modern manufacturing finally reached southward in the mid-nineteenth century, not everyone shared Thompkins’s enthusiasm. “There are tenacious people of fine education who are living in the dying conditions of ante-bellum [*sic*] life, some by obstinate preference, some of necessity,” Thompkins admitted in one of his speeches. Nevertheless, he continued, those unwilling to move away from a farm-based economy “constitute the Old South...growing poorer day by day and will continue to grow poorer until the most tenacious of them pass out of life and with them will go the system to which they persist in adhering.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Winston, *A Builder of the New South*, 84.

<sup>95</sup> The statistics and definition of “urban population” come from: Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990) 2-3.

<sup>96</sup> Winston, *A Builder of the New South*, 84.

Tompkins's speech demonstrates the dichotomized southern social system after the Civil War: those who still longed for the old agrarian system and those who "have divorced from their minds the idea that for a southern man there is no occupation but raising cotton with negro labor."<sup>97</sup> This "divorce" was not proving to be a simple exercise. As I will describe in this chapter, post-Civil War economic realities and social changes disquieted the lives of many white, middle- and working-class southerners. This culminated in an existential crisis in the decades following the Civil War that broke down faith in traditional institutions and left many looking for self-fulfillment and meaning.

### **The Old South and Laboring in the Earth**

The American South industrialized differently than the American North. The South's early regional history was tied to the land through exploration, exploitation, and contested authority, beginning as far back as the Jamestown settlement in 1619. Unpacking these particularities is key to analyzing the mentality of post-Civil War middle- and working-class white southerners whose fates were intertwined with the land.

Thomas Jefferson, himself a southern landowner, championed agrarianism as the superlative socio-economic philosophy. "Those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God," he wrote in his 1782 book, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, a collection of musings and reports about contemporary life in his southern home state.<sup>98</sup> Jefferson and other physiocrats like him believed that a nation's wealth was derived from the products that could be generated from its land. Enlightenment physiocracy held up self-sufficient, land owning farmers as the

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<sup>97</sup> Winston, *A Builder of the New South*, 84.

<sup>98</sup> Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, 1782. Digitized by the Avalon Project, Lillian Goldman Law Library, Yale University School of Law, 2008, [http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th\\_century/jeffvir.asp](http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/jeffvir.asp).

embodiment of virtue, morality, and democratic citizenry. “It is a mark set on those, who, not looking up to heaven, to their own soil and industry, as does the husbandman, for their subsistence, depend for it on causalities and caprice of customers. Dependence begets subservience and venality...” Jefferson declared in *Notes*.<sup>99</sup> Under this theory, relying on the land the best way to ensure independence and self-sufficiency. Conversely, physiocrats believed mercantilism and commercialism necessitated dependency on consumers’ whims and other exterior market factors, thus limiting independence and self-reliance. (This, despite Jefferson and his compatriots defining “agrarian” not necessarily as those who performed the farm labor themselves, but rather the landowner who managed the property’s production and derived wealth from it.) Physiocracy’s agrarianism anointed farmers as the bedrock of the new republic’s white citizenry and the independent American economy.

Well after Jefferson’s time, early twentieth century southern writings continued to hold up the region’s agrarianism. In 1930, twelve writers at Vanderbilt University, collectively known as the “Southern Agrarians,” wrote in the introduction to their essay collection *I’ll Take My Stand*, that the South must preserve “a southern way of life against what may be called the American or prevailing way.”<sup>100</sup> The “American way” implies social and cultural congruencies created by the North’s manufacturing-based economy. In other words, according to the Vanderbilt Agrarians, the South must keep to the land and push back against northernization. The essays in *I’ll Take My Stand* represent the lasting feelings of many southerners who, even as late as 1930, were struggling to mitigate two contrary and often competing views of the increasingly modern topographies in which they lived, ones that tried to meld together industrial

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<sup>99</sup> Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia*.

<sup>100</sup> Twelve Southerners, *I’ll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*, 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition, ed. Susan V. Donaldson (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2006), xli.

progress and pastoral memory. According to the Agrarians, industrialism is cold, dark, and mechanical, while farming is warm and romantic. A “farmer knows that he cannot control time, whereas he can wrestle with space, or at least with that particular part which is his orbit,” they wrote.<sup>101</sup> The essayists celebrated southern distinction and oriented it around agrarianism and the past.

The Agrarians traded in a collective memory that was highly influenced by Lost Cause ideology. More than rewriting southern defeat, the Lost Cause’s mythology created a place-based cyclical illusion of “a near-perfect society...[where] rich and mellow moonlight beamed on a country studded with magnolias that offered sweet scents and a becoming background for beautiful maidens.”<sup>102</sup> It may seem odd that highly educated men working at an urban university should call themselves “Agrarians” and so prominently pontificate the merits of an economic system in which they did not participate. Nevertheless, their essays articulate a powerful truth: southern historical memory is intertwined with southern land. The Agrarians wrote:

Memories of the past are attended with a certain pain called nostalgia...It occurs to our sorrow when we have decided that it is time for us, marching to some magnificent destiny, to abandon an old home, an old provincial setting, or an old way of living to which we have become habituated.<sup>103</sup>

Along with this nostalgic “pain” was an embellished and imagined past, tied up with the “deep mysteries” of “one’s love for his own land.”<sup>104</sup>

But the underlying fact of southern history, the unwritten footnote to the Agrarian’s pastoral narration, is that white southerners were ultimately unable to defend their land or their way of life that had bound generations, willingly or unwillingly, to the agrarian system. This

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<sup>101</sup> Twelve Southerners, *I’ll Take My Stand*, 212.

<sup>102</sup> Paul M. Gaston, “The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking,” in *Myth and Southern History, Vol 2: The New South*, 2nd Edition, ed. Patrick Gerster and Nicholas Cords (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 22.

<sup>103</sup> Twelve Southerners, *I’ll Take My Stand*, 6.

<sup>104</sup> Twelve Southerners, *I’ll Take My Stand*, 345.

reality may have somewhat dissipated, melded into mere nostalgia by the time *I'll Take My Stand* was published. For white southerners recovering from the loss of land and authority in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, however, these realities were ever-present.

### **Cotton Markets and the Changing Southern Economy**

By 1865, the Confederacy and America's peculiar institution were dead. The Civil War, "that fell destroyer and arch demon of evil," left the South's agrarian-based economy in shambles.<sup>105</sup> Although the Agrarians and other writers would one day romanticize farming, the South's post-war relationship with the land was as troubled as the agricultural industry itself. Much of the South's physical landscape had been destroyed by battles, enemy troops, and years of neglect during the war. Emancipation forever changed the southern economic structure and caused a labor shortage that left fields under harvested or unplowed all together. Small trading posts and transportation lines destroyed by war added distributional challenges to the supply problem. Wild dogs and boars roamed the countryside, attacking crops and livestock. The scene was apocalyptic.

Yeoman and subsistence farmers were some of the hardest hit by post-war economic changes because of their antebellum reliance on slave labor-based agriculture and local trade.<sup>106</sup> Even some planter families who had previously enjoyed wealth and prestige now struggled to

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<sup>105</sup> This phrase originated in a sermon by Methodist Bishop and Georgia native, Warren A. Candler. As quoted in Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920*, 1980, (Reprint, University of Georgia Press, 2009), 96.

<sup>106</sup> In her study of the South Carolina's antebellum-era Upcountry, Civil War historian Stephanie McCurry defines a yeoman farmer as one who owned nine slaves or less. "Surprising as it might seem," she writes, "farmers could well have owned as many as nine slaves and still found themselves depending on family members even for field labor...the overrepresentation of women and children meant that even the man who owned nine slaves was still by all accounts, a 'self-working farmer.'" Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 48, 50.

make their land yield. William Felton, a Confederate veteran and future United States Congressman from Georgia, returned home from war to a failing plantation. In a draft of a speech he would later give to the Annual Assembly of the State Agricultural Society of Georgia, Felton articulated the feelings of many of his fellow Georgia farmers:

Of course I see in the newspapers, the statement that the era of first-class prosperity has arrived – and the people are better off than they have been in at least a dozen years...But if farming is prospering in my part of the country, I am too stupid to see it...Do you call this state of things prosperity?...Now I have lived on a farm ever since I married in my teens. I have stuck to it when my neighbors all pulled up and went to town to educate their children and enjoy something besides worry of mind and trifling renters. Yet, I have been as loyal to the business as anybody in Georgia – but I am about worn to a fazzle [sic]...<sup>107</sup>

Felton was an educated white man who married into a wealthy family; he had every advantage. Although his Cartersville, Georgia, plantation was not prospering at the time he wrote the speech, Felton still owned the land itself, his house, his livestock, and at least two other homes. On the other hand, the “trifling renters” Felton noted were several African American families who lived on his land. He mentions in other writings that the renters did not own any livestock, even a mule for plowing. These sharecroppers rented small, mostly unsuccessful plots on the Felton Family’s property and, by Felton’s own accounts, were held in contempt by their landlord.

Wartime recovery was just one challenge to the South’s agricultural economy. Perhaps the most glaring economic issues affecting southern farmers in the late 1860s and 1870s were cash crop overproduction and falling global cotton prices. In the early nineteenth century, Great Britain and New England were the two largest consumer regions of raw cotton from the American South. By the late 1850s, the American slavery debate had intensified to such an

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<sup>107</sup> William H. Felton, “Economic and Social Issues,” Speech (draft undated but written sometime between 1866 and 1874). MS 81, Box 11, Folder 5, Rebecca Latimer Felton papers, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, GA.

extent that British business leaders feared a violent conflict would break out in the United States that would interfere with the cotton supply needed for Britain's textile industry. Hoping to hedge the cotton market, Britain aimed to "encourage the increased cultivation of cotton in every part of the world suited for its growth," including Brazil, Egypt, West Africa, the West Indies, Fiji, China, and India.<sup>108</sup>

The gamble worked. Like the British had predicted, the American Civil War did interrupt the cotton supply chain as the Union Navy blockaded southern ports. Meanwhile, Britain had a new supply chain grounded, to a large extent, on its own colonies or occupied territories. Egyptian cotton soon served much of Western Europe. India became the world's largest cotton exporter by 1862 and remained its market leader into the 1870s.<sup>109</sup> By the time the American Civil War was over in 1865, the increased availability of global cotton, coupled with an economic downturn in northern England, decreased the demand for raw textiles and greatly diminished cotton prices.

Despite these economic realities, farmers like Felton who had enjoyed cotton prosperity before the war assumed British business would eventually return. Felton was not alone; southern farmers overwhelmingly continued to plant cotton. "The passion for raising cotton became almost a craze," D. A. Tompkins recalled in a 1900 speech. "Its victims were not only the big planters but small farmers, poor white tenants, and ragged negro hirelings."<sup>110</sup> Across the states of the former Confederacy, but especially in Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas, farmers dedicated their fields almost entirely to growing cotton. Even many farms that

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<sup>108</sup> *Fifth Annual Report of the Cotton Supply Association* (Manchester, England, 1862), 5. As quoted in Frenise A. Logan, "India – Britain's Substitute for American Cotton, 1861-1865," *The Journal of Southern History* 24, no. 4 (Nov 1958), 472.

<sup>109</sup> Logan, "India – Britain's Substitute for American Cotton, 1861-1865," 478.

<sup>110</sup> Winston, *A Builder of the New South*, 73.

had once grown staple foodstuffs were converted to growing almost entirely cash crops. As the nineteenth century continued, southern cotton production increased while domestic and international prices continued to fall. Cotton was no longer king, and the South's land-based economy grew more precarious. Some trade journals and agricultural experts did warn about the risks of relying too heavily on cash crops, cotton specifically. Warnings were largely ignored, however, even by wealthy planters like Felton with access to the data and educations to understand it. Although demand continued to fall, market saturation persisted. Between 1870 and 1894, the price of a pound of cotton decreased 48 percent.<sup>111</sup>

A lack of market responsiveness wasn't southern agriculture's only flaw. Many farmers, especially those with little agricultural knowledge, failed to rotate and diversify their fields. This stripped the land of valuable nutrients and decreased the bounty of the harvest. Tobacco, in particular, is notoriously hard on its soil. Less crop diversity also meant an agroecosystem that was more susceptible to plant species-specific parasites. Blight and pests became more problematic and attacked whole farming communities. Most notably, the boll weevil invaded Texas from Mexico in the 1890s. By 1920, these cotton-bud-eating beetles were in every cotton producing state in America. Crop diversification initiatives wouldn't entirely diffuse through the southern agricultural community until it was included in the New Deal programs of the 1930s. In short, Tompkins said in 1900, cotton farming "seemed likely to ruin the South."<sup>112</sup>

A myriad of other factors outside of crop selection also rocked the South's land-based economy after the Civil War. The latter half of the nineteenth century ushered in severe global market fluctuations and economic decline. The Franco-Prussian War interrupted trans-Atlantic

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<sup>111</sup> Elizabeth Hayes Turner, *Women and Gender in the New South, 1865-1945* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2009), 37.

<sup>112</sup> Winston, *A Builder of the New South*, 75.



trade networks. Domestically, inflation soared, and rampant railroad speculation resulted in the excessive expenditure of borrowed capital, coupled with a slower than expected return on those investments. All of this led to the bursting of a major speculative bubble in September 1873 (now commonly known as the Panic of 1873). According to historian Eric Foner, by 1876, more than half of American railroads defaulted on their bonds and were in receivership.<sup>113</sup> This then decreased the availability of funding for other industries and caused completion delays for their projects, which in turn, further reduced available investment capital. The national economic downturn would last through 1879. Several long periods of recession followed, culminating in additional national economic panics and banking collapses in 1893, 1896, and 1907.

Scarce credit and increasingly falling cotton prices made banks nervous and often unwilling to make loans to southern cotton farmers. Traditionally, many farmers bought seeds or rented land on credit in the spring, and then used their autumn harvest to pay off debts before beginning the cycle over again the following year. Without loans or available cash to live on, by 1900, between thirty and fifty percent of white southern farmers had lost their land and become either tenant farmers or sharecroppers, estimates historian Elizabeth Hayes Turner.<sup>114</sup>

The second half of the nineteenth century proved that basing nearly all of a region's economy on cash crops like cotton, indigo, or tobacco, was no longer economically viable. Farms failed and prices plummeted. Southern land could no longer provide the self-determination at the heart of the Jeffersonian ideal. Hope waned. Many yeoman farmers had little choice but "to find wage labor in the wake of the elimination of their rural self-sufficiency," writes historian Tera W. Hunter.<sup>115</sup> Faced with few economic options, black and white families

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<sup>113</sup> Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1990), 217.

<sup>114</sup> Turner, *Women and Gender in the New South*, 37.

<sup>115</sup> Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 23.

alike gave up on the land, and moved into new factory towns and growing urban centers, hoping for a better life in the South's emerging manufacturing-based economy.<sup>116</sup> In short, explains historian Blaine A. Brownell in *Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930*, "the salvation of the South" was beginning to appear "precisely where Thomas Jefferson had once perceived damnation for the country—in cities."<sup>117</sup>

### **The Growth of New South Cities**

Southern cities grew differently than northern cities. In 1850, 15.4% of all Americans lived in urban centers, most of which were concentrated in the northeast. Land and agrarianism (and all their related aspects there-in) remained the dominant southern social, economic, and political, forces well into the twentieth century. The South's urban population did not reach above 15% until 1900.<sup>118</sup>

European immigration was the largest cause of rapid population growth and urban expansion in the American North and Midwest during the long nineteenth century. Conversely, urban migration in the South was principally from within the region. According to Bownell, rarely did the "number of foreign-born residents exceed ten percent of the population of any southern city."<sup>119</sup> Some southern coastal cities like New Orleans, Charleston, or Savannah, saw European immigration waves in the nineteenth century, but nothing to the extent of arrivals to Boston, Chicago, or New York. Southern urban population growth was comprised "mostly of

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<sup>116</sup> For more on the history of African American employment in southern mills, see for example: Hunter's *To 'Joy My Freedom*, Timothy J. Minchin's *Hiring the Black Worker: The Racial Integration of the Southern Textile Industry, 1960-1980*, or Mary E. Frederickson's *Looking South: Race, Gender, and the Transformation of Labor from Reconstruction to Globalization*.

<sup>117</sup> Blaine A. Brownell, *The Urban Ethos in the South, 1920-1930* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975), 3.

<sup>118</sup> "Selected Historical Decennial Census Urban and Rural Definitions and Data," U.S. Census Bureau, accessed April 30, 2019, <https://www.census.gov/geo/reference/urban-rural.html>.

<sup>119</sup> Brownell, *The Urban Ethos*, 7.

native-born southerners who had previously lived in rural areas and small towns.”<sup>120</sup> The South’s internal migration, black and white alike, from rural communities to industrializing towns and cities, impacted the already quickening pace of post-Civil War southern urban development.

Despite southern farmers’ obsession with growing cotton, as late as 1880, textile industry investors believed that “no staple of the world is so wastefully handled as cotton.”<sup>121</sup> This waste was caused by the great conundrum of the American cotton industry: cotton was grown in southern fields but the majority of its processing occurred in northern mill towns like Lowell, Massachusetts, or across the Atlantic Ocean in Manchester, England. Southern capitalists believed that to reduce transportation and redistribution costs, the region would need to evolve such that it could refine its own raw materials, especially cotton. Thus, if investors drove the commercial redevelopment of southern cities, then solving the cotton conundrum drove investors.

In Georgia, early moves toward manufacturing began in the late 1830s with the state’s first mill village being established in 1835 near Athens, Georgia. By 1850, there were thirty-eight textile mills in the state, most of which were small operations in terms of laborers and outputs.<sup>122</sup> Additionally, most antebellum southern mills were located in rural communities on or near the plantations from which the raw cotton was derived. Their yields were “lethargic,” often a secondary undertaking to the cultivation of the cotton itself.<sup>123</sup> During the Civil War, some mills were converted to wartime production, weaving uniforms and other army supplies; most, however, were shuttered due to compromised supply lines, a lack of laborers, or destruction by

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<sup>120</sup> Brownell, *The Urban Ethos*, 7.

<sup>121</sup> K. Stephen Prince, “A Rebel Yell for Yankee Doodle: Selling the New South at the 1881 Atlanta International Cotton Exposition,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 92, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 342.

<sup>122</sup> Arden Williams, “Textile and Industry,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, last modified September 10, 2019, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/business-economy/textile-industry>.

<sup>123</sup> Gregory John Labyak, “Geographical factors influencing the rise and growth of cotton textile manufacturing in the South Carolina Piedmont, 1880-1940,” PhD diss., Louisiana State University, 1994, 63, LSU Digital Commons.

Union forces. After the war, family and economic needs had changed, giving rise to the fervor that launched southern industrialization.

Between 1880 and 1940, the United States saw an industrial consolidation movement, the beginning of the nation's modern economic system that has larger but fewer companies. Manufacturers, hoping to vertically integrate their production processes within a single factory, consolidated their locations, which led to greater concentrations of workers, and drove the growth of denser municipal spaces.<sup>124</sup> Mounting investments in production, commerce, and secondary industries, like restaurants and entertainment venues, were channeled into new manufacturing centers. Additionally, easier transportation meant those who still lived in rural areas could travel to a commercial center for a few days, rather than a few weeks. Southern urbanity exploded.

Refineries and mills were launched across the South. Purveyors of this manufacturing-based regional economic development recalled a similar strategy employed in New England decades prior: company recruiters traveled to rural towns and struggling farming communities, hoping to find enough laborers to fill new jobs in mills. Poor Appalachian towns, with their rocky soil and subsistence farms, were targeted especially hard for recruitment. As a result, mining, tobacco, and textile towns across the southern Piedmont surged from a few hundred residents after the Civil War to several thousand by 1900. Additionally, new train routes helped connect smaller mill towns like Whitehall, Georgia, with larger municipalities like Athens, Georgia, then on transportation hubs like Chattanooga and Atlanta. Urban centers grew up where antebellum southern villages had been, creating new centers that could accommodate both transportation and factory production. According to Don H. Doyle in *New Men, New Cities, New*

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<sup>124</sup> Labyak, "Geographical factors influencing the rise and growth of cotton textile manufacturing..." 92.

*South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910*, the number of urban areas in the eleven states of the former Confederacy rose from 51 in 1860, to 103 in 1880. By 1910, the number jumped to 396 urban areas.<sup>125</sup> Across the region, cities that had once defined southern cosmopolitanism and trade—Nashville, Richmond, Charleston—were being surpassed in area and population size by industrial and transportation towns like Jacksonville, Memphis, and Atlanta. A new generation of southern cities was born.

### **Atlanta Emerges as the Phoenix City**

Atlanta was largely destroyed and economically destitute when the Civil War ended in April 1865. Only \$1.64 in Confederate currency remained in the city's treasury.<sup>126</sup> “[Atlanteans] began returning as early as December, 1864...with heavy hearts but with matchless devotion to their loved city,” Lollie Belle Wylie, Georgia's first female professional journalist, wrote in her 1923 unpublished autobiography. “The people of Atlanta were impoverished [after the war]. Their property had been destroyed; the city treasury was empty; and grim want added to the horrors of a lawless class, who seemed to be drawn hither by the hope of plunder.”<sup>127</sup>

Wylie was born on the Gulf Coast of Alabama in 1858. Her father died shortly thereafter. The Alabama fishing village lacked economic opportunities for a young widow after the Civil War, so Wylie's mother moved the family to Atlanta, seeking a better life. A precocious seven-

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<sup>125</sup> Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South*, 11. Doyle relies on the United States Census definition of urban to mean “comprising all territory, population, and housing units in urbanized areas and in places of 2,500 or more persons outside urbanized areas.”

<sup>126</sup> Franklin M. Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, vol. 1 (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1969), 662.

<sup>127</sup> Lollie Belle Wylie, *My Own Story*, (Unpublished, 1923), 18. MS 3408, Box 4, Folder 2, Lollie Belle Wylie family papers, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, GA. Wylie wrote the majority of the manuscript but died before its completion. It was finished and edited posthumously by Wylie's grand-daughter, Laura Augusta Hay.

year-old, Wylie grew up alongside her new hometown. Atlanta was at a turning point after the war. Wylie recalled the moment well in her autobiography:

During the remainder of winter [1864], and in the early spring of 1865, the population [of Atlanta] increased very fast. All began immediately on their arrival to rebuild with what material could be found. The first public meeting held in the city after the [Confederate] surrender was on Saturday, June 24, 1865. It was for the purpose of considering the best measures to adopt to bring about the rehabilitation of the city.<sup>128</sup>

Massive investment capital poured into Atlanta during the late 1860s and 1870s, expanding the city's existing infrastructure and transforming its once bucolic landscape. In 1868, Georgia's state capital was moved to Atlanta after having been located in Milledgeville, Georgia, since 1804. Despite its relatively small size before the war, Atlanta had long been at the intersection of several major railroads and points of trade. Because of this, northern railroad industrialists and southern textile entrepreneurs saw potential in the Georgia town. They theorized that by investing in remaining antebellum infrastructure, they could mold Atlanta into a regional center of transportation and trade. Goods and people would arrive in Atlanta by train and then be sent along to other southern cities like Charleston and Savannah in the East, or Chattanooga and Birmingham in the West.

Atlanta's promoters branded it the "Phoenix City," a conurbation emerging from the ashes of its war-destroyed predecessor that would consecrate a new South. "During these days, the brave people of Atlanta were carrying on. They had staggered under the weight of the burning and bombardment, and carpetbaggers were plentiful, but reconstruction was underway. The ashes of the conflagration were being cleared away. Business was starting anew," wrote Wylie.<sup>129</sup> This made Atlanta into the state's economic and political center, and quickly molded

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<sup>128</sup> Wylie, *My Own Story*, 18.

<sup>129</sup> Wylie, *My Own Story*, 30.

the city into an archetype for the new South: a metropolis where capitalism and politics could work together to promote wealth and modernity.

The South “found her jewel in the toad’s head of defeat,” Georgian son Henry W. Grady told a New England crowd of potential investors during a December 1886 speech.<sup>130</sup> Northern investment was being funneled out west under concern that southern political and racial volatility would bleed over into the marketplace. To counter this, Grady and his fellow Atlanta boosters, including Samuel Inman and Hannibal Kimball, traveled throughout the northeast giving similar speeches. They leveraged their personal wealth, social networks, and overall goodwill, to raise funds for southern development and create economic partnerships with northern investors. “We have sowed towns and cities in the place of theories and put business above politics. We have challenged your spinners in Massachusetts and your iron-makers in Pennsylvania... We have established thrift in city and country. We have fallen in love with work,” Grady proclaimed.<sup>131</sup> He assured his audience that the South had changed its antebellum ways; Georgia was ready to compete with northern industry.

Henry Grady spoke at high society gatherings, garnering himself more than a little press coverage. This is on top of the fact that he owned one of the South’s largest newspapers, *The Atlanta Constitution*. His propaganda was surely self-serving. By 1880, he had personally invested heavily in the newspaper, which was established in 1866, and invested in other major development projects around Atlanta. However, Grady’s personal writings reveal that he was also deeply, genuinely committed to a new regional economic direction for the South. This new South, the New South (a term generally attributed to Grady), would be one based on

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<sup>130</sup> Henry W. Grady, “The New South,” *The Complete Orations and Speeches of Henry W. Grady*, ed. Edwin DuBois Shurter (New York: Hinds, Noble & Eldredge, 1910), 18.

<sup>131</sup> Grady, “The New South,” 14.

manufacturing and industry rather than “the old plantation, with its simple police regulation and its feudal habit,” he wrote.<sup>132</sup>

When studying southern history, it is important to remember that Grady was not only one of the most outspoken proponents of Atlanta’s new direction; his opinions were, and remain, prolific because he made them so. Historical sources overwhelmingly reflect the most vocal participants in important conversations, in this case giving the false impression that the entire South bought into the region’s new economic direction. Wealthy capitalists like Grady were optimistic about the condition of the New South, but most working- and lower-class white southerners lacked the boosters’ enthusiasm. Historian C. Vann Woodward has argued that “New South” came to define the region’s rebirth, but the term only “vaguely set apart those whose faith lay in the future from those whose heart was with the past.”<sup>133</sup> The hearts of many white southerners did not simply lie in the past with regard to the skill or will to change the region’s economic course, but also in the desire to maintain its antebellum social structure. Grady’s imagined New South represented a world for which some were unprepared, unwilling, or both.

## **Conclusion**

Reconstruction and the New South offered opportunity and optimism to some southerners. For others, especially of the lower classes, the era ushered in confusion and crisis. Massive social, economic, and political, upheavals accompanied not only Confederate defeat, but also the influx of modern industry and commercialism. This gave way to large gaps in the southern consciousness during the long nineteenth century.

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<sup>132</sup> Grady, “The New South,” 18.

<sup>133</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913: A History of the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 209.



When the final federal troops withdrew from the states of the former Confederacy in 1877, the time from the end of Reconstruction through the early years of the twentieth century was a “period of the ripening of these attitudes of ‘inferiority, antagonism, and insulation’ within the mind of the South,” argues religious historian Samuel Hill.<sup>134</sup> These feelings did not quickly dissipate. They festered like an infection slowly degrading into gangrene. White southerners’ “negative outlook,” writes Hill, “did not reach its full development until after the Reconstruction era had ended.”<sup>135</sup>

As I discuss in Chapter Three, these anxieties were immensely complex and not limited to the confusion that came with a new regional economic focus. Some white southerners expressed an almost overwhelmingly deep nostalgia for the sacred symbols they felt had once defined southern life before the Civil War: a land-based economy, faith in a god who supported the southern cause, a patriarchal family structure, and a defined racial hierarchy. After the war, however, these elements lost some their functional and symbolic dimensions. For these southerners, the New South was ushering a period of confusion, anger, unease, and discontent, but going back to the Old South was not an option either. A “negative outlook” and the loss of sacred symbols only compounded the difficulty of living in a region that, for many, was changing without them. As a result, these southerners lost faith in the traditional institutions they once turned to for making meaning in difficult times.

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<sup>134</sup> Samuel Hill, *The South and the North in American Religion* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1980), 91.

<sup>135</sup> Hill, *The South and the North in American Religion*, 91.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Religion and the Post-Civil War South: “Nothing Left but War”**

#### **War Blurs the Sacred and Profane**

Religious undertones of the American Civil War have concerned historians for decades. Antebellum denominational splits in Protestant churches over the issue of slavery were forerunners of civil secession. After war broke out, both the Union and the Confederacy tried to justify their causes with religious rhetoric, and called on God to support their respective armies. Civil and religious leaders on both sides referred to their respective nations’ war efforts as holy. Crusading language was just as evident in Sunday sermons as it was in state house addresses. Faith groups published tracts and special editions of religious newspapers advocating for their army and couching their cause in religious terms.

In Georgia, Christian clergymen, especially Methodists, were heavily represented at the state’s secession convention in 1861. These formal connections reified the already close but informal prewar ties between organized Christian religion and the movement for southern independence. The line between religious cause and military cause virtually disappeared. Even as

the war progressed and the Confederacy began to fail, the interests of most white, southern churches remained intertwined with the interests of the Confederate States of America.

During the war, northern and southern Christian denominational leadership councils sent clergymen to preach to troops on the battlefields, serving either as commissioned military chaplains or informal spiritual leaders. Some ministers held tent revivals near the fighting, drawing in crowds of soldiers and civilians alike. Others ministered to men from both armies in the name of saving as many souls as possible. When ordained clergymen were unavailable, delegations of unordained laymen and circuit riders were sent to minister to troops. This was especially the case in the South where the white male population waned in the later years of the war. In Georgia, the majority of white Christian congregations explicitly supported the Confederacy, although some clergy were also willing to minister to the Union's flock. Father Thomas O'Reilly, Catholic priest at the Church of the Immaculate Conception in Atlanta, ministered to any practicing Catholics in Atlanta, regardless of civil affiliation, after the troops of Union General William Sherman invaded the city in summer 1864. "As a proof of their attachment to their Church and love for Father O'Reilly," Sherman's soldiers even obliged the old priest's pleas to spare several houses of worship in downtown Atlanta, including his own, from the Union flames that would scorch the rest of the city.<sup>136</sup>

Religion and war were tangled in other ways, too. As the fighting dragged on and death tolls increased, Americans turned to military-couched civil religion to make sense of the war's high causality rate. In her book, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*, Drew Gilpin Faust describes Americans' deep conviction that a soldier's death, "like Christ's

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<sup>136</sup> Gary Laderman, *Religions of Atlanta: Religious Diversity in the Centennial Olympic City* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 5.

sacrifice,” could “become the vehicle of salvation” for his cause.<sup>137</sup> Even later in the war when the high mortality rate was more adequately understood, letters sent home from soldiers in both armies indicate they were willing to die for their cause, in part, because of the heavenly reunification that awaited a family after death.<sup>138</sup> This rhetoric inculcated what historian Harry Stout has termed the “new religion of patriotic martyrdom,” a soldier’s ultimate demonstration of loyalty toward his faith and cause.<sup>139</sup>

In the same way religious conceits could be seen in civil affairs, secular political concerns crept into Sunday morning sermons. It was not uncommon for white church leaders to reference the “military power of religion,” the explicit ties between military exercises and wartime politics in rhetoric.<sup>140</sup> Parishioners, too, intertwined religious and military language. “Vicksburg is besieged, but we are hopeful that God will defend us against our enemies!” Mrs. Mary Elizabeth Humphrey Howes wrote in her diary in May 1863. A few days later Howes recorded: “We had a very interesting morning prayer meeting at the Presbyterian Church, which was well attended and many prayers were presented at the throne of Grace...Prayer meeting [sic] are continually held for the soldiers and for the country.”<sup>141</sup> Howes was a native of Kentucky who moved to Macon, Georgia, during the war with her husband and two daughters. According to her diary, five prayer meetings were held at various times throughout the week to pray “for our country and our weary, brave soldiers” fighting for the Confederacy.<sup>142</sup> Through battlefield

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<sup>137</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Random House, Inc., 2008), 189.

<sup>138</sup> Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 189.

<sup>139</sup> Harry S. Stout, *Upon the Altar of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* (New York: Penguin Group, 2006). This is a major theme in Stout’s work. See for example, Chapter 9 and Chapter 26.

<sup>140</sup> Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 175.

<sup>141</sup> Mary Elizabeth Humphrey Howes, *Diary of Mrs. Orrin Howes*, Macon, Georgia, Feb 25, 1863–Sept 1, 1865, unpublished. On loan to the author from the personal collection of S. Robin Reid, Mrs. Howes’s decedent. Entry dated May 27, 1863, unnumbered page.

<sup>142</sup> Howes Diary, May 29, 1863.

revivals, prayer meetings for the Confederate cause, and family life centered on martyrdom and Heavenly reunification, white, southern Christianity became intertwined with war.

### **Madness, Suffering, and Confusion**

During the secession crisis and the initial skirmishes, there was a feeling among many, Unionist and Confederate alike, including politicians, military officers, and the general public, that any war would end generally quickly. This was not to be. Combat ravaged southern land. The overwhelming majority of Civil War battles were fought in Confederate states, destroying fields and towns in the process. “It was a time of madness...there seems to be nothing left but war,” Rebecca Latimer Felton, the daughter of a wealthy Atlanta family who would go on to be the first woman to serve in the United States Senate, recalled of the Civil War in her autobiography.<sup>143</sup> The total war strategy utilized by Union General William Sherman and his troops further tore apart the region. During his March to the Sea, Sherman endeavored to break the southern will by not only defeating the Confederate Army, but also by annihilating southern farms, crops, livestock, factories, and villages, that supported the Confederate cause. Even southern rail lines were pulled up piece by piece, then burned or bent to limit reuse.

Miscalculations by Confederate leadership also caused inadvertent suffering to its own people. In *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South*, Stephanie McCurry summarized the misery:

When the [Confederacy] adopted a draft of white men, when it enlisted 85 percent of adult white men and stripped the countryside of labor, when it attempted to create a tax base and supply the army by a levy on the ‘surplus’ agricultural production of farms and plantation, it extracted the means of war from a

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<sup>143</sup> Rebecca Latimer Felton, *Country Life in Georgia In the Days of My Youth* (Atlanta: Index Printing Company, 1919), 80.

population of women and children staggering under the burden of farm labor and, by 1863, facing starvation.<sup>144</sup>

The misery described by McCurry is also evident in first-person accounts from the era, especially those written by white southern women who were feeling the effects of loss and war on the home front. The personal recollections and contemporary diary entries Latimer Felton included in her autobiography describe the Civil War southern mentality well: “When any population in any sort of a nation gets violently angry, civilization falls down and religion forsakes its hold on the consciences of human kind in such times of public madness.”<sup>145</sup>

Of course, northerners also suffered war trauma. In *No Place for Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920*, historian Jackson Lears describes “a sense of human finitude” persisting in post-war northern minds, stemming “in part from the inescapable presence of Civil War veterans—not just heroes but hallowed-eyed men who had merely survived, maimed at Antietam, gone mad at Chickamauga, reminders of the tragic limits on all human aspiration.”<sup>146</sup> Some historians, however, argue that post-war southern suffering was different than that of northern. After all, war destroyed the land, economy, and social structure, as much as the Confederate cause. The war’s course also taught white southerners a lesson that other Americans still have not experienced to this day: total military defeat.

C. Vann Woodward holds defeat as an element of southern distinctiveness. In his 1960 book, *The Burden of Southern History*, Woodward writes:

The American people have never known the chastening experience of being on the losing side of a war...Success and victory are still national habits of mind...[but] Southern history, unlike American, includes large components of frustration, failure, and defeat. It includes not only an over-whelming military

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<sup>144</sup> Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 359.

<sup>145</sup> Latimer Felton, *Country Life in Georgia In the Days of My Youth*, 80.

<sup>146</sup> Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 4.

defeat but long decades of defeat in provinces of economic, social, and political life.<sup>147</sup>

The Confederacy's failure was especially felt amongst those southerners who struggled to separate their own individual salvation from Confederate loss, countering much of the earlier feelings of salvation and post-ascension family reunification. "All looks dark now, but we must trust in the God of Battles," Mary Howes wrote in July 1863 after the Confederate defeat at Vicksburg.<sup>148</sup> But heavy Confederate losses only worsened.

With victory and casualties having been couched in religious terms, military defeat and the dissolution of the South's slavery-based social and economic system, shook the foundations of southern faith. Historian Charles Reagan Wilson perhaps posed the problem best when, in his pivotal work on religion and the Lost Cause, he asked, "Southerners believed they had fought a holy war in the Confederacy, but how does a self-defined chosen people lose a holy war?"<sup>149</sup>

Historians disagree on the cause of Confederate defeat. Some believe the Union eventually broke the Confederacy's spirit and will to carry on, while other historians assert that the Confederate Army was simply out supplied and out gunned. Whatever the ultimate cause of defeat, many southerners began to lose faith—in their cause, in themselves, and in God—even before the end of the war. Southerners' Christian providentialism, the belief that all events are controlled by God, was shaken with the realization that God may have planned all along for the North to win. Was all the suffering, the martyrdom, the sacrifice, in vain? When almost one in seven white, southern men and boys between ages ten and forty-four was killed in a war that

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<sup>147</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History*, 1960. (Reprint, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 19.

<sup>148</sup> Howes Diary, July 20, 1863.

<sup>149</sup> Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920*, 1980, (Reprint, University of Georgia Press, 2009), 80.

ultimately ended in defeat, southerners' death, loss, and sacrifice, as Faust has written, "could only seem meaningless."<sup>150</sup>

Reconstruction provided little relief. In order to ensure a peaceful retrocession and adherence to United States laws, federal (Union) troops occupied large areas of the former Confederate states for a dozen years after the end of the Civil War. Some southerners did not mind the presence of troops. (Atlanta journalist Lollie Belle Wylie described her distain for scallywags and several of Reconstruction's interventions, but noted that "but for the [federal] armed forces in Atlanta, the town would have suffered manifold wrongs."<sup>151</sup>) For most southerners, however, especially those Confederate veterans who were now being policed by the same soldiers who had defeated the their army, federal occupation compounded feelings of anxiety and vulnerability that only added to the psychological trauma of the post-war period. "When the South lost out and the will of the [Union] military was the law of the land, the sense of helplessness of Southern homes was a dreadful burden to bear," Latimer Felton wrote in her autobiography.<sup>152</sup>

Eliza Frances Andrews of Washington, Georgia, kept a detailed diary and catalog of personal reflections during in the 1860s. She chronicled the confusion and discombobulation that followed the surrender of Army of Northern Virginia and the dissolution of the Confederate

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<sup>150</sup> Quote from Drew Gilpin Faust in *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*, 191. And J. David Hacker, "A Census-Based Count of the Civil War Dead," *Civil War History* 57, no. 4 (Dec. 2011): 341. Note on Casualty Statistics: Civil War casualty statistics used in my dissertation are backed by the 2011 Hacker "Preferred Estimate" paradigm wherein Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS) samples of the 1850, 1860, 1870, and 1880, censuses were used to make an alternative, census-based estimate of white male deaths caused by the Civil War. The result, in historian David Hacker's estimation, was an excess of 752,000 total deaths (even up to 851,000 deaths on the upper bounds of Hacker's data set), a more than twenty percent increase over the previous widely accepted estimate of 620,000, by James MacPherson (1988) and Drew Gilpin Faust (2008). For more on the methodology see: J. David Hacker, "A Census-Based Count of the Civil War Dead," *Civil War History* 57, no. 4 (Dec. 2011), 307-348.

<sup>151</sup> Lollie Belle Wylie, *My Own Story*, (Unpublished, 1923), 18. MS 3408, Box 4, Folder 2, Lollie Belle Wylie family papers, Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens, GA.

<sup>152</sup> Latimer Felton, *Country Life in Georgia In the Days of My Youth*, 105.



States of America. “We are all reduced to poverty,” Andrews grieved.<sup>153</sup> Nevertheless, to do their part for the Confederate cause, the Andrews Family opened their house to “everybody” passing through to get back home. “The son of the richest man in New Orleans trudged through [our home] the other day, with no coat to his back, no shoes on his feet,” Andrews recorded.<sup>154</sup> In addition to poor locals and poorer soldiers, looters were everywhere in Andrews’s hometown. No one stopped them, she writes, because “everybody is demoralized and reckless, and nobody seems to care about anything any more [*sic*].”<sup>155</sup> Andrews’s diary describes one tale that is particularly indicative of Georgia’s post-Civil War condition: “A number of paroled men came into our grove where they sat under the trees to empty the [gun powder] cartridges they had seized. Confederate money is of no more use now than so much waste paper” but the gun powder could be traded for supplies during the soldiers’ journey home.<sup>156</sup> Many Confederate troops were never properly outfitted with uniforms or supplies for battle, to say nothing of supplies available for the defeated army’s journey home. Some soldiers even took to scavenging, begging, or looting, as they walked hundreds of miles home after Confederate regiments unceremoniously and incongruently disbanded throughout spring 1865.

### **Doubt and Loss in Confederate Defeat**

As individual soldiers staggered homeward, white southern family structures struggled to adapt to their new status quo. The pain of Confederate defeat was compounded by the reorganization of gender roles, and the physical and psychological scars of war. White men had

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<sup>153</sup> Eliza Frances Andrews, *The War-Time Journal of a Georgia Girl 1864-1865* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1908), 191. Digitized by Documenting the American South, University Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1998. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/andrews/andrews.html>.

<sup>154</sup> Andrews, *The War-Time Journal of a Georgia Girl*, 197.

<sup>155</sup> Andrews, *The War-Time Journal of a Georgia Girl*, 195-196.

<sup>156</sup> Andrews, *The War-Time Journal of a Georgia Girl*, 196.

embodied the patriarchal order and its authority in antebellum public and private life until the war challenged family structures.<sup>157</sup> In addition to the fighting itself, the Civil War ended in southern military defeat and full emancipation for enslaved African Americans, destroying a patrilineal family and economic system that was rooted in inherited property.<sup>158</sup> Nearly six months after Confederate surrender, the writings of Confederate chaplain Moses Drury Hoge express a continued sorrowful outlook did not seem to have improved. “I have not been very well since the surrender,” he lamented in a September 1865 letter. Hoge even drew on religious rhetoric to articulate just how deeply fallen and depressed he felt, writing, “Other seas will give up their dead, but my hopes went down into one from which there is no resurrection.”<sup>159</sup> For white, male supporters of the now-defunct Confederacy, their loss was pervasive and palpable.

These social factors, coupled with what we now understand to be post-traumatic stress disorder and other psychological injuries, contributed to higher suicide rates and asylum commitments among white, southern men during the Reconstruction years than in a century prior. According to a quantitative analysis by historian Diane Miller Sommerville, the Milledgeville Insane Asylum in Milledgeville, Georgia, reported 275 patients in 1865. Two years later, its roster listed 431 patients and reported to be “greatly overcrowded,” filled “almost to capacity.” By 1870, the asylum remained full, with an additional 88 applicants on its admission waiting list.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Elizabeth Hayes Turner, *Women and Gender in the New South, 1865-1945* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2009), 26.

<sup>158</sup> Diane Miller Sommerville, “‘Will They Ever Be Able to Forget?’ Confederate Soldiers and Mental Illness in the Defeated South,” in *Weirding the War: Actually Fresh Perspectives on the American Civil War*, ed. Stephen Berry (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 323.

<sup>159</sup> Peyton Harrison Hoge, *Moses Drury Hoge: Life and Letters* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1899), 236-237. Digitized by Harvard University and Internet Archive, 2006, <https://archive.org/details/mosesdruryhogel00publgoog/page/n9>.

<sup>160</sup> Thomas F. Green, “Report of Superintendent and Resident Physician to Board of Trustees,” as quoted in Sommerville, “Will They Ever Be Able to Forget?” 325.

Contemporaneous literature also shared recollections that this was a time of, in Latimer Felton's words, "public madness" and aimless doubt. Georgia-born writer Sidney Lanier based his 1867 novel, *Tiger-Lilies*, on his own wartime experiences serving in the Confederate signal corps. Describing a character's inner monologue after a particularly gruesome battle Lanier writes, "Vague ideas ran through [Phillip's] mind. They were something like this: life – death – friendship – strange – how does God have the heart to allow it – don't understand..."<sup>161</sup> For southerners like the fictional Phillip or the real Lanier, the Heavenly reunion once hoped for was traded for a hellish future of incapacity and defeat.

White women also wrote about their struggles to keep the faith. Just one week after Confederate surrender at Appomattox, Mary Howes attended a solemn and sparsely attended church service. "Some of our own [church] members are very cold or luke warm [*sic*]. O Zion is desolate—Satan triumphs," she recorded in her diary.<sup>162</sup> The once devout Grace Brown Elmore of Columbia, South Carolina, had similar feelings. "Sometimes...I feel so doubtful of His mercy," she wrote in her journal after Columbia was overtaken by Union troops.<sup>163</sup> Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas of Augusta, Georgia, a self-described Methodist, recollected a similar feeling. "For a time I doubted God," she wrote in her diary on October 8, 1865.<sup>164</sup> Thomas's faith would eventually recover, but her journal delineates a long struggle with doubt, confusion, and loss after the war.

Christian ministers were aware of their congregants' challenges, both physical and spiritual. Confederate chaplain and Baptist leader Samuel H. Ford wrote the following in 1866:

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<sup>161</sup> Sidney Lanier, *Tiger-Lilies. A Novel* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1867), 177.

<sup>162</sup> Howes Diary, April 16, 1865.

<sup>163</sup> As quoted in: George C. Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 393.

<sup>164</sup> Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, *The Secret Eye: The Journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 1848-1889*, ed. Virginia Ingraham Burr (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 277.

It is, indeed, a crisis with the churches, and with Christians throughout the South. The scenes of the last four years have tried, severely, our spirits, our temper, and our faith... 'Where is God' seemed to be the anxious questioning of each heart... Is there a God? many *many* asked.<sup>165</sup>

Some church leaders even faced their own doubts. One Georgia Baptist circular newsletter written after the war theorized that perhaps God had “forsaken us and left us to wail, to weep, and to mourn.”<sup>166</sup> Even before the rising post-war existential crises, antebellum southern states were already “less churchd” (in terms of reported weekly attendance) than the nation as a whole.<sup>167</sup> In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the discrepancy in white church attendance between North and South was due in large part to the distance between farming families and town centers; northern towns were denser while the South’s population was more scattered. Without modern transportation, it was simply more difficult to minister to the South’s rural populations. Southern religion would eventually assert itself during the second half of the New South-era, especially evangelical Protestantism. However, in the time between the end of the Civil War and the 1890s, southern churches did not “enjoy an easy dominion.”<sup>168</sup>

Despite the long historiography of the Civil War and religion, scholars have only recently begun to examine the the post-Civil War decline in southern church attendance and religious adherence. Works by James MacPherson, Drew Gilpin Faust, Daniel Stowell, among others, have included studies of the physical challenges of accessing church buildings or holding denominational leadership conferences after the wartime destruction of large parts of southern infrastructure. For example, most of the Confederate States’ Presbyterian Synods and the

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<sup>165</sup> S. H. Ford, “Duty of Southern Churches,” *Christian Repository and Family Visitor: A Southern Religious and Literary Monthly* (June 1866): 65. As quoted in Daniel Wesley Stowell, “Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South, 1863-1877,” PhD diss., (University of Florida, 1994), 38. Italicized emphasis is original to the source document.

<sup>166</sup> As quoted in: Rable, *God’s Almost Chosen Peoples*, 347.

<sup>167</sup> Edward L. Ayres, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 162. For more detailed quantitative data of southern church attendance, see Ayres’s charts on pages 498-499.

<sup>168</sup> Ayres, *The Promise of the New South*, 162.

Methodist Episcopal Church South General Conference did not meet for the majority of the 1860s due to physical accessibility challenges.

Accessibility and transportation were not the only limiting factors facing post-war Christian southern religion. Paul Harvey contends that one cause of the South's diminishing overall church membership rates was due in part to the withdraw of African Americans from the region's established pre-war religious institutions.<sup>169</sup> Despite civil equalities gained by African Americans after passage of the Reconstruction Amendments, many white-majority Christian congregations in the South continued limiting black authority within the church. Black congregants, searching for equality and autonomy, left these churches and founded new congregations, affiliating themselves with northern denominational institutions or choosing to be independent of national denominations all together. Big Bethel A.M.E. Church in Atlanta, for example, operated independently under various names from 1847 until 1866, when the then "Bethel Tabernacle" opted to join the Philadelphia-based African Methodist Episcopal church.<sup>170</sup> Similarly, Friendship Baptist Church in Atlanta began after several enslaved African Americans left the white-dominated First Baptist Church to form their own congregation during the Civil War. Friendship would become the first autonomous African American Baptist congregation in Atlanta. Today it is affiliated with the Pennsylvania-based American Baptist Churches USA.<sup>171</sup>

A third challenge to post-Civil War southern religion was a dearth of ministers. No segment of adult white males was exempt from the Confederacy's high rates of mortality and

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<sup>169</sup> Paul Harvey, "Race, Culture, and Religion in the American South," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2015. Digital subscription accessed via Emory University Libraries, December 10, 2018, <http://oxfordre.com/religion/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-7>.

<sup>170</sup> "History of Big Bethel," Big Bethel A.M.E. Church Homepage, accessed March 2, 2019, <https://bigbethelame.org/welcome/>.

<sup>171</sup> "Friendship Baptist Church: A Commitment for the Ages," Fall 2018, in *The Leading Edge's "Building Memories" Podcast Series*, produced by the Georgia Institute of Technology, Soundcloud-embedded audio, 30:52, accessed May 10, 2019, <https://leading-edge.iac.gatech.edu/building-memories/friendship-baptist-church-a-commitment-for-the-ages/>.

morbidity, even ministers. The shuttering of nearly all southern colleges and ministerial training institutions during and immediately following the war added to the shortage of ordained ministers in the region. In some rural areas, the need for preachers became so dire that the Methodist Episcopal Church relaxed education requirements for would-be preachers, just as it had done in earliest years of the American republic. Now, inexperienced, untrained, and often barely literate, preachers were tasked with shepherding a flock in crisis.

Fourth, church governance, doctrine, and theology, were in flux after the war. Many once national Protestant denominations had split over the issue of slavery before the war. Now in peace, regional offices were hesitant to reunify because of ongoing ill feelings regarding loyalty, religious freedom, theological sovereignty, and the incorporation of freedmen. Some denominations ultimately did reunify with northern counterparts while others, like the Southern Baptist Convention, solidified their new denominations with codified theologies born out of sectionalism and racial hierarchies.<sup>172</sup> Interdenominational conflicts were only compounded over the next five decades as debates over hermeneutics, millennialism, and fundamentalism inundated theological conversations. Furthermore, although the Civil War was over, some parishioners remained disillusioned about how some congregations had allowed the profane intrusion of politics and war into Christian worship.<sup>173</sup>

Several studies have analyzed the decline of church attendance and membership after the Civil War; however, historians must bear in mind that church participation (including attendance and membership metrics) is not necessarily an accurate metric of religion, faith, or spirituality. These statistics surely have their place, but they are assessments of institutional participation, not

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<sup>172</sup> For more on theology and race in the post-Civil War South, see for example: Paul Harvey, *Freedom's Coming: Religious Culture and the Shaping of the South from the Civil War through the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012).

<sup>173</sup> Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples*, 241.

belief or practice. In order to understand American religion, scholars must move beyond only analyzing quantitative data and formal structures, and instead more closely examine sources for personal faith or religiosity. Moreover, just as scholars have studied the intersection of religion and the Civil War, so too, must they examine how belief began to fall away, and how faith and spiritual practices recovered or were transformed as a result of the war. Antebellum religion, I argue, did not look the same as postbellum religion.

## **Conclusion**

After the war, antebellum providentialism and Civil War millennialism gave way to loss, uncertainty, and ambiguity. The region's accelerated rate of post-war recovery compounded white southerners' wartime confusion, sorrow, and lack of faith in institutions. Even southern Protestantism was losing ground. As regional economic and social structures transformed, many white southerners sought refuge from their grief, anxiety, and confusion in outlets outside of traditional religion. If God could no longer offer fulfillment or answers; if the church or even faith in millennialism could not provide white southerners with enough solace to mediate Confederate defeat, confusion and loss over rapid social and racial change, or the growing pains of New South modernization, many southerners began to wonder what could.

The South had "vested significant faith" in the institution of slavery and in the Confederacy's attempt at independence; but if southerners had learned anything from the war, it was that God was not always on their side.<sup>174</sup> Additionally, many white southern men, women, and families, continued to face adversities even after fighting ceased, all of which were poised to

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<sup>174</sup> Edward Blum, "To Doubt This Would Be to Doubt God," in *Apocalypse and the Millennium in the American Civil War Era*, eds. Ben Wright and Zachary W. Dresser (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press), 220-221, 244-245.

challenge their faiths. “In personal sorrow we rest on God,” Grace Brown Elmore wrote in her diary. “But now in this terrible trouble, brought on us by our own acts, now with our whole country brought low, true sin...I find no consolation in religion.”<sup>175</sup> Elmore was not alone in her feelings. Her sentiments expressed those of many southerners who struggled to make sense of the post-war period. In Chapter Four, I will discuss how some of these struggles were rooted not only in challenges to southerners’ faith in institutional religion, but also to antebellum period’s racial and familial institutions.

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<sup>175</sup> Grace Brown Elmore, *A Heritage of Woe: The Civil War Diary of Grace Brown Elmore, 1861-1868*, ed. Marli F. Weiner (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 118.



## CHAPTER 4

### **Realignment of White Family Structures: “When Papa Wasn’t Able”**

#### **War and Changes to the White Patriarchy**

Elite white men embodied the patriarchal order and its authority in antebellum public life until the war challenged family structures.<sup>176</sup> In an 1886 speech, Henry Grady vividly described “the footsore Confederate soldier” who returned home to find:

...his house in ruins, his farm devastated, his slaves free, his stock killed, his barns empty, his trade destroyed, his money worthless; his social system, feudal in its magnificence, swept away; his people without law or legal status, his comrades slain, and the burdens of others heavy on his shoulders. Crushed by defeat, his very traditions are gone; without money, credit, employment, material or training...<sup>177</sup>

Although Grady’s soldier is a fabled archetype, his origins are based in reality. Historian Diane Miller Sommerville has investigated the long-term effects of Civil War experiences on white working- and middle-class southern men. She asserts that historically, men suffered loss in a

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<sup>176</sup> Elizabeth Hayes Turner, *Women and Gender in the New South, 1865-1945* (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, Inc., 2009), 26.

<sup>177</sup> Henry W. Grady, “The New South” Speech, December 22, 1886, Digital Library of Georgia, University of Georgia Library System, 2018, <https://georgiainfo.galileo.usg.edu/topics/history/article/late-nineteenth-century-1878-1900/henry-gradys-new-south-speech-dec.-22-1886>.

fundamental and gendered way that is different to women or children. For example, men bore an outsized proportion of the violent war's lasting physical and psychological effects.<sup>178</sup>

Sommerville's theory can be seen first-hand, for example, in the personal writings of Confederate chaplain Moses Drury Hoge: "I forget my humiliation for a while in sleep," Hoge wrote in a May 1865 letter to his sister. "But the memory of every bereavement comes back heavily, like sullen sea surge, on a wakening, flooding and submerging my soul with anguish...I hope my grief is manly."<sup>179</sup> Hoge expressed deep, sorrowful emotion. At the same time, he maintained a concern that his grief was being expressed in a stoic and manly way, rather than an outwardly emotional way that was associated with femininity.

While men were off fighting, white women on the southern home front took over more leadership roles than ever before. They defended their homes and families against Union troops, violence, and starvation. They kept their families together. Rebecca Latimer Felton described this phenomenon in her autobiography, writing:

But for the fortitude of the women of the Confederacy, and the resolute courage of the plain privates, the bottom would have dropped out just then [after the surrender]. The story of Southern women will never be told until the final chapter is written of their heavy trials with poverty, with poor help, with no money to educate their children and no privileges of travel or education in new methods, in labor-saving, etc.<sup>180</sup>

Wartime may have brought defeat to southern men, but it gave many white women a new-found sense of authority and strength. This caused a "reconstruction of white male-female relations in

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<sup>178</sup> Diane Miller Sommerville, "'Will They Ever Be Able to Forget?' Confederate Soldiers and Mental Illness in the Defeated South," in *Weirding the War: Actually Fresh Perspectives on the American Civil War*, ed. Stephen Berry (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 323.

<sup>179</sup> Peyton Harrison Hoge, *Moses Drury Hoge: Life and Letters* (Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1899), 236-237. Digitized by Harvard University and Internet Archive, 2006, <https://archive.org/details/mosesdruryhogel00publgoog/page/n9>.

<sup>180</sup> Rebecca Latimer Felton, *Country Life in Georgia In the Days of My Youth* (Atlanta: Index Printing Company, 1919), 105.

response to their respective war experiences,” argues historian Elizabeth Hayes Turner.<sup>181</sup> Thus, the Civil War’s reverberations on the southern home front, coupled by the post-war economic crisis, placed the Old South patriarchy in a precarious position.

Much like the men in Sommerville’s study, women’s post-war experiences also took on a gendered component. Antebellum southern women were often overlooked. They also lacked suffrage and property rights. Nevertheless, white southern women across the class divide had to quickly adapt to their new wartime role as their family’s primary provider and defender. “I wish I could blot out those horrible days,” Anna Logan of Richmond, Virginia, wrote in her diary.<sup>182</sup> When war broke out, Logan was attending an elite finishing school and about to make her formal debut to Richmond society. Just a few years later, Logan’s mother had no choice but to barter family heirlooms in exchange for basic foodstuffs. Life for the Logan family never went back to its prewar homeostasis even after the war ended. Anna Logan and her sister had to take tutoring and teaching positions to pay for their brothers’ educations, an expense the family could have easily afforded before the war.<sup>183</sup> The family’s postbellum wealth was never again what it had been previously.

Still, Logan’s family was relatively lucky. Despite bartering candlesticks for grain during the war and having to work to pay for tuition money after the war, the Logans were able to keep living in their James River home throughout the 1860s. The house contained valuable possessions (silver, feather beds) for which merchants were willing to trade.<sup>184</sup> Other families were not as fortunate. Some southern homes and possessions were commandeered or destroyed

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<sup>181</sup> Turner, *Women and the Gender in the New South*, 26.

<sup>182</sup> Marilyn Mayer Culpepper, *All Things Altered: Women in the Wake of Civil War and Reconstruction* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2002), 275-276.

<sup>183</sup> Culpepper, *All Things Altered*, 275-276.

<sup>184</sup> Culpepper, *All Things Altered*, 275-276.

by troops or looters; other families had had few possessions to begin with. Before, during, and after the war, poor and working-class, white women took whatever jobs they could in order to support their families. Whether distraught widow or caretaker of a newly physically or mentally disabled male relative, women whose economic situations had been precarious before the war often fell deeper into debt and despair as they moved into their new position as head-of-household.

The postbellum outlook was likewise bleak for white men of the South's lower classes. They had shouldered the physical burdens of war to a greater extent than men of the upper classes. Some had enlisted in the Confederate Army hoping to elevate their social and economic status. Others were drafted or paid to take the place of a wealthier man. But military honors of a defeated army were nominal at best, certainly not enough to overcome antebellum poverty. Increased feelings of social displacement were exacerbated by depression, war trauma, and financial insecurities. Poor and working-class white men feared losing what little antebellum political and economic capital they had previously enjoyed. White women were more empowered than before than war. And the Union's victory and Reconstruction-era federal policies extended African American men emancipation, suffrage, and new economic advantages previously unavailable to them.

As time passed and parts of the region recovered from war, some white southerners, especially poor and working-class white men, struggled to acclimate to a fluctuating region and a reunified nation. The result, demonstrated in Woodward's 1938 political biography, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel*, was several generations of disillusioned and impoverished white families reluctantly thrust into a changing world.

## **“When Poppa Wasn’t Able”: Industrialization and Gender Realignment**

In Atlanta and other New South towns and cities across the George Piedmont, urbanization and the growth of industry, changed the structure and nature of work for many white southerners. This continued the realignment of the southern working-class family structure that began during the war.

Leveraging Clifford Geertz, historian Colleen McDannell asserts that the white middle-class Victorian home was “not only a symbol, it was a sacred symbol...In a society which appeared increasingly more distant, alienating and chaotic, the home was perceived as foundational, eternal, and unchanging.”<sup>185</sup> This traditionalism asserted the husband/father as head-of-household and family, the wife/mother as leader of the home and children, and the children as darling, obedient, apprentices of the tradition. For working- and middle-class families, however changing economic structures meant that the ideal family, too, was changing.

As had been the case in the antebellum North, many of the first arrivals to southern mill towns after the Civil War were single women or female-led households. Reticent of their New England counterparts decades prior, southern women turned to factory work for a variety of reasons including financial independence, a life away from farming, and needing to support their families. Occasionally, a wife and children moved to a mill town to live and work while the husband, unable to fully commit to life away from the freedom of working with the land, continued to farm either at home or as a farm-hand for someone else. By the South’s second generation of post-war mill workers, however, part-time or partial family farming was almost completely abandoned. While only a fraction of the South had industrialized by the end of the

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<sup>185</sup> Colleen McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 48.

nineteenth century, the majority of those working wage labor factory jobs lived on or near (within a few miles) company-owned property.

For middle-class white families, the shift to cities and a paid labor economy meant that men spent less time at home. This gave wives more responsibilities and authority in the household than ever before. Even though the majority of women were excluded from the white-collar workforce, their private-sphere authority increased. Middle-class, white women typically oversaw the entirety of the household, including the food, domestic budget, children's education and spiritual welfare, décor, social lives, and any hired help who worked in the home. Conversely, poor and working-class families were often unable to conform to the white, Victorian traditionalism afforded by the middle-class's time and financial stability. When all members of the family needed to work to ensure survival—even young children, when the home was rented, and food insecurity was common, familial and gender roles broken down further. In doing so, the sacred symbol of the Victorian family lost some of its power.

New South factory work meant economic opportunity, but it also meant the company took over many caretaker and patriarchal leadership duties once reserved for the male head-of-household. Just like the male head-of-household had once dominated both labor and domestic life, now the mill controlled these sectors. By 1900, 92 percent of families who worked in southern mills lived in company mill villages, often in a property rented from the mill owner.<sup>186</sup> Mill owners set up housing, dining facilities, stores, churches, schools, and even entertainment and leisure facilities. “[We] bought everything from the commissary that we needed,” recalled Eula McGill during an oral history interview with historian Jacquelyn Hall in February 1976.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Turner, *Women and the Gender in the New South*, 40.

<sup>187</sup> Eula McGill, interview by Jacquelyn Hall, February 3, 1976, interview G-0040-1, transcript, Southern Oral History Program Collection (#4007), Series G. Southern Women, Manuscripts Department, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, <https://docsouth.unc.edu/sohp/G-0040-1/G-0040-1.html>.

McGill was born in 1911 near Resaca, Georgia, about seventy-five miles north of Atlanta. She spent her life bouncing from one southern industrial town to another as she and her family chased economic opportunities. McGill's oral history describes that as a young child, she attended a mill-owned school and had time to read and play. But she grew up quickly, constantly aware of the physical and psychological challenges around her.

Sometime in the 1870s, when farming and an Army pension could no longer support the family, McGill's grandparents sold their small Georgia farm and moved to find work near Dalton, Georgia's, factories and iron ore refineries, a booming industry as the railroad rapidly spread throughout the South. The decision to give up the independence, land, and tradition that came with farming, and move to a mill town was not an easy one for McGill's grandparents. Even worse, two generations after these elder McGills moved to the mills, the family's outlook had not improved much. For example, when Eula McGill's uncle died, McGill's aunt could no longer afford to care for all of the couple's children. Several of McGill's cousins were sent to live with relatives or to work in neighboring mills; the youngest two daughters, not old enough to work, were "put in a girls' school, like an orphanage."<sup>188</sup>

Eula McGill's immediate family also struggled. During her childhood, the McGills owned little property, no animals (for work, eating, or transportation), and not enough land for even a vegetable garden. They rented their mill-town house from the mill corporation, and their continued habitation was contingent upon being employed in good standing. What the commissary or their tight budget couldn't provide, the McGills and other local families foraged in the woods for items like poke or fresh herbs.<sup>189</sup> The McGill children attended the Dwight School, which was built on land donated to the community by the Dwight Mills. At fourteen, the

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<sup>188</sup> McGill, interview by Hall.

<sup>189</sup> McGill, interview by Hall.

eldest McGill sister dropped out of school to take a job in the mill and help support her siblings. Soon after, Eula McGill had to go to work as well. “It was the worst thing that ever happened when Poppa wasn’t able to let me go on to school,” she told Hall. “I would like to have gone on to school; I was unable to because of the financial situation [of our family].”<sup>190</sup> Other families in the area fared no better; McGill mentioned that pellagra was rampant in her North Georgia town.

The independent farm life Eula McGill’s grandparents had once lived was gone. The movement away from farms also saw the entrance of an arbitrary schedule determined by the mill’s owner and the company’s needs. This meant that for the laborers at the Dwight Mills, even time was not their own. McGill remembered:

A lot of people back in those days did not have time clocks in their homes, and everything then blew a whistle for starting time: the textile mill did. They’d blow a whistle for a certain length of time and let you know you had so much time to get there; then the whistle blew for work time. Then it blew for lunch and for coming back after lunch, and at quitting time.<sup>191</sup>

The entrance of an arbitrary schedule created what Jackson Lears has called the “rationalization of economic life,” which he defines as “the drive for maximum profits through the adoption of the most efficient forms of organization...furthered by the dominant social groups who stood to benefit, however indirectly, from corporate expansion.”<sup>192</sup> Lears originally used “rationalization” to describe the outsized cultural focus on the growth of production and the control of (and by) capital in the industrializing antebellum northeast. As we have seen with other qualities of southern industrialization, however, echoes of northern industrial trends were also evident in the New South. Like others around them, after the McGills left the farm, the family lived their “rationalized” lives in company spaces, on company time, by company rules.

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<sup>190</sup> McGill, interview by Hall.

<sup>191</sup> McGill, interview by Hall.

<sup>192</sup> Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), 9.



Decades later, the nostalgic Vanderbilt Agrarians would write that one of the heart's "deep mysteries" lives "in one's love for his own land. If there is a sadness, or old memory, added to this sense, it may become part of the substances of which the soul makes its tragic journey," they wrote.<sup>193</sup> The soul may have suffered by the sacrifice of independence and land, but for many southern families during the latter part of the nineteenth century, basic needs outweighed the Jeffersonian dream. Like the McGill grandparents who were forced to move to a mill town in order to survive, nevermind thrive, many poor, working-, and even middle-class white southerners felt they were becoming culturally, socially, economically, and politically displaced, all at the same time. Once sacred symbols, the Victorian patriarchal family structure and the independence of the land, were exchanged for the realities of postbellum modernity.

### **The New South's Spatial Concerns**

In the Author's Preface to his landmark book, *Origins of the New South: 1877-1913*, C. Vann Woodward asserts, "In some ways [the postwar South] was more distinctive as a region than it had been earlier. War and Reconstruction, while removing some of the South's peculiarities, merely aggravated others and gave rise to new ones."<sup>194</sup> Rural antebellum plantations, isolated and intimate, had engendered a hierarchical system of order based on property, race, gender, and labor. Such structures were able to remain so prevalent in large part because of southern ruralism. Specific racialized locations grounded in centuries of southern history (for example, the Big House and the fields), lost some of their authority immediately following the Civil War. However, racial identity remained the bedrock of spatial mediation and

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<sup>193</sup> Twelve Southerners, *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*, 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition, ed. Susan V. Donaldson (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2006), 345.

<sup>194</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913: A History of the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), x.

social hierarchy.<sup>195</sup> Some upper-class planters, men like William Felton, were able quickly reestablish their economic and political power in rural areas through systems like sharecropping and tenancy.<sup>196</sup> Away from the farm, however, traditional structures increasingly broke down. The sudden increase of diverse inhabitants to postbellum towns and cities created new challenges to white southerners' understanding of social control.

New South urbanization triggered two new issues for white working- and middle-class southerners: a breakdown of the clearly defined antebellum social structure and an overall unease with modernity. Realizing this, New South boosters were careful to couch their new ideas within old, accepted structures. "There is a New South," Grady once explained to a crowd. "Not through protest against the Old, but because of new conditions, new adjustments and, if you please, new ideas and aspirations."<sup>197</sup> This sort of phraseology, often evident in the speeches of Grady and his compatriots, was meant to market modernity and alleviate some nervousness in those white southerners whose hearts were "with the past."<sup>198</sup> The Old South was imperfect, boosters acknowledged, but it wasn't being thrown out completely; southern life was simply being fine-tuned for a new age. The reaffirmation of Old South ideals, combined with a focus on the need for order in a chaotic urban landscape, necessitated a reconfigured hierarchical system that would still somewhat mirror the antebellum years. Economic modernity could be reified through social and racial orthodoxy, at least in theory. In practice, however, capitalism often trumped race.

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<sup>195</sup> Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 2010), 7.

<sup>196</sup> Edward J. Blum, *Reforging the White Republic: Race, Religion, and American Nationalism, 1865-1898* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), 88.

<sup>197</sup> Grady, "The New South" Speech." Capitalization is original to the published text of Grady's speech.

<sup>198</sup> Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 209.

Contemporary speeches and essays attempted to gain buy-in for industrialization across the social, economic, and racial, divide. For southern industrialization to work, the market needed cheap labor, regardless of its source. Antebellum slavery meant very little job competition between African Americans and working-class whites; this changed after emancipation. Before codified segregation and the entrance of public accommodation Jim Crow laws in the 1890s, the New South's urban arena created new interracial spaces including factories, stores, and boardinghouses. Although some Black Codes sprang up beginning in 1866, demands for labor and the dense nature of cities and factory workspaces intermingled members of different races and classes in ways antebellum farm towns had not. Labor demands, coupled with the war's depletion of able-bodied workers, meant that black men and white men initially worked alongside one another in many blue-collar industries. Generally, black and white men laboring together on the docks or in mines was not a major concern for white business leaders, especially during Reconstruction.<sup>199</sup> Grady, for example, was by no means in favor of racial or class equality, topics on which he often spoke and made his view quite clear. However, Grady advocated for racial cooperation, not out of some belief in social justice, but for the benefit of capitalism.

Even many southern unions largely ignored race early on. Unions believed capitalist investors were taking advantage of all workers, and that the New South was being built on the backs of all poor people, regardless of race.<sup>200</sup> Southern Knights of Labor chapters even

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<sup>199</sup> Turner, *Women and Gender in the New South*, 42. Mill owners were careful to separate black men from white women in mills for fear of endangering white womanhood or promoting miscegenation. There were no such accommodations for black women.

<sup>200</sup> Beginning with W.E.B DuBois' work in 1885, there is a plethora of publications and statistical data on black labor and southern labor unions. For a bibliographic essay on national and federal records available, see James Gilbert Cassedy, "African Americans and the American Labor Movement," *Prologue Magazine Special Issue: "Federal Records and African American History"* Vol 29, no. 4 (Summer 1997), <https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/1997/summer/american-labor-movement.html>. For a summary overview of the major issues for race and labor in nineteenth century Georgia, see Georgia State University

unionized across racial lines in several industries. But any class alliance was short-lived. Working-class whites, in particular, struggled to mitigate their new competitive situations as laissez-faire capitalism further undid portions of the pre-war southern social order. White labor, Woodward describes, “realized pretty early that ‘In nearly all the trades, the rates of compensation for the whites is [*sic*] governed more or less by the rates at which the blacks can be hired’.”<sup>201</sup> Working-class whites not only had to compete for jobs with African Americans for the first time, but with rampant discrimination and no pay equity laws, it was often fiscally advantageous for a business owner to hire a black man who could be paid less than his white counterpart. Black women, especially, were paid less to work in worse conditions. Industrial employment spaces quickly became a shared space of racial unease, fear, and conflict.

New South modernizations also affected life outside of the workplace. The passage of the Reconstruction Amendments undid at least part of the antebellum racial hierarchy that had placed enslaved African Americans at the bottom. The Fifteenth Amendment, federally ratified in 1870, signified that black men were now politically equal to white men in the voting booth, at least in theory. The new, largely unregulated freedoms afforded to African Americans after the Civil War unnerved white southerners who no longer had a concrete “definition of the Negro’s ‘place’,” especially in relation to whites’ own social status.<sup>202</sup> At the voting booth, when poll taxes were introduced in Georgia in 1877, they assailed the voting rights of poor whites as much as they did poor blacks, as neither of these groups could afford to pay. Additionally, when

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Library’s Southern Labor Archives “Work n’ Progress” series,  
<https://research.library.gsu.edu/c.php?g=115684&p=751971>.

<sup>201</sup> Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 228. Woodward is quoting Philip A. Bruce’s 1905 study *The Rise of the New South*. Integrated workplaces and the practice of hiring cheap black labor over more expensive white labor was undone as segregation took hold, either de facto by order to the business owner, or de jure after Georgia’s Jim Crow laws were enacted in the 1890s. Additionally, several major challenges to race-based pay equality and collective bargaining representation were established in *Tunstall v. Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen*, 323 U.S. 210 (1944).

<sup>202</sup> Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 209.

Georgia's voter registration literacy test was approved in 1908, it included a subjective "good character" clause to register more white voters because so few lower-class whites could read.<sup>203</sup> Moreover, even as some white families felt shame in giving up their farms for factory work, the New South's labor structure made it possible for a business owner to hire an African American instead of a white man.

African Americans were paid less for their work, but that they were paid at all was a far cry from the forced slave labor of the antebellum past. Emancipation, a new economy, and the opening of black centers of education meant a small but growing group of African Americans were having the opportunity to increase their social statuses. Some were even able to take part in Victorian consumer culture in ways equal to, or sometimes even superior to, some southern whites. While many middle- and upper-class white southerners enjoyed Lost Cause activism and continued black servitude during the long nineteenth century, hierarchical superiority was increasingly a "fading memory" for lower-class white southerners "and did nothing to counter the spectacle of the well-dressed black consumer," writes Grace Elizabeth Hale.<sup>204</sup> This made "the disjuncture of race and class in the figure of the middle-class black more visible at a time when southern whites already felt threatened," argued political scientist Gilbert Thomas Stephenson in 1909.<sup>205</sup>

During Reconstruction, the Georgia legislature required all railroads to furnish equal accommodations without regard to race, color, or previous condition.<sup>206</sup> Since Georgia did not comprehensively aim to racially separate its passengers until 1891, for nearly three decades,

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<sup>203</sup> *Lassiter v. North Hampton County Board of Elections*, 360 U.S. 45 (1959).

<sup>204</sup> Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 137.

<sup>205</sup> Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 137.

<sup>206</sup> Gilbert Thomas Stephenson, "The Separation of the Races in Public Conveyances," *The American Political Science Review* 3, no. 4 (May 1909), 182.

anyone in Georgia who could pay for a ticket could ride a train. This was another consequence of capitalism undoing southern tradition, writes Edward L. Ayres in his book, *The Promise of the New South*. “The railroad would not have been such a problem, then, had blacks not been seeking first-class accommodations where women as well as men traveled, where blacks appeared not as dirty workers but as well-dressed and attractive ladies and gentlemen.”<sup>207</sup> If business owners could hire a black laborer over a white laborer, if middle-class African Americans were able to participate in innovation, consumerism, and first-class modernity, if the family, labor, and economic structures no longer centered on the land, where did that leave working-class whites? Many white southerners struggled to decipher their new roles.

## **Conclusion**

The configuration of work, family, and urban life changed dramatically during the long nineteenth century. During the Civil War, there was “nothing left but war,” and immediately following, the states of the former Confederacy launched into a new period of the unknown. The land was not as it had been, the economy was not the same, and family life was upended. Autonomy, that quintessential feature of the white, male, southern experience since the early days of the American Republic, gave way to anxiety, displacement, and an understanding that the region was in a new moment. But the new period, the New South, was not totally devoid of promise. Industrious southerners like Henry Grady leveraged northern investment to turn the battle-weary South into an industrial and commercial enterprise. New industries meant new opportunities and renewed hope, at least for some southerners. Mechanization and shift work

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<sup>207</sup> Edward L. Ayres, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 140.

decreased familial independence, but they brought with them technology, transportation, and most importantly, a little free time.

As these changes took hold, historian John F. Kasson has written, “so too did the forms of leisure and communications by which people found release from and perspectives on their worlds.”<sup>208</sup> The cultural productions that had once been limited to the North and just a few coastal southern cities, began to move into the South’s new industrial centers, like Atlanta. Victorian cultural productions intersected with the social and cultural changes being experienced by working- and middle-class white southerners for the first time, and in doing so, created the conditions for “a new society of spectacle that seemed to ease of the deep divisions” in the region’s new industrial landscape.<sup>209</sup>

As I will demonstrate in Part III, when white Atlantans, old families and newcomers alike, were faced with massive change and social upheaval in the years after the Civil War, they turned to popular culture to understand, reinterpret, and even escape from the challenges of the world area them. But I argue that cultural productions were not merely diversions and escapism. I will show that not only were most religious leaders and institutions were unopposed to respectable forms of popular culture, but soon, religious practice even pulled entertainment and popular culture into its sphere. Occasionally, entertainment was incorporated to such an extent that the Christian theological practice became the secondary focus to the amusement. More than mere entertainment, popular culture helped provide solutions to the realignment post-war family structures, helped address challenges to existing institutions, and even created an opportunity for the city of Atlanta to showcase its modern identity.

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<sup>208</sup> John F. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 13.

<sup>209</sup> Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man*, 13.

**PART III**

**A “Little Nonsense [is] Ever Necessary”**

**OR**

**The Interconnectedness of Popular Culture and the Religious Lives of White Atlantans**



## CHAPTER 5

### **White Women, Popular Culture, and Religion in Atlanta:**

#### **“What a Great Responsibility”**

#### **Introduction**

In a 1901 speech to the Atlanta Woman’s Club, Rebecca Latimer Felton called Christianity “the great elevator of the woman-status.” Elaborating on this point, she continued, “All readers of our Lord’s gospels must understand the honor and respect the [*sic*] Christ uniformly gave to the [female] sex. Never a word against the woman, always tenderness, pity, and respect.”<sup>210</sup> Felton’s speech, entitled “Some of the Influences Which Affect Life and Character,” represents several elements of the Victorian moment in which Felton lived, including the rise of the women’s club movement, and the reification of Victorian gender constructs concerning the public and private roles of women.

White women’s Victorian gender constructs have been widely discussed in the historiography of women’s history. However, little has been written about how they connect to

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<sup>210</sup> Rebecca Latimer Felton, “Some of the Influences Which Affect Life and Character,” speech to the Atlanta Woman’s Club, April 24, 1901, in Rebecca Latimer Felton, *Country Life in Georgia In the Days of My Youth* (Atlanta: Index Printing Company, 1919), 145.

the blending of religion and popular culture, especially in the South. In this chapter, I aim to fill in this historiographical gap. First, I detail the paradigms of the white, middle-class Victorian family, focusing especially on how they played out in the American South. Then I discuss how religion and popular culture intersected for Atlanta's white women in three specific areas: the home, women's clubs and activism, and popular amusements. I argue that for white women in Atlanta, popular culture and religion were not diametrically opposed, but rather were intertwined through Victorian religious and cultural norms.

### **Religion, the Family, and Victorian Gender History**

As I discussed in Chapter Four, Victorian family structures in the United States began to change in the mid-nineteenth century as a result of social and economic shifts. During the antebellum period, the South lagged behind in adopting many of these largely urban social constructions. By Reconstruction, however, architecture, cultural practices, and family structures reflective of the Victorian period were commonplace among Atlanta's white, middle-class.

When the antebellum southern economy was centered on agriculture, men were closely connected with the daily household operations. Although women may have been tasked with maintaining the house itself and raising the children, the nature of an agricultural economy meant that men's work lives were centered on the family's land and homestead. After the Civil War, however, the South's new industrial economy demanded more clerks and factory workers, and less farmers and small business owners. This meant men spent increasingly fewer hours at home. White men who left the home for most of the day to work were understood to be the leaders of the public sphere. They commanded the economy and the vote, giving them significant control over the operations of the community. Meanwhile, with husbands away running the public

sphere, women's role in the home's private sphere grew. These contrasting roles contributed to the defining of more concrete gender roles and stereotypes whose foundations began several decades earlier.

Victorian men were understood to be more sinful and susceptible to their basic urges, a theory that was only made worse by the increased time spent out in the unregulated public sphere, with its corrupting power, money, and secular vices. Women, on the other hand, had been increasingly visible in religious gatherings for nearly a century. Now, more contained in their private homes away from outside influences, a particular social and spiritual ideology developed that formed the basis of what historian Barbara Welter has called the "Cult of True Womanhood."<sup>211</sup> Barbara J. Harris succinctly defines the "cult of true womanhood" term in her book, *Beyond Her Sphere: Women and the Professions in American History*, noting:

The cult of true womanhood was a compound of four ideas: a sharp dichotomy between the home and the economic world outside that paralleled a sharp contrast between female and male natures, the designation of the home as the female's only proper sphere, the moral superiority of woman, and the idealization of her function as a mother.<sup>212</sup>

The ties between white Victorian womanhood, motherhood, morality, and domesticity, became inextricably linked as a result of the reified spheres of influence. Even arguments in the women's suffrage debate were couched in terms relating to the cult of true womanhood. Suffragists argued that women should be able to vote to better represent the moral concerns of children and families. On the other side of the debate, some men argued that politics was a dirty business that would inevitably corrupt women's virtuous sensibilities. Further, some southern women anti-

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<sup>211</sup> Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," in *Dainty Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Barbara Welter (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1976), 21-41.

<sup>212</sup> Barbara J. Harris, *Beyond Her Sphere: Women and the Professions in American History* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishing, 1978), 33. For more on Harris' assessment and the economic and social changes that led to the establishment of the "cult of womanhood," see Chapter 1 in Betty A. DeBerg, *Ungodly Women: Gender and the First Wave of American Fundamentalism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2000), 13-41.

suffragists wanted women and men to stay in separate spheres to guarantee women's power somewhere instead of nowhere.<sup>213</sup> Through the cult of true womanhood, women, especially white, middle-class, Protestant women, became understood as the moral guardians of the family, tasked with educating and even redeeming their households. In other words, Rebecca Latimer Felton told the Atlanta Woman's Club, "The Lord was willing to trust the mother. He knew her loyalty to the maternal instinct. There is another fact worthy of mention: No stream rises higher than its source."<sup>214</sup>

Victorian social codes were not the only sources of pressure to adhere to specific feminine gender constructs. Along with technical innovations that benefited industrial development, the late nineteenth century also saw the professionalization of the fields of medicine and psychology. New so-called "experts" on women and motherhood, nearly all of whom were men, published volume after volume chronicling science's latest research on how to best raise a family. Together, they developed scientific and medical arguments that "formed an ideological system rigid in its support of tradition, yet infinitely flexible in the particular mechanisms which could be made to explain and legitimate woman's role" in the home and family, wrote Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, the pioneering historian of gender and sexuality, back in 1973.<sup>215</sup> "The Victorian woman's ideal social characteristics—nurturance, intuitive, morality, domesticity, passivity, and affections—were all assumed to have a deeply rooted biological basis," contends Smith-Rosenberg.<sup>216</sup> Thus, it was science, in addition to societal pressure, that

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<sup>213</sup> Elna Green, "The Ideology of Southern White Antisuffragism," in *Hidden Histories of Women in the New South*, ed. Virginia Bernhard, Betty Brandon, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Theda Perdue, Elizabeth Hayes Turner (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 103.

<sup>214</sup> Latimer Felton, "Some of the Influences Which Affect Life and Character," 148.

<sup>215</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Charles Rosenberg, "The Female Animal: Medical and Biological Views of Woman and Her Role in Nineteenth-Century America," *The Journal of American History* 60, no. 2 (1973): 334.

<sup>216</sup> Smith-Rosenberg and Rosenberg, "The Female Animal," 334.

established the mother as the moral guardian of the family, and the purveyor of domestic sphere virtuosity and religion.

New social structures and science did not simply define Victorian womanhood; they also opened the door to new ways of living that blended existing conceptions of women's physical and spiritual lives with biological concerns. For example, until the twentieth century, Smith-Rosenberg explains, it was "almost universally assumed" that "improper life-styles" or parents' diseases like "nervousness" would be transmitted hereditarily to children.<sup>217</sup> This was especially true with regards to a mother's afflictions because mothers were perceived to have a larger biological role than a father in the development of a fetus. A woman who lived "unphysiologically," which she could do by "reading or studying in excess, by wearing improper clothing, by long hours of factory work, or by a sedentary, luxurious life," was assumed to "produce only weak and degenerate offspring."<sup>218</sup> Therefore, if over exertion could cause bad offspring, and producing offspring was a woman's chief purpose in life, then relaxation, as well as work, was required to fulfill a woman's divinely-endowed purpose.

The perceived medical need for relaxation during the Victorian era was reinforced, according to Jackson Lears, by a decrease in the Protestant ethos of self-denial and a movement toward the "therapeutic ideal of self-fulfillment...through exuberant health and intense experience."<sup>219</sup> Just like the women discussed in Smith-Rosenberg's article were living "unphysiologically" if they spent too much time on work or too much time on luxury, the subjects of Lears's book could not be solely focused on religious contemplation if they wanted to live full lives; taking time to enjoy the new moment in which they were living was seen as

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<sup>217</sup> Smith-Rosenberg and Rosenberg, "The Female Animal," 338.

<sup>218</sup> Smith-Rosenberg and Rosenberg, "The Female Animal," 338.

<sup>219</sup> Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), xvi.

equally important. Based on Smith-Rosenberg's medical "experts" and Lears's philosophers, it is possible to draw the conclusion that both pleasure and piety, work and leisure, were seen as requirements to live a meaningful life during in the Victorian era, and for women, to produce healthy offspring. Victorians needed balance, not mere entertainment or mere toil.

The New South's rapid economic growth allowed an increasing number of white families to seek a middle-class lifestyle. Catalogs, urban density, and more delivery services, made shopping easier and less time consuming. Cheap labor, namely African Americans who were denied opportunities elsewhere, rural transplants from Appalachia, and to a lesser extent, immigrants, meant that cleaning, cooking, and childcare services were more accessible to middle-class families. This allowed more middle- and upper-class white women more free time to pursue leisure time activities than ever before.

White women in Atlanta, especially in the middle- or upper-class, had several options for combining leisure activities into pursuits that were considered socially and religiously acceptable roles for women in that moment. I have chosen to focus on three such areas: the home, women's clubs, and general public amusements. As I will demonstrate, these categories demonstrate how Atlanta women were able to engage in the meaningful work of motherhood and family religious guidance, while also taking time for relaxation and popular culture.

### **Women, Leisure, and the Home**

Art historian Kenneth L. Ames has described that the homes of Victorians represented the values of the home's inhabitants. For Victorians, Ames writes, the "exteriors of houses and houses unfurnished spoke of architects and buildings. But inside the houses and houses

furnished spoke of the life that went on within and the character of those who lived it.”<sup>220</sup> New corporate and public lives were changing during the long nineteenth century, but the domestic sphere was still the major arena for acting out what remained of Victorian social and familial structures. The nineteenth century was also the time in which the character of the household became synonymous with articulations of the “proper Christian home.” This blending of Victorian character with Christianity led to the creation of what religion historian Colleen McDannell has called “domestic religion,” which is “a particular social and spiritual ideology developed within the private sphere.”<sup>221</sup> By McDannell’s assessment, domestic religion “served to both uphold the traditions of the larger [white, Protestant] church and to provide an alternative to that church.”<sup>222</sup> At the same time the domestic sphere as a whole had “its own intrinsic logic, leadership patterns, and symbols which provide a sense of the sacred.”<sup>223</sup> Thus, the logic and leadership patterns of domestic religion can be understood as a function of the new economic realities of the Victorian era coupled with the cult of true womanhood. For white, middle- and upper-class families in Atlanta, the city’s new industrial economy meant that men’s work centered on the leading the public sphere outside the home, while women’s work increasingly meant leading the private sphere, where mothers were already understood to be the moral leader of the family.

Even southern women whose social and economic standing allowed them time away from the home to participate in clubs and social gatherings were still expected to oversee the household. An example of these societal expectations can be seen in an essay written by Atlanta

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<sup>220</sup> Kenneth Ames, *Death in the Dining Room and Other Tales of Victorian Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 7.

<sup>221</sup> Colleen McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America, 1840-1900* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 151.

<sup>222</sup> McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America*, 151.

<sup>223</sup> McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America*, 151.

journalist Isma Dooly entitled, “Interesting Incidents In the Life of Mrs. William H. Felton.” The essay, which was included in Rebecca Latimer Felton’s autobiography, states:

[Felton’s] prominence in public life... may suggest that she is held aloof from the general pursuits of woman in the home, but such is not the case. She is distinguished for the perfect order maintained in the domestic side of her life, and her excellent housekeeping is never neglected for, or hampered by, her public work.<sup>224</sup>

Along with managing the appearance of the home, the cooking, and the decorating, mothers were responsible for the family’s civic, social, intellectual, and religious education. For literate women with leisure time, which included most white women of Atlanta’s middle- and upper-classes, resources were available both for children and for mothers that blended entertainment with Christian lessons. There were traditional pieces of religious literature—tracts, pamphlets from religious organizations, published sermons, and daily devotionals—but there were also historical fiction texts, Christian ladies’ magazines, and children’s story books written to make important lessons appealing to the public.

For women, publications like the Methodist Episcopal Church’s *The Lady’s Repository* magazine used “fiction [and] short stories with uplifting moral lessons” to produce “a moving panorama of life and life pictures.”<sup>225</sup> The articles were aimed at both children and adults so the entire family could engage in entertaining, religious exercises at home. Before the Civil War (during which time the *Repository* took a starkly political and pro-Union stance, losing it a good deal of its southern readership), the magazine’s circulation reached almost 40,000, readers, making it the third largest women’s magazine in the antebellum United States, religious,

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<sup>224</sup> Isma Dooly, “Interesting Incidents In the Life of Mrs. William H. Felton,” in Rebecca Latimer Felton, *Country Life in Georgia In the Days of My Youth* (Atlanta: Index Printing Company, 1919), 117.

<sup>225</sup> Kathleen L. Endres, “A Voice for the Christian Family: The Methodist Episcopal *Ladies’ Repository* in the Civil War,” *Methodist History* 33, no. 2 (1995): 85, 86.



commercial, or otherwise; only *Godey's Lady's Book* and *Peterson's Magazine* had larger circulations.<sup>226</sup>

For children, new Sunday School curricula were developed in the late nineteenth century, drawing not only on theology, but also on the latest research in the growing field of educational psychology. Back at home after attending Sunday church services, children were expected to respectfully observe the Sabbath just like their parents. Realizing that children needed more amusement and stimulation than parents, "Sabbath books" were developed by several Protestant denominations and Christian organizations. The books were intended to read and inform, but many were advertised as being "no less entertaining than [children's] every-day story-books."<sup>227</sup> An 1880 catalog of publications for sale by the publishing board of the Presbyterian Church (USA) advertised a six volume collection by Mary J. Hildeburn entitled, *Archie and Pussy Stories*. The collection was described as: "Another series of books for our little friends that will entertain whilst instructing them with true stories."<sup>228</sup> More than entertainment, these publications allowed children, led by their mothers, to observe the Sabbath and learn about Christian religion.

Writers and publishers targeted women with morality and religion dressed up in a secular package. Increasingly, these works were less theological and more centered in general Christian lessons and proper codes of socially respectable, white, middle-class behavior. As writers transformed religious instruction into entertainment, both for both children and for adults,

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<sup>226</sup> Endres, "A Voice for the Christian Family," 86.

<sup>227</sup> McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America*, 92.

<sup>228</sup> Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. Board of Publication, *Descriptive Catalogue of the Publications of the Presbyterian Board of Publication* (Philadelphia: Westcott & Thomson, 1880), 344. Digitized by the University of Wisconsin – Madison, 2017, <https://books.google.com/books?id=0hUTFjO1sHEC&vq>.

religious teachings were revitalized, Victorian social codes were reinforced, and entertainment was legitimized.<sup>229</sup>

In addition to texts and literary expressions of domestic religion, leisure time at home provided women with an opportunity to decorate in new Victorian styles while fashioning displays of the family's faith. Creating crafts and domestic arts with Christian themes on items like needlework, samplers, decorative bookmarks and cards, motto card holders, or embroidery, legitimated women's hobbies and leisure activities by associating the activities with religion.<sup>230</sup> Even women's publications began to consider these sorts of domestic cultural productions as women's "work," actions necessary to draw Christian symbols and values into the Victorian home.<sup>231</sup> Soon many publications sold supplemental issues with sampler designs and how-to instruction books.

Do-it-yourself Christian crafts were just one of many types of ornamentation employed by white, middle- and upper-class Victorian women to decorate their homes and show off their families' faith. The Victorian era marked the rise of consumerism, mass consumption, department stores, and catalog shopping. In New South Atlanta, the Chamberlin-Johnson-DuBose Company established a department store in 1866, just after the end of the Civil War. The M. Rich & Company was established as a dry goods store in 1867, and by 1877, was one of the most popular shopping destinations in Atlanta. The J.M. High Company was started as a dry goods store in Madison, Georgia, before moving to Atlanta and becoming a full department store by 1884. These shopping destinations made downtown Atlanta a central, bustling hub of retail-based commerce. Even women of the lower classes without the expendable income to make

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<sup>229</sup> McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America*, 101.

<sup>230</sup> McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America*, 39.

<sup>231</sup> For more on this line of investigation, and how it relates to Clifford Geertz's theory of sacred symbols, see McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America*, 47-48.

purchases could enjoy the storefront window displays or read catalogs for the sheer enjoyment and escapism of the practice.<sup>232</sup>

While it may appear that consumerism would be antithetical to a proper Christian home, the opposing categories were reconciled by objects' capacities to perform dual functions: participate in Victorian commercialism and display a family's Christian values. In other words, shopping helped create the aesthetic necessary to maintain a proper Christian home. Furnishing the home was not just engaging in conspicuous consumption; it was crafting a sacred space and turning popular culture, leisure time, and capitalism into notions endowed with religious meaning. The diametric opposition between materialism and spirituality that had proliferated since the time of the Puritans was increasingly narrowing by the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>233</sup> Victorian-era social guidance presumed the home to be "a place of relaxation, recreation, and reflection," writes McDannell; even the garden or lawn of a home should articulate the home's order, taste, and leisurely nature. Therefore, consumerism could be justified when what was consumed could reinforce the Victorian aesthetic values and Christian expressions that positively affected the human character.<sup>234</sup>

The white, Victorian family was heavily influenced by the social and domestic codes of the time. However, Victorianism extended to more than just the domestic sphere. In fact, the blending of religion and entertainment allowed women to balance leisure time with their duties as the moral leader of the household. As I will demonstrate in the next section, this balance between works of faith and leisure could also be seen through women's work in public spaces.

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<sup>232</sup> Margaret Ripley Wolfe, *Daughters of Canaan: A Saga of Southern Women* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1995), 127-128.

<sup>233</sup> Ames, *Death in the Dining Room*, 160.

<sup>234</sup> McDannell, *The Christian Home in Victorian America*, 28, 50.

## Women's Clubs and Public Activism

Although descriptions of domestic religion may appear to imply that white Victorian women spent their days toiling at home on Bible verses samplers or searching Sabbath book catalogs on behalf of their children, the reality was that many women ventured outside of their homes to play an active role in their communities.

In New South Atlanta, mechanization and mass production lowered the costs of many goods and services. Additionally, migration and the end of southern slavery meant that cheap domestic labor was available, especially in a city with few labor or discrimination laws. “By modern standards, entertainment was quite inexpensive,” recalled diarist and Atlanta-native, Arthur Inman. “Servants were in everyone’s house. The houses were on the whole fairly spacious. My Mother ‘gave a reception’ for nearly 400 ladies and it cost her under \$400—decorations, food, orchestra, I imagine a caterer, included.”<sup>235</sup> To be sure, Inman was a member of the wealthy elite of Atlanta; the Inman clan was one of the most prolific in the entire New South. Nevertheless, his sentiment carries some broader truth: Victorian-era Atlanta represented the first time amusements and leisure time were physically and financially accessible to many women, from working-class factory laborers up through the likes of the Inmans. And white women of New South Atlanta’s growing middle-class, freed from the day-to-day concerns of subsistence living, began to carve out new spaces for themselves beyond caring for the family and the home.

New South Atlanta, still physically reconstructing itself after the Civil War, provided new opportunities for women to become involved in the public sphere, especially when those needs served local church congregations. Atlanta had a minimal number of physical church buildings in

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<sup>235</sup> Arthur Crew Inman, *The Inman Diary: A Public and Private Confession*, ed. Daniel Aaron (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 1:34.

the wake of Sherman's destruction. Even many churches that were rebuilt or newly established after the war found themselves in need of replacement buildings as congregations, and the city itself, quickly expanded over the next several decades. Fundraising for religious causes became an acceptable way in which white, Atlanta women could engage in leisure time activities while working within the confines of suitable Victorian feminine conduct.

According to religion scholar Betty DeBerg, by the end of the nineteenth century, American women organized and taught Sunday Schools, were "the most successful supporters of foreign and domestic missions," and by 1892, "ten of the major [Protestant] denominations organized large women's missionary societies that raised millions of dollars."<sup>236</sup> Published contemporary accounts from the nineteenth century's ministerial community point to the large number of women in attendance at church and an exceptional lack of men's participation in the same congregations.<sup>237</sup> Over time, this resulted in female congregants, reporting to the male pastor, who largely became responsible for fundraising and church management efforts in many mainline and evangelical Protestant denominations. For example, between 1875 and 1890, white women established missionary organizations, serving both foreign and domestic causes, within several Protestant denominations with significant presences in the South, including the Presbyterian Church in the USA (PCUSA) in 1875, the United Methodist Church in 1876, the Methodist Episcopal Church (North in 1880, and South in 1890), and the Southern Baptist Church in 1888. These were in addition to the myriad of other, broader interest, denominationally-specific women's organizations that were launched during the same period, for example, the United Methodist Women in 1869, and the PCUSA Women of the Church in 1901. Church-

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<sup>236</sup> DeBerg, *Ungodly Women*, 28.

<sup>237</sup> According to DeBerg, in postbellum Massachusetts Baptist churches, for example, only about one-third of congregants, on average, were men. For more, see DeBerg, *Ungodly Women*, 28.

affiliated women's clubs fundraised for ministerial training institutes, hosted Sunday Schools and women's Bible studies, and performed social and leisure functions for church members, all within an environment that mixed entertainment with Christian morality. Additionally, as white, Protestant women began to fundraise on behalf of Protestant denominational initiatives and organize themselves into denominationally-sanctioned associations, the pushback from churches' typically all-male leadership was minimal since the women were serving the faith and the church community.

Like in other cities, Atlanta women established and participated in women's denominational organizations during the late nineteenth century. Despite several local Presbyterian churches, in particular Central Presbyterian and First Presbyterian, an "outgrowth of a feeling by Atlanta Presbyterians" believed that there should be a "strong church of that denomination on Atlanta's north side," notes Franklin Garrett's history of Atlanta.<sup>238</sup> The result of the effort was North Avenue Presbyterian Church, established in 1898. Garrett describes that women were "active in the movement" to establish the congregation, and were leading donors to the fundraising effort that would give the new congregation a permanent church home. Garrett especially notes the efforts of Mrs. J. M. High (wife of the founder of Atlanta's J.M. High Company department store) who was the first to pledge her moral and financial support for the congregation and its new building. Her daughter, Dorothy High, was later given the honor of breaking the first ground once the building funds were raised.<sup>239</sup>

Through the work of women's religious organizations, "feminine religiosity shifted from personal piety to public concern," writes historian Margaret Ripley Wolfe.<sup>240</sup> However, despite

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<sup>238</sup> Franklin M. Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs: A Chronicle of Its People and Events*, vol. 2 (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1969), 366.

<sup>239</sup> Garrett, *Atlanta and Environs*, 367.

<sup>240</sup> Wolfe, *Daughters of Canaan*, 135.

this public activism, and although the nineteenth century was the time of the first wave of feminism, it should not be assumed that women participating in religious clubs, or any woman's club for that matter, were necessarily engaging in an intentionally feminist act. Some white women, especially in northern, Protestant denominations, did push to expand female roles within church leadership, or were involved in women's suffrage movements; however, many other women, especially in the South, simply joined women's clubs out of a sense of religious duty, interest in a club's subject matter, and enjoyment in an organization's activities. The connection between women's clubs and feminist activism was not necessarily implied, especially in the South.

While religious clubs run through churches or denominational auxiliary groups had goals that specifically aimed to address church or Christian-related issues, the role of the Victorian mother as a moral head of the household also led women to secular community activism. One of the most lasting ways in which a white southern woman could become involved in community works was through Lost Cause organizations, specifically the Ladies Memorial Association and the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC).

Capitalism and economic change may have encouraged southerners to look forward during the New South era, but there was still a concerted effort to look backward. In 1872, former Confederate corps commander Jubal A. Early delivered a landmark Lost Cause speech on the anniversary of Robert E. Lee's death in which he charged southern citizens to preserve the memory of the Confederacy, the South's so-called "Lost Cause." In discussing the Early speech, Civil War historian Gary W. Gallagher writes:

[Commander] Early charged veterans to hold dear 'the holy memories connected with our glorious though unsuccessful struggle'...Turning to the women in attendance, he expressed...it would be their duty 'to instill the sentiments of honor and patriotism into the hearts of the rising and future generations, and teach

them to venerate the memory, emulate the virtues and cherish the principles of those who fell fighting for your homes, your all.’<sup>241</sup>

Over the next twenty years, men and women in the South took up Early’s call by joining organizations dedicated to Confederate memory. Historian Karen L. Cox notes that by 1912, the UDC’s national membership reached approximately 80,000 women and was still growing.<sup>242</sup> By joining these groups, southerners aspired to reclaim reminiscences of their past lives in the Old South and “transform military defeat into a political and cultural victory, where states’ rights and white supremacy remained intact.”<sup>243</sup>

The Georgia Division of the UDC was officially chartered in Atlanta in November 1895. Subsequent chapters rapidly sprang up across the state. Like other Lost Cause groups, the Georgia UDC was active in debates over what and who would constitute the New South. Local Atlanta historian Gregory Murphy recorded a brief history of the Georgia UDC in his 1941 book, *Builders of Georgia*. He then remarked (in present tense as he wrote in the 1940s) that the UDC “is represented throughout the State, and besides its work of historical value, helps in civic, social, and educational lines.”<sup>244</sup>

The nuances of Lost Cause-related women’s organizations and their connections to Christianity and civil religion have been recorded in important historical works like Cox’s *Dixie’s Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture*, and Charles Reagan Wilson’s *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920*. For my purposes, what is important to glean from the significant proliferation of women’s Lost Cause work is not only the connections to Confederate memory, but also how

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<sup>241</sup> Gary W. Gallagher, *The Confederate War: How Popular Will, Nationalism, and Military Strategy Could Not Stave Off Defeat*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 170.

<sup>242</sup> Karen L. Cox, introduction to *Dixie’s Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2003), 1.

<sup>243</sup> Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 50.

<sup>244</sup> Gregory Murphy, *Builders of Georgia* (Atlanta: Gregory Murphy, 1941), 61.



the organizations facilitated the leisure pursuits of middle- and upper-class white women in the South in ways that were reinforced by southern religion.

The Ladies Memorial Association (LMA), established immediately after the Civil War to aid in the funerary practices and commemoration of Confederate dead, gave white women the opportunity to engage in public works while still maintaining deference and subordination to the men in their lives.<sup>245</sup> Through the LMA and later the UDC, women performed public acts usually designated only to men, including giving speeches, designing cemetery layouts, negotiating contracts with builders and sculptors, and maintaining the financial and accounting records of their work. Cox notes that similarly, membership in the UDC allowed southern women to use their education, time, passions, and leadership skills, “without fear of being criticized as ‘unfeminine.’”<sup>246</sup> Through the UDC, women used their time and talents to honor men understood to be Confederate martyrs, and carefully protected the reputation of their white, southern, ancestors. In this way, women’s domestic work and home-based moral guardianship was extended into the public sphere.

Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, published for northern audiences in 1852, publicly challenged whether the Old South’s elite white population were true Christians, given that they owned slaves. After the Civil War, Lost Cause organizations proclaimed the Old South’s planter/slave relationship to have been paternalistic and benevolent, and thus inherently Christian. Because of the latter belief, one of the UDC’s main goals was to push back against the trope of the un-Christian Confederate.<sup>247</sup> In the view of Mildred Lewis Rutherford, a teacher,

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<sup>245</sup> LeeAnn Whites, “‘Stand By Your Man’: The Ladies Memorial Association and the Reconstruction of Southern White Manhood,” in *Women of the American South: A Multicultural Reader*, ed. Christie Anne Farnham (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 141.

<sup>246</sup> Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 26.

<sup>247</sup> Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 97.

devout Southern Baptist, and president of the Georgia division of the UDC from 1899 to 1902, Old South planters should be celebrated “for having participated in ‘the greatest missionary and education endeavors that the world has ever known,’” by “providing their African slaves with the gift of Christianity.”<sup>248</sup> The UDC, backed by the same southern iterations of Protestant denominations that had split with their national church affiliations over the issue of slavery, set out to revise historical narratives regarding slavery, the Old South, and the Confederate war effort. They did this work while acting alongside the same religious traditions that were contemporaneously reifying racial hierarchies in congregations throughout the South.

Through the commemoration of male ancestors who died for a cause perceived to be righteous, and defending their families’ honor by revising history, women’s Lost Cause work was not just a civil religion, as other historians have argued, nor was the work incompatible with Protestant religious values, despite the work’s masculine nature. Rather, I argue that the efforts of women’s Victorian-era Lost Cause organizations and the joy and passions southern women expressed through this work was an extension of white, Protestant, southern values.

In addition to memory and looking to the past, other women’s organizations during the long nineteenth century examined what they could do to change problematic conditions in their communities. American social reform movements that began in the 1870s and 1880s took up activism in rural areas, especially in the American South. Both women and men were enthusiastic members in many of these organizations. For example, according to Wolfe, during the 1880s and 1890s, women made up a fourth of the Farmer’s Alliance’s total membership nationally, and accounted for up to half of the members in some local chapters.<sup>249</sup> As the long

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<sup>248</sup> Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters*, 106.

<sup>249</sup> Wolfe, *Daughters of Canaan*, 127.

nineteenth century continued, the improvement of urban lives became a central focus of Progressive Era social reform movements.

Organizations that grew out of these reform movements had an important role in the intersection of religion and culture: they directly connected motherhood and white, Protestant Christianity with public service. According to historian Lynn Lyerly, white women were able to use the culture's "glorification of mothers and wives" to inscribe "larger spaces of responsibility in religious and public affairs."<sup>250</sup> For example, women's organizations with a Christian penchant, if not outright theology, were established during this period, like the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in 1873. Activism and volunteerism in service-based organizations, coupled with newly available leisure time, contributed to the rise of the women's club movement in the United States during the latter half of the long nineteenth century.

In Atlanta during the 1870s through 1890s, white Progressive reformers fought for sewer lines, paved streets, improved public health programs, better education (almost always for white children), and a more beautiful city. As the state capital, Atlanta also served as the headquarters for state-wide Progressive reform efforts. Just in the years from 1900 through 1906, the state of Georgia established its first state-wide Board of Education, Board of Health, and Department of Commerce and Labor. According to local historian Gregory Murphy, "As a result of a widespread campaign against child labor and the evils that arose in new industrial centers where whole families could be profitably employed at cheap cost," the Georgia state legislature passed a law in 1906 "forbidding the employment of any child under ten years of age 'in or about any factory under any circumstances.'"<sup>251</sup> By 1914, the law was amended to include children up to

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<sup>250</sup> Lynn Lyerly, "Women and Southern Religion," in *Religion in the American South: Protestants and Others in History and Culture*, ed. Beth Barton Schweiger and Donald G. Mathews (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 248.

<sup>251</sup> Murphy, *Builders of Georgia*, 64.

age fourteen. Child labor laws and many other social reforms for the time period were the direct result of the intervention of women's organizations. Participation in these groups and their activism was not only considered respectable, but in many instances, the organizations held more sway than other interest groups since white women had the authority of morality on their side. "A good mother cared not only for her own children, but for all children; a good homemaker helped keep schools safe and streets clean," writes Lyerly.<sup>252</sup> An example of the intersection of social reform and respectable women's organizations can be seen in the case of Atlanta's Rebecca Douglas Lowe.

Lowe was an upper-middle-class wife and mother. She helped found the Atlanta Women's Club in 1895 and encouraged "every woman interested in the advancement of her sex" to join the club, including "those in society to those who earn their living in Atlanta factories."<sup>253</sup> The following year, Lowe helped organize the Georgia Federation of Women's Clubs, and by 1898, Lowe became the first southern woman to be elected International President of the General Federation of Women's Clubs, which counted 800,000 members at the time.<sup>254</sup>

Lowe was a staunch supporter of women's education. She petitioned the state government to admit women to public universities in Georgia, promoted free kindergarten (for white children), and "wanted to 'take up the trouble of the working woman and see what we can do to lighten her labor and increase her pay.'"<sup>255</sup> Despite her outspoken opinions on politics, the economy, and society, I have found no evidence that Lowe faced a backlash for her activism, at least not personally. There are plenty of contemporary articles decrying "the Coming Woman" or

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<sup>252</sup> Lyerly, "Women and Southern Religion," 265.

<sup>253</sup> Cimi Douglass and Leigh Reynolds, "Rebecca Douglas Lowe and the Georgia Federation," General Federation of Women's Clubs website, March 12, 2017, <https://www.gfwc.org/rebecca-douglas-low-and-the-georgia-federation/>.

<sup>254</sup> "Woman and Society: Mrs. Lowe, President of Woman's [sic] Clubs," *Atlanta Constitution*, June 28, 1898.

<sup>255</sup> Douglass and Reynolds, "Rebecca Douglas Lowe and the Georgia Federation."

the “New Woman” who, some social commentators and male ministers believed, would undermine the patriarchal status quo, especially if that activism involved fighting for women’s suffrage. Typically, however, white women whose activism was couched in the ideals of southern Christian womanhood (taking care of vulnerable children, making their hometowns more appealing places to live and work, helping uplift downtrodden white families), did not earn themselves such pejorative nicknames. For Lowe, articles in *The Atlanta Constitution* even note regret when she declined to pursue re-election as General Federation President in 1900.<sup>256</sup>

Black women in Atlanta also led social reform efforts. In 1908, a group of African American women led by Lugenia Burns Hope established the Atlanta Neighborhood Union to improve living conditions in the city’s poor black communities. The Neighborhood Union began by tackling small projects, like raising money to build playgrounds in segregated black neighborhoods, but soon took on larger initiatives. By the early 1920s, the Neighborhood Union had founded multiple health clinics, schools, and orphanages, to serve African American families. This work was undertaken at a crucial time when most publicly-funded state services were provided to white families only. The Neighborhood Union coordinated with the American Red Cross during a tuberculosis outbreak in Atlanta, worked with Atlanta University social science students to create surveys to track quality of life metrics in low-income neighborhoods, fought segregated city and state services, and established social worker training programs to train future community organizers.<sup>257</sup> The Neighborhood Union continued to operate until the 1970s.

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<sup>256</sup> Regret was expressed in many articles as news of Lowe’s declination spread. See for example, “Woman and Society: Regret Among Club Women at Mrs. Lowe’s Decision,” *Atlanta Constitution*, May 10, 1900.

<sup>257</sup> Brittany Newberry, Kayin Shabazz, and Trashinda Wright, “‘Thy Neighbor as Thyself:’ The Neighborhood Union Collection,” *Women Who Changed Atlanta and the World*, Atlanta University Center Robert W. Woodruff Library Digital Collection, online exhibition, accessed February 20, 2020, <https://digitalexhibits.auctr.edu/exhibits/show/womenwhochangedatlanta/overview>.

Even though the Atlanta Neighborhood Union's goals, works, and caliber of educated, middle-class female members theoretically aligned with those of other Atlanta women's groups, segregation and racism nonetheless kept these black women out of most white women's organizations. Evidence of the exclusion is often subtle, as many clubs' bylaws do not specifically mention race. However, the evidence is implicitly clear in demonstrating who was welcome and what causes were worthy of attention by Atlanta's largest, most established, and best funded women's groups.

In one instance, Lowe held a children's talent show fundraiser at her home to raise money for the Free Kindergarten Association. Although there was a similar organization that supported free kindergarten for black children, Lowe's fundraiser was only for the white kindergarten association. Additionally, *The Atlanta Constitution* article, which recounted the event, implies that the only non-white women in attendance were "'mammy Anns' of the ideal type with the new white aprons and kerchiefs."<sup>258</sup> Meanwhile, the children in attendance were "afforded the greatest amusement" as the talent show began with a performance by seven-year-old Clara Brantley, which the articles describes this way, "With her little face blackened and in a costume quaint and appropriate she sung and danced 'Little Alabama Coon' with an appreciation and perfection that was most artistic and frequently encored."<sup>259</sup> The racial implications of the position of the African American women in attendance and the child's blackface performance mark additional reasons why black and white women's activism remained largely separate in New South Atlanta.

Beyond the racial implications of Lowe's fundraiser, the event's structure also demonstrates something else: Lowe was fulfilling her duties in all of the ways acceptable for a

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<sup>258</sup> "Woman and Society: Children's Matinee at Mrs. Lowe's," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 30, 1896.

<sup>259</sup> "Woman and Society: Children's Matinee at Mrs. Lowe's," *Atlanta Constitution*.

white, southern woman of her class. She planned the event on a weekday morning when men were at work to raise money for a children's charity. Children and their mothers (and nannies) were invited to dress up, eat finger sandwiches, and entertain and amuse one another. By working in the confines of what was considered acceptable behavior for a Victorian, Christian woman, Lowe expressed how a woman could balance pursuing a passion, amuse oneself during free time, and adhere to the expectations of Victorian motherhood.

From church-run organizations, to Lost Cause crusades, to Progressive Era activism, women's clubs gave Atlanta's white women new visibility in the public sphere, while they still operated within acceptable southern Victorian social norms and Protestant church teaching the time. The introduction to a souvenir publication created by the Women's Committee during the 1895 Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition describes just how unique this time period was to the public lives of white women in Atlanta:

The speeches [given by members of the Women's Committee] are included in this pamphlet, because of their bearing upon certain important official occasions, and because they will, in time to come, mark an interesting era in the progress of Southern womanhood. Up to the opening of the Exposition, no woman, unless she was a religious devotee or an enthusiast on some especial subject like politics or patriotism, had ever spoken in public in the South; indeed, public speakers of any kind among women were exceedingly rare.<sup>260</sup>

As women's roles expanded from being the moral guardians of the home to being the moral guardians of the public, Atlanta's entertainment industry also evolved to cater to the tastes of women and children who had more leisure time, expendable income, and appetite for amusements than ever before.

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<sup>260</sup> Maud Andrews, *A Little Souvenir of the Board of Women Managers of the Cotton States and International Exposition, at Atlanta, Georgia, from September 18th to December 31st, 1895* (Atlanta: The Franklin Printing and Publishing Co., 1896), 46. MSS 1022, Box 1, Folder 2, James G. Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, GA.

## Women and Public Amusements

Public roles for women may have been expanding during the long nineteenth century, but when white, respectable women were out in the public sphere, they still shouldered the responsibility as the guardians of morality and Christian living. Although women were considered less sinful than men, they were also seen as both more easily able to uphold Victorian virtues, while also being more susceptible to offense.

In 1907, Reverend Leonard G. Broughton, founder and pastor of Atlanta's Tabernacle Baptist Church, published a parable in *The Atlanta Constitution* that illustrates these expectations. Broughton's "Woman and Her Religion Discussed by Broughton," was an article series that took up nearly a full page of the newspaper. One article in the section, "Religion and Social Life" included the parable of a man sitting at a restaurant near a table of a group of women. According to Broughton's story, the man considered ordering a beer but decided against it, fearing he could not drink alcohol in the presence of ladies. Shortly thereafter, however, the women decided to order beer themselves. "Well!" the man remarked, "Seeing that these women don't mind us, I see no reason why we should mind them. Here, waiter, bring us a couple of bottles of beer."<sup>261</sup> The women in this tale could not relax their morals even at a private table amongst their female companions because of the influence they had over a male stranger.

If the implication that the women were responsible for the man's drinking wasn't clear enough, Broughton makes sure his reader understands the message adding, "What a shame on woman! A woman that will do that kind of thing is lacking in sense, refinement, and character."<sup>262</sup> He continues, "If every young woman in this country would realize the extent of

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<sup>261</sup> Leonard G. Broughton, "Woman and Her Religion Discussed by Broughton: Religion and Social Life," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 4, 1907.

<sup>262</sup> Broughton, "Woman and Her Religion Discussed by Broughton: Religion and Social Life," *Atlanta Constitution*.



her influence and put her foot down...there would soon be no more drinking.” According to Broughton, women were also “largely responsible for the rapid increase of the gambling curse,” not only for engaging in gambling themselves, but for failing to stop the men in their lives from gambling. Broughton concludes, “Men in every walk of life look to the women to set their standards of morality. What a great responsibility! Do you realize it? Thank God, some do.”<sup>263</sup>

Another Broughton parable from the same full-page spread has a similar message. A woman’s “sweetheart” knew she was a member of a church but the woman “had not made anything out of her religion.” Realizing the influence the woman could have over her lover, she wrote to him to say “she had been unfaithful to her religion and to him.” The story continued that the woman’s “chiefest delight seemed to be to accompany her sweetheart to the theater,” yet the woman had “never once asked him to go with her to the prayer meeting or any other religious exercise.” Ultimately, “the result of the religious influence of a young woman,” caused the man to attend church with her, become a Christian, and marry the woman.<sup>264</sup>

For Broughton and others like him, it was women who oversaw the regulation of men’s vices and leisure time. Whether as a mother, wife, “sweetheart,” or even when just in close physical proximity to a man, Victorian women had to be constantly aware of their moral obligations, in public and in private. It is noteworthy, however, that Broughton’s critique of the women at the restaurant is their beverage choice and nonchalance to their influence on those around them; their ability presence enjoying time out at a restaurant is not questioned. Similarly, Broughton’s critique of the “sweetheart” woman was not that she enjoyed accompanying her beloved to the theater, but that she was not using her “religious influence” to ask the beloved to

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<sup>263</sup> Broughton, “Woman and Her Religion Discussed by Broughton: Religion and Social Life,” *Atlanta Constitution*.

<sup>264</sup> Leonard G. Broughton, “Woman and Her Religion Discussed by Broughton: She Saved Her Sweetheart,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 4, 1907.

attend church with her. With the exception of partaking in genuine vices or sins, there is no concern expressed regarding women venturing out of the home to enjoy amusements or leisure time, so long as that fun does not reinforce or make tacit approval of immoral or unchristian choices. Even in the South, it was possible to be both a consumer of popular culture and entertainment, and a faithful Christian.

Elsewhere in Atlanta, the sway of market capitalism, which itself was influenced by views of Victorian womanhood and white, Protestant respectability, also affected how popular amusements operated for and appealed to women. The reconstruction and rapid expansion of the city meant there were plenty of opportunities for entrepreneurial businessmen to establish new entertainment venues. Granted, the attractions at some sites were considered too distasteful for respectable, white women, like saloons, dance halls, and burlesque shows. But other even lowbrow Atlanta venues offered amusements that were generally considered acceptable, like theaters, nickelodeons, restaurants, amusement parks, and at least two velodromes within city limits.

Concert saloons had been popular among working-class men in New York during the 1850s. These were places where men could get a drink and a show for a low cost. Realizing the economic potential of concert saloons, if only they could overcome the alcohol and crude performances, entrepreneurs like B. F. Keith, Edward Albee, and the aptly named Tony Pastor tried to create similar, more restrained variety shows performances to appeal to families. The result became known as “the Sunday School Circuit” of touring variety shows. The shows were low cost to host theaters, but high value for audiences. Acts rotated, but always gave an entertaining and family-friendly performance. As vaudeville theaters spread across the United

States, this more censored version of entertainment proved to be a popular one, earning it the title “polite vaudeville.”<sup>265</sup>

Vaudevillian theaters came to Atlanta during the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition, although most did not last after the exposition was over. Within a decade, however, the first successful theaters opened in Atlanta’s downtown district. A 1907 *Atlanta Journal* article described that vaudeville, in particular, was so popular in Atlanta during this time because “it is a direct outgrowth of present-day life and needs, the need of spry, restful, constantly changing amusement for fagged-out brains and nerves.”<sup>266</sup> By this time, Atlanta had a booming economy and manufacturing industry with plenty of blue-collar workers who had a leisure time and a bit of money to spare. As one promoter noted, “There are clearly more people in the world who can only afford to pay ten cents for their theatrical amusements than there are who are capable of paying a dollar [for the opera].”<sup>267</sup> To meet this opening in the market, Atlanta theaters needed to frame themselves as cheaper and more popular alternatives to highbrow opera, but appeal to wider audiences than the rowdy, male factory workers who had visited New York City concert saloons. Advertisements for Atlanta vaudeville theaters and reviews of local vaudeville performances make clear that theater owners and promoters understood the profits that were at stake if they could not manage to cater to white women, children, and women’s perceived Victorian sensibilities. Atlanta librarian Katharine Hinton Wootten saved a 1912 article in one of her scrapbooks about a vaudeville performance at Atlanta’s Grand Theater, in which the acts were referred to as “wholesome” or “not a vulgar word.”<sup>268</sup>

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<sup>265</sup> Steve Goodson, *Highbrows, Hillbillies, and Hellfire: Public Entertainment in Atlanta, 1880-1930* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 63, 65.

<sup>266</sup> *Atlanta Journal* article, September 17, 1907. As quoted in Goodson, *Highbrows, Hillbillies, and Hellfire*, 68.

<sup>267</sup> As quoted in Goodson, *Highbrows, Hillbillies, and Hellfire*, 68.

<sup>268</sup> Katharine Hinton Wootten, “Scrapbook, 1908-1912,” MSS 330, OS Box 4.34, Katharine Hinton Wootten Scrapbooks, James G. Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, GA.

In early 1908, the *Atlanta Weekly Amusement Pilot*, “Official Organ of Atlanta’s Theatres and Places of Amusement,” began its publication.<sup>269</sup> As its name suggests, this weekly booklet gave Atlantans a list of the coming attractions for the week, including content summaries, performance times, locations, and prices. Despite their temporary use, given that the booklet’s content was largely only applicable for a week at a time, various copies of the *Atlanta Weekly Amusement Pilot* show up in the archival collections and personal papers of several Atlanta families. The publication gives a glimpse into Atlanta’s available attractions each week, and how those attractions were marketed to certain audiences. Specifically, the ways in which some entertainment attractions were advertised to Atlanta’s white women speaks to the cult of true womanhood. For example, when the Dixie Theatre opened in Atlanta, it hoped to appeal to white families, as well as young adults out on the town.<sup>270</sup> To demonstrate the theater’s commitment to families and family-friendly entertainment, an article in the *Atlanta Weekly Amusement Pilot* promised that the Dixie Theatre

...is to be the coziest amusement resort in the city. Both [owners are] gentlemen have been long in the amusement line and will cater strictly to the ladies and children, who will at all times be treated kindly and politely, and nothing will be shown to displease or offend the most fastidious. Baby buggies will be looked after at all times.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> *Atlanta Weekly Amusement Pilot* (Atlanta: Press of the Cotton Journal Publishing Company). Several editions of this weekly publication were used in my research, primarily from 1908 and 1909. Copies can be found, for example, included in the personal papers of Katharine Hinton Wooten, and the Galhouse, Kuhn, and Brisendine families, both housed at the James G. Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center.

<sup>270</sup> Note: The Dixie Theatre I am discussing was a whites-only theater located at 86 Whitehall Street in Atlanta. In the 1914-1915 edition of the *American Motion Picture Directory*, another theater with the same name is listed at 127 Decatur Street in Atlanta, with the notation, “Colored.” Both Dixie Theatres are mentioned in the directory, with their respective addresses and racial designation; they were not the same. For more see: *The American Motion Picture Directory: A Cyclopedic Directory of the Motion Picture Industry, 1914-15* (Chicago: Motion Picture Directory Co., 1915). Digitized by the Library of Congress, Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division, 2014, <https://archive.org/details/americanmotionpi00chic/page/n5/mode/2up>.

<sup>271</sup> “At the New Dixie Theatre, 86 Whitehall St.,” *Atlanta Weekly Amusement Pilot*, April 5, 1909. MSS 781, Box 1, Folder 9, Galhouse, Kuhn, and Brisendine families’ papers, James G. Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, GA.

The implication is that women could come to the Dixie Theatre and attend a show without worrying about being offended by the content or having to cope with the rough, working-class men who frequented some theaters in Atlanta. Additionally, the advertisement is targeting white mothers, especially women of Atlanta's working- and lower-middle-classes who perhaps could afford a cheap show but not the cost of childcare. Using contemporary phraseology that readers at the time would have understood, the advertisement is speaking to women who may want to come downtown for a show, while still maintaining their moral leadership and caretaker status.

In this way, there is a duplexity about cultural life in New South Atlanta. Even taking into account the regulations of white women's behavior by scientists, outspoken preachers, or social commentators, culture was increasingly less Puritanistic and more pragmatic; parishioners could both enjoy their leisure time and be faithful Christians. Historians can see the versatility in Victorian cultural and social practices emerge by reading journals, personal correspondence, and scrapbooks of Atlanta's white women.

Harriet Reynolds Dunnington Wayt of Atlanta often wrote letters to her son, John, while he was away at college at the University of Virginia. A letter dated Sunday, September 20, 1914, recounts that the previous evening, the Wayt parents stayed out until midnight at a dance. But, notes Mrs. Wayt, the whole family still managed to wake up in time to make it to Sunday School, presumably at one of several Atlanta-area Presbyterian churches the Wayt family attended.<sup>272</sup> Similarly, Janie Avary also wrote letters to her son, Stephens, while he was away at college. In one letter, Avary, who attended First Methodist Church in Atlanta, told her son that she attended a movie that afternoon but left early for a Missionary Society meeting.<sup>273</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> Harriet Reynolds Dunnington Wayt, letter to John Augustus Wayt, September 20, 1914. MSS 738, Box 1, Folder 2, Wayt Family Papers, James G. Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, GA.

<sup>273</sup> Janie Stephens Avary, letter to Stephens Archer Avary, June 21, 1921. MSS 1028, Box 1, Folder 5, Avary and Stephens family papers, James G. Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, GA.

The balance of Saturday recreations with Sunday Sabbath can be seen for girls, as well. In another letter from mother to son, Harriet Wayt describes how the two Wayt daughters, Isabelle and Helen, participated in leisure time amusements and attending church services. The letter, written on a Saturday afternoon, stated:

Helen and Isabelle have gone to Gainesville to play "Basket Ball." I hated to have them stay all night but they are coming home on the six o'clock train tomorrow in time for Sunday School. Isabelle was very much excited, it is the first time she has ever gone with the team and the first time she has been out of Atlanta in five years.<sup>274</sup>

This short note holds so many important elements that describe how interwoven popular culture and religion were during the long nineteenth century.

First, participation in sports was a new phenomenon during this period, especially for women and girls. Girls' participation in amateur sports began in the 1880s and largely ended within four decades when girls were increasingly excluded from recreations that by the 1920s, were perceived to be just for boys.<sup>275</sup> Second, basketball had only recently been invented by a physical education instructor at a Massachusetts Young Men's Christian Association chapter in 1891. By playing a sport, especially at a level competitive enough to require traveling to a game roughly fifty miles from central Atlanta to Gainesville, Georgia, Helen and Isabelle Wayt were demonstrating just how far girls' public roles had come since the days of their mother's youth just a few decades prior. Finally, it is notable that not only would Helen and Isabelle be coming home on such an early train, so as to not miss Sunday School, but also that Mrs. Wayt would feel this detail to be of such importance that it was worth pointing out to her son. Such was the careful equilibrium to be demonstrated through the words and actions of a mother's moral

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<sup>274</sup> Harriet Reynolds Dunnington Wayt, letter to John Augustus Wayt, January 27, 1917. MSS 738, Box 1, Folder 2, Wayt Family Papers, James G. Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, GA.

<sup>275</sup> Tony Ladd and James Mathisen, *Muscular Christianity: Evangelical Protestants and the Development of American Sport* (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 92.

guardianship: oscillating between the amusement of Saturday with the reverence of Sunday, all while making sure the men in their lives took note.

In some instances, however, the personal writings of Atlanta women also make clear that attending Sunday services was not necessarily a personal or a family mandate. Carrie Ellett Roy described her social calendar in detail in her 1915 diary. Roy notes attending several funerals on Sundays, but otherwise rarely mentions attending church or a church-related event. Sundays were often used as a travel day to visit friends outside of Atlanta or as day of rest at home. During Atlanta Opera Week, Roy wrote in her diary for Saturday, May 1, 1915, “Went to Matinee—‘Magic Flute,’ Eve—‘Madame Sans Gene’.” For Sunday she wrote only, “Staid [*sic*] home by ourselves all day—rested.”<sup>276</sup> Even Harriet Wayt admitted to son John in a letter written on a Sunday evening, “I was the only one of this family to go to church today.”<sup>277</sup>

Still, some women’s archival records make no mention religion at all. Scrapbooks and personal papers saved by Victorians and their decedents point to a treasure trove of entertainment offerings in New South Atlanta. The scrapbooks of Katharine Hinton Wootten are especially telling. Wootten was raised a Catholic family of Irish descent and she attended an Atlanta parochial school as a child. Despite American suspicions of Catholics in the late nineteenth century, especially in the South, Wootten was evidently quite proud of her Catholic heritage and was an active member in her parish church (Sacred Heart Church in Atlanta, now the Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus).<sup>278</sup> Wootten rose to prominence in Atlanta as an employee at and then

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<sup>276</sup> Carrie Ellett Roy Diary, MSS 296f, James G. Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, GA.

<sup>277</sup> Harriet Reynolds Dunnington Wayt, letter to John Augustus Wayt, September 16, 1917, MSS 738, Box 1, Folder 2, Wayt Family Papers, James G. Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, GA.

<sup>278</sup> Peter Thomas Conmey, “Katherine Hinton Wooten [*sic*] 1877-1946, Lady of the South,” *Catholic Library World* 59 (January/February 1988): 159-160. Note: Conmey spelled Wootten’s name incorrectly in his article. The spelling of the name, with two “T’s,” was confirmed by Wootten’s scrapbooks and other materials written in her own hand. Despite the spelling error, Conmey’s article is an otherwise thorough biography of Wootten, especially with regards to her faith and her professional life as a librarian.

eventually the Librarian of the Carnegie Library of Atlanta. In her free time, Wootten created richly detailed scrapbooks that included articles, notes, cards, and other ephemera from life in Atlanta. They cover a span of twenty-two years, from 1895 to 1917.

The choice of what to include in a scrapbook speaks to the memories the scrapbook's creator wanted to preserve. In Wootten's case, there are collections of articles, poems, wedding invitations, comics, cartoon, clippings of the latest fashions, calling cards, and notes about Atlanta society receptions, like a tea hosted by the Daughters of the American Revolution, of which Wootten was a member. Nothing in Wootten's scrapbook, however, is related to religious life or religiously-affiliated social gatherings, clubs, or meetings. This, despite her reportedly active church life.

Even the Christmas-related items in Wootten's scrapbooks are surprisingly secular. Christmas cards pasted into the scrapbooks contain images of holly, stockings, and Santa Claus; none are Biblically-themed or related to Christ's birth. A scrapbook dated 1908 to 1912, includes a commemorative holiday booklet from the Southeastern Freight Association. Like its name suggests, the territory of the Southeastern Freight Association stretched from the Potomac River to West Virginia, southwest to Bristol, Tennessee, then southeast to northern Florida.<sup>279</sup> Conventional wisdom might suggest that a company operating in the South may fill its Christmas message with evangelism or at least some religious language. However, this booklet only includes quotes and poems about Christmas being a time of love, joy, and charity, never noting the birth of Jesus. The booklet even mentions "the Great Apostle of Christmas," who, it turns out, was not Jesus, but Charles Dickens.<sup>280</sup> The booklet and Wootten's Christmas cards are

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<sup>279</sup> Elvin Sydney Ketchum and Thomas D. Fitzgerald, *The Freight Classification and Traffic Territories of the United States* (Chicago: United States Commerce Association, 1913), 33-34. Digitized by the University of California, 2007, <https://books.google.com/books?id=puxAAAAIAAJ>.

<sup>280</sup> Wootten, "Scrapbook, 1908-1912."



valuable pieces of historical evidence for scholars of religion because they demonstrate that Victorians, even in the South, wanted to send holiday greetings that were disentangled from Bible stories and Christian theology. Secular Christmas greeting cards and holiday ephemera would not have been created without a consumer market for them.

The scrapbooks and Wootten's notes do not describe why she chose to include the items she did. Whether her omission of religion was intentional or accidental, the scrapbooks make clear that the coexistence of religious practice with participation in secular, popular culture was possible, even at a time when women were considered guardians of morality and teachers of Christianity.

## **Conclusion**

In her study of the religious lives of nineteenth century southern women, Lynn Lyerly summarizes their lived experiences, writing, "Women joined religious and public associations, but also led devotionals at home, and had inner, spiritual lives that were entirely their own."<sup>281</sup> Because of this fact, Lyerly argues, the study of women and religion must "envision a spectrum from private to public rather than a division between the two."<sup>282</sup> This spectrum is precisely why the study of religion and popular culture is so important for understanding the lives of white women in Atlanta during the long nineteenth century.

As is visible elsewhere in New South Atlanta, the connections between popular culture and religion for white women was complicated. In the home, the societally-endowed moral guardian role allowed women to engage in new forms of leisure, work, and family authority. Outside the home, activism in clubs and organizations gave women opportunities to use their

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<sup>281</sup> Lyerly, "Women and Southern Religion," 249.

<sup>282</sup> Lyerly, "Women and Southern Religion," 249.

education and professional skills, while advocating for causes important to them. Finally, by attending public amusements like sporting events or vaudeville performances, white women in Atlanta were able to rest their “fagged-out brains and nerves” and escape their daily routines, even for a few minutes. These activities may have been couched in what Victorian gender constructs and institutional religion understood to be as proper activities for respectable white women, but the women nevertheless took advantage of these openings to carve out new spaces for themselves in private and public life.

Not merely entertainment, Victorian amusements and cultural productions, at home or in public, gave women in Atlanta the opportunity to enjoy their leisure time, and take larger roles in public and private spheres without interfering with the practicing of institutional religion.

## CHAPTER 6

### **Sports, Entertainment, and Manliness at the Atlanta YMCA:**

#### **“Exercise for the Body, Mind, and Soul”**

#### **Introduction**

In 1903, the Atlanta chapter of the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) released a special edition publication recounting the chapter’s history and successes. The publication celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of the Atlanta YMCA’s post-Civil War re-establishment. Prominent local community leaders, all white and male, were asked to contribute their thoughts and opinions about the chapter. The submissions are full of praise for the YMCA’s work in Atlanta and around North Georgia. While it may be expected that solicited submissions would be positive, the diction used in almost every contributed submission is surprising: their language focuses on broad moral values and wholesome amusements. Even submissions from clergymen mention very little explicitly Christian theology. For example, Reverend Theron H. Rice of Central Presbyterian Church submitted the following:

I am glad that there is a place open every day and every night where the hundreds of young men in Atlanta, living in boarding-houses and deprived of the recreations and safe pleasures of the family circle, can find fellowship, innocent

recreations, wholesome physical training, all under the control of Christian principles and in an atmosphere free from corrupting influences.<sup>283</sup>

Many of the themes expressed in Reverend Rice's reflection fit within the late Victorian era's revivalist and muscular Christianity movements. But they also express that something more was at work. At a time when many southerners saw a crisis in masculinity and the traditional white, southern family structure, the YMCA offered a space where young men and boys could escape the new temptations of modernity and strengthen their mind, body, and spirit.

This chapter will examine how sports and popular culture came together at the Atlanta YMCA to reify white, middle-class, Victorian values during the latter half of the long nineteenth century. Despite the YMCA's Christian mission, I argue that New South Atlanta's articulation of masculine sports and recreation amusements was more about reifying the Victorian era's white, middle-class, broadly Protestant values, than it was a singularly evangelistically-minded endeavor. To make this point, I first discuss the origins of the international YMCA's founding, organization, and ideology. Second, I contextualize Atlanta's YMCA chapter and local sporting attractions within southern industrialization, the development of gender-specific recreations, and the South's iteration of the muscular Christianity movement. Finally, I will examine how the Atlanta YMCA's use of Victorian entertainment was more evidence of Victorianism than it was theologically Christian.

### **Southern Manhood and Victorian Gender Norms**

From the earliest years of the American colonies, honor and virtue dominated constructions of southern manhood. Historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown has described how old

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<sup>283</sup> YMCA of Atlanta, *Atlanta: A Book of Letters* (Atlanta: Doctor Blosser Co., 1903), 25. This book is included as part of the YMCA of Metro Atlanta archival collection, James G. Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center: MSS 1108, Box 1, Folder 6.

English codes of honor were translated in the antebellum American South through a system Wyatt-Brown calls “chivalry.” Chivalry in white male culture was an intense lifestyle, Wyatt-Brown writes. It demanded courage, self-assertiveness, and self-control.<sup>284</sup> Historian Ted Ownby has drawn similar conclusions, writing that that working-class, white, men in the antebellum South added competition to this description. These men “liked to see battles of many sorts, especially those with an element of chance and the possibility of danger. Honor came from winning; momentary shame came from losing; identification with the male community came from participating in the competition.”<sup>285</sup>

Prior to the Civil War, white, southern men of the elevated classes attended military academies that sought to strike a balance between teaching traditional methods of combat, such as fencing, with more modern techniques of warfare like engineering and technology.<sup>286</sup> According to historian Jennifer R. Green, antebellum military academies helped create a conception of manhood that “...recognized the importance of a man’s hierarchical status but modified elite male goals of wealth, honor, and mastery over slaves, replacing the standards of valuation with ones they could attain, such as self-discipline, education, and industry.”<sup>287</sup> These modern characteristics of masculinity became intertwined with Christian religion during the American Civil War.

Honor, power, violence, and white masculinity were keenly inculcated with religion during the Civil War. The North and the South attempted to justify their causes in religious

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<sup>284</sup> Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics & Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 23 and 26.

<sup>285</sup> Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 13.

<sup>286</sup> James L. Morrison, Jr, “Educating the Civil War Generals: West Point, 1833-1861,” *Military Affairs* 38, no. 3. (October 1974): 109.

<sup>287</sup> Jennifer R. Green, “Stout Chaps Who can bear the Distress: Young Men in Antebellum Military Academies” in *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South*, ed. Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 2004,) 175.

terms, while simultaneously preparing the next generation of Christian warriors. Even "...awed children learned to revere the war and the warriors of Christ who prosecuted it," notes historian Harry Stout.<sup>288</sup> As I described in Part II, white, southern men faced a crisis in manhood after the Civil War. They lost the war, failed their cause, and significantly depleted their numbers in the process. While some Confederate soldiers, particularly officers from the middle- and upper-class, had attended military institutions like the United States Military Academy at West Point (which graduated both Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee in the late 1820s), Virginia Military Institute (founded in 1839), or the South Carolina Military Academy (founded in 1842, now known as the Citadel), after the war, the sons and grandsons of these military leaders were caught between the dissolution of the Old South's white patriarchy and a realignment of pre-war social, cultural, and economic institutions.

As the nineteenth century progressed onward, shifts in masculinity and social constructions altered the perception of embodied masculine religion; it was no longer based on exterior restrictions (those which external factors like church discipline or public shame that could be placed on a man), but on self-control. Thus, nineteenth century southern manhood was a delicate balance between the restrictions of chivalric honor and expanding evangelical religions, with the freedom and liberty of physical power. For a group whose life reflected shame, dishonor, and confusion, a resurging movement known as "muscular Christianity" offered a new path to old values.

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<sup>288</sup> Harry S. Stout, *Upon the Alter of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* (New York: Penguin Group, 2006), 101.

## Muscular Christianity's Foundations and American Iteration

Muscular Christianity rose out of the eighteenth-century teachings of John Wesley, although the term would not be coined until almost a century later. Wesley, an eighteenth-century Anglican priest in England whose theories would later become the foundations for Methodism, believed in incorporating all men as equals in the Christian faith, regardless of social class. During the mid to late-eighteenth century, a new religious fervor grew within England's Christian sects. The revival came as the Second Industrial Revolution's need for physical labor caused many in the Anglican Church to reexamine the church's relationship with members of the working-class who provided this labor. Wesleyan ideas and the theories behind muscular Christianity were part of this revival.

Wesley was a strong proponent of "perfectionism," the doctrine that there is a "more excellent way" of approaching one's life that could bring a person closer to the "perfect" life of Christ.<sup>289</sup> In a sermon entitled "The More Excellent Way" (also known simply as "Sermon 89,") Wesley used 1 Corinthians 12:31 to outline some "more excellent" ways of living a righteous, Christian life. There are many "who profess the Christian religion, then go no farther than honest Heathenism," Wesley argued. "Now, by the grace of God, we may chose the 'more excellent way.'"<sup>290</sup> According to Wesley, a Christian could live in a "more excellent way" through many facets of one's life, including prayer and service, but also through labor, eating a meal, "[promoting] health both of body and mind," and participating in "relaxation" and "intervals of

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<sup>289</sup> John Wesley, "The More Excellent Way (Sermon 89)," ed. Edward Purkey, Ryan Danker, George Lyons, Wesleyan-Holiness Digital Library: Wesley Center for Applied Theology, Northwest Nazarene University, 1999, <http://whdl.nbc.edu/more-excellent-way-sermon-89>.

For more on perfectionism, see for example: John Wesley, "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection," and "The Scripture Way of Salvation," in *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., ed. Thomas Jackson (London: Wesleyan Book Room, 1872), 11:366-446 and 6:53-54.

<sup>290</sup> John Wesley, "The More Excellent Way (Sermon 89)." Spelling and capitalization are original to the source.

diversion from business.”<sup>291</sup> Sermon 89 essentially argues that in order to be more perfect, Christians need, among other things, cheerfulness, communication, fellowship, service, prayer, diversions, and physical and mental health. Taking part in activities “most conducive both to bodily and spiritual health,” became the foundations of muscular Christianity.

In Wesleyan England, muscular Christianity was a conduit to incorporate men of the laboring classes into the formal worship practices of Anglicanism. In the United States, muscular Christianity reemerged in the mid-nineteenth century as a way of teaching self-control to men in blue-collar jobs, while also reminding nervous, pale, middle-class men in new white-collar jobs that they were still strong soldiers for Christ.

Muscular Christianity in the United States was one way that young, white, southern men could channel the same physical power and aggression described by Ownby, into more constructive and restrained demonstrations of chivalric power. It reflected a national trend that shifted the ideal young man from the lean and vigorous farm boy of the antebellum period, to a muscular outdoorsman or bodybuilder of the postbellum years. As sports historians Tony Ladd and James Mathisen have argued, the American iteration of muscular Christianity that was cultivated during the late nineteenth century developed parallel to and complementary of its British counterpart; however, the American version was “distinctively evangelical and premillennial in its theology, and culturally American in its process and methods.”<sup>292</sup> While the general theories of muscular Christianity had been present since the mid-eighteenth century, especially in white, Anglo, Protestant traditions, it wasn’t until the late nineteenth century that

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<sup>291</sup> John Wesley, “The More Excellent Way (Sermon 89).”

<sup>292</sup> Tony Ladd and James Mathisen, *Muscular Christianity: Evangelical Protestants and the Development of American Sport* (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 20.



physiology, evangelism, and masculine power, coalesced to create a new, American, and uniquely Victorian iteration.

In the American conception of Victorian-era muscular Christianity, physicality and embodied power merged with the spread of rising evangelical Protestant religious traditions. In his 1993 article, “A Short History of the Penis,” Toby Miller, explains the origins of muscular Christianity and sports derived from “a regimen of knowledge set down as an all-consuming faith in the transformability of individuals through continuous exercise.”<sup>293</sup> In this form, muscular Christianity was a “binding mind and body together under the sign of health.”<sup>294</sup> Miller’s theory is evident in the writings of both scholars of religion and health from the Victorian era. For example, William James articulated that physical strength is connected with moral strength. In his essay collection, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*, first published in 1902, James writes:

The moralist must hold his breath and keep his muscles tense; and so long as this athletic attitude is possible all goes well—morality suffices. But the athletic attitude tends ever to break down, and it inevitably does break down even in the most stalwart when the organism begins to decay, or when morbid fears invade the mind. To suggest personal will and effort to one all sicklied o’er with the sense of irremediable impotence is to suggest the most impossible of things. What he craves is to be consoled in his very powerlessness, to feel that the spirit of the universe recognizes and secures him, all decaying and failing as he is.<sup>295</sup>

The physical nature of humanity was thus thought of in terms of both moral and scientific physicality.

Outside of religion, the professionalization of science and medicine during the long nineteenth century also influenced the revival of muscular Christianity during the Victorian era.

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<sup>293</sup> Toby Miller, “A Short History of the Penis,” *Social Text* 43 (Autumn 1995), 3.

<sup>294</sup> Miller, “A Short History of the Penis,” 3.

<sup>295</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience A Study in Human Nature*, 11th ed. (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1905), 47. Digitized by the California State Library, digitization date unknown, accessed February 29, 2020. <https://books.google.com/books?id=WRkMAAAAIAAJ>.

Improvements to science and medicine showed the benefits of keeping a healthy lifestyle. As the century progressed, men like Theodore Roosevelt tied up health with masculinity, physical prowess, and white racial superiority. Strongmen and stunt performers, like Eugen Sandow and Harry Houdini, drew crowds to their Vaudevillian stage performances. “At a time when it seemed to be losing authority and coherence...[they] stress[ed] the potential for strength, control, heroism, and virility in the male physique,” men like Sandow and Houdini reaffirmed male identity writes historian John F. Kasson.<sup>296</sup> Roosevelt, Sandow, Houdini, and other famous white “manly men” like them tied the body to expressions of restraint, desire, and, power, and pleasure. They did this while pushing back against fears that desk jobs, mechanization, and less farm-based living were emasculating American civilization.

In addition to men’s bodies being a topic of reexamination during the Victorian era, boys’ physicality was also reconsidered. While more white, middle-class fathers worked outside of the home, mothers had increasing responsibilities for raising children of both sexes. Additionally, the decline of the apprenticeship model and a decrease in family-owned businesses meant that even slightly older boys, roughly eight to fourteen years-old, were spending long hours at home with their feminine mothers and sisters. As a result, many men feared that excessive time spent with a mother and sisters may result in a boy’s “sissification” and encouraged fathers to spend more time with their sons.<sup>297</sup>

This period also ushered in one of the first times that play spheres became segregated by gender for young children, which generally occurred around five years old when formal schooling began. And it was the first time “gender-appropriate clothing,” instead of unisex

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<sup>296</sup> John F. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), 76.

<sup>297</sup> Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 107.

“frocks” (linen dresses), emerged for toddlers with “knickerbockers and trousers...for little boys.”<sup>298</sup> By the turn of the twentieth century, and the growth of department stores and catalogs, meant toys were also increasingly marketed as gender-specific, further reifying recreation and play as “for boys” or “for girls.”

Playtime wasn't the only place where white masculinity could potentially be impacted by women's involvement. Since religion, especially evangelical revivalism, was seen as emotional and therefore more feminine, many white men were reluctant to become overly involved in institutional Protestant religious practices. As evangelical religion spread throughout the American South during the early half of the long nineteenth century, many white southern men were willing to discuss or debate theology, but when ministers attempted to “probe their souls or to insist on the truth of evangelical creeds, most drew back,” writes religious historian Christine Leigh Heyrman.<sup>299</sup> Such men believed that discussing their faith or the characteristics of their souls meant demonstrating the same sensitive characteristics that were synonymous with emotionalism, womanhood, and femininity. Heyrman goes on to assert, “Even those [men] who did not recoil from searching inquiries or dogmatic assertions resented the churches' infringements on their freedom of conduct.”<sup>300</sup> The resentment was true for men raised in evangelical traditions, as well as new converts, describes Heyrman. Men who embraced the powerlessness brought forth by religious conversion were to be “stripped of dignified restraint along with the liberty to think and act for oneself. It was to embrace the postures of powerlessness appropriate only to women, children, and slaves.”<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 107.

<sup>299</sup> Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 216.

<sup>300</sup> Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 216.

<sup>301</sup> Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 216.

Before the mid-twentieth century's gender realignment in Protestant churches that sought to more purposefully assert the husband as the spiritual leader of the household, both the home and church were seen as effeminate. Conversely, men's lodges and fraternal order clubs offered a "womanless family," an "unfeminized church, devoid of clucking mother hens and effete ministers."<sup>302</sup> Men-only clubs grew increasingly popular during the Victorian era, with the majority of modern American college social fraternities and men's fraternal orders being founded in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. According to Kimmel, fraternal orders were an attempt to create a "domestic sanctuary" outside the home "where men might experience fellowship and intimacy without the feminizing influence of women."<sup>303</sup> In his study of fraternity and lodge rituals, historian Mark Carnes argues that fraternal ritualism helped transition boys into a new patriarchal system that would in term help them better cope with the outside world.<sup>304</sup> Victorian gender anxieties were so significant, argues Carnes, that men could not possibly connect to religious emotionalism while still being manly, and by Christianity being increasingly focused on emotionalism, the space was made implicitly female. This "deprived [Victorian men] of a religious experience with which they could identify," says Carnes, pushing young men out of the church and toward other sources of "sober ritualism" and a theology of "great virile manhood."<sup>305</sup>

As a result, evangelical men of faith had "only one course," Heyrman concludes: "persuading other southern white men that becoming evangelical would leave them no less masculine and masterful."<sup>306</sup> An 1890 poem entitled "Boys Wanted," published in a newspaper

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<sup>302</sup> Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 125.

<sup>303</sup> Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 125.

<sup>304</sup> Mark Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 123.

<sup>305</sup> Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America*, 149 and 153.

<sup>306</sup> Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 216.

for the Southern Baptist Convention of North Carolina demonstrates how white, Protestant religion and new masculine constructs were intertwined during the Victorian era South:

Boys of spirit, boys of will / boys of muscle, brain, and power, Fit to cope with anything, / These are wanted every hour. Not the weak and whining drones, / Who all troubles magnify; Not the watchword of "I can't!" / But the noble one, "I'll try." Do whate'er you have to do / With a true and earnest zeal, Bend your sinews to the task, / Put your shoulder to the wheel. Through your duties may be hard, / Look not on it as an ill, If it be an honest task, / Do it with an honest will. In the workshop, on the farm, / At the desk, where'er you be, From your future efforts, boys, / Comes a nation's destiny.<sup>307</sup>

This poem ties together religious rhetoric such as "a true and earnest zeal," with Victorian standards of "muscle, brain, and power." For evangelists, the theories of muscular Christianity provided an opportunity to combine these elements into a cohesive strategy for recruiting men and boys into the faith, and sustaining their involvement in institutional religion.

Muscular Christianity was a focus on the corporeal; the more physically fit a man was, the closer to God he could be. According to historian Anthony Rotundo, muscular Christianity is a philosophy not of the "idea of the spirit made flesh, but of the flesh made spirit."<sup>308</sup> By connecting Christian religion to physicality and the body ("the flesh"), the church could retain manly characteristics. In this way, muscular Christianity was a divergence from other evangelical Protestant religious traditions that were considered more emotional, more sensitive, and therefore more feminine. Grounding Christian religion in the bodily strength would serve especially important when appealing to the same white, southern men who, as Ownby has argued, liked danger and competition.

Furthermore, this cultural transformation coincided with, and eventually helped feed the rise, of organized sports in the United States. Princeton College and Rutgers College are credited

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<sup>307</sup> "Boys Wanted," *Biblical Recorder* (Raleigh, NC), May 14, 1890.

<sup>308</sup> E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity From the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 224.

as having played the first intercollegiate football game in 1869. Professional baseball began with the National League's founding in 1876, followed by the American League in 1901. By the turn of the twentieth century, evangelists like Dwight L. Moody and Billy Sunday were preaching a gospel that placed "emphases on involvement in sports as a common ground for evangelism, as a means to manliness, [and] as a method of character development."<sup>309</sup> This connected evangelical eschatology to modernity and moral change. The Young Men's Christian Association, at least at its inception was a part of this "common ground," intending to connect physicality and sports with a palatable Christian gospel for even the "manliest" men and boys.

### **Early Years at the Young Men's Christian Association**

The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) was established in London in 1844. At the time, young men from the countryside were moving to work in London's growing drapery and textile trades during Great Britain's Second Industrial Revolution. Christian leaders aimed to provide a safe place for these newcomers to fellow in a wholesome, Christian environment, especially during times when the men may be tempted to engage in other vices out on the streets of London. Creating the YMCA was their solution.

The YMCA's central goal was to "improve the spiritual condition of young men."<sup>310</sup> To accomplish this, the YMCA provided Bible studies, prayer groups, and educational opportunities. Association leaders also distributed religious tracts and joined with other urban reformers to advocate against urban vices. Boarding and extended services offerings came several years later.

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<sup>309</sup> Ladd and Mathisen, *Muscular Christianity*, 18.

<sup>310</sup> This phrase, "improve the spiritual condition of young men," is visible throughout many early YMCA publications. It is reiterated in Ladd and Mathisen, *Muscular Christianity*, 40.

The association was a success. In less than a decade, there were nearly thirty YMCA chapters across Great Britain's industrial cities, and chapters were beginning to open internationally, as well. The United States' first YMCA chapter for white men opened in Boston in 1851; the first for black men opened in Washington, D.C., in 1853. By 1879 and 1881, the American YMCA and British YMCA offices, respectively, began to incorporate fitness and exercise into its program offerings.<sup>311</sup> In this way, the first YMCAs were attempting to inculcate Protestant evangelism with the Victorian era's values of industrial production and masculine gender constructs. Additionally, by adopting muscular Christianity as a tactic to attract young men to the association and to the religion, the YMCA was attempting to tap into these two, seemingly conflicting areas: Christian evangelism and Victorian masculinity. However, as the years progressed, Victorianism increasingly encroached on evangelism at the YMCA.

Atlanta's YMCA chapter was founded in 1857. Its first president, Basil Hallam Overby, was a Methodist minister and staunch supporter of Prohibition. Just four years after the chapter's founding, the Civil War broke out and the Atlanta YMCA was forced to shut down; its efforts, supplies, and manpower were channeled to the Confederate war effort. Much of what historians know about the early years of the Atlanta YMCA is from secondary newspaper accounts; the chapter's official records were housed in its main headquarters building, which fell victim to Sherman's raid and the burning of Atlanta. After the war, the chapter's reestablishment began in a period that the Atlanta YMCA has called its "Resurrection."<sup>312</sup>

By the late 1870s, the Atlanta YMCA was "resurrected" along with the rest of the city. It rented a large space in a building on Whitehall Street and began fundraising efforts to construct

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<sup>311</sup> "YMCA Through the Years," *YMCA England & Wales* website, 2019, <https://www.ymca.org.uk/about/history-heritage/timeline>.

<sup>312</sup> YMCA of Metro Atlanta, "YMCA History: A Look Back at 150 Years of the YMCA in Atlanta," 2008, [http://www.ymcamedia.com/pdfs/atlantaymca\\_150.pdf](http://www.ymcamedia.com/pdfs/atlantaymca_150.pdf).

its own building. Additionally, a large portion of the Atlanta YMCA's work was done off-site. The Atlanta YMCA had begun a small ministry before the Civil War that operated in conjunction with the city's railroad industry. After the war, the YMCA picked up its work with railroad workers. The association collaborated with railroad companies and even went out to job sites to lead Bible studies and other evangelizing events. The Atlanta YMCA's Railroad Department (YMCARR) published a column in the organization's monthly newsletter outlining the types of activities hosted, the number of men engaged, and occasionally, the number of new converts.<sup>313</sup> Internal programming notes from the period, and ephemera from various initiatives and activities preserved in the archival record suggest that the YMCARR had different needs and goals as it ministered to men building railroads across the Georgia countryside than did leadership at the urban YMCA headquarters in Atlanta. Evidence, including Atlanta YMCA board meeting minutes, does not explicitly note a split, but the urban/rural divide is clear. By the 1880s, the YMCARR had grown to such an extent that it largely operated separately than the rest of the Atlanta YMCA. The YMCARR went from recording its operational highlights in a small section of the Atlanta YMCA newsletter to having folders of its own documents, reports, fundraisers, events, and highlights.<sup>314</sup>

Back at its downtown headquarters, the Atlanta YMCA's leadership decided to place many of its programmatic and funding efforts to provide a moral center to young men in newly industrializing Atlanta.<sup>315</sup> Atlanta civic and religious leaders assumed that young white men,

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<sup>313</sup> For example, the monthly bulletin mentions that the YMCARR's Saturday Night Club meeting will hold its annual banquet on Jan 9 and invite "members of the Association, invited guests, and representatives of the press and pulpit." (7)

YMCA of Atlanta, "Railroad Department," *Monthly Bulletin* 2, no. 1 (January 1891). MSS 1108, Box 3, Folder 6, James G. Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, GA.

<sup>314</sup> YMCA of Atlanta, "Bulletins of the Rail Road Committee" 1886, MSS 1108, Box 3, Folder 8, James G. Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, GA.

<sup>315</sup> Film, *Here for Good: 160 Years of the YMAC in Atlanta*, YMCA of Metro Atlanta in association with Georgia Public Broadcasting, 2018, <https://www.ymcaatlanta.org/160/>.



especially those out on their own or who had recently moved to Atlanta to work in the railroad or manufacturing industries, lacked the sort of moral center that came from living in a Victorian family. They especially expressed a concern, which was not far from the reality, that these rowdy young men would come to Atlanta for work, then spent their leisure time and money in the city's saloons and dance halls. The YMCA saw itself as an opportunity to channel leisure time energies into something more productive. Like the YMCARR, the Atlanta YMCA's initial work also used traditional evangelism to reach young men, such as establishing Bible studies and prayer groups. By the 1880s, however, the YMCA in Atlanta and its national counterpart were changing: the association was becoming increasingly concerned with the fads of Victorianism, instead of focusing solely on the work of evangelism. As I will demonstrate, this was the case even in the South.

### **Sports and Muscular Christianity at the Atlanta YMCA**

After American YMCAs began incorporating physical fitness and gymnastics into its programs in 1879, the organization began placing a tremendous emphasis on the body. For example, the Boston YMCA coined term "body building" in 1881 to describe the building of one's physical strength through exercise, especially in a gymnastic environment. Peach basket ball (the precursor to modern basketball) was invented by a YMCA instructor in 1891 in Springfield, Massachusetts. Feeling this activity was too strenuous for older members, another Massachusetts YMCA instructor modified the rules and invented a separate game, volleyball, in 1895. At first, sports and recreation were a means to draw boys and men into YMCA religious programs, but the historical record demonstrates that soon, sports and entertainment came first and Christian religion came second.

Atlanta's YMCA was not exempt from the increased attention on sports and entertainment. Sports, exercise, and proper codes of white, middle-class manhood, were increasingly at the center of the chapter's efforts, rather than just Christian ministry. "[The Atlanta YMCA] stands for well-rounded manhood, physical, mental, and spiritual," Reverend C.B. Wilmer, Rector at Atlanta's St. Luke's Episcopal Church, offered for the 1903 *Atlanta: A Book of Letters* anniversary publication. In this statement, Reverend Wilmer was articulating a balance for which the Atlanta YMCA strived: body and spirit. However, as with other aspects of post-war southern life, attention to Victorian gender constructs and popular culture won out over a strictly Bible-based Christian endeavor.

The Victorian era was the beginning of summer camps in the United States. Out of the nineteenth century's new research on health, wellness, and recreation, came several initiatives aimed at taking children out of the city, away from industrialization and dizzying urbanity, to a rural area where they could get fresh air and exercise. Like other YMCA chapters around the United States, the Atlanta YMCA established a camp in 1900 in Demorest, Georgia, (about eighty miles northeast of Atlanta). The Demorest YMCA Camp was intended to give Atlanta's white boys a break from the hustle and bustle of urban life, and introduce them to outdoor sportsmanship and the raw manliness and self-sufficiency of previous, more rural generations.

The camp's 1902 programming bulletin is preserved in the Atlanta YMCA's archival records. This bulletin, entitled "Boys' Camp 1902: For Members of the Junior Department, Young Men's Christian Association, Atlanta," gives a glimpse into the balance of religion and entertainment at southern YMCA camps. A section of the bulletin addressed "To the Parents" in bolded letters makes the case about why the new Atlanta YMCA summer camp was a worthy place for boys to spend their time. It states:

The object of this outing is to give the boy a free outdoor life, and the pleasure of roughing it for a time under the very best of influences and companionship. We have now conducted three Boys' Camps, ranging from 20-42 in each. There has been no accident or sickness and we gratefully recognize the Divine guidance and protection in the past, and rely on Him alone for the accomplishment of our expectations in the future. With careful and experienced supervision we do not hesitate to promise 1902 Camp to be the best ever held for Atlanta boys.<sup>316</sup>

At its core, the bulletin, especially this section, is an advertisement. Its goal was to sell Atlanta parents on the idea of paying to send their sons to the camp. The language used in this sales pitch is especially interesting. In this section, the terms "God" or "Christ" are never used, although there are of course hints to the Christian god and obvious conclusions to be made about this being a camp run by an organization with the word "Christian" in the name. It is therefore ironic that the major points that the YMCA chose to include in this letter to parents makes no mention of sharing Christian theology with the campers, participating in worship, or engaging in other form of traditional Christian religion. In fact, the only time traditional religion is mentioned is when telling parents not to worry about the safety of their sons because "Divine guidance and protection" is on the side of the YMCA if the campers "rely on Him." Perhaps the YMCA assumed this language would imply the Christian god, but nevertheless, a correlation with Christianity is never stated outright. This sort of implicit or culturally Christian language is elsewhere in the bulletin, too.

The bulletin includes a packing guide for campers under the heading, "What to Take." Among the various clothing items, toiletries, and nineteenth century camping accoutrements (including "one heavy night gown," "rubber coat," "Pond's extract and vaseline (for sunburn) [*sic*"]), the list ends with "Your Bible and Revival No. 2 song book."<sup>317</sup> No specific Bible or

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<sup>316</sup> YMCA of Atlanta, "Boys' Camp, 1902, For Members of the Junior Department, Young Men's Christian Association, Atlanta," MSS 1108, Box 2, Folder 2, James G. Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, GA. All capitalization is original to the source.

<sup>317</sup> "Boys' Camp, 1902," YMCA.

Biblical translation is mentioned listed, although the diction here is operating under the assumption that the boys who plan to attend already have a revival hymnal and a Bible (“your” Bible, not “a” Bible, denoting the book a boy ostensibly already owns). Then the next paragraph continues by listing items which appear to be optional, presumably items boys can bring in order to best enjoy their summer camp experience, including “games, hammocks, reading matter, musical instruments, cameras, and fishing tackle.”<sup>318</sup> A Bible and hymnal are as important as a coat, and separate than the strictly entertainment items like instruments or fishing gear. In this instance, religion ranks as more essential components than items for strictly entertainment value.

If the bulletin’s readers had any questions about how or when the Bible might be used, the next section provides answers under a section entitled “Devotional.” This section is only two sentences. The first says, “A short time during the hottest part of the day will be devoted to Bible Study, and the day will be closed with evening prayers, at which the attendance of all is required.”<sup>319</sup> It is striking that a camp run by a Christian organization would make the point of noting that “devotional” time will be short. Devotional time was also scheduled during the hottest and most uncomfortable part of a summer day in Georgia, not a time that is conducive to helping boys sit quietly and contemplate scripture. Evening prayers are noted as mandatory, but it does not appear that attendance at Bible study time is also required. Furthermore, the camp’s daily schedule, listed on the opposite page, notes that more than twice the amount of time is dedicated daily to “Games, rambles boating, swimming lessons, bathing and fishing” (over three hours) than to “Bible study” (seventy-five minutes).<sup>320</sup> Finally, in the second sentence from the “Devotional” section, Sunday church service is listed as optional. The bulletin notes, “Those who

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<sup>318</sup> “Boys’ Camp, 1902,” YMCA.

<sup>319</sup> “Boys’ Camp, 1902,” YMCA.

<sup>320</sup> “Boys’ Camp, 1902,” YMCA.

desire may attend church services in town on Sunday accompanied by a [YMCA camp] Leader,” even though it is unclear what alternative programming is available for boys who opt not to attend church, or if this programming will be a religious exercise.<sup>321</sup>

The national summer camp movement was not necessarily synonymous with religion, although camps for Jewish children were some of the first and most popular of the time. Still, it is curious that a camp run by the Young Men’s Christian Association placed such a minimal focus on the “Christian” part in its advertising and planning materials.

Outside of summer camp, the YMCA engaged in many other activities that were more concerned with Victorian amusements than were strictly evangelistic in nature. In 1887, well-known revivalist and former evangelical missionary, Luther Gulick, took over leadership of the Springfield, Massachusetts, YMCA. Gulick believed strongly in education as a path to human improvement, especially physical education. He estimated that the gymnasium was the best place to develop a young man’s character. “The gymnasium is not simply a trap to catch young men,” he wrote, referring to the YMCA’s recruitment efforts. “Yet we do hope to reach young men through the gymnasium...The gymnasium exists in the association as a fundamental and intrinsic part in the salvation of man.”<sup>322</sup> This sentiment, the incorporation of athleticism as an crucial component of evangelism and salvation, spread to other YMCAs, including Atlanta’s.

Planning for a gymnasium at the Atlanta YMCA began in the early 1880s as the association looked to expand to a new location. By 1883, its fundraising efforts had paid off; instead of renting a space above another business, the Atlanta YMCA now owned a new location, complete with a reading room and a gymnasium. The gym facilities even had a full-time medical director and physical education teacher on staff, Dr. J. Joseph Shafer. In March

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<sup>321</sup> “Boys’ Camp, 1902,” YMCA.

<sup>322</sup> As quoted in Ladd and Mathisen, *Muscular Christianity*, 62.

1896, an article in *The Atlanta Constitution* described the facilities and the importance of the gymnasium and physical fitness to the Atlanta YMCA:

The [YMCA's] magnificent system of body building that is daily being carried on is the result of a great truth...that systematic exercise is absolutely necessary to good health, and that a sound mind within a sound body is always conducive to a successful career. There is no doubt that the gymnasium is the main inducement of the association.... What a godsend this great institution is for the poor fellows who are confined in an office, poring over their books day in and day out, with no rest and no exercise....The gymnasium will undoubtedly counteract any possible confinement or overwork that a young man must necessarily endure in his business.<sup>323</sup>

Although one may think that worship or Christian fellowship may be the biggest motivations for men to join the Atlanta YMCA, the article gives a different reason: “the gymnasium is the main inducement of the association.” Additionally, when delineating a “great truth” put forward by a Christian organization, especially one in the so-called “evangelical South,” there is a presumption that the “truth” may be tied to some Christian principle. But in this article, the “truth” turns out to be that exercise is the key to a successful career, even for an office laborer. Through this language, what begins as an inward to Christian evangelism ends with a more Victorian twist.

This review was part of a full-page spread in *The Atlanta Constitution*, entitled “Building Up the Physical Man.” It even included realistic sketches of the YMCA gymnasium’s interior and cartoons of men using exercise equipment. Its assessment of the YMCA gymnasium and its fitness programs incorporates many facets of Victorian masculinity. For example, in a subsection headlined, “For the Office Man,” an article discusses the importance of a strong body to a successful career, even for men with white-collar jobs. The article directly addresses the new generation of young men who worked in offices across Atlanta, having chosen a job choice that

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<sup>323</sup> “Building Up the Physical Man. Something of the Good Work Being Done at the Y.M.C.A. Gymnasium,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 8, 1896.

was of particular concern to purveyors of Victorian masculine constructs, with their fears that office work would make for nervous, frail men.

The Atlanta YMCA also marketed itself to potential members and parents of potential members using a heavily Victorian strategy. Once the Atlanta YMCA finished constructing its gymnasium, the new facility began to feature prominently in recruitment materials. An advertising pamphlet mailed out to parents of potential members of the YMCA Junior Department (boys under 16) detailed the YMCA's gym and entertainment features: "To parents: Is your boy a member of your Junior Department? Does he enjoy reading and playing games? Are you doing anything towards straightening up those round shoulders and keeping him from growing tall and thin? Every boy should join now."<sup>324</sup> The advertisement then goes on to discuss rates for specific membership types. It never mentions religion or Christianity. Muscular Christianity may have been intended to draw men and boys into the faith early on, or as Gulick said, be an "intrinsic part in the salvation," but it seems the original intent of some YMCA theories did not always trickle down into practice. Additionally, attendance statistics paint the Atlanta YMCA as a place men joined to develop their bodies in outsized numbers to men who joined to develop their Christian faith.

Published attendance records in monthly, quarterly, and annual reports, give clues regarding not only the programs offered by the Atlanta YMCA, but also their popularity amongst the men of Atlanta. For example, the same *Atlanta: A Book of Letters* publication that includes thoughts and quotations about the YMCA from Atlanta ministers and business titans, also listed

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<sup>324</sup> This quotation was incorporated in a souvenir publication issued by the Atlanta YMCA in 1998 in celebration of its 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The publication does not have page numbers and is mostly unsourced. The citation and location for the full publication is the following: Franklin M. Garrett, Joseph C. Barnsby, and Fred Hanna, *Historical Highlights: 140 years strong...the Metro Atlanta YMCA, 1858-1998*. MSS 1108, Box 1, Folder 1, James G. Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, GA.

some attendance statistics from the previous year. This section, “Some Things Accomplished in 1902 in Atlanta,” notes that 8,499 worshipers (men and boys) attended Sunday services.<sup>325</sup> This is not an insignificant number. However, what is more telling for the purposes of understanding the relationship between religion and culture in Atlanta, is examining the attendance rates for the YMCA’s non-religious programs. According to the publication, members made 6,294 visits to the YMCA’s reading and game rooms in 1902. This means that 3 out of 4 visits to the YMCA were for entertainment purposes instead of worship.

The gymnasium’s attendance statistics are even more unexpected when compared to the worship numbers: YMCA members made a total of 47,113 visits to the association’s gymnasium in 1902, compared to the 8,499 Sunday worshippers. There are many possible reasons for this number, including that the gym and its physical education classes were available six days per week, while Sunday services were only once per week. Additionally, some men or boys may be YMCA members to use the gym but attend worship elsewhere; conversely, some YMCA worship attendees may never have visited the YMCA gym. Nevertheless, the fact that over five times the number of YMCA members visited the gym than attended a YMCA Sunday worship service is astonishing. It also speaks to the larger trend in amongst white, Victorian men of receiving self-fulfillment and entertainment from a source other than Christian worship. Religious work was still being accomplished; the YMCA’s published statistics on converts and participation in Bible studies proves this. However, something more was also happening: sports and entertainment was becoming an increasingly prominent focus of events and programs at the Atlanta YMCA, sometimes even more so than religion.

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<sup>325</sup> YMCA of Atlanta, *Atlanta: A Book of Letters*, 61.



## Entertainment and Popular Amusements at the Atlanta YMCA

Like sports, entertainment and popular amusements took on a larger role at the Atlanta YMCA, especially beginning in the mid-1880s. The city was electrified in 1884. Among other advantages, electrification allowed for more evening performances in the city's vibrant downtown entertainment district, where the Atlanta YMCA was also located. Atlanta's early years offered little in the way of entertainment, allowing for young men to engage in more covert, nefarious activities like drinking or gambling. By the 1880s, however, Atlanta had an ever-growing availability of more respectable forms of popular entertainment. For example, DeGive's Opera House was established in 1881, and at the time, it was located on the same street as the YMCA. DeGive's was increasingly drawing first-rate acts who had previously bypassed a developing southern city like Atlanta. Its offerings included both popular musical acts, as well as classical opera.

Atlanta's new entertainment venues helped breakdown the old dichotomy of a Friday night choice between downtown vices or YMCA religion. Additionally, based on evidence in the historical record, the effect of the city's additional entertainment offerings seems to have pushed the YMCA to adapt to Atlanta's emerging Victorian preferences.

In 1883, the Atlanta YMCA published its first summary bulletin of statistics, final records, and amusing anecdotes. The bulletin recounts the successes of the prior ten years, and even specifically mentions a goal of hosting more entertainments at the Atlanta YMCA.<sup>326</sup> It is possible that all of the other Atlanta attractions were drawing men away from YMCA programs, because just a few years later, a January 1887 YMCA publication, titled *Atlanta's Young Men*, notes the following scheduling change: "The Bible Training class has been changed from Friday

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<sup>326</sup> YMCA of Atlanta, "Our Bulletin: Young Men's Christian Association," 1, no. 1 (February 1883): 1. MSS 1108, Box 3, Folder 8, James G. Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, GA.

to Monday night. Let all attend who can and learn something about God's word."<sup>327</sup> The publication does not specify a reason for the schedule change, and although there could be many reasons to change the Bible training class schedule, it is noteworthy that a Bible class would be moved away from a Friday night at the same moment Atlanta's popular entertainment scene was coming into its own.

The influences of Atlanta's entertainment scene on the local YMCA are evident at other times, too. The January 1891 YMCA monthly bulletin addresses entertainment first and foremost. The top of the title page lists the title, volume, and date. The other three-fourths of the page is an advertisement for the 1890-91 season for Star Course Entertainments at DeGives' Opera House and Association Hall. None of the DeGives events listed are religious or connected to the YMCA, although the advertisement does note that YMCA members get a discount on ticket prices.<sup>328</sup> The same bulletin lists the classes to be taught at YMCA Night School, all of which are related to job training, like bookkeeping, first aid, or mechanical drawing. However, the entire bulletin never once mentions religion or religious classes, except to note a prayer given before the New Year's Reception dinner.

Advertisements for Atlanta's secular entertainments fill the pages of this and other bulletins and publications produced by the YMCA during the period. A variety of products and services are advertised, although alcohol is one item that is never mentioned in any advertisement. By the 1910s, the published advertisements weren't just marketing to YMCA members, but were using the YMCA to market products. Announcements for new graphophone and Dictaphone models discuss how the YMCA was making use of these technological

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<sup>327</sup> YMCA of Atlanta, *Atlanta's Young Men* 1, no. 9 (January 1887): 34. MSS 1108, Box 4, Folder 1, James G. Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, GA.

<sup>328</sup> YMCA of Atlanta, "Monthly Bulletin," 2, no. 1 (January 1891): 1. MSS 1108, Box 3, Folder 6, James G. Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, GA.

advancements, in worship services or for administrative purposes, respectively.<sup>329</sup> The overarching theme of these sorts of advertisements is “if it’s good enough for the YMCA, it’s good enough for your family too.” The YMCA’s moral authority was leveraged by for-profit companies to sell commercial products, and the practice seems to have been fully endorsed by the association.

The moral authority of the Atlanta YMCA was also used for other commercial and entertainment-related ends. The first motion picture in Atlanta was introduced at the Cotton States and International Exposition in 1895. Over the next ten years, Atlanta’s demand for motion picture theaters increased exponentially, much to the dismay of several downtown residents who found the films’ musical accompaniments to be overbearing. Lawsuits and civil complaints to the city government ensued, which decreased the respectability of the theaters. Theater owners worked in earnest to win back public support for their businesses. In 1907, George Crater, owner of the Elite Theater, offered to turn over the theater to the Atlanta YMCA for Sunday afternoon worship services. Crater hoped the theater’s “central location and the attraction of an electric piano playing religious music before the theater [would] draw hundreds who would not go down to Auburn-ave. and Pryor-st. [*sic*] to the Young Man’s Christian Association building.”<sup>330</sup> Crater did not donate space at the Elite Theater out of kindness or support of YMCA’s Christian mission. Rather this was done to garner positive press reporting about the theater’s reputability, community engagement, and its owner’s good, moral character. In this and in other instances, archival documents do not note that Atlanta YMCA leadership was

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<sup>329</sup> North American Young Men’s Christian Association, *Association Men*, “The Columbia in the Y.M.C.A.,” January 1914, 1; and “The Dictaphone in the Y.M.C.A.,” 7. Both from MSS 1108, Box 3, Folder 6, James G. Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, GA.

<sup>330</sup> Steve Goodson, *Highbrows, Hillbillies, and Hellfire: Public Entertainment in Atlanta, 1880-1930* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 83.

bothered by the entanglement of religion and popular culture. In fact, the association seemed agreeable with the mutual exchange of free space and an electric piano, for publicity and respectability.

Years before the Elite Theater deal, *The Atlanta Constitution* newspaper reported how on other ways the Atlanta YMCA became connected to popular entertainment. In January 1896, the Atlanta YMCA's Literary Club hosted an amateur production of a play entitled, *Between the Acts*. According to the article, the performance was full of "fun arising from its comic situations. The play abounds in sparking bits of humor and well sustained in all its parts, makes a most amusing comedy."<sup>331</sup> The play was not on the topic of a Biblical or religious lesson in the way of *Ben Hur*, which was still a best-selling novel at the time. Nor was this production generally moralistic or proverbial. Instead, the plot of *Between the Acts*, which was delineated in great deal by *The Atlanta Constitution* newspaper, was just the opposite: it was a comedy about a young man who lies to his uncle about being married, lest the young man risk being disinherited. When the uncle surprises the young man with a visit, the young man's wife must pretend to be the maid. Chaos ensues until all is revealed and forgiven in the end.

The absence of religion or some other moral lesson does not seem to have negatively impacted the audience's reaction to the event. According to a review in *The Atlanta Constitution*, the audience was amused by the plot and the actors, alike. The newspaper found the production to be "perhaps the most delightful comedy ever presented in this city by amateur performers."<sup>332</sup> From the description of the plot, there does not appear to be anything outwardly distasteful or inappropriate. Yet, it is noteworthy that the Atlanta YMCA would play host to a cultural

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<sup>331</sup> "Between the Acts. A brilliant Performance by Local Amateurs Last Night," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 9, 1896.

<sup>332</sup> "Between the Acts," *Atlanta Constitution*.

production that has no relationship to the Christian mission of the organization. Additionally, it can be inferred that the play was not just a fundraising exercise for association's more evangelistic endeavors, because all YMCA members were admitted for free. The Atlanta YMCA seemingly hosted *Between the Acts* just for the sheer enjoyment and entertainment of the play's attendees.

In addition to secular theatrical performances, the Atlanta YMCA was host to an even more surprising form of Victorian entertainment: a hypnotist. In April 1895, *The Atlanta Constitution* published an article about an upcoming event at the Atlanta YMCA. According to the article, the YMCA's entertainment committee contracted Mr. Sam A. C. Everett of Macon, Georgia, for a week-long engagement at YMCA Hall. Before scheduling Everett's performance, YMCA leadership "made the fullest investigation of [Everett's] work and record in other cities. He has received the highest testimonials and his performance will be looked forward to with much interest," the article states. "There have been a number of hypnotists and mesmerists—so-called—in Atlanta before, but none of them were ever accepted as such by the people."<sup>333</sup> The article is very complimentary of the selection by the YMCA's entertainment committee and the hypnotic skills of Everett. This is somewhat remarkable given the headline of the article: "The Svengali Act: Hypnotism Will Be Expounded Upon at the Y.M.C.A. Hall." The choice of the word "Svengali" is an odd one, especially for a forthcoming performance hosted by a Christian organization. The origin of the word "Svengali," is from an 1894 serialized story, *Trilby*, by George du Maurier. (The stories were published into a novel with the same name in late 1895.) *Trilby* is about a sinister man, named Svengali, who uses his hypnosis skills to do evil, namely manipulating and subjugating an innocent young woman. The reference may seem somewhat

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<sup>333</sup> "The Svengali Act: Hypnotism Will Be Expounded Upon at the Y.M.C.A. Hall," *Atlanta Constitution*, April 8, 1895.

obscure today, but for consumers of popular culture in the mid-1890s, an allusion to Svengali would have been well-understood. Even if the term was used in jest, one of the largest newspapers in the South used it to associate something sinister with a coming attraction at a Christian organization.

Everett performed his hypnosis act every night during a week in mid-April 1895 and received positive reviews. Every performance was “crowded with people...who have attended and been amazed and puzzled at [Everett’s] remarkable demonstrations of hypnotic power.”<sup>334</sup> After recounting the hypnotist’s performance, one *The Atlanta Constitution* article described the man’s background. “[Mr. Everett] regards hypnotism as a science and claims for it a wonderful curative power, saying that in all nervous diseases and in the treatment of the morphine habit it has proved very effective.”<sup>335</sup> Reports describe Everett as a reputable businessman from Macon, Georgia, who travels in the town’s cultured society circles. Although he had no medical training, if hypnosis was an effective cure for morphine addiction or the often-discussed disease of “nervousness,” an affliction of particular concern to white Victorian men, then Everett may have been recruited to present these health benefits to the YMCA audience. This theory is undermined by the press’s detailed review of Everett’s performance, however. Recruiting volunteers from the audience, the hypnotist would put his subjects into a “state of semi-sleep” and then “has made them do many ridiculous things...[the subjects] obeyed every mandate of the hypnotist and sang, danced, whistled, crawled or wept at his command.”<sup>336</sup> For the medicine, this was entertainment. Perhaps the humorous subjugation of his volunteers is why Everett’s demonstration earned the name “Svengali Act.” Regardless, Everett’s performance was a success.

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<sup>334</sup> “The Subject Fainted: Stirring Scene at Mr. Everett’s Hypnotic Lecture Saturday Night,” *Atlanta Constitution*, April 22, 1895.

<sup>335</sup> “The Subject Fainted,” *Atlanta Constitution*.

<sup>336</sup> “The Subject Fainted,” *Atlanta Constitution*.

The following year, 1896, when Everett was in Atlanta for another “series of entertainments” at the YMCA auditorium, Dr. J. Joseph Shafer, a medical doctor and the YMCA’s director of physical education, took an especial interest in Everett’s methods.<sup>337</sup> An *Atlanta Constitution* article notes Shafer “was very much interested in the wonderful work of Mr. Everett and was in the habit of calling on the hypnotist for a private séance in his room at the Kimball [Hotel in Atlanta].”<sup>338</sup> If Everett’s original intent to had been to demonstrate how hypnosis could be used to treat medical conditions, it is unclear what ailment could be treated by communing with the dead via séance. Additionally, this report of Everett and a senior Atlanta YMCA staff member holding private séances received just a passing mention in the society and gossip pages; the article’s main topic was not about the séances, but rather about a debate over the proper pronunciation of Shafer’s name.

YMCA archival records and published newspaper accounts do not note any concern that a senior member of the Christian organization was engaging in private séances with a hypnotist. Shafer continued to be employed in the same role at the organization for several more years, until he resigned to return to private medical practice. For his part, Everett was invited back to this and other southern YMCA chapters on several other occasions to perform his hypnotic entertainment. In an 1895 interview, Everett said, “I have been only to the principal cities of Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee, and in all the places I have visited was well received by the physicians, ministers, and public generally.”<sup>339</sup> Everett must have been telling the truth about his reception because he was invited to perform at the Atlanta YMCA roughly every year for over a decade. That newspapers and YMCA leadership found it generally unremarkable that Shafer and

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<sup>337</sup> “Stories of the Town,” *Atlanta Constitution*, March 12, 1896.

<sup>338</sup> “Stories of the Town,” *Atlanta Constitution*.

<sup>339</sup> “The Subject Fainted,” *Atlanta Constitution*.

Everett were holding in séances, and that a hypnotist would be invited to perform so often at a Christian association speaks to an increased cultural acceptance of Christians participating in both institutional religious practices and Victorian popular culture.

The Atlanta YMCA's annual membership statistics demonstrate how entertainment attendance related to worship attendance, just as they did for sports. In 1895, the Atlanta YMCA hosted 147 "gospel meetings," which were "attended by 13,952 persons." That same year, "nineteen entertainments" were hosted by the Atlanta YMCA, "and 4,405 people have attended these entertainments."<sup>340</sup> Based on the total attendance rates alone, this means more people attended worship services than YMCA-hosted amusements. However, by averaging out the attendance at each worship service as compared to attendance at each entertainment event, a different picture emerges. On average, 94 people attended each worship service, while 231 people attended each entertainment event. Similarly, to the sports attendance statistics, there could be several potential reasons for these discrepancies.

It is a powerful notion that, on average, not only were more Atlantans attending entertainment events at the YMCA than worship services, but they were doing so at 2.5 times the rate. As with other examples of Victorian entertainment, many white Atlantans were participating in popular cultural at frequencies equal to or even exceeding that of their participation in traditional religious practices.

## **Conclusion**

The American YMCA dabbled in steadily more entertainment and sports, especially between the 1880s and World War I. By 1900, the national association sought to reach out to

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<sup>340</sup> "Last Year's Work, How the Young Men's Christian Association Has Prospered," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 11, 1896.



young men on college campuses. In some instances, the YMCA even offered to pay for the construction of a gymnasium on campus, provided it could run then the gym. With a growing higher education sector and new land-grant universities being chartered by states, colleges were tempted to accept the funds in order to construct additional facilities for potential students. Some members of the higher education community balked at the idea that secular institutions would spend money donated by a sectarian organization. However, “most felt that sports, especially in educational settings, were ‘among the most important moralizing influences in America,’” and subsequently acquiesced to the YMCA-constructed gymnasiums.<sup>341</sup> Generally, the YMCA’s initiatives, including hosting sports and entertainment events, received support from mainline and evangelical Protestant communities, especially for the events’ ability to harness the energies of young men and make them more productive, moral, and engaged citizens.

In Atlanta, community leaders, themselves mostly white, Protestant, men, could have derided the YMCA’s choice to introduce activities that were not sober, contemplative, or puritanically Christian. Instead, civic and religious leaders celebrated the Atlanta YMCA’s balanced approach to life, faith, and masculinity. Reverend W. W. Landrum of Atlanta’s First Baptist Church contributed his thoughts to the 1903 *Atlanta: A Book of Letters*. Landrum wrote that at the Atlanta YMCA, “Under one roof, and in the best surroundings, the young man finds exercise for the body, mind and soul...its workers lead souls to Christ and enlarge their own by training them along the lines of Christian manhood and usefulness.”<sup>342</sup> According to Landrum, the YMCA addressed the Victorian era’s focus on new codes of masculinity with the balanced approach of “body, mind, and soul.” This combination of Victorianism and religion can also be

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<sup>341</sup> As quoted in Ladd and Mathisen, *Muscular Christianity*, 59.

<sup>342</sup> YMCA of Atlanta, *Atlanta: A Book of Letters*, 21.

seen in the contribution of W. E. Newill to the same publication. Newill, then chairman of the Atlanta Freight Bureau, which oversaw Atlanta's railroad businesses, submitted the following:

[The Atlanta YMCA] gives the young man, actively engaged every day, the proper opportunity for healthful recreation, and the mental and physical diversion so necessary to the thorough enjoyment of one's work. This is made possible in surroundings totally void of bad influences, which more than doubles their value, aside from the spiritual uplift. Its gymnasium and baths afford to the business man a healthful means of rest and recreation after the trials and extraction of the business day.<sup>343</sup>

The Atlanta YMCA leveraged muscular Christianity's principles to reinforce the major values of Victorianism: self-restraint, gendered-spheres, entertainment, and white, Protestant values. Bible studies, evangelism, and religious gatherings were still a major effort of YMCA administrators; photographic evidence from the time proves that these Christian activities were still popular and successful at the Atlanta YMCA. However, the chapter's entertainment and recreation offerings demonstrate that addressing Victorian leisure inclinations was also a concern for the association.

The hypnotist's performances and the YMCA's enthusiasm to host other secular entertainment acts speaks to a change within both institutional religion and Atlanta's urban life. It notes an acceptance on the part of the YMCA that Atlantans, and even its own staff, could stay dedicated to the association's Christian mission while also participating in popular culture. Not merely entertainment and not just a recruitment tool for new members, sports and popular amusements at the Atlanta YMCA gave its members a whole, balanced life, "body, mind and soul."

As Atlanta grew up during the Victorian era and more entertainments were offered at respected institutions like the Young Men's Christian Association, such manifestations of popular culture were increasingly understood to be acceptable ways for respectable white

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<sup>343</sup> YMCA of Atlanta, *Atlanta: A Book of Letters*, 13-14.

Atlantans to spend their time and money. Most mainline and evangelical Protestant faith communities did not deny their parishioners the opportunity to participate in such events, provided the entertainment adhered to general, secular codes of white, Victorian morality and respectability. By 1895, when Atlanta hosted the Cotton States and International Exposition, the city was exploding with opportunities to engage with popular culture. And as I will demonstrate in the next chapter, even religious Atlantans took every opportunity to do so.

## CHAPTER 7

### **Religion, Entertainment, and the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition:**

#### **“They Caught the Spirit of Enthusiasm”**

#### **Introduction**

In mid-September 1895, Charles F. Crisp, the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives and a Georgia native, arrived in Atlanta late one evening. As he stood on the portico of the Piedmont Driving Club in central Atlanta, Crisp looked eastward. He gazed out on the club’s grounds, which were temporarily serving as the site for Atlanta’s Cotton States and International Exposition, a southern attempt at a world’s fair. “Magnificent,” the Speaker said, examining the “outlines of the exposition grounds under the glare of myriads of electric lights... ‘I knew Atlanta would have a good show, but I never dreamed of anything like this,’” Crisp told a cadre of reporters.<sup>344</sup> Atlanta’s political and business community had spent years trying to host a grand reopening of their New South city to show the rest of the United States, and even the international community, that Atlanta, the Phoenix City, was thriving. Even Crisp, who had publicly expressed doubts about the exposition, was amazed at the visual spectacle

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<sup>344</sup> “On the Show Grounds,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 17, 1895.

before him. “Every Georgian, every southerner, every American can take pride in Atlanta’s great accomplishment,” he said. “I am amazed at its grandeur.”<sup>345</sup>

Atlanta’s Cotton States and International Exposition was a huge enterprise. It spurred extensive development in and around the city and brought in new entrepreneurs and entertainers. It also drew out new conversations about how popular culture and religion could and should interact in the changing city. This chapter aims to shed new historical light on how the exposition’s planning and execution balanced Atlantans’ cravings for entertainment with its citizens’ religious sensibilities. To do this, I will first address the historic antecedents of world’s fairs and large exhibitions, focusing specifically on how and why the Cotton States and International Exposition came into being. Second, I will discuss the structure and course of the exposition, including what attractions were selected and how these selections did or did not reflect southern, Victorian, or Christian values. Third, I will consider how religion and entertainment worked together to create a successful exposition for the city of Atlanta. Ultimately, I argue that published accounts, private reflections, and publicly circulated exposition souvenirs, including scrapbook clippings, photographs, ephemera, and the event’s official history, demonstrate that Protestant religious values of the late nineteenth century did not interfere with the majority of southern citizens’ acceptance of or participation in mainstream Victorian amusements or popular culture.

### **Historic Inspiration for an Atlanta Exposition**

To understand the Victorian era’s world’s fairs, it is necessary to examine some of their antecedents. Although local festivals and agricultural exhibitions were a staple of cultural life in

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<sup>345</sup> “On the Show Grounds,” *Atlanta Constitution*.

Western Europe going back to the medieval period, the nineteenth century saw such festivals evolve to something bigger. In 1844, King Louis Philippe I of France drew on the festival tradition and added a modern, industrial twist; the result was Paris's French Industrial Exposition (*Exposition des produits de l'industrie française*). This exposition featured artisan wares, scientific innovations, and manufacturing developments, from across France. It was an opportunity for middle- and upper-class Frenchmen to celebrate industrial progress while enjoying both Enlightenment-inspired "rational amusements," and more plebian amusements like early variety shows.<sup>346</sup>

The 1844 French Industrial Exposition was the tenth in a series of eleven such European endeavors, but its lasting importance is rooted in two major areas: first, it successfully blended local culture, Enlightenment learning, and early Victorian amusements; and second, the French created a new design for the festival's physical landscape that spurred many imitators. The new France exposition model was a grand event where citizens, not just business owners, would gather to showcase, judge, and enjoy one another's goods and innovations. It was replicated across Europe, from Spain to Saint Petersburg, throughout the 1840s.

Great Britain took the French model one step further. British inventor Henry Cole and Prince Albert (husband of Queen Victoria) organized the Great Exposition of the Works of Industry of All Nations in London in 1851. After nearly a century of European social and political upheaval, the event intended to showcase British industrial superiority while also celebrating the value of peace, cooperation, and individuality of every invited nation. Also known as the Crystal Palace Exposition, London's Great Exposition is considered the first, great World's Fair.

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<sup>346</sup> Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 30.

Not to be outdone, New York tried to emulate London with its 1853 Exposition of the Industry of All Nations. The event is remembered in history books as the first successful demonstration of an elevator, but as little else. It was a much quieter event to its British counterpart. Nevertheless, the modern World's Fair had arrived in the United States.

Industrial expositions flourished in major cities in the American northeast during the mid-nineteenth century. Amid the turmoil of the Civil War, showcases of capitalism and industrial progress were exchanged for so-called "Sanitary Fairs" to raise money for the United States Sanitary Commission, a relief organization that supported sick and wounded Union Army soldiers. What began as modest fundraising events grew more and more lavish as the war progressed, leading up to the Great Central Fair in Philadelphia in 1864. The Great Central Fair featured a 200,000 square foot exhibition space, sponsored tents, and even a few entertainment elements for children. A decade later in 1874, Philadelphia outdid its own sanitary fair when it organized the United States' first official World's Fair as a centennial celebration of the reunited United States. Officially named the International Exposition of Arts, Manufactures, and Products of the Soil and Mine, Philadelphia's Centennial Exposition was a tremendous success, drawing over ten million visitors.

The global attention earned by Philadelphia's Centennial Exposition was appealing to Atlanta's boosters. By 1880, the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, headed by several Georgia politicians and landowners, sought an outlet to reintroduce the post-war South and showcase the technological advancements in cotton production and refinement methods that were so important to the city's new industrial economy. Inspired by the popularity of the London and Philadelphia World's Fairs, Atlanta leaders decided they would ceremoniously reopen the South to the rest of the world through a grand exposition of agricultural engineering. Atlanta's International Cotton

Exposition was planned for fall 1881. Newspaper accounts, many of which were written by members of the Chamber of Commerce, praised the fair's sights. In reality, however, the success of the 1881 exposition was mediocre at best. Atlanta tried again six years later with its 1887 Piedmont Exposition. Both of the 1880s expositions were a sort of commercial trade show focused on capital, manufacturing, and technological innovation. Small entertainment events, like a performance by a family of folk singers, were booked on particular evenings in local Atlanta playhouses, but amusement was a secondary goal to exhibiting the South's economic potential. While neither exposition drew the kind of daily ticket sales city leaders had hoped for, both helped establish Atlanta as a city on the rise through advertisements and national press coverage.

Less than a decade after Atlanta's second exposition, the 1893 World's Fair: Columbian Exposition in Chicago marveled the nation and the wider world with its wonders. It set records for attendance at an outdoor event. It hosted social as well as scientific and commercial programs. It was spectacular, splendorous, and most importantly, financially successful. In a way, Atlanta's civic leaders idolized Chicago. As Atlanta resurged from its ashes, it strived to be a nucleus of commercialism and industry, to be "the Chicago of the South" southern newspapers reported.<sup>347</sup> "We stopped two days in Atlanta, the Chicago of the South," the *Dalton Citizen* reported. "Here, as usual, everybody seemed to be 'up to their ears' in businesses—no drone here—men, women, horses, dogs, everything on the move. Truly, Atlanta is a marvel..."<sup>348</sup> And

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<sup>347</sup> This sentiment was echoed in papers across the South every few weeks, especially in Atlanta. In addition to the *Dalton Citizen* example, see for example: "The Exposition Booming," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 31, 1894.

<sup>348</sup> The *Dalton Citizen* newspaper of Dalton, Georgia, was part of a collection of smaller dispatches in local communities who also wired their stories to the larger *The Atlanta Constitution* newspaper. This comment, specifically, can be found in "Georgia News," *Atlanta Constitution*, August 14, 1869.



like the midwestern city itself, Chicago World's Columbian Exposition embodied everything that Atlanta's leaders hoped to achieve as they started to plan a third attempt at an exposition.

Initial preparations for Atlanta's third exposition began even before Chicago's fair concluded. The first step was to rally public support and private financial backing for the endeavor. To do this, Atlanta Exposition directors turned to print advertising. As early as January 1894, members of the Atlanta Women's Building Committee issued requests for southern women to contribute items and funding for their building's exhibitions and events, noting the fair's great importance and potential for joy.<sup>349</sup>

The exposition was easy enough to advertise around greater Atlanta; Henry Grady's prominent *The Atlanta Constitution* newspaper supported the first two Atlanta expositions financially and through advertisements. Grady was deceased by the time of third exposition (he died in December 1889), but through his legacy and relationships, the plenary committee already had the ear of one of the region's largest newspapers. Additionally, the high volume of print news offerings in the late nineteenth century meant that word of Atlanta's latest exposition spread quickly around the United States. By fall 1894, the *Washington Post* announced the exposition's dates and Board of Directors.

Articles in *The Atlanta Constitution* advertised in favor of the exposition almost daily. "An enterprise that is worthy of the energetic city which stands sponsor for it, is the Cotton States and International exposition, to be held this summer and fall at Atlanta, Ga.," a feature article in *The Atlanta Constriction* declared in March 1895.<sup>350</sup> Other newspapers around the country, too, echoed praises of the coming attraction and promoted the impending extravaganza and Atlanta as the "Chicago of the South." This further solidified the image that the Atlanta

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<sup>349</sup> "The Women Are Ready," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 1, 1894.

<sup>350</sup> "The Atlanta Exposition," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 17, 1895.

Exposition's Board of Directors wanted to present to the public: the South as an energetic center of cosmopolitanism, economic trade, and entertainment, just like its northern counterparts.

Location scouting for the third exposition was a vital early task of the plenary commission of the Atlanta Exposition's Board of Directors. This third exposition was intended to mesmerize and amaze visitors, so its physical location needed to make a powerful first impression. Prior to the 1870s, most trade shows and World's Fairs held their exhibitions in one building; that changed with the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876. Philadelphia deviated from the single building model, choosing to "spread its splendors around a huge acreage instead of housing everything in one big building."<sup>351</sup> Atlanta's first two expositions were held on the outskirts of the city, which allowed for a single, large building to be constructed.<sup>352</sup> Philadelphia's model, however, was perfected in Chicago, with its large buildings complimented by long avenues for walking and viewing attractions, rather than traveling to a condensed campus. After seeing the success of Chicago's layout and central location, which also drew existing city establishments like theaters and hotels into the exposition events, Atlanta leaders sought a location closer to the economic and entertainment center of the city.

Several men on the exposition's Board of Directors were members of the Piedmont Driving Club, a gentlemen's club founded in the 1880s. The club agreed to lease its clubhouse and land in central Atlanta, 185 acres in all, to the developers of the exposition.<sup>353</sup> "These grounds are beautifully located...In natural beauty and picturesqueness they exceed the natural site of the world's fair," glowed one article in July 1894, almost a year before the exposition

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<sup>351</sup> Edo McCullough, *World's Fair Midways: An Affectionate Account of American Amusement Areas From the Crystal Palace to the Crystal Ball* (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 31.

<sup>352</sup> The first two expositions were held on land that is now part of Oglethorpe University in the Brookhaven neighborhood of Atlanta.

<sup>353</sup> Sharon Foster Jones, *The Atlanta Exposition* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2010), 13.

opened.<sup>354</sup> “Chicago had a greater array of buildings; Paris perhaps had more exhibits; Vienna covered more ground space; [but] Stand upon the hill created by the Driving Club and the New York State Club and the grounds present a picture of which the world does not produce in artistic equal,” declared another article published as the exposition opened in September 1895.<sup>355</sup> What went unmentioned in these reports was that the exposition’s site was built on lands used by the Driving Club for horse racing, gambling, masculinity, and upper-class opulence. The utilization of the Driving Club motioned even early on that the Atlanta Exposition was not to be a Puritanical exercise in order or education. Instead, the location choice set the tone that the city was placing its future in the hands of entertainment.

### **Construction, Concessions, and Keeping the Sabbath**

With land allocated, massive design and construction efforts were kicked off. Minutes from the exposition’s plenary board help illustrate debates over the event’s execution. However, Atlanta’s press has an even larger record of reports and opinion articles that captured more nuances and emotionalism to plenary debates than the buttoned-up, straight-forward meeting minutes. Even at the start of construction, evidence from board minutes and newspaper articles show concerns with Victorian morality and propriety, although these were not necessarily rooted in Christian theology.

On March 8, 1895, after construction began but still nearly six months from the opening of the event, several members of the Atlanta chapter of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) spoke just before the adjournment of a meeting of the exposition’s board. A “huge petition, eight yards long and bearing 1,600 names, was unrolled” before the board,

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<sup>354</sup> “The Exposition Booming,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 31, 1894.

<sup>355</sup> “On the Show Grounds,” *Atlanta Constitution*, September 17, 1895.

announcing that the WCTU's "prayer was that the beverage of the great exposition be water— simply water."<sup>356</sup> Mrs. M. L. McLendon, speaking on behalf of the organization at the meeting, noted that the WCTU "has passed resolutions requesting the management of the exposition to allow no intoxicating beverages sold on the grounds," as "the selling of whisky could result in nothing but evil to the visitors." She concluded by adding the WCTU wanted "the good morals of the city protected."<sup>357</sup> Next, Mrs. Parks was introduced to give the board some history on how whisky at Chicago's World's Columbian Exposition, though it was only sold in cafes, "opened the way for a limitless violations of the law."<sup>358</sup> The WCTU then concluded their presentation, left their petition with the board, and withdrew. After the ladies left, the board acknowledged that the matter of temperance at the exposition had been brought to its attention before. In a statement that reads like mockery, an unnamed director of the meeting added, "We have no committee on temperance,"<sup>359</sup> and ordered the large petition to be sent to the Committee on Concessions.

It was at this point that board president C. A. Collier first mentioned, somewhat in passing in the last moments of the meeting, that he had been approached by the Moerlein Brewing Company, "offering \$4,000 for the privilege to sell beer on the exposition grounds from now until the opening of the doors of the exposition."<sup>360</sup> The Moerlein Brewing Company of Cincinnati, Ohio, was known for its ability to successfully ship its German-style beer around the United States, and it had a second brewing location in Nashville, Tennessee, an easy train ride

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<sup>356</sup> "To Exclude Liquor: Ladies of the W.C.T.U. Appear before the Exposition Board," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 8, 1895.

<sup>357</sup> "To Exclude Liquor," *Atlanta Constitution*.

<sup>358</sup> "To Exclude Liquor," *Atlanta Constitution*.

<sup>359</sup> "To Exclude Liquor," *Atlanta Constitution*.

<sup>360</sup> "Before the Board," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 9, 1895. *The Morning News* (Savannah, GA,) and the *Waycross Weekly Herald* (Waycross, GA), reported that a brewery offered \$100,000 for the privilege of selling beer at the Exposition, although neither publication named the brewery and this note does not appear in any Atlanta newspaper or official Cotton States Exposition publication. However, given that Moerlein, a successful and well-known company only offered \$4,000, that any brewery would offer \$100,000 is dubious.

from Atlanta. Construction workers, artisans, and laborers of all types, almost all of whom were white and male, were being recruited to come to Atlanta and work on the on exposition-related projects at the fairgrounds and nearby businesses. Everything needed doing, from clearing the land, to building up the city's infrastructure, to constructing the dozens of buildings and kiosks necessary to run the exposition. The brewing company wanted permission to set up a temporary beer garden on the fairgrounds and sell beer to these workers. Moerlein was willing to pay \$4,000 to the exposition for the rights to do so, a not insignificant amount at the time, especially for an event that was still in its fundraising stage. Moerlein offering the exposition board a large sum of desperately-needed cash in exchange for the exclusive rights to create a beer garden on the then-vacant fairgrounds because the brewery stood to make a significant return on its investment; laborers could buy beer at the end of their shift without even leaving the job site. One board member moved to table the proposition, while another moved "to refer it to the committee on privileges and concessions."<sup>361</sup> The "dazzling proposition," as it was called by *The Atlanta Constitution* newspaper, was moved to the Committee on Concessions for further consideration.

Within days, some Atlantans voiced their opposition to the board's decision not to immediately reject the offer. The WCTU once again submitted their disapproval, as they often did with nearly all matters relating to alcohol. Even members of the general public wrote letters to *The Atlanta Constitution* voicing their concerns and opposition to the Moerlein deal.

Ultimately, the Committee on Concessions voted to decline Moerlein's offer. However, the short but fervent episode is telling for two reasons. First, in all of the published accounts of opposition, whether to the Moerlein question or some other alcohol-related issue related to the

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<sup>361</sup> "Before the Board," *Atlanta Constitution*.

exposition, the opposing party begins by explicitly stating their overwhelming support for the exposition, broadly speaking, before narrowing in on the specific complaint. When even vocal opponents of specific issues voiced general support for the exposition as an endeavor, this hints that the general public, too, supported the general aims of Atlanta's exposition. Second, the specific diction of oppositional arguments is telling of the general cultural feeling in Atlanta. Both reasons are evident in a March 11, 1895, an opinion letter was printed in *The Atlanta Constitution*. The letter, published just days after President Collier's announcement, pushed back against the pre-exposition beer sales. Its author, recorded only as "J.F.B.," begins by specifically outlining their support for the event and expressing hope that "the coming exposition [that] shall be a great success and that it may result in the greatest amount of good not only to our city and state, but to the whole country."<sup>362</sup> The letter praises work on the exposition, before shifting to expressing concern over Moerlein's proposition. The exposition may need the cash, J.F.B. states, but the source of Moerlein's economic return is problematic—the "hundreds and possibly thousands of mechanics and laborers...who have, on account of hard times and general suspension of work, been out of employment for many months, many of these have families dependent upon them."<sup>363</sup> The workmen described by J.F.B., the very men who had been affected by post-war economic downturns and the decline of the region's agricultural sector, had a new opportunity for economic and familial uplift. However, wondered J.F.B., "is it right to place an institution [at a worksite] for the sole purpose of taking, if possible, every dollar earned by these workmen," and from their wives and children "who have been joyously looking forward to...relief from the suffering and want which they have endured for months."<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>362</sup> J.F.B., "Letters from the People: Beer and the Exposition," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 11, 1895.

<sup>363</sup> J.F.B., "Beer and the Exposition," *Atlanta Constitution*.

<sup>364</sup> J.F.B., "Beer and the Exposition," *Atlanta Constitution*.

J.F.B.'s ultimate argument against the Moerlein's deal is that it would "literally take the very bread out of the mouths of the helpless women and children."<sup>365</sup> J.F.B. concedes that the "staunchest and truest Christian men" amongst the laborers will not be spending their salaries on drink, but that these are not the majority. Despite their use of the word "Christian," however, J.F.B. discusses morality and lawlessness broadly. This language is similar to that of the WCTU, whose anti-alcohol committee petition did not explicitly state a theological concern that alcohol would interfere with Christian teachings. The diction employed by the WCTU and J.F.B. demonstrates that they were not necessarily concerned with religious doctrine; rather they were channeling Progressive Era social reform principles that were becoming a fixture of American life at the end of the nineteenth century.

In addition to holding plenary meetings and debating the merits of serving alcohol, members of the Atlanta Exposition's Board of Directors travelled to Chicago's World's Fair to find out what made it so successful. Observations by these men are memorialized in *The Atlanta Constitution* newspaper articles and in Atlanta Exposition plenary records. Their remarks make clear that any future Atlanta exposition needed to do more than simply celebrate industry and showcase cotton refining methods. Under the Chicago model, a successful exposition needed to be impressive. It needed to amaze and inspire, collectively drawing the whole city into the festivities. It needed to be more than merely edifying; it needed to entertain.

The presence of amusements at world's fairs was a debated topic amongst nineteenth century fair plenary committees. P. T. Barnum's tent popped up near the Crystal Palace Exhibition Building during New York Exposition in 1853, although he was never formally invited to appear. Barnum brought with him General Tom Thumb, a famous performer in

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<sup>365</sup> J.F.B., "Beer and the Exposition," *Atlanta Constitution*.

Barnum's circus, who drew large crowds to the showcase of humbugs and oddities. Two decades later at Philadelphia's Centennial Exposition, of the 150 buildings erected for the fair, "not a single pavilion was devoted to fun or frivolity."<sup>366</sup> Without formally organized entertainment or even the informal presence of someone like Barnum, working-class Philadelphians established "Shantytown," an area adjacent to the fair where they made their own amusements. Vendors sold food from carts and performers put on street shows for tips. Pop up dime museums exhibited "learned pigs," "five-legged cows," the Wild Man of Borneo, the Fiji man-eaters, and other "freaks of nature."<sup>367</sup> It didn't conform to the finessed fairgrounds or sophisticated demonstrations organized by the Centennial Exposition's board, but Shantytown's lowbrow entertainment proved to be extremely popular. Not only that, Shantytown made the exposition look much larger: official exhibitions were in the exposition's central building, but Shantytown's extension into the streets drew more of Philadelphia's geography and peoples into the exposition's activities.

Taking a lesson from Barnum, Shantytown, and the popularity of popular amusement parks and attractions like New York's Coney Island, the plenary committee of Chicago's 1893 Columbia Exposition invested significant time and capital into developing an amusement area.<sup>368</sup> A central strip of food and vendors, once common at medieval Renaissance fairs, proved to be a successful design concept at the 1844 Parisian exposition. Using the French midway as a model, Chicago ran its midway directly through the South Side of the city.<sup>369</sup> Chicago called it the

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<sup>366</sup> McCullough, *World's Fair Midways*, 34.

<sup>367</sup> McCullough, *World's Fair Midways*, 34.

<sup>368</sup> Extensive scholarship has been written on the Chicago World's Fair and its Midway. For a comprehensive history of the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago see, for example: Norm Bolotin and Christine Laing, *The World's Columbian Exposition: The Chicago World's Fair of 1893* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992). For a photographic history of the World's Fair from the Chicago Historical Society see, for example: Stanley Appelbaum, *The Chicago World's Fair of 1893: A Photographic Record* (Mineola, NY: Courier Dover Publications, 1980).

<sup>369</sup> This central avenue later became the main thoroughfare through the University of Chicago.



“Midway Plaisance,” the Midway of Pleasure. It was filled with “freaks, fakirs, waiters, dancers and exhibitors,” as well as theaters, caterers, concessionaires, and “Oriental beauties.”<sup>370</sup>

Crowds embraced Chicago’s fair; the Midway alone generated \$4 million in revenue. In contrast, the 1881 and 1887 Atlanta Expositions had little in the way of entertainment or amusements; a few evening concerts were held but nothing to the extent of Chicago’s offerings. When Atlanta leaders saw the success the Chicago Exposition and the revenue generated from its Midway, they began to shape Atlanta’s third exposition around a Victorian center of pleasure and amusement.

To accommodate visitors and the central layout for its campus, the Atlanta Exposition’s Building and Grounds Committee went through at least two different master landscape architects as they planned how their Midway would be shaped. Local Atlantan Walter Gerald Cooper was hired as the exposition’s official historian. According to his massive 1896 tome, *The Cotton States and International Exposition and South*, “[Architect] Henry Watterson said that this Exposition copied nothing from the World’s Fair [in Chicago] but its’ Midway, and this is true.”<sup>371</sup> The Chicago Midway represented what the directors of the Atlanta Exposition wanted for its own exposition: to leverage accepted forms of Victorian entrainment to create a sublime space for amusement, and in turn, to generate revenue and acclaim for the emerging city.

The main goal of the Atlanta Exposition was to enable southern chambers of commerce to “publicize the promise of their section.” But plenary committee minutes note that organizers also hoped to create a tourist destination by leveraging city and exposition amusement

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<sup>370</sup> McCullough, *World’s Fair Midways*, 39.

<sup>371</sup> Walter Gerald Cooper, *The Cotton States and International Exposition and South, Illustrated: Including the Official History of the Exposition* (Atlanta: Illustrator Company, 1895), 34.

offerings.<sup>372</sup> As such, in addition to planning traditional buildings that would hold exhibits, “the work of the [planning] committee also largely comprehended the amusement features of the fair.”<sup>373</sup> Atlanta planned to showcase areas that were successful at other world’s fairs, like a Women’s Building, an Arts Building, and several buildings dedicated to politics, mechanics, and science.

Of particular note in Atlanta was support for its planned Negro Building.<sup>374</sup> White leaders believed the building would demonstrate how far the region had come since the days of slavery, while black leaders hoped to reveal more genuine articulations of African American cultural productions and beliefs than were appropriated elsewhere. Booker T. Washington, then President of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, chaired the exposition’s Negro Committee. Washington was also a member of the Atlanta delegation that successfully lobbied United States Congress for federal funding to support the exposition.

The Atlanta Exposition’s plans and schedule were published widely, including that it intended to host an event and a Midway that would rival Chicago. Local and regional newspapers throughout the South, from the *Macon Telegraph* (Macon, Georgia,) to *The Daily Picayune* (New Orleans, Louisiana), responded excitedly to news of the exposition. They not only featured advertisements, but also editorials that praised the exposition’s announced schedule of events and coming attractions. The *Southern Cultivator*, a semi-monthly newsletter aimed at farmers, unequivocally endorsed the exposition and announced that the annual meetings of the

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<sup>372</sup> Charles Paul Garofalo, “The Sons of Henry Grady: Atlanta Boosters in the 1920s,” *The Journal of Southern History* 42, no. 2 (May 1976): 202.

<sup>373</sup> Cooper, *The Cotton States and International Exposition and South, Illustrated*, 39.

<sup>374</sup> A Note on Terminology: Terms like “Indian,” “Oriental,” or “Negro,” commonly appear in my primary sources. For example, at the Atlanta Exposition, Booker T. Washington led the Negro Committee, which hosted the Negro Building. Elsewhere at the exposition, there were Asian performers described as “Oriental beauties.” As a historian, I aim to use the language of my sources and source material, even if terminology is outdated or no longer considered suitable today. I will use quotation marks when appropriate, such as when a newspaper calls women “oriental beauties,” or simply the official term with no quotations or an official name, like the Negro Committee.

respected Farmers' National Congress and Southern Cotton Growers Association would be held at the Atlanta Exposition.<sup>375</sup> Northern publications, too, promoted Atlanta's coming spectacle. *The Outlook* magazine from New York City wrote in a June 1895 article, "The most striking feature among great gatherings for the latter half of the present year will be the Cotton States International Exposition at Atlanta...Besides exhibits of their products from Southern States, there will be a number of rather remarkable attractions."<sup>376</sup>

Through all of these press reports and editorials, I have found no evidence in secular publications of Christian religious leaders advocating against the Atlanta Exposition. Neither is there evidence of editorials in opposition to the exposition, its economically-motivated plenary board, or its proposed entertainment lineup, with the exception of some debate regarding the morality of selling alcohol. Additionally, news reports and plenary minutes do not describe organizations of clergymen and religious leaders from around Atlanta and the Georgia Piedmont did not petition the exposition. Despite the potential for the sort of lowbrow attractions that often accompanied midways, if Atlanta's religious community opposed the exposition, its leaders' voices were largely silent in the secular press.

It is possible to consider that *The Atlanta Constitution* or other southern papers may have censored major opposition to the Atlanta Exposition in order to appease Atlanta's political and business elites. However, there were several unflattering articles about scandals connected to the exposition that were extensively publicized in *The Atlanta Constitution* and elsewhere. For example, it was widely reported that the exposition was under tremendous financial strain even after it officially opened. Many newspapers also published a series of stories detailing how a powerful Atlanta prison warden who was poised to oversee security at the exposition was

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<sup>375</sup> "Southern Cotton Growers' Association," *Southern Cultivator* (Augusta, GA), December 1894.

<sup>376</sup> "Noteworthy Gatherings for the Next Half-Year," *The Outlook* (New York, NY), June 15, 1895.

arrested under suspicion of corruption. If censorship or propaganda were goals of those in charge of the exposition, the press likely would have also avoided publicizing these scandalous articles. As such, it is not likely that newspapers censored religious-based opposition; it is more probable that serious or significant published opposition was simply not present.

In addition to an expanding secular press, the nineteenth century had its share of religious newspapers. Christian publications were both non-denominational and denominationally-affiliated. Religious and ethnic minority groups, too, had publications rooted in religion. The majority of religious newspapers coming out of the South, make no mention of the Atlanta Exposition at all, in support or against. *Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, *Biblical Recorder*, *Baptist Missionary Magazine*, and *The Methodist Review*, all based in the South, also say nothing about the Atlanta Exposition. Some nationally circulated Christian newspapers published in the North did reference the Atlanta Exposition. In these instances, all mentions are explicitly in support of readers attending the event. For example, *Zion's Herald*, a Methodist newspaper from Boston, wrote that the “coming great cotton States and International Exposition...is not attracting the attention it deserves.”<sup>377</sup> The article gives directions taking a new train route from Boston to Atlanta, and even lists various tourist sites to see along the way, none of which had any connection to religion. The *New York Evangelist*, a Presbyterian newspaper, wrote about the “arrayed in tangible witness of the industrial and general progress of the negro in recent years,” as a reason to attend the exposition.<sup>378</sup> There is little evidence that religious communities in the North or the South were opposed to Atlanta’s exposition; in fact, faith-based publications that did mention the exposition gave it a generally positive review, even its Midway.

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<sup>377</sup> “The Atlanta Exposition,” *Zion's Herald* (Boston, MA), July 17, 1895.

<sup>378</sup> “Article 11 (No Title),” *New York Evangelist*, August 22, 1895.

There were a few notable exceptions, however. The *Wesleyan Christian Advocate*, the official newspaper of the North and South Georgia Methodist Conferences, urged Methodist ministers not to hesitate to stand up against liquor law enforcement, bullfighting, and other vices, should the need arise for the clergymen to choose “between mere money and manhood.”<sup>379</sup> This article, however, was more about encouraging clergy to be active in civic life and raise a loud voice to battle against social vices; it was not dismissive of the exposition altogether.

One reason for religious support of the Atlanta Exposition may be due to a recognition by its plenary board that visitors might be both religious and excited to enjoy popular culture. The exposition’s organizers published brochures and communication bulletins that described Atlanta’s many attributes as a cosmopolitan city. After noting its hospitals and universities, one collectable guide lists “Churches of Atlanta.” The list includes Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian, Episcopal, Congregation, Lutheran, Unitarian, Christian Church, Christian Science, and two branches of the YMCA. On the following page, Catholic churches, synagogues, and “Negro Churches” are listed.<sup>380</sup> As I argued in Chapters Five and Six, the Victorian era’s new social norms meant cultural dichotomization was no longer required. The personal and institutional theologies of most southerners could participate in mainstream American popular culture while also being faithful religious practitioners.

Additionally, many of these collectable guides are a part of personal collections and family papers donated over time to the Atlanta History Center. They were not part of a collection effort; their assemblage was more grass roots. The fact that seemingly inconsequential pieces of ephemera, event schedules and lists of churches, were preserved by families and then donated to

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<sup>379</sup> Kathleen Minnix, *Laughter in the Amen Corner: The Life of Evangelist Sam Jones* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2010), 100-101.

<sup>380</sup> *Horsford’s Handy Guide to the Cotton States and International Exposition* (Atlanta, 1895), 7-8. MSS 1022, Box 2, Folder 2, James G. Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, GA.

an archive points to a more subtly pervasive southern belief system that could accommodate both religion and modern, popular entertainment.

A second reason for public support of the exposition may have been a strategic decision made by the scheduling committee: early in the planning phase, the Atlanta Exposition's Board announced the event would be closed on Sundays. When the plenary committee of the Chicago World's Fair agreed to accept souvenir half-dollar coins from the United States Congress, the committee also accepted the condition that the fair and all of its directly connected events would be closed on Sundays to observe the Sabbath. Chicago tried this schedule at first. After three weeks, however, Chicago's Board of Directors began to see Sunday closures as a high potential revenue loss. They reversed course and, like previous World's Fairs in Europe, Chicago's fair remained open on Sundays.<sup>381</sup>

News of Chicago's irreverently-kept Sabbath was met with shock and outcries of disagreement from Christian leaders and laypeople across the United States. Famed evangelist and Illinois native Dwight L. Moody had already agreed to loan some of his ministerial staff to run the Sunday School building at the Chicago Fair. When word of the Sunday openings reached Moody, he "surrounded himself with a staff of able Christian workers...and preparations have been made to hold meetings each night in every part of the city..." in protest and prayer over the unholy kept Sabbath.<sup>382</sup> Publications, religious and secular, condemned Chicago's decision and praised Moody's protest revival. Newspaper headlines exclaimed, "Go to the Exposition: Dr. Wharton Says Chicago Needs the Gospel – Mr. Moody's Work" and "World's Fair Evangels: How Brother Moody Will Attack Satan's Cohorts in Chicago."<sup>383</sup> The disparaging articles are

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<sup>381</sup> McCullough, *World's Fair Midways*, 40.

<sup>382</sup> "Notes Of The World's Fair," *New-York Tribune*, March 24, 1893.

<sup>383</sup> "Go to the Exposition," *The Sun* (Baltimore, MD), July 03, 1893. "World's Fair Evangels," *Bismarck Daily Tribune* (Bismarck, ND), April 16, 1893.

particularly interesting because they all come from northern and midwestern publications. (The latter examples being from newspapers in New York, Baltimore, and North Dakota, respectively.) While northern newspapers called for revivals and conversions at the Chicago Fair, opinions on Chicago's Sunday opening or the Moody protest were silent in the so-called evangelical South.

As the official opening of the Atlanta Exposition grew closer, the Sunday issue was debated again and again. Class values are very evident in the record, more so than religious ones. "There was no Sunday for the exposition workers," *The Atlanta Constitution* reported just two weeks before the grand opening. "To get the great show in readiness for the opening Wednesday, day and night work is now necessary and Sunday proved no exception."<sup>384</sup> Many articles praised the workers' dedication to the city and its endeavor, questioned construction costs, and interviewed members of the Piedmont Driving Club. "Will the exposition be on time, on budget, and as promised," is the theme of these articles. There is no mention of the need for laborers to keep the Sabbath or the morality of asking laborers to work on a Sunday.

Even as the exposition opened in fall 1895, the Sunday debate reemerged. The exposition's Board of Directors took up the issue again, with some members arguing that it was amoral to open on the Sabbath, others arguing that without a Sunday opening "many laboring people" would not be able to visit "because of their continuous work," while still other members argued that the matter was settled months ago when the exposition's by-laws were written and so the debate was now moot. For their part, Atlanta's associations of Methodist ministers, Baptist ministers, and the Evangelical Ministers' Association wrote letters opposing a Sunday opening. Ultimately, it was the argument that opening on Sundays would require changing the by-laws,

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<sup>384</sup> "Sunday at the Show," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 16, 1895.

which caused the board to keep the exposition closed on Sundays, not any strictly religious reason. Reports in some southern newspapers like Raleigh, North Carolina's *News and Observer* wrote statements like, "The south is peculiarly the home of orthodox religion and the sacred observance of the Sabbath...Opening the Atlanta exposition on Sundays would have been a rude shock to the religious convictions of the people of the south."<sup>385</sup> Despite this narrative, it was litigious paperwork, not Sabbath considerations, that rendered the final decision in Atlanta. Additionally, while official exposition events and buildings were closed, Sunday visitors to the Atlanta Exposition were still permitted to walk the fairgrounds "and use them for a park."<sup>386</sup>

Once the Atlanta Exposition officially opened, speeches and ribbon cuttings marked the official opening of each major attraction. Many of the events, including speeches and invocations, were recorded in Cooper's official history. Of the published texts, the three largest events—the exposition's dedication, a visit by President Grover Cleveland, and the dedication of the Women's Building—all began with similar prayers. The use of prayer to begin a public event was not unusual in the nineteenth century. That said, exposition plenary documents do not mention that an introductory invocation was necessary for any specific religious purpose; presumably the organizers were just following contemporary social protocol. Furthermore, there is something peculiar about the rhetoric of these speeches: they are all a sort of secular prayer that leverages a board, general deity. Christian theology is barely visible, if at all.

In the opening prayers for these three big events, God is asked for blessings of safety during the exposition, that the newly reunified United States receive God's protection, and that the exposition be successful in bringing happiness to its visitors. One prayer's Trinitarian

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<sup>385</sup> "No Sunday Exposition," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 4, 1895. (This article is a collection of clippings from other newspapers around the country that voiced support for the board's decision.)

<sup>386</sup> "Closes on Sunday: Board of Directors Take Up the Question of Sunday Opening Again," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 1, 1895.



language, a request for blessings from the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, made clear that this was a Christian prayer. Generally, however, the language is non-specific; “God” is used generally and there are no other hints these are Christian prayers. These are not evangelical prayers to Jesus to save the souls of those in attendance, nor do they discuss a Christ figure, salvation, Heaven, sin, or any other dominant Christian theological trope. As religion scholar Robert Bellah once described with regard to President John F. Kennedy’s Inaugural Address, “The placing of the [name of God] references in this speech as well as in public life generally indicates that religion has only a ceremonial significance.”<sup>387</sup> What held true for Kennedy in 1961, was also the case six decades prior: even in the South, religion was more nominal and ceremonial, acting second to the entertainment and amusement of the dedication speeches themselves. Based on this evidence, it appears as though the God of the Cotton States Exposition was articulated as an ecumenical god, the God of American Civil Religion. Like the majority of the exposition, this god was also a commercial deity, one who wanted people to have people fun during their leisure time as they searched for joy, happiness, and euthymia in daily life.

Even at Christmastime, the exposition featured a mostly secularized celebration of the holiday. The Children’s Christmas Parade, a widely advertised event that started at the Grand Stand and processed down the Midway, was led by Santa Claus. Written accounts of the festivities, both published and unpublished, make no mention of a celebration of the birth of Christ. In a similar manner to the Christmas cards saved by Katherine Wootten in her scrapbooks that I discussed in Chapter Six, the Atlanta Exposition hosted a Victorian Christmas celebration

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<sup>387</sup> Originally published as: Robert N. Bellah, “Civil Religion in America,” *Dædalus*, Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences 96, no. 1 (Winter 1967), 1-21. Now available online through Bellah’s personal website at: [http://www.robertbellah.com/articles\\_5.htm](http://www.robertbellah.com/articles_5.htm). Accessed January 13, 2016.

centered on commercialism, entertainment, and joy, not salvation or the birth of a savior like in Christian theology.

Like the speeches and Christmas parade, the Atlanta Exposition offered its visitors many opportunities to celebrate, relax, learn, and be joyful. But the exposition's greatest source of entertainment and even amazement was its Midway.

### **Amusements, Morality, and Christianity at Atlanta's Midway**

Atlanta's Midway was constructed to mesmerize and astonish visitors. It included games, activities, theater, adventure rides, bright lights, food, drink, and even freak shows. These sites offered visitors from rural areas and new transplants to Atlanta an opportunity see the awe-inspiring scenes in person, often for the first time in their lives. Cooper's official history describes the illustrious scene in great deal, painted "for the edification of those who never saw that charming landscape."<sup>388</sup> Describing the Midway's décor he wrote:

...Ornamentation was not generally elaborate, but the imposing character of the structures and the general harmony of the series formed a grand composition in architecture which appealed with great power to the spectator. Then came [the architect of "decorative illumination" Mr. [Luther] Stieringer with his electric lights and his lines of fire, giving a transcendent beauty to the whole. When twilight fell on that enchanting scene and night led forth her constellations, the far-off splendor of the sky, reflected in the clear mirror of the lake, found counterfeit presentment in the scintillating domes of this fair land.<sup>389</sup>

The diction used in this detailed description is an interesting amalgamation of the various literary languages of the Victorian era. It is naturalistic and mystical. It presents a scene that is "not generally elaborate" but with an aesthetic that, as Georg Hegel would say, creates an overwhelming sense of awe. *The Atlanta Constitution* later bestowed on electric water fountain,

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<sup>388</sup> Cooper, *The Cotton States and International Exposition and South*, 34.

<sup>389</sup> Cooper, *The Cotton States and International Exposition and South*, 34.

with its nightly “grand display of lights,” a name fitting of a phoenix city: The Pillar of Fire.<sup>390</sup>  
The spectacle was sublime.

In addition to light shows, one of the most popular entertainment attractions at the Atlanta Exposition was the Grand Stand, located just north of the Midway. John Phillips Sousa composed his *King Cotton* march for the exposition and debuted it in the Grand Stand in fall 1895. This was also the location where major speeches and oratory exercises were held. President Grover Cleveland spoke here on President’s Day. Booker T. Washington’s famous “Atlanta Compromise” speech was given in the Grand Stand on Negro Day, September 18, 1895. Even the Liberty Bell was hauled to Atlanta to be presented and celebrated in the Grand Stand before being moved to the exposition’s Pennsylvania Building. Cooper’s official history describes the bell’s arrival in striking language:

The crowd had brushed through the gates of the depot and surrounded the [train] car. Little children were held up by their parents, and as their chubby hands patted the bell their lips kissed its brazen sides. They were hardly old enough to know the meaning of the noise, but they caught the spirit of enthusiasm and seemed to be happy in the presence of the venerable relic.<sup>391</sup>

Cooper’s word choice hints that a cultural zeal was exuding through Atlanta in ways similar to that of a religious revival. The children strived to touch the bell as a “spirit of enthusiasm” filled the air. The crowd was content just knowing they were in the presence of a “relic.” More than mere entertainment or spectacle, the Liberty Bell’s arrival was a powerful moment of civil religion at the exposition.

Elsewhere on Atlanta’s Midway, crowds could experience a different type of spectacle: a living one. At other Midways, so-called “freak shows,” like the type P. T. Barnum displayed in

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<sup>390</sup> The Pillar of Fire was a widely described attraction. For example see: “A Day of Events: Yesterday Was a Memorable Day at the Exposition,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 22, 1895.

<sup>391</sup> Cooper, *The Cotton States and International Exposition and South*, 115.

New York, grew out of the desire to learn about new people while also being amused. The same was true for anthropological displays of cultural otherness; that is, the recruiting non-whites to set up a small, living exhibitions about life in another place or time. Although Barnum's programs were initially aimed at the working class, they and other cheap amusements quickly became popular throughout much of American society.<sup>392</sup> The Chicago World's Fair had a widely successful display of both anthropological exhibits and freak shows. As the Atlanta Exposition was planned, organizers also wanted to have an oddity and human display component for its Midway.

Like the men and women in Barnum's dime museums, the people who were recruited to participate in Atlanta's oddity tents were displayed for their otherness. Their images were commoditized, sold as commemorative photographs and stereoscopic cards. When Atlanta's Midway opened, tourists flocked to the exhibits, including "the Coming Woman" (a farce of masculine, modern women who wore pants), snake charmers, burlesque dancers from Egypt, and many others. Cooper's official history describes some of these exhibitions saying:

Society was, so to speak, turned inside out, and the half-world confronted the politer half with smiling self-assurance...The live subjects were nowise disconcerted, and conducted themselves with an abandon which seemed to assert that the spectators were touched with a feeling of their firmities, and were only holding up an exaggerated mirror of themselves. The mirror, indeed, showed what, as John Wesley would say, but for the grace of God everyone might be.<sup>393</sup>

Although Cooper invokes Methodist founder John Wesley, there is no evidence in secular or sectarian newspapers that Atlanta's Protestant community paid any mind to the religious or moral implications of having humans on display for the amusement of others.

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<sup>392</sup> For more on the transformation of class-based Victorian popular culture, see: Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in the Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 186-188.

<sup>393</sup> Cooper, *The Cotton States and International Exposition and South*, 89-90.

Religion and the Midway interacted in another way, too. Adventure shows just off the Midway were exceedingly popular. Also, many shows located just outside of the fairgrounds were not officially affiliated with the Atlanta Exposition but were planned by local business entrepreneurs (many of whom served on the exposition's board) to debut concurrently with the exposition. According to historian Steve Goodson, "One local newspaper estimated that on the evening of October 28, [1895,] a combined audience of 10,000 people had visited either the city's theaters or the Buffalo Bill Wild West show on the exposition grounds."<sup>394</sup> Mexican bullfighting was a particular highlight of the nightly entertainment offerings. Years later in 1941, Fred Manley from Tennessee, who had attended an exposition bullfight as a child, wrote to the Atlanta Historical Society to get some more information about the show. He wrote:

I remember very well all matters of the exposition, but one, and that was the attending of a 'Mexican Bull-fight' in an arena just outside of the Exposition Grounds. My recollection of the show is quite plain, but I also remember the police shut it up after this one performance, and it is also my remembrance that the crowds at the show were more in sympathy with the bull than they were with the Mexicans.<sup>395</sup>

Manley was correct in his remembrance of a bullfight. He must have been an observant boy because sympathy for the show's bulls is the one area in which some members of the nation's evangelical community seems to have taken a stand against the Atlanta Exposition. An August 1895 editorial in the *Christian Advocate* newspaper of New York, entitled "Bull Fights Proposed for This Country" admonished the organizers of the Atlanta Exposition for permitting such cruelty to animals. The editorial asserted, "At a time when even the French government is prohibiting bull fights, and making most strenuous efforts to suppress them, it is hoped that such

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<sup>394</sup> Steve Goodson, *Highbrows, Hillbillies, and Hellfire: Public Entertainment in Atlanta, 1880-1930* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 47.

<sup>395</sup> Fred Manley, Letter to Ruth Blair of the Atlanta Historical Society, June 7, 1941. MSS 1022, Box 1, Folder 1, James G. Kenan Research Center, Atlanta History Center, Atlanta, GA.

a brutalizing show will be prohibited [from the exposition].”<sup>396</sup> The article goes on to support the actions of the American Humane Society in limiting cruelty to animals. And like Manley stated in his letter, there is no mention of the treatment of the “troupe of bull fighters” brought to Georgia to also take part in the spectacle.

Unlike the silence of most religious leaders concerning popular culture at the exposition, some politicians and civil leaders took a vocal stance against one feature of the Midway: burlesque dancing. An October 1895 article in the *Los Angeles Times* notes that the Georgia House of Representatives “have been so shocked” by nudity on Atlanta’s Midway that they sought to pass “a bill to suppress the lithe-limbed young women in their efforts to introduce the latest oriental novelties in the South.”<sup>397</sup> *The Atlanta Constitution* published a series of other articles on the subject that provide some more context. These note that the state representative who introduced the bill had done so in a previous session and taken back up the bill after hearing about belly dancers in the Midway’s Streets of Cairo exhibit. The Georgia legislature debated whether it was the duty of government to “purify the moral atmosphere” of the country. Some members argued that a bill to make burlesque dancing a misdemeanor would help “protect our young people” from the moral decay brought on by the “dance due ventre,” also known as the “coutah-coutah.”<sup>398</sup> Ironically, at the time of the legislature’s debate, the *Daily Time-Enterprise* of Thomasville, Georgia, called the Streets of Cairo’s burlesque show “one of the star attractions on the midway.”<sup>399</sup> Eventually, four burlesque shows on the Midway were closed in mid-November due to performances deemed morally questionable by exposition authorities, but other

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<sup>396</sup> “Editorial: Bull Fights Proposed for This Country,” *Christian Advocate* (New York, NY), August 1, 1895.

<sup>397</sup> “No Friends to Muscle: Georgia Statesmen are After Midway Dancers,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 26, 1895.

<sup>398</sup> “On With The Dance: But It Is Move On, the Georgia Legislators Say,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 26, 1895.

<sup>399</sup> “Down on the Dance,” *Daily Time-Enterprise* (Thomasville, Georgia), October 27, 1895.

similar burlesque shows remained open, both on the fairgrounds and in small theaters throughout Atlanta.

The strangest part of this tale is not that the “oriental novelties” were damned, but rather that it was a group of politicians who expressed shock over the Midway’s entertainment, not leaders of southern, Christian communities. The *Los Angeles Times* article states:

Early in the history of the exposition, the ministers of Atlanta, inspired by certain reports wafted from Chicago and San Francisco, appointed a committee to investigate the [burlesque] dance and report. The committee visited the Midway, ate the ‘hot-hots’ of Egyptian commerce, drank of the seductive liquid refreshments purveyed by the Turks, witnessed the “coochee” dance, and pronounced it a good thing. The Ministerial Association accepted the report, and there was no further talk about the Midway.<sup>400</sup>

More than simply “accept[ing] the report,” several ministers went even further. Around the same time the *Los Angeles Times* article was published, *The Atlanta Constitution* wrote that Atlanta’s Methodist ministers had drafted a resolution that “pointed out certain immoral features of the exposition with a view to having them corrected.” However, “after mature consideration,” the specifics of which the article doesn’t note, the resolution was tabled “in no spirit of compromise or concession, but after the meeting had been persuaded of the fact that evil doings on the Midway were not as bad as they had been represented.”<sup>401</sup> As a result, the ministers expressed “full sympathy with the educational and progressive features of the exposition” and moved on with their regular agenda.<sup>402</sup>

Moving on with “no further talk” and in “full sympathy” includes that religious leaders said nothing in the press about the “Muslum Princess” who was scheduled to give a talk about her native homeland in the Women’s Building. It is unclear if this woman was actually a

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<sup>400</sup> “No Friends to Muscle,” *Los Angeles Times*.

<sup>401</sup> “No Action Against the Board: The Methodist Ministers in Sympathy with the Exposition,” *Atlanta Constitution*, October 8, 1895.

<sup>402</sup> “No Action Against the Board,” *Atlanta Constitution*.

practicing Muslim or a princess, but contextual evidence about her visits suggests her religiously-related title was more of an orientalized adjective than a religious demarcation. Perhaps through the “Muslum” woman’s otherness, her display was understood as being for more educational and entertainment value than for demonstrated religiosity. Maybe it was implicitly decided she posed no threat to Christian religiousness or middle-class, white, southern womanhood. In these ways, Victorian’s obsession with the orient and popular culture won out over Christian theology or moral concerns.

Similarly, there was also no published discussion about religions showcased in the African or (American) Indian Villages. Nor was there controversy about the exposition’s Chinese Joss House (small temples for ancestor worship often commoditized for tourists in San Francisco and New York Chinatowns), the Egyptians and Arabs brought in for the “Streets of Cairo” exhibit, performances by Turkish whirling dancers, or showcases of any of the other anthropologic exhibits that displayed a myriad of non-Christian religious practices and symbols. Most of Atlanta’s Protestant congregations practiced evangelism and many directly funded foreign missionary efforts. Yet, there were no calls to convert the non-Christians on the Midway, and no demands to limit displays of non-Christian or non-Western religious practices or symbols. The presence of the burlesque dancers’ bare stomachs seemed to pose more threat to delicate Victorian sensibilities than watching foreigners describe and practice “oriental” religions. Guidebooks, souvenir photographs, and advertisement posters describe excitement about the possibility of seeing these cultural stereotypes on display for the sake of amusement and edification. Cooper’s office history writes, “The concessions for amusements built up Midway Heights, the great resort of tired sightseers. It added something more than amusement, for the



villages of the Midway furnished an anthropological exhibit full of instruction to the visitor.”<sup>403</sup> Even private diaries and correspondence of Atlantans who saw these installations first-hand describe no objections. This demonstrates that like other Americans during the long nineteenth century, southerners shared the Victorian fascination with orientalism more than they feared or resented displays of non-Christian religious practices, at least those exhibited for entertainment purposes.

Even evangelist Dwight Moody played a strange role in the religio-cultural history of the Atlanta Exposition. Moody hosted two months of revivals outside the fairgrounds of the Chicago World’s Fair in protest of the fair being open on Sundays. After seeing Chicago host a Moody revival, even if Chicago’s plenary committee had neither organized nor appreciated the event, several southern religious leaders began clamoring for the evangelist to come to Atlanta, as well. Atlanta’s Evangelical Ministers Association recruited Moody to come to the city, but most rhetoric around a potential Moody visit, including in major newspapers and in private diaries, reflects a desire to have a prominent religious figure visit Atlanta and the possibility to see one of Moody’s revivals in person.<sup>404</sup> Unlike in Chicago, sources did not specifically mention the hordes of unsaved souls who could be converted as a result of a Moody revival.

For his part, Moody had to be cajoled to Atlanta. After persistent negotiations, Moody only agreed to the trip on the condition that his recruiters built him a “tabernacle” (a temporary tent-like auditorium common for large outdoor revivals) to his exact specifications.<sup>405</sup> According to some newspaper reports, Moody required the tabernacle accommodate 3,000 seats; others note

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<sup>403</sup> Cooper, *The Cotton States and International Exposition and South*, 9.

<sup>404</sup> The Evangelical Ministers Association included myriad churches and ministers around Atlanta, including ministers from established denominations like Methodist or Baptist churches, each of which also had their own denominationally-specific ministerial association.

<sup>405</sup> This fact is mentioned in many articles. See, for example: “To Make a Canvass: Subscriptions To Be Asked To Build a Temporary Auditorium,” *Atlanta Constitution*, July 31, 1895.

5,000 seats. Either way, it was to be strategically located between the exposition grounds and downtown Atlanta, and needed to be accessible by streetcar. Notably, neither Moody's recruitment nor the fundraising and construction of his tabernacle were undertaken by Atlanta's city government or by official exposition committees; all of this work was performed by a few local ministers and their congregations. Even more striking, the evangelical recruiters struggled to raise the funds necessary to build the tabernacle. "Very little interest has been taken by the public in raising funds for a tabernacle and the matter is likely to fall through unless somebody comes to the rescue," reported *The Atlanta Constitution* in September 1895.<sup>406</sup> This nods to the fact that average parishioners in Atlanta's evangelical community may have lacked the same appetite for a Moody revival than did their faith leaders.

Once the tabernacle was finally built and Moody had arrived, the preacher and his sanctuary theoretically had every advantage for a successful revival. The tabernacle dedication ceremony drew in thousands. Published crowd estimates range from 6,000 to 10,000 attendees at the November 1895 event. However, when the seven-days-a-week revival began, the other entertainment options at the exposition and around the city of Atlanta did not stop or adjust their schedules or acts to accommodate for the evangelist's visit. Goodson describes that during the last week of November 1895, in addition to Moody's daily revival festivities, "theatergoers could choose from among Shakespeare, John Philip Sousa, and [vaudeville act] McCart's Dog and Monkey Comedians. Atlantans and their guests flocked to such attractions."<sup>407</sup> Before his arrival, Moody had stressed the importance of media coverage to his Atlanta-based recruiters, but *The*

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<sup>406</sup> "Meeting of the Ministers: They Will Discuss the Building of a Tabernacle for Mr. Moody," *Atlanta Constitution*, September 2, 1895.

<sup>407</sup> Goodson, *Highbrows, Hillbillies, and Hellfire*, 47-48.

*Atlanta Journal* only reported Moody's arrival, departure, and his three biggest sermons. Some of the coverage was even relegated to Page 8's pedestrian "Church News" section.<sup>408</sup>

In her biography of Georgia evangelist and Moody collaborator, Sam Jones, historian Kathleen Minnix proposes several reasons for the Moody revival's "failure to flourish" in Atlanta, including bad timing (the Methodist ministers were away at their national conference at the time), a lack of press and advertising, and poor overall organization.<sup>409</sup> According to Minnix, the most basic cause of Moody's failure, however, was that "important Atlantans were more concerned with having a successful fair than with saving souls."<sup>410</sup> In this way, Moody's thirty-day long Atlanta revival did not reflect a counter movement to the Midway's sights and sounds; rather, Moody became just one more option for entertainment at the Atlanta Exposition. Christian evangelist or not, he too, was just another of Atlanta's amusements.

## **Conclusion**

When Atlanta's Cotton States and International Exposition ended and the data calculated, 779,560 total paying visitors are reported to have attended. This was significantly less than Chicago's World's Fair which drew roughly the same number of visitors on "Chicago Day" alone. Still, Atlanta's event was considered a success by all accounts, including by its Board of Directors, *The Atlanta Constitution* and other national newspapers, and unpublished personal descriptions of attendees.

Cooper's official history includes extensive quantitative data about attendees, revenues, and other key business metrics. Receipts from "some of the more important concessions" at the

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<sup>408</sup> Minnix, *Laughter in the Amen Corner*, 100.

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<sup>410</sup> Minnix, *Laughter in the Amen Corner*, 100.

exposition give a glimpse into the popularity of lowbrow amusements in the South.<sup>411</sup> The attraction or vendor category that brought in the most money during the Atlanta Exposition was “Restaurants and Lunches” with \$16,821. This is unsurprising given that nearly everyone who attended the exposition would need a break for food. The second most profitable vendor is more telling: “Liquors: three concessions,” with a total revenue of \$15,354. In other words, visitors to the exposition spent in total, almost the same amount on food as they did on alcohol. Considering that many children attended the fair and presumably bought food but not alcohol, in addition to any adults who chose to abstain, this is an especially high figure. Other top grossing attractions were on the Midway, including: Streets of Cairo (with its belly dancers), Eden Musée, Mystic Maze, Shooting the Chutes (a water ride), and the Palace of Illusion.<sup>412</sup> This is to say nothing of the concurrent but unaffiliated local attractions—theaters, burlesque shows, restaurants, temporary food carts—who may have benefited from the crowds that came to Atlanta for the exposition, but whose sales were not part of official exposition records.

If ministers or church leaders spent Sunday morning services reproving the mysticism, orientalism, and lowbrow entertainment at the exposition (and of the many published sermons in secular and religious newspapers during the period, there is no evidence of them doing so), congregants were voting with their feet on Saturday night. Even the exposition’s Peep Show ended up in the black, netting \$608 overall.<sup>413</sup> Cooper’s official history of the exposition argues that the amusements at the exposition were important because a “little nonsense [is] ever necessary” to prevent crowds from growing weary.<sup>414</sup> Or perhaps *The Morning News* of Savannah put it best in its review of the Atlanta Exposition’s Midway when it noted, “If all of

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<sup>411</sup> Cooper, *The Cotton States and International Exposition and South*, 42.

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>414</sup> Cooper, *The Cotton States and International Exposition and South*, 40.

the wickedness were taken out of the Atlanta exposition, the chances are that it would be somewhat dull at times.”<sup>415</sup>

While the Cotton States and International Exposition was only open for one hundred days, analyzing the popular culture related to this important and understudied event reveals a multidimensional historical reality that typically excluded from conventional understandings of the American South or American religious history. More than mere entertainment, amusements at the exposition were “full of instruction” and were not protested by southern clergy. Without them, Cooper’s history concludes, “the fair would have been sadly incomplete.”<sup>416</sup>

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<sup>415</sup> “Notes,” *The Morning News* (Savannah, Georgia), October 2, 1895.

<sup>416</sup> Cooper, *The Cotton States and International Exposition and South*, 40.

## CONCLUSION

### **On Studying Religion, Popular Culture, and the New South**

Between 1865 and 1925, the city of Atlanta dramatically changed. The Phoenix City not only rose out of the ashes left by Sherman's March to the Sea, but became a larger, stronger, and more prominent city than its antebellum predecessor. But the journey was not an easy one. As a result of the devastating Confederate loss, many southerners lost their faith in institutions, including organized religion. Immediately following the Civil War, rapid economic, social, racial, and familial changes spurred unease, depression, and cultural anxiety in white working- and middle-class southerners. Searching for new opportunities or just basic survival, many southerners opted to give up their land-based agricultural lifestyle and move to the region's growing mill towns and metropolitan centers. Meanwhile, modern technologies helped spread ideas faster than ever before, allowing these urban spaces to be filled with new, Victorian popular culture trickling in from the northeast. This dissertation has been an attempt to understand how the influx of new ideas and cultural productions interacted with traditional religious institutions in the South.

Few scholars have studied the intersection of religion and popular culture between the end of the Civil War and the early 1920s. When the topic has been considered, it is generally in the context of the American North, not the American South. In the historiography of nineteenth century southern religion, scholars have examined connections between religion and the Civil War, antebellum religion and gender, postbellum denominational history, and the rise of twentieth century Christian fundamentalism. By centering my research on religion, popular culture, and the industrializing New South, my dissertation aims to open a new area of investigation in the historiography.

In the course of doing this work, three major themes have emerged. First, religious and cultural life in Atlanta was multi-faceted and complex, especially during the period from 1865 to 1925. During the second half of the long nineteenth century, white working- and middle-class Atlantans engaged in a sort of cultural versatility. By blurring the boundaries between the sacred and profane, popular culture and religion, they were increasingly able to have a foot in two different worlds. Atlantans were both southern and Victorian. They could be looking forward to a New South future, while struggling to let go of the Old South past. And as I address more directly, Atlantans could both engage in popular culture and be concerned with maintaining the practices of institutional religion. While the Puritans before or the Fundamentalists after were made to choose religion or modern culture, during the long nineteenth century, most white men and women in Atlanta could enjoy both.

The second major theme to come out of my work is that Atlantans leveraged their cultural versatility to recover from post-war struggles, and to define new roles that could help them adapt to the modern moment in which they were living, as individuals, as families, and as a city. Women used popular culture, including literature, women's clubs, and attending public

amusements, to grow their influences in both the private sphere and the public sphere. Men used sports, exercise, and entertainment at the YMCA to reframe Christianity as a masculine endeavor, to offer other men a place of amusement without the vices of the street, and to address concerns that the Victorian era's new white-collar jobs were making men weak. Protestant clergymen and religious leaders used popular culture to advertise for their religious programming, like when the YMCA agreed to hold worship services in a movie theater. Popular culture also became a teaching tool, an opportunity for men like Revered Leonard Broughton to create modern, relatable parables about preferred behavior. Finally, Atlanta's civic leaders were able to leverage the Victorian era's cultural versatility to make the 1895 Cotton States exposition a success, creating openings for visitors to engage with entertainment at the Midway on Saturday, and still practice their faith on Sunday by using exposition-provided guidebooks that listed local churches.

The third and final theme that emerged from my dissertation is that as religion and popular culture became entangled, a distinctive type of secularized, cultural Christianity began to emerge. Some women joined church-affiliated women's clubs not just for the club's religious practices or contributions to the congregation, but also because the clubs had entertainment value. They were places where women could fellow, share, work, and enjoy in the company of other women. In some of these instances, the religious purpose of the club became secondary to the joy of attending the meetings. Camping trips offered by the YMCA were more about building moral character and masculine traits than they were contemplative Christian worship opportunities. Additionally, the Atlanta YMCA's gymnasium was "the main inducement of the association" not Christian worship, and soon theatrical performances and even hypnotists were



widely-advertised YMCA program offerings, more so than Sunday services.<sup>417</sup> At the Cotton States Exposition, civil prayers vaguely referenced a larger deity, but rarely connected the language with Christian theology. In the same way, Santa Claus led the Christmas parade and kicked off a celebration of giving and joy, not the birth of the Christian savior.

These three components, the establishment and proliferation of a cultural versatility that could accommodate religion and popular culture, the use of that versatility to define one's new place in the world, and the emergence of a secularized form of Christianity, worked together to create a modern cultural identity for white working- and middle-class Atlantans. Not mere entertainment or mere religion, but a vibrant, complex, lived experience.

For my evidence, I used traditional primary sources like newspapers, diaries, and personal correspondence. However, I also relied heavily on ephemera. The beliefs and behaviors that accompany an object's collection matters for how scholars evaluate both the collection itself and the collectors. By mailing a ticket stub to a son far away, like in the case of the Wayt parents to their son away at college; by maintaining two decades of specific cards, invitations, and newspaper clippings in large scrapbooks, as did Katherine Wootten; or by including a lock of a grandmother's hair in the pages of her unpublished autobiography, like Laura Augusta Hay chose to do for Lollie Belle Wylie, these southerners were making judgements about what mattered, what was worth saving, and what was not. Historians of visual and material culture have used these objects since the 1970s; scholars of religion, however, have only recently begun to dig into the richness of such sources. This is an area worthy of more attention, especially in the field of religion.

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<sup>417</sup> "Building Up the Physical Man," *Atlanta Constitution*, March 8, 1896.

There are, of course, limitations to these sources. Pieces of ephemera are often compiled in thematic archival collections. Because those items would be moved out of family papers and placed into thematic collections, their accession paperwork is often lost, and therefore the logic behind the object's collection or donation is lost as well. This omission then requires the scholar to make inferences about motivations, feelings, or intent. Additionally, ephemera collections are laborious to explore. Items can be small, like souvenir wooden coins; they can be enormous and unwieldy like framed collages made of a dozen, ceramic, commemorative plates; or they can be irrelevant to the research at hand.<sup>418</sup> Despite their limitations, however, ephemera can provide new insights, especially for scholars of religion who want to better understand the semiotics or meaning-making behind particular ideas, objects, or events.

Many historical studies of religion and popular culture, especially in the South, focus on the recent past, since World War II. It is my hope that this dissertation is a starting point for a new conversation that pushes this timeline back a century. Southern popular culture has deeper roots than the 1940s, and southern religion has always been connected to popular culture in some way. As such, this relationship is worth exploring in more depth, especially in the more distant past.

Even in the nineteenth century, the South was not too religious to enjoy popular culture, particularly when the cultural form allowed southerners to better understand or better engage with the new era in which they were living. Victorianism as a movement had a tremendous impact on the city of Atlanta, including its architecture, its ideas and social constructions, its

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<sup>418</sup> I experienced all of these during the course of my research. The coins can be found at the James G. Kenan Research Center at the Atlanta History Center. The collages can be found at the Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library at the University of Georgia. There are also collages made of spoons, and ones made of stereoscope photos. Each one weighed about thirty pounds and had to be brought in on a separate handcard by an archivist. Still, they were important pieces of evidence for understanding what their creator or commissioner valued.

cultural entertainment, and its established institutions. This is a rich line of investigation that is worthy of further exploration in future studies.

I don't purport to have written a definitive text on southern religion and popular culture, nor was that my intent. But I do believe I have opened new avenues for discussion in the historiography, and exposed new potential sources of historical evidence, especially for the field of religious studies.

The majority of my work has focused on white, working- and middle-class Protestants in Atlanta, with the exception of Katherine Wooten who was Catholic. Future scholarship in this area would benefit from considering if other faith traditions, races, ethnicities, or groups, also experienced the same thematic changes that I have discussed. Another area of potential future scholarship is the rise of gothic, magic, and occult themes that proliferated during the Victoria area, and how or if these cultural productions were evident in the South. I touched briefly on spiritualistic entertainment in the case of the hypnotist at the YMCA, but future scholarship could consider whether popular culture that involved some element of the occult, such as early horror films, Ouija board parties, or plays like *Vera the Medium*, were also considered acceptable forms of entertainment for white, southern Christians during the long nineteenth century.

Popular culture is more than a set of productions; it is pervasive, and in many instances, intentional. The very nature of the "popular" requires wide appeal and participation. The worlds that surround us give clues regarding who we are and what we value. In the same way, values can be found in what we create, and in what and how we consume. Therefore, I argue that studying popular culture can give historians of religion new insights into how peoples of the past actually lived. For example, studying the sermons and writings of preachers can point to a church-endorsed mode of living or an institutional ideal, but studying how average people chose

to spend their time, money, or energies, gives a more accurate picture of real, past lives.

Victorian cultural productions brought something new to the lives of Atlantans in the New South era, including joy, community, and euthymia. More than mere entertainment, popular culture changed southern religion.

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