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Kate Margiotta April 10, 2023

The Mistress as Master:

A Critical Reassessment of Plantation Women in Georgia

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Abstract

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This thesis traces the transitions of the roles of plantation mistresses in Georgia from the period 1850-1867. It interrogates the historical notion that Southern white women living on plantations were gentler, or even unaware of the severity of the institution of slavery than their male counterparts. It consists of four chapters that analyze the diaries and correspondence of three different Georgia women, Martha Battey, Dolly Lunt Burge, and Mary Jones who all lived in different regions of Georgia with different size holdings. Each chapter demonstrates how white women's perceptions of slavery and their status as plantation mistresses changed in the years immediately preceding, during, and following the American Civil War. Ultimately, I find that plantation mistresses were aware of the brutalities of slavery, and, in fact, they expressed many of the same sentiments as their male counterparts, including expressions of paternalism and a willingness to use violence. Additionally, they all participated directly in the southern slave economy- they were not clueless, innocent bystanders, and they certainly were not secretly opposed to an institution that their husbands, fathers, and brothers condoned and profited from. Revealing who these women really were demonstrates that we live in a world that still fails to acknowledge the depth and breadth of slavery's mark on our nation. A system as abominable as slavery must have required the support of more than just southern white male politicians and influential planters.

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Introduction:

On December 10th 1860, Martha Battey wrote in a letter to Mary Battey, "My negroes don't try to frighten me in any way- they are afraid to- You know that our ladies a great many of them shoot very well."[1]

The Civil War is perhaps one of the most well-researched events in United States History. Most Americans are familiar with the major lead causes of the war: The Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the *Dred Scott* decision, the list goes on. However, much of this history fails to address an essential question: what were the women doing? Particularly, what were white southern women, the wives of plantation owners, doing? What were they thinking? Were they generally in agreement about the maintenance of the "peculiar institution"? Were they, in their own ways, upholding it? An institution as despicable and inhumane as United States slavery likely could not have lasted as long as it did if the only true beneficiaries were white men.

This thesis aims to interrogate the role of plantation mistresses – women married to or daughters of plantation owners – from around 1850-1868 in Georgia. Although historians, both before and during the Civil War, have studied how culturally engrained the institution of slavery was in the Antebellum South – by means of interrogating the transatlantic slave trade, slave markets, and plantation life – there is a piece of this history that is largely missing. Until recently, few historians had attempted to explain what role white plantation mistresses played in not only perpetuating, but also directly benefiting from the institution of slavery. Broadly, the role of plantation mistresses has either just gone unaddressed, or they are written off as being more

[1] Martha Battey to Mary Battey, December 10, 1860, Box 1, Folder 14, "Typescripts: Martha Battey Correspondence," Robert Battey Papers, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library [hereinafter Battey Papers].

benevolent and gentle, or perhaps even oblivious, than their fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons.

Serious interrogation of the roles of white women in upholding slavery is somewhat of a recent historical endeavor. As Stephanie Jones-Rogers points out in her 2019 book *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners* in the American South, "Historians rarely consider why slave ownership might have mattered to the women in question, to the enslaved people they owned, to slaveholding communities, to the institution of slavery, or more broadly, to the region."[2] Further, she notes, "Scholars who examine the authority that women held over their slaves frequently focus on the women's obligatory, rather than voluntary or self-initiated management and discipline of enslaved people."[3] This results in the argument that "women could not be true 'masters' of slaves."[4] They are historically written off as "fictive masters."[5]

Recent historians like Jones-Rogers have challenged this notion, and have found plenty of evidence that this was not necessarily true. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese contributed to this historical conversation when she published her book *Within The Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (1988), in which she suggested that as much can be gleaned from looking within the plantation household as studying the happenings of the physical plantations and slave markets. By tracing the interactions of Black and white women, as well as analyzing how notions of gender were shaped by race and class at the time, she ultimately finds that "to the mistress accrued the feminine face of a paternalism that endowed the ownership of

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[2] Stephanie E. Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South* (Yale University Press, 2019), https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvbnm3fz.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.

some people by the ownership of others with whatever humanity it could muster"[6] Her findings also address the [false] historical notion that there was a sisterly bond between enslaved women and plantation mistresses, or that both were merely victims of a patriarchal and paternal society. On this question, Genovese writes, "Class and race deeply divided southern women, notwithstanding their shared experience of life in rural households under the domination of men... slave women did not see their mistresses as oppressed sisters."[7]

In the twenty-first century, more historical work has been done to expand on the question of what roles white southern women played in the perpetuation and maintenance of the institution of slavery. Building upon the work of Fox-Genovese, Thavolia Glymph published *Out of the House of Bondage* in 2003, a book in which she challenges the "popular and scholarly images of the plantation household as the source of slavery's redeeming qualities, where 'gentle' mistresses ministered to 'loyal' slaves."[8] Glymph argues that the plantation household was a political space, and "first and foremost a site of production."[9] In fact, she ultimately finds that "physical conflict seems to have occurred much more frequently between mistresses and slaves than between masters and slaves."[10] The instances of violence she describes have largely been written off as "acts of passion" in the past, as the notion of white females being violent "transgressed the idea of white female gentility."[11] Most recently, in her book *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners* scholar Stephanie Jones-Rogers examines the relationship of white women to the more capitalist elements of slavery (as opposed to social),

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[6] E. Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South*, Gender & American Culture (University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 132, https://books.google.com/books?id=uetf-7GmqNwC.
[7] Ibid, 42, 47.
[8] Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), i, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511812491.
[9] Ibid, 1.
[10] Ibid, 36.
[11] Ibid.

pointing out that white women were active participants and benefactors in the slave economy by showing that they typically inherited more enslaved people than land, thus making enslaved people a major source of wealth for white women.[12]

With a nod to these scholars, this thesis serves as a focused investigation of the role of the plantation mistress in the state of Georgia by examining family papers, correspondence, and journal entries from various plantation mistresses living in Georgia around the time of the Civil War. Although this topic has recently been broached by more historians, it remains on the outskirts of general historical inquiry when discussing the Civil War. Focusing mainly on three families, particularly the women of these families, I use the published diary of Dolly Lunt Burge, a woman born in Maine who moved to Georgia and married Thomas Burge, the owner of the Burge plantation in Newton County located in the Piedmont region. When he passed away from tuberculosis, Dolly managed the Burge Plantation on her own in the days leading up to the Civil War. I also use the Battey family papers, which contain correspondence between the family members of Dr. Robert Battey. I am working primarily with the correspondence from his wife, Martha Battey. The Battey family lived in Rome, Georgia. Lastly, I use letters from Mary Jones to the rest of the Jones family, which are published in *The Children of Pride: A True Story of Georgia and the Civil War*. This book features letters from the Jones family, who owned a plantation in Liberty County, Georgia which is on the coast of Georgia, about 35 miles away from Savannah.

The families I am studying are from very different geographical locations in Georgia, and their holdings all differed in size. The Burge plantation was located nine miles east of Covington, in Newton County, which is located in the Piedmont region of Georgia. It was a 900-acre site

[12] Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property*.

with around 100 enslaved people.[13] The primary residence of the Jones family was in Liberty County, on the Coastal Plain region. However, the Jones family owned three plantations and around 1,000 enslaved people: Arcadia (their residence used during the Civil War), which contained approximately 2,000 acres used for raising inland swamp rice and Sea Island Cotton, Montevideo (their primary residence), a 936-acre rice and Sea Island cotton plantation, and Maybank, which was a 700-acre Sea Island cotton plantation (their summer home).[14] There is not as much information available about the Battey family, but they were located in Rome, Georgia, which is in Floyd County, located in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains. Martha Battey wrote that she has 13 members of her family, including the people her family enslaved.[15] Although these regions are very different in their climates, and the size holding of each family differed vastly, in terms of the roles and the thoughts of the plantation mistress, they appear to have many historical similarities that reveal the ubiquity of slavery's capitalistic nature. Nearly all of these women had the experience of managing the affairs of their family's plantation around the time of the Civil War because their husbands got sick and died, served as a Confederate doctor, or were otherwise involved in the Confederate cause. I focus on highlighting these experiences and pointing out similarities in the reactions and approaches taken by these women. Ultimately, my work demonstrates that plantation mistresses were not unaware of the brutalities of slavery, and, in fact, they expressed many of the same sentiments as their male counterparts, including expressions of paternalism and a willingness to use violence. They were also all

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[13] Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives. "Burge Family Papers, 1832-1952." EmoryFindingAids : Burge family papers, 1832-1952. Emory University, August 30, 2022. https://findingaids.library.emory.edu/documents/burge266/.
[14] Erskine Clarke, *Dwelling Place: A Plantation Epic* (Yale University Press, 2005), 505-508, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1npqzp.
[15] Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives. "Robert Battey Papers, 1810-1894." EmoryFindingAids : Robert Battey papers, 1810-1894. Emory University, August 30, 2022. https://findingaids.library.emory.edu/documents/battey361/?keywords=Battey.

participants in the southern slave economy who did not protest the social and economic order of the time, as they directly benefited from it.

Proceeding chronologically as well as thematically, this thesis contains four chapters that span from around 1850-1868. In the early 1850s, the religious fervor brought upon by the Second Great Awakening, the Compromise of 1850, the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act all touched upon slavery's sanctity in the South. The first chapter provides some cultural context: especially the way the Second Great Awakening affected the South, the concept of paternalism, a general overview of the ways in which race informed gender roles in the Old South, and the capitalist foundation of slavery. The second chapter focuses primarily on the roles of plantation mistresses before the war, as well as the language that they were using to describe enslaved people. It reveals how aware these women were of the political climate at the time, how much they knew about the realities of slavery, and their opinions on the seemingly imminent war. It details their thoughts and their duties in the years leading up to the Civil War. The third chapter explores the shift -- both in plantation mistresses' roles and the language that they were using -- during the Civil War. As their husbands left home to participate in the war or were otherwise absent, these women assumed more active roles in maintaining the institution of slavery. This chapter also examines the noticeable shift in the language being used by plantation mistresses in their correspondence. It becomes apparent that their delusions had begun to fade, and they started using language that could be characterized by fear, disappointment, or even surprise at the lack of loyalty by the people they had enslaved. Finally, chapter four highlights the aftermath of the war and its effects on these plantation women. Their records indicate how much they benefited from the labor of enslaved people, and how lost they were once they had to figure out another source of income. It also

addresses how we can see glimmers of the Lost Cause myth and the formation of the community of women defining the past of the Confederacy, and the ideology and language that certainly preceded the actual formation of the UDC.

The conclusion reflects why this history is so important, and continues to inform our modern political world. It is clear that Georgia --and much of the south-- is still grappling with its racist history. The conclusion displays how violent every aspect of slavery was, including the ongoings of the plantation household, and the role that plantation mistresses played. We must approach this history in a way that avoids romanticization, and tells the truth about the brutality.

Chapter 1: Life in the Antebellum Old South

This chapter describes what life was like in the Old South prior to the Civil War. It details the importance of religion, the Second Great Awakening, and gender roles that were prevalent in the Old South.

I. Ideology in the Old South

Though tensions were high in 1857, just four years prior to the start of the Civil War, many Americans seemed blissfully oblivious to what was to come: the end of the "Old South" as they once knew it. At this time, forced labor, as well as the paternalistic ideologies used to justify it, were still alive and well in the South, as demonstrated by a letter from plantation mistress Martha Battey. "The children have been in the field all evening," she wrote, "looking at the negroes pick cotton- the fields are white with cotton now."[16] Writing to her husband's aunt Mary Battey, she wished that Mary "could go in the fields and see the negroes," as they are "very happy."[17] Further driving this notion of deliberate blindness, she writes, "You can hear them singing every night as they come home from work. You would not think that they had worked so hard all day if you would hear them now in the yard dancing."[18] In Martha Battey's depiction of the people her family enslaved as so "happy" that "you would not think that they had worked so hard all day," she embraced a popular logic at the time- the logic of paternalism.

II. The Importance of Religion and the Second Great Awakening

In a society as religious as the Old South, the majority of people, including those who enslaved others, were concerned with the morality of their actions. Paternalism -- the idea that the institution of slavery was somehow mutually beneficial, or that slave owners took genuine

[16] Martha Battey to Mary Battey, November 7, 1856, Battey Papers.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.

interest in the lives of the people they enslaved-- offered a comfortable hypocrisy for enslavers to adopt. In the diary of Dolly Lunt Burge --who began recording her experiences of being married to a planter in Newton County, Georgia in 1848-- it became immediately clear how significant religion was in their daily lives. The first few years of her journal center around her and her husband's life as faithful Christians, as she frequently described the happenings of "Sabbath school" and "Bible class."[19] She often recorded the teachings that impacted her the most, writing long entries describing how to remain in God's good graces: "If we keep Gods law he will keep us, Faith considered. We must believe in the truth of what we are required to have faith."[20]

Oftentimes, there was great overlap between the religious culture of the Old South and attempts to justify slaveholding. In fact, many Georgian slave owners were involved in efforts to provide religious education to the people whom they enslaved. Dolly often wrote of her husband attending "Negro Class," which was likely "a local class for Bible instruction and Christian worship," as "at this time, it was probably illegal to teach slaves to read and write."[21] Mr. Burge was not the only planter involved in these efforts; a prominent example that speaks to the paternalistic nature of southern society at the time was the publication and reception of *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States* by Presbyterian clergyman and planter of Liberty County Georgia, Charles Colcock Jones.

Although the Jones family was understood as "unique because of patriarch Charles Colcok Jones Sr.'s reputation as a benevolent slaveholder and his mission to provide slaves an oral, religious education," *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes in the United States* is

[19] Christine Jacobson Carter, ed., *The Diary of Dolly Lunt Burge*, paperback (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 56.
[20] Ibid, 16.
[21] Ibid, 57, 227.

pervaded by derogatory language used to describe enslaved people in America.[22] In his defense that there is an "obligation of the Church of Christ in the slave-holding states to impart the Gospel of Salvation to the Negroes within those States," he described enslaved people as having a "degraded and miserable appearance and character."[23] Further, he wrote that "Religion will tell the master that he is a master 'according to the flesh,' only; that his servants are fellow-creatures, and he has a master in heaven to whom he shall finally account for his treatment of them." [24] In the same vein, he suggested that "the master" inquire "In what kind of houses do I permit them to live; what clothes do I give them to wear... What care do I take of their family relations?"[25] Though he was supposedly in favor of treating the people he enslaved in a more "humane" way, his proposition to provide religious education to enslaved people was essentially a way to ease his own psyche. He clearly continued to perpetuate the notion that slavery was acceptable and perhaps even necessary, as he wrote that "the Negroes are intellectual and morally, in a degraded state" and "the influence of the Negroes on the general intelligence and morality of the whites is not good."[26]

Charles Colcock Jones was not an anomaly of his time. In fact, the Second Great Awakening, a Protestant religious revival which spread throughout the United States between 1790 and 1840, inspired a similar reaction in many plantation owners. In much of the country, this religious revival, characteristic of "an institution-building process, a cultural revitalization movement, a women's awakening and a shopkeeper's millennium," inspired a series of social

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[22] Peggy G. Hargis, "For the Love of Place: Paternalism and Patronage in the Georgia Lowcountry, 1865-1898," *The Journal of Southern History* 70, no. 4 (2004): 825–64, https://doi.org/10.2307/27648562.
[23] Charles Colcock Jones, *The Religious Instruction of the Negroes. In the United States* (Savannah: Thomas Purse, 1842), 159, 44, https://docsouth.unc.edu/church/jones/jones.html.
[24] Ibid, 207.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid, 216.

reforms.[27] For example, in other parts of the United States, there were "temperance, abolition, and women's rights" movements.[28] However, in the South, it forced plantation owners to confront the morality of their actions. As Erskine Clarke writes, "[Colcock Jones was] part of an evangelical awakening that had been sweeping the country for some years and that was already being called the Second Great Awakening."[29] All over the country, "the movement was bringing great numbers into the Protestant churches, providing them with widely shared religious experience, and creating within them a vision for a Protestant America which demanded reforms of society."[30] For Colcock Jones, his "religious experience and its resulting piety committed him to a life of intense introspection."[31] For Charles, as was true for many plantation owners, "this meant a steady gaze at his own heart and motives, a disciplined probing of his feelings, and an awareness of the role of sin in his life."[32]

The Second Great Awakening posed a unique challenge: how were Southern plantation owners to follow the word of God, and in the same breath justify owning other human beings? It was a question they often considered. In 1864, Dolly Lunt Burge wrote, "I have never felt that Slavery was altogether right for it is abused by many & I have often heard Mr. Burge say that if he could see that it was sinful for him to own slaves, if he felt it was wrong, he would take them where he could free them he would not sin for his right hand."[33] She continued her justification by saying that "The purest and holiest men have owned them & I can see nothing in the scriptures which forbids it."[34] There is a clear tension here as she tried to convince herself that it

[27] Donald G. Mathews, "The Second Great Awakening as an Organizing Process, 1780-1830: An Hypothesis," *American Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1969): 23–43, https://doi.org/10.2307/2710771.
[28] https://www.teachushistory.org/second-great-awakening-age-reform
[29] Erskine Clarke, *Dwelling Place: A Plantation Epic* (Yale University Press, 2005), 102, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1npqzp.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Clarke, *Dwelling Place,* 103.
[33] Carter, *The Diary of Dolly Lunt Burge,* 156.
[34] Ibid.

is religiously permissible. This tension is what caused such a strong connection between religion and slavery, people who were enslaving other people were trying to convince themselves that they were somehow carrying out God's will. Though the writing and the mission of Charles Colcock Jones provides a more overt example of this, using religion to justify slavery was an omnipotent practice.

In 1856, Dolly wrote, "Mrs. Hodge & Miss Guise came to see me to day. At night old Father Eli Bennett arrived who baptized our daughter Sarah & eleven little Negroes."[35] This line is indicative of the major culture of conversion that took place during this time. Historian Erskine Clarke has written on this culture of conversion in *Dwelling Place: A Plantation Epic*. He writes that enslaved people had their own world, a "secret world" of "root doctors and charms."[36] White people were aware of this world, but "they knew of this world largely through a distance, as one would view a faraway cosmos."[37] In fact, this separation was often used "as a way to justify keeping blacks in their place."[38] However, slave owners were living in a contradiction, as "whites wanted it both ways in regard to what they perceived as this cultural distance- they were dismissive of the secret world of Blacks as primitive and uncivilized, and they were also in fierce opposition to blacks entering too deeply into the world of whites."[39] For Charles Colcock Jones, this religious revival represented a dilemma, as he wanted to bring God to the people he enslaved, and have them understand God in the same capacity he did, yet "he would also want them to remain in their place in the settlements so that they would be like him in every way except for freedom."[40]

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[35] Ibid, 91.
[36] Clarke, *Dwelling Place,* 84.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid, 85.
[40] Ibid.

III. Historiographical Approaches to the Role of Women in the Old South: Silence, Scrutiny, Violence

It is certainly easier to identify the ways in which male plantation owners contributed to a culture of racism and paternalism in the Old South; men were able to vote, run for office, publish writing, and speak publicly in religious settings. Historians have often taken this fact to mean that women were secondary in the maintenance of these structures. However, that is not necessarily true. In her groundbreaking book *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South*, Stephanie Jones-Rogers immediately challenges the notion that white southern women were unaware of the realities of slavery. She begins her monograph by quoting an 1859 *New York Tribune* article from editor James Redpath. After touring the South, he "attempted to explain to his readers why white southern women opposed emancipation."[41] She writes: "Redpath assumed that white southern women did not know 'negro slavery as it is' because their society shielded them from the institution's horrific realities... white women seldom saw slavery's 'most obnoxious features'; they 'never attend auctions; never witness examinations; seldom, if ever, see the negroes lashed.'"[42] She further quotes him saying that if the women of the South "'knew slavery as it is... they would join in the protests against it."[43] However, in her research, Jones-Rogers found that "narrative sources, legal and financial documents, and military and government correspondence make it clear that white southern women knew the 'most obnoxious features' of slavery all too well."[44] In fact, she writes, "slave-owning women not only witnessed the most brutal features of slavery, they took part in them, profited from them, and defended them."[45]Although women did not contribute to the

[41] Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property,* ix.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.

maintenance and perpetuation of the institution of slavery in the same ways that men did, historians have recently begun to find that they did not represent a gentler figure within the plantation household.

It is important to note before proceeding that the roles of women in the Old South varied greatly depending on race. In that era, race, gender, and class all worked concurrently to form identity.[46] As American historian Elizabeth Fox-Genovese writes, "Slavery as a social system shaped the experience of all its women, for slavery influenced the nature of the whole society."[47] Certainly, "the experience of black slave women differed radically from that of all white women."[48] Further, the site of the plantation household played a significant role in the construction of race-based gender roles, as "the plantation household was the principal site for the construction of white womanhood, making the place of black women within it critically important."[49] This is particularly true throughout the Civil War and after it, as plantation mistresses assumed more of an active role within and outside of the plantation household, as many of their husbands left to fight in the war, or in the case of Dolly Lunt Burge, passed away. Plenty of historians who have read and attempted to analyze the diaries of plantation mistresses or well-to-do white women who lived in the American South during the Civil War have found noticeable silences regarding the topic of slavery in their diaries. One such example of this is in *Keep the Days: Reading the Civil War Diaries* of Southern Women by Steven M. Stowe. In this book, he analyzes the diaries of twenty well-to-do white women who lived in the American South during the Civil War. With regard to the topic of slavery, he finds that "diarists don't make seeing the mask easy. Using the thicket of terms for the enslaved, diarists hid from slaves and

[46] Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household, 45*.
[47] Ibid, 46.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household,* 65.

from themselves."[50] He also finds that unlike war's violence or war's men, "some diarists wrote about black people in nearly every entry while others wrote hardly at all," which was a much wider range than most other topics that we can presume were the most prevalent in their lives. This is certainly true for much of Dolly Lunt Burge's diary. Though she often recorded that "Mr. Burge commenced planting cotton" and "commenced planting swamp corn," she never suggested that anyone is doing this labor aside from her husband.[51]

In response to this historical trend, Glymph writes, "historians have subjected white women's silence to far greater scrutiny than their violence."[52] As she says, the common narrative surrounding the involvement of white women in upholding slavery is that they silently conceded, or did not really have a say, as "gender ideals... equated power over slaves with white men."[53] Further, she explains that, "while acknowledged, white women's violence is rarely analyzed as a central facet of their existence."[54] This seems to be primarily because white womanhood as it was constructed in the Old South was predicated upon this idea of the carefree, oblivious southern belle, or "lady."[55]

IV. Widespread Culturally Ingrained Practices

However, the culture of slavery in the Old South was so societally ingrained that it is impossible to suggest that white women were not essential in the maintenance of its structure. In fact, sometimes they participated in the violence against enslaved people in very gendered ways. For example, in many southern states, wet-nursing, the action of breastfeeding another woman's child, was a very common practice that reinforced social hierarchies. It was not unusual to hear,

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[50] Steven M. Stowe, *Keep the Days: Reading the Civil War Diaries of Southern Women* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 104.
[51] Carter, *The Diary of Dolly Lunt Burge,* 61, 105.
[52] Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage,* 26.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.

as historian Stephanie Jones-Rogers notes, “through parlor talk or by a passing mention in a letter from a friend... that a mother was in need of an enslaved woman to suckle her baby.”[56] As pointed out by historians Emily West and R. J. Knight, these seemingly less brutal practices were actually a “uniquely gendered exploitation,” that demonstrated how slaveholders and mistresses “denigrated black women’s mothering of their own children as innately inferior.”[57]

Ultimately, affluent white women in the slaveholding south, particularly plantation mistresses, were aware that their livelihood depended on the subjugation of others. This next chapter will continue to reveal that although I am examining documents from women and families from very different regions of Georgia, so much of their knowledge of politics, awareness about the moral question of slavery, language they use to describe and infantilize enslaved people, and active positions in managing their family’s plantations is very similar.

[56] Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property,* 101.
[57] Emily West and R. J. Knight, “Mothers’ Milk: Slavery, Wet-Nursing, and Black and White Women in the Antebellum South,” *The Journal of Southern History* 83, no. 1 (2017): 37, 48.

Chapter 2: Before The War

This chapter focuses on the roles of plantation mistresses prior to the Civil War, as well as the language that they were using to describe enslaved people. It aims to answer: how aware were these women of the political climate at the time? What was their relationship to the people that they were enslaving? Did they have opinions on the seemingly imminent war?

I. Antebellum Political Climate

Until around 1850, the United States was "precariously balanced on the slavery issue."[58] However, in 1850, a series of bills in congress passed to address issues related to slavery.[59] Following the war with Mexico, tensions arose over what to do about slavery in the aftermath of the war. The Compromise of 1850 was passed, which reveal the challenges congress faced: "The acts called for the admission of California as a 'free state,' provided for a territorial government for Utah and New Mexico, established a boundary between Texas and the United States, called for the abolition of the slave trade in Washington, DC, and amended the Fugitive Slave Act."[60] Following the Compromise of 1850 and the amending of the Fugitive Slave Act, the nation became quite polarized by regional identities.[61]

Additionally, the presidential election of 1852, in which Democrat Franklin Pierce defeated the Whig nominee Winfield Scott, posed a threat to the Whig party as a whole. This election was so significant because of the "growing differences between northern and southern Whigs over the slavery issue."[62] Political struggles moved to center stage in the South, as there

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[58] "A Nation Divided: The Political Climate of 1850s America · The Benjamin Hedrick Ordeal: A Portrait of Antebellum Politics and Debates Over Slavery · Civil War Era NC," Civil War Era North Carolina, accessed March 20, 2023, https://cwnc.omeka.chass.ncsu.edu/exhibits/show/benjamin-hedrick/polticalclimate.
[59] "Compromise of 1850," National Archives, June 28, 2021, https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/compromise-of-1850.
[60] Ibid.
[61] "The Political Climate of 1850s America," https://cwnc.omeka.chass.ncsu.edu/exhibits/show/benjamin-hedrick/polticalclimate.
[62] Gienapp, William E., "The Whig Party, the Compromise of 1850, and the Nomination of Winfield Scott," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (1984): 399–415.

grew the question of what political party Southern, slaveholding Whigs would align with: "While Compromise Whigs divided their allegiance between Webster and Fillmore, anti-Compromise Whigs united behind Winfield Scott."[63] Additionally, "The Whig national campaign directors wrote off the deep South from the beginning."[64] Ultimately, this election greatly wounded the party, and after this election the Whig party "proved unable to resist the centrifugal forces pulling it apart."[65] There was no question that by this time, the question of slavery was becoming increasingly difficult to avoid, and fracturing political parties.

II. Women in Antebellum Georgia

During this antebellum period, the majority of the diary entries and correspondences that I am examining focus on daily life and these women's relationships to the men in their family. Though family and church seem to be at the forefront of most of their records, it is also clear how much of their daily lives centered on their interactions with the people they enslaved, and their knowledge of the political climate at the time.

When Dolly Lunt Burge described her daily life, there was ample mention of work that the enslaved people were doing without ever mentioning them. She would often write of the crop-planting process, which normally took the form of phrases such as "Commenced planting corn-," "Mr. Burge commenced planting cotton" and " Finished planting cotton."[66] Her entries often looked like this, and sometimes her notes for the day were no more than a line describing the planting process that had taken place.

In 1854 her only entry on November 24th was, "Finished negro clothes."[67] The next year, her entry on November 7th, 1855 was: "Finished negro clothes for this year. A wet & unpleasant

[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Carter, *The Diary of Dolly Lunt Burge*, 60-61.
[67] Ibid, 86

week though not much rain. Ginning cotton sowing oats & wheat."[68] She mentioned the clothing that she sewed, and was clearly preparing for another year of crop production, but does not mention the labor that her enslaved people are doing. A few months after she finished preparing the clothes for that year, she wrote, "Mr. Burge employed an overseer at ten dollars a month."[69] It is unclear who this person was, as "on large plantations, the person who directed the daily work of the slaves was the overseer, usually a white man but occasionally an enslaved black man --a "driver" -- promoted to this position by his master" but in either case, she had a keen awareness of the plantation operations that were ongoing -- her husband did not keep her in the dark, and she was not simply an oblivious woman sewing clothing.[70]

Dolly Lunt Burge became a widow in 1858. She wrote, "After two years of failing health indeed my dear husband has had a cough for thirty years but always been active & out of doors for most of the time it has at last conquered him.... Death came to him as sleep."[71] Before his death he said to her, "'My heavenly father knows best. I leave it all to Him. He will take care of you & the children. I have prayed for you Dolly that your faith fail not. That in the trials to come your faith & trust may be in Jesus. He doeth all things right remember that."[72] She wrote that "the next day he took Elbert out over the farm & showed him what to do for the next year. So calmly & cheerfully he gave up all."[73] Interestingly enough, Elbert was one of the people who the Burge family enslaved. However, from this moment on, Dolly had far more duties around the plantation, as upon her husband's death, she independently ran the plantation.[74]

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[68] Ibid, 90.
[69] Ibid, 91.
[70] "Slave Drivers, Overseers, Enslavement, African American Identity: Vol. I, 1500-1865," National Humanities Center, Toolbox Library: Primary Resources in U.S. History and Literature, 2007, http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/enslavement/text4/text4read.htm.
[71] Carter, *The Diary of Dolly Lunt Burge,* 95-96.
[72] Ibid, 96.
[73] Ibid.
[74] "The Diary of Dolly Lunt Burge, 1848–1879," *Georgia Press* (blog), accessed March 20, 2023, https://ugapress.org/book/9780820328591/the-diary-of-dolly-lunt-burge-18481879.

Despite these new responsibilities, much of Dolly's descriptions of her everyday obligations, as well as the work of the enslaved people on the Burge plantation remained just as vague as when her husband was in charge. Two entries after she recorded the events of her husband's death, she wrote, "Finished sowing oats planted potatoes pea & cabbage up trees not in bloom broke colts."[75] Even as the war began to approach in 1860, her short descriptions remain consistent: "Commenced bedding cotton land & hauling cotton seed for manure," "Commenced planting corn," and "Very dull to day have been out over the crop. Very weedy. Not managed well."[76] Many entries that take this form -- her entire entry for any given day, what she found worthy of note was the crop-planting process, but she never explicitly mentions who is actually doing the labor. It is clear that her livelihood depends on the work taking place on the plantation, and sometimes her entire day revolves around it, yet she often only mentions the people who they owned in other contexts, such as when she would sew their clothing.

However, her interactions with and reliance on enslaved people on her plantation still shines through in her descriptions, though they are typically not very explicit. In 1860 she wrote, "Our cotton rows are too wide not even. I must look to this in the future especially in manured land. My garden corn is tasseled."[77] A couple of weeks later, she wrote, "Laid by all of the corn looks very well but had a bad time getting a stand. The cotton scarcely needs ploughing but it had better be done."[78] Because of current knowledge of who Dolly Lunt Burge was, and the context of the time, readers of her now published diary are aware of who was actually responsible for fixing the appearance of the cotton rows, and plowing the cotton, and can likely

[75] Carter, *The Diary of Dolly Lunt Burge*, 97.
[76] Ibid, 105-106
[77] Ibid, 108.
[78] Ibid.

assume that when she wrote, “Severe dry wind. Man putting up blinds,” she was likely referring to one of the people she owned, but according solely to her accounts, this is never very clear. However, despite all of the vague language, it is clear that she took charge of this plantation, and she depended completely upon the labor of the people who she enslaved.

In 1860 she wrote, “Had to have corn gathered to day for bread drying it in the garden. Got a bag of cotton out. Had a day of trials & cares. My overseer is so inefficient.”[79] A few months later she writes: “Dismissed my no account overseer paid him off. Gathering for swamp corn waggon [sic] broke having it shucked.”[80] There is no question, however, that this is a woman who was completely in charge of a plantation and the ownership of other people as the Civil War approached.

Though Burge perhaps had a more hands-on role in the antebellum period than the other women I am examining due to her husband’s death, each one expressed equal reliance on the labor of enslaved people. In a letter to her husband’s relative Mary Battey, Martha Battey wrote: “I don’t know how Emily’s health is I have not seen her since I came home. I have heard that she was coming to stay some time the weather has been so cold, I expect it is the reason why she has not been up. She has lost her negro Maria, she died about three weeks ago. I don’t know what will become of her.”[81] The concern of the statement “I don’t know what will become of her” demonstrates just how significant the roles of enslaved people were in the daily lives of plantation mistresses. The family members of Emily Battey showed concern about her health and how she could go on without the assistance of someone she owned. In this way, it simply rings untrue that, as historian Elizabeth Fox Genovese noted, “the plantation mistress closely

[79] Ibid, 110.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Martha Battey to Mary Battey, February 4, 1857, Battey Papers.

resembled slave women in being the victim in the double burden of patriarchy and slavery."[82] It is also clear these women did not secretly oppose the institution of slavery, they completely depended on it.

Martha Battey's husband, Dr. Robert Battey, was often traveling, particularly prior to the start of the Civil War, and as such Martha spent a lot of time at home alone with the people that they enslaved. In a few of her letters to Mary Battey, she would describe her need for domestic help. On September 19th Martha wrote to Mary: "I have had a great deal to do all this summer. I have had no cook and have had to do most of it by myself and a babe to attend to- I wish you could see my babe."[83] A couple of months later she writes, "I have a cook now- Jinny- that yellow girl I used to have... we are doing well with our Negroes."[84] Plantation mistresses -- those who were in charge of the entire plantation or those who were primarily tasked with more domestic work-- absolutely depended on the labor of the people who their families enslaved.

III. Language Used to Describe the People They Enslaved

One of the most telling aspects of where plantation mistresses aligned on the issue of slavery is the way that they described the people who they owned. One of the most notable commonalities in their descriptions of enslaved people is the infantilizing and degrading language they used. For example, in a letter from Martha Battey to Mary Battey, she wrote, "I wish you could go into the field and see the Negroes, they race all the time to see who will get the most [cotton]... the Negroes are very happy.... You would not think that they had worked so hard all day if you would hear them now in the yard dancing."[85] Whether she genuinely believed

[82] Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household,* 53.
[83] Martha Battey to Mary Battey, September 19, 1857, Battey Papers.
[84] Martha Battey to Mary Battey, December 20, 1857, Battey Papers.
[85] Martha Battey to Mary Battey, November 7, 1856, Battey Papers.

this or it was an attempt to ease her psyche, this language describes people who are being forced into labor against their will and for no pay as being childlike, and having fun. Martha Battey was not the only mistress to express such sentiments. On January 1, 1861, Dolly wrote: Thus a New Years has commenced. I have had a lonely week. Most of the time rainy. Negroes have appeared to enjoy themselves finely. Commenced doing some sewing for myself."[86] Though Dolly appeared hesitant to explicitly mention the labor that the enslaved people were doing, she was sure to mention that they seemed to be enjoying themselves. Mary Jones expressed these same sentiments every time she wrote of how positive of an experience it was to preach to or teach enslaved people.[87] In a similar vein, this could be to appease her consciousness, or perhaps it is indicative of a true self-deception and commitment to the narrative that the institution of slavery was somehow necessary, or even positive. In either case, these women were not displaying any objection to the institution of slavery, and rather minimizing it by describing the people that they enslaved as happy and having a great time.

Though phrases of infantilization pervade the diaries and letters of these women, some of the language that they used to describe enslaved people is more obviously racist and degrading, and at times even explicitly violent. Only one month after Martha Battey wrote of how happy her enslaved people were, she wrote, "... the Negroes are getting very troublesome every where - I fear that there are hard times in store for the negroes- I know my feelings have changed towards them very much. I care very little for them. I dislike them more and more every year. I don't feel afraid of our own Negroes but others."[88] This indicates that at some level, she is aware of the reality that the people who are forced into enslavement are not happy, nor are they willing to

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[86] Carter, *The Diary of Dolly Lunt Burge*, 113.
[87] Robert M. Myers, ed., "Letter from Mary Jones Jones to Mary Sharpe Jones Mallard, January 29, 1855" (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 36–37, https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cdocument%7C4337727.
[88] Martha Battey to Mary Battey, December 17, 1856, Battey Papers.

remain subordinated, and this is a scary thought for her. In fact, she expressed "fear to stay alone so long" because "the Negroes are getting very troublesome."[89] It is easier for her to convince herself that they are submissive, content, and even childlike in oblivion, but this quote reveals an acknowledgement that she knows that this reality she has created for herself is fabricated- the people that her family enslaved are not happy.

Additionally, it is noteworthy that she initially claimed to be unafraid of the people that she personally enslaved, but she qualifies a few years later: "I dont feel afraid of any Negroes and they know it. My negroes don't try to frighten me in any way- they are afraid to- You know that our ladies a great many of them shoot very well."[90] Further, she writes, "I don't know how well I could but I guess if I was to get close enough I would try what I could do case anyone was to try and frighten me."[91] In this letter, she admits that she is not afraid of the people that she enslaves, not because they are happy and content, but because they are aware that she has the capability to physically injure and even kill them. This is not a relationship predicated upon "trust" or "family." Further, she seems to be aware of the fact that the people she enslaves have reason to hate her, and it is on her mind enough to consider what she would do in the case that anyone would try to "frighten her." As time passes and the Civil War approaches, it seems that the delusions of mistresses and their attempts to describe the people that they enslaved as satisfied with their lives begin to fade. It is clear that their anxiety is increasing with each passing year.

IV. Political Awareness

Although women could not vote or run for office at this time, this did not mean that they were unaware of the antebellum political climate. In fact, they often wrote of elections, events

[89] Martha Battey to Mary Battey, December 17, 1856, Battey Papers.
[90] Martha Battey to Mary Battey, December 10, 1860, Robert Battey Papers.
[91] Ibid.

leading up to war, the disunited state of America, and sometimes even specifics of the institution of slavery.

Perhaps due to the status of their husbands, of the women this thesis examines, Mary Jones most frequently expresses her awareness of the antebellum political climate. She would often write to her son about the travels and congregations of her husband, Charles Colcock Jones. In 1854 she wrote to him: "Your dear father was enabled to preach with great feeling and power from 1 John 3:1-2.[92] A large congregation of Negroes. I trust some good was done. I felt that it was good to be there myself."[93] Her husband not only kept her informed of his travels when he was away, but also involved her in his preaching. Perhaps because of this, she had a greater awareness of the events taking place in the years before the war. Though she seems to be in agreement with her husband regarding his desire to bring religious education to enslaved people, she would often discuss her own opinions and knowledge of politics.

In another letter to her son, she wrote: "Your father was much improved by his trip to Savannah. I only wish he could have remained longer... I was glad to see that the infamous proposition to the commercial convention for the revival of the slave trade was promptly rejected. It was a perfect disgrace to the body to present such a subject for consideration."[94] As historian Stephanie Jones-Rogers also found, it is untrue that "white southern women did not know 'negro slavery as it is' because their society shielded them from the institution's horrific realities."[95] Though it is perhaps true that women did not attend auctions or witness physical

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[92] A Reading from the First Letter of John: "Beloved: See what the love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope based on him makes himself pure, as he is pure."
[93] Robert M. Myers, ed., "Monday" (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 12–12, https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cdocument%7C4338220.
[94] Robert M. Myers, ed., "Letter from Mary Jones Jones to Charles Colcock Jones, December 22, 1856" (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 174–174, https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cdocument%7C4337802.
[95] Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property*, ix.

examinations, women like Mary Jones were aware of their existence, enough to form their own opinions about the matter.

Despite taking a position against presenting enslaved bodies for consideration, Mary Jones did not take issue with owning enslaved people. In fact, in late 1860 she wrote to her son: "It is a new era in our country's history, and I trust the wise and patriotic leaders of the people will soon devise some united course of action throughout the Southern states. I cannot see a shadow of reason for civil war in the event of a Southern confederacy; but even that, if it must come, would be preferable to submission to Black Republicanism, involving as it would all that is horrible, degrading, and ruinous."[96] She ends this letter with, "Howdy for the servants."[97] She is clearly not only complicit in, but also in favor of the subordination of Black Americans. In this letter she expresses views that are much like those of her husband when he writes that "the Negroes are intellectual and morally, in a degraded state."[98] She would prefer the disunion of the country and a war over the prospect of the people who her family enslaved have political and bodily autonomy. Additionally, she is so committed to the self-deception that she and her husband were doing something positive for the people they enslaved that she writes: "the revision and correction of the History is a very laborious work, and keeps your father very closely confined, which is the secret of his recent uncomfortable feelings."[99] It seems clear that she and her husband were defensive that their enslavement of others was now morally

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[96] Robert M. Myers, ed., "Letter from Mary Jones Jones to Charles Colcock Jones, November 15, 1860" (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 422–23, https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cdocument%7C4337936.
[97] Ibid.
[98] Jones, *The Religious Instruction Of the Negroes. In the United States*, 216.
[99] Robert M. Myers, ed., "Letter from Mary Jones Jones to Mary Sharpe Jones Mallard, August 9, 1860" (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 405–6, https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cdocument%7C4337927.

questionable, and instead of confronting it directly, convinced themselves that any alternative would be "horrible, degrading, and ruinous."[100]

For Mary Jones, national pride and glory rests on the fact of the enslavement of others. Only a couple of months before the start of the Civil War, she wrote: "An indescribable sadness weighs down my soul as I think of our once glorious but now dissolving Union! Our children's children -what will constitute their national pride and glory? *We* have no alternative; and necessity demands that we now protect ourselves from entire destruction at the hands of those who have rent and torn and obliterated every national bond of union, of confidence and affection."[101] Even before the start of the war, language that mirrors Lost Cause rhetoric began to emerge, as shown in this letter. Mary Jones was convincing herself, whether implicitly or not, that the glory of the nation and generational pride is dependent on the structures enforced by the institution of slavery. Despite any moral question, she and her husband continued to express overwhelming favor for the maintenance of slavery, as they were aware that if the South were to lose the Civil War, they would be financially ruined.

Around this same time, only a few months prior to the start of the Civil War, Dolly Lunt Burge wrote: "The day of Election which may be the last presidential Election Our United Country will ever see- Digging potatoes."[102] She recorded this on November 6, 1860, which was the day that the presidential election took place between Republican candidate Abraham Lincoln and Democratic candidates Stephen Douglas and John Breckinridge.[103] This election ended with

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[100] "Letter from Mary Jones Jones to Charles Colcock Jones, November 15, 1860"
[101] Robert M. Myers, ed., "Letter from Mary Jones Jones to Charles Colcock Jones, January 3, 1861" (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 430–430, https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cdocument%7C4337941.
[102] Carter, *The Diary of Dolly Lunt Burge*, 111.
[103] NCC Staff, "On This Day, Abraham Lincoln Is Elected President," National Constitution Center, November 6, 2022, https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/the-day-abraham-lincoln-was-elected-president.

Abraham Lincoln as President, although his victory did not happen on that day.[104] There is something rather unsettling about her diary entry from this day- Dolly was certainly aware of the state that the Union was in, and even predicted that this may be the last time the United States of America is one united country, yet she follows this supposition with: "digging potatoes."[105] Despite her awareness, she is committed to her lifestyle of managing a plantation. She does not mention how she feels about the state of the union, or the question of slavery. In fact, she fails to mention why this "may be the last presidential Election [the] United Country will ever see."[106]

Dolly only mentioned the political state of the United States once more prior to the beginning of the war. On January 4, 1861 she wrote: "This is a fast day for our Country that our Great Ruler may restore Peace to our disunited country."[107] On this day, "In a message to the people, President James Buchanan designated Friday, January 4, 1861 as a day to be 'set apart for fasting, humiliation, and prayer throughout the nation.'" Once again, she is not at all oblivious to the political happenings of the country, and through all of the events leading up to the Civil War does not question the morality of slavery.

It is important to note that these women did not blindly side with their husbands with regard to questions about slavery, national unity, politics, and secession. In Burge's case, she was widowed before the start of the war, so she was certainly forming opinions on her own. As for Martha Battey, in a letter she writes to Mary she says: "Dr. B is with the most of our folks for dissolving the union right away- I am not. We differ a little in the time. I am for waiting and asking for our rights and if then the north refuses- I am for disunion - I believe they only differ in time."[108] Though she follows this statement with, "but Mary this is something I know very little

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[104] Ibid.
[105] Carter, *The Diary of Dolly Lunt Burge*, 113.
[106] Ibid, 111.
[107] Ibid, 113.
[108] Martha Battey to Mary Battey, December 10, 1860, Battey Papers.

about - though you hear nothing else talked of....” it remains true that Martha Battey heard information on her own, and formed opinions that differed from her husband’s on the matter.[109] These women were not only aware of the political happenings of the time, but they all had a deep financial stake in it, and thus formed their own opinions, most of which were overwhelmingly in favor of upholding the institution of slavery.

[109] Ibid.

Chapter 3: The War

As the Civil War became a distinct reality in the everyday lives of Southerners, the plantation mistresses' roles and language they were using began to shift. As many of their husbands left to participate (whether fighting or providing medical service) in the war or were otherwise absent, their wives assumed more active roles in maintaining the institution of slavery. Their new responsibilities could be seen in the shift in the language used to describe their relationship with the people they owned. It became apparent that their delusions began to fade, and they started using language that revealed fear, disappointment, or even surprise at the lack of loyalty by the people they had enslaved. Even at this stage of the war, the seeds were planted that would grow into Lost Cause rhetoric that would prevail in the postwar South.

I. Historical Context: Beginnings of the War

At 4:30AM on April 12, 1861, Confederate troops fired on Fort Sumter in South Carolina's Charleston Harbor. This event traditionally marks the beginning of the Civil War.[110] However, when voters elected Republican candidate Abraham Lincoln president in 1860, eleven Southern states seceded from the Union between December 1860 and April 1861. The country had long been disunited, now it becomes official.

There is no question that the Civil War took a toll on every American: it was a long, bloody war with around 620,000 casualties.[111] Its result would entail a complete reimagining of the United States. However, for plantation mistresses, the war forced them to confront the delusion that they had been caught up in for decades: if presented with the opportunity, would

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[110] "U.S. Senate: Civil War Begins," accessed March 20, 2023, https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/Civil_War_Begins.htm.
[111] Drew Gilpin Faust, "Death and Dying--Civil War Era National Cemeteries: Discover Our Shared Heritage Travel Itinerary," National Park Service, accessed March 20, 2023, https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/national_cemeteries/death.html.

the "happy" people that they enslaved leave them? Would it turn out that they were the only remaining members of their "family" mourning the loss of bygone days? Would this war cause them to face their moral wrongs? Though there were some hints of these confrontations beforehand, during the war, these questions begin to emerge in a more serious way.

II. Descriptions of the War from the Home & Shifting Roles:

The Civil War marked a significant change in the lives of all of these Georgia women: for Dolly Lunt Burge, she ran a plantation on her own throughout the entirety of the war. For Martha Battey, her husband Dr. Robert Battey served as a surgeon in the Confederate army, so she was alone at home for the majority of the war as well. For Mary Jones, her husband died of an illness halfway through the war, in 1863. Descriptions of the war from these women reflect an awareness of the state of the nation as a whole, but they are also indicative of their experiences as Georgia women who had been primarily in charge of the plantation household throughout the war. In reading their accounts throughout these four years, the attempts of these women to cling to the lives they have had for the past few decades is visible, as is their desire to convince themselves that the Confederate cause was a noble one, and that the war is simply a sad, horrific atrocity.

Dolly's descriptions of the war are extremely emotive, and above all express a desire for it to stop (although she clearly expressed her desire for a Confederate victory). In November 1861, Dolly first mentioned the war: "Our beautiful house wherein we praised God has been burned by an incendiary."[112] The following entries described her experience during the war, as well as her comments on the state of the nation as a whole. She wrote, "Our once united &

[112] Carter, *The Diary of Dolly Lunt Burge*, 121.

prosperous country is in the midst of a civil war. War. Battle after battle has been fought and still goes on.... Some of the best blood of our country has been spilled. O the horrors of war."[113] Though she sometimes mentioned the explicitly political element of the war, such as when she recorded: "Jefferson Davis the first president of the Southern Confederacy inaugurated to day!" most of the time, her records are long lamentations about how terrible the war was.[114]

Though Mary Jones' descriptions of the war sometimes expressed her sadness, they tended to center more around her strong political opinions of the war and the Union generally. Her letters convey her sincere fear of the Union victory, and express unwavering support of the Confederate cause. In 1861, she wrote a letter to her son after he was offered a military promotion which, if he took it, would mean that he would be fighting in Virginia. She discouraged him from taking the position, and wrote to him: "Your usefulness I do not think would be increased, for I believe you are now occupying one of the most important positions in the most effective arm of service on our coast. It seems to me you are now especially defending your native soil, your own home and servants, your infant daughter, your father, your mother, the graves of your loved ones, the temples where we long have worshiped God."[115] To say that her son would be defending "his servants" (slaves) while fighting for the Confederacy, in the same line as she said that he would be defending everyone who subordinated them, revealed her steadfast commitment to the delusional ideas that she and her husband has been expressing for decades: that the people they enslaved sincerely considered themselves part of the Jones family, and that they wouldn't leave if even if they could. This letter also reveals how personal this war was for Mary- it is not something she is just hearing about in the news, but she is aware of the

[113] Ibid, 122.
[114] Ibid, 124.
[115] Robert M. Myers, ed., "Letter from Mary Jones Jones to Charles Colcock Jones, December 3, 1861" (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 503–503, https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cdocument%7C4337979.

enormous financial stakes that she had in the war's outcome, and it is so personal to her that she does not even want her son to fight for the Confederate cause in a different state. Her anxiety was palpable, especially about defending their property, and her letters continue to reveal a great fear that the Union may win the war.

As the war continued, and conditions worsened for the South, Mary remained committed to the Confederate cause, and her language became increasingly religious. In 1862 she wrote to her son: "God bless and protect you and your whole company and our united army and country! I cannot trust myself to write on this subject. At times I feel that my heart would almost break when I think of what may be the suffering of my own sons and my relatives and countrymen, and the wrongs inflicted by the diabolical enemy upon our country. But God reigns, and I commit all into His just and wise and holy keeping!"[116] In this letter, the "diabolical enemy" to which she refers is the North, and she claims to maintain faith that she and her family, as well as all other slaveholding families, are on the side of God. This war was biblical to her, and deeply personal.

In fact, she believed that the Confederacy cannot, and should not, possibly lose, because they are on the side of God. In 1863, she wrote to her son: "My dear son, not a moment passes that my thoughts are not with you or my bleeding country in some form....I do bless God for the spirit of true patriotism and undaunted courage with which He is arming us for this struggle. Noble Vicksburg! From her heroic example we gather strength to hold on and hold out to the last moment. I can look extinction for me and mine in the face, but *submission* never! It would be degradation of the lowest order."[117] Mary expresses that she would rather die than submit to the

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[116] Robert M. Myers, ed., "Letter from Mary Jones Jones to Charles Colcock Jones, January 30, 1862" (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 518–518, https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cdocument%7C4337988.

[117] Robert M. Myers, ed., "Letter from Mary Jones Jones to Charles Colcock Jones, July 14, 1863" (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 597–597, https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cdocument%7C4338034.

Union order. She would first have herself and other slave owners go extinct than submit to a politic in which her "family" of thousands of enslaved people could be free, and be paid for their labor. Her livelihood is completely dependent on the exploitation of the people that she owns, and she is aware of this. In fact, she is so keenly aware of it that she would rather not live at all than give up and experience "degradation of the lowest order."[118]

Even on the days that she recorded to be feeling "unusually depressed about [the] future prospects," as the North continued to take over southern territory, and it began to be quite evident that the Union would win, she maintained the same faith.[119] In late 1863, she wrote in another letter to her son: I believe we are contending for a just and righteous cause; and I would infinitely prefer that *we all* perish in its defense before we submit to the infamy and disgrace and utter ruin and misery involved in any connection whatever with the vilest and most degraded nation on the face of the earth."[120] She expressed the same belief again- that she would rather die than associate with a nation that would free the people whose exploitation allows her to live the life that she does. This time, she writes that they are "contending for a just and righteous cause," but does not explain exactly what this cause is. It is evident that she cannot bear to fathom the idea of America without slavery, or with Lincoln's "Black Republicanism," but she never explicitly states that the thing she is so anxious about losing is the right to own people, or financial devastation.[121] This is interesting, because it seems that if she, like her husband, truly believed that they were "the 'Apostle to the Blacks,'" they shouldn't have to worry about nationwide

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[118] Ibid.
[119] Robert M. Myers, ed., "Letter from Mary Jones Jones to Charles Colcock Jones, September 18, 1863" (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 613–15, https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cdocument%7C4338043.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Robert M. Myers, ed., "Letter from Mary Jones Jones to Charles Colcock Jones, November 15, 1860" (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 422–23, https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cdocument%7C4337936.

emancipation- if their enslaved people were truly loyal to them, would they not stay?[122] In this way, it seems as if her delusion is wavering ever so slightly: she is aware that her lifestyle and her wealth would change if the Confederacy loses the Civil War, no matter how much she tried to convince herself of the existence of a paternalistic relationship between herself and the people she owned. She would rather perish than be a citizen of a nation that does not allow her to enslave people. As the war continued, plantation mistresses became increasingly anxious about the prospect of mourning their lives as they used to be. Additionally, there is an observable change in the way that they describe their relationships to the people they own- whether that looked like becoming distrustful, afraid of, or betrayed by the people that they enslaved, or grasping the last of the delusion that could possibly convince themselves of, that they were in the moral right, and that the people they owned should remain with them.

III. Mistresses' Relationships to the People They Enslaved: Self-Deception Begins to Change:

One of the most notable changes in the letters and diary entries of these plantation mistresses during the war is the shift in the ways they described their relationship to the people they owned. Just a couple of months prior to the Civil War, Martha Battey wrote to Mary: "in regard to the political prospects of the country- I am very sorry to see our people so anxious to fight - I don't feel any interests in any their entertainments - I think that it is not a time to rejoice."[123] However, it is unlikely that this was because she was against the institution of slavery, as she had previously stated: "I am for waiting and asking for our rights and if then the north refuses- I am for disunion - I believe they only differ in time."[124] It is far more likely that

[122] Donald G. Mathews, "Charles Colcock Jones and the Southern Evangelical Crusade to Form a Biracial Community," *The Journal of Southern History* 41, no. 3 (1975): 299–320, https://doi.org/10.2307/2206401.
[123] Martha Battey to Mary Battey, February 17, 1861, Battey Papers.
[124] Martha Battey to Mary Battey, December 10, 1860, Battey Papers.

she believed it was not a time to rejoice because she had a sense that the outcome may be bleak for the South once the Civil War began. She would like to continue to own people for as long as possible, and a Civil War certainly threatened this.

It seems that her suspicions were confirmed in a letter to her husband that revealed a complete shift in the way she described her relationship to the people she owned. There was certainly a sense of betrayal that can be gleaned. On November 17, 1864, she wrote: "I have had a hard time for the last two months. The negroes all left me and went to the Yankees, and when the Yankees left, the negroes all had to 'foot it' to Kingston.... by the time they reached Kingston they were sick of the Yankees and turned and came home."[125] She then wrote: "They have treated me very badly, left me sick; Bessie to nurse, cows to milk, cooking to do... no one to help but George. We had a hard time.... I had no one to help me out with my children."[126] She has come to the realization that the people she enslaved did not care for her on a personal level, and they were helping her because they were being forced to, not because they were part of her "family." Interestingly, her tone lacked surprise and instead conveyed disappointment and offense. Perhaps she knew that this would be the outcome of the war all along, as she admitted a few years earlier that "[her] negroes don't try to frighten [her] in any way - they are afraid to."[127]

However, the change in her relationship to the people she enslaved does seem to have stirred up some worry in her: "I don't know how the negroes will treat me when I take to my bed. I miss poor old Coyle. I wrote you that he was dead."[128] Further, she told her husband, "Should I ever see you I will tell you what I have to go through. Don't have too much confidence in all the negroes; some of them are mean.... The night the town was burned I was all alone, except for my

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[125] Martha Battey to Robert Battey, November 17, 1864, Battey Papers.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Martha Battey to Mary Battey, December 10, 1860, Battey Papers.
[128] Martha Battey to Robert Battey, November 17, 1864, Battey Papers.

little children."[129] Her world was changing, and she appeared to be gaining an awareness that the people she enslaved were not fond of her, and would not be there to support her as a family. The relationship that many plantation mistresses had fabricated with the people that they owned was finally being interrogated- when they were not afraid of her, they had no reason to help her, keep her company, or even be kind to her.

Dolly expressed similar sentiments. On Christmas morning of 1863, she noted that it was "unlike many of its predecessors," as it was not "ushered in with shouts & crackers & fun but all seemed sad."[130] She lamented, "No stockings were filled by Santa Claus. The servants dislike to leave their homes for those they know nothing of."[131] This was the first Christmas that she was alone, and without the company of the people she enslaved. Though this moment in time was "sad" and different for her, she assumed that her enslaved people felt the same way, and that they would have preferred to be with her on Christmas. In this projection, she failed to acknowledge that the relationship of fondness and care that she created was not the reality.

Additionally, it is clear that Dolly's care for her enslaved people was conditional: she cares for them as long as she can continue to live a life that exploits them. On July 4,1862 she penned the ironic line: "Many a time have I seen this day ushered in by the ringing of bells and the booming of cannon. Manifestations of a peoples joy in their liberty their independence their freedom from tyranny. But how changed is all now, warring one with the other. Mourning and lamentation in every household.…"[132] At this time, many Americans could not share in the liberty, independence and freedom from tyranny that she described.[133]

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[129] Ibid.
[130] Carter, *The Diary of Dolly Lunt Burge*, 140.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid, 130.
[133] In fact, Juneteenth (June 19th), the day that enslaved African Americans were emancipated, is now a Federal Holiday, because there was no freedom for enslaved people on the fourth of July.

However, in Dolly's accounts of the Civil War, there remain glimpses of paternalism, and the same ideologies that pervaded so many plantation mistresses' letters and diary entries prior to the war. In the depths of the conflict she wrote, "The servants have a candy pulling to night & are enjoying themselves right merrily dancing & frolicking. How much happier they are than their mistress-"[134] This language comes about because throughout the war, Dolly clung to the belief that she was morally correct, and that she was truly doing what was best for the people who she enslaved. When she considered the question of whether or not slavery was "altogether right," she wrote that she did not believe so, but that she had never "bought nor sold & [had] tried to make life easy & pleasant to those that have been bequeathed to [her] by the dead."[135] She continued to say, "I have never ceased to work, but a Northern housekeeper has a much easier time than a Southern matron with her hundred negroes."[136] This seems like her best attempt to absolve herself of any guilt, while hinting that she is aware that the institution of slavery as a whole is harmful. However, she is not committed enough to this belief to let her enslaved people go.

On November 19 1864, Dolly recounted a night when the "Yankees" came to her property. Reflecting on this encounter, she writes: "I had not believed they would force them from their homes the poor doomed negroes, but such had been the fact here cursing them & saying that Jeff Davis was going to put them in his army but they should not fight for him but them."[137] Her reaction to this proposal was, "No indeed! No! They are not friends to the slave. We have never made the poor cowardly negro fight & it is strange... that the all powerful Yankee Nation with the whole world to back them.... Should at last take the poor Negro to help them out

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National Museum of African American History and Culture. "The Historical Legacy of Juneteenth."https://nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/historical-legacy-juneteenth.
[134] Carter, *The Diary of Dolly Lunt Burge*, 154.
[135] Ibid,156.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid, 160.

against this 'little Confederacy...'"[138] She then contrasted her relationship with the people who she enslaved to the Northerners who wanted Black men to fight for the Union Army: "My poor boys... what unknown trials are before you. How you have clung to your mistress & assisted her in every way you knew how. You have never known want of any kind. Never have I corrected them. A word was sufficient it was only to tell them what I wanted & they obeyed!"[139] This is perhaps one of the most revealing entries throughout her entire diary- there is a clear attempt to cling to the final shreds of delusion that the people she enslaved enjoyed their life with her, and it would be a better fate for them to stay with her and work on her plantation than to fight for their own freedom. In fact, the way in which she phrased her relationship to them almost makes it seem as if it is voluntary; as if they wanted to be there for her and assist her in every way that they knew how. Additionally, the way in which she described their relationship seemed to reveal the nature of it- she described her enslaved people as never having any want, and wrote that she would give them demands and they would follow through with them. Her livelihood depended on the subordination and exploitation of the people who she claimed to care about, and perhaps she did care about them, but only insofar as they were at her beck and call without complaint or protest.

In a final revealing statement, on the last Christmas before the end of the Civil War, Dolly wrote: "This has usually been a very busy day with me preparing for Christmas. Not only for my own tables but for gifts for my servants. Now how changed no cakes, no pies or confectionery, can I have.... I have nothing to put in Sadais stocking.... Poor children! Why must the innocent suffer with the guilty?"[140] The next day, she recorded that she was sobbing when the children of the enslaved people came to ask her for a gift and she had nothing to give them. It is unclear

[138] Ibid.
[139] Ibid, 161.
[140] Ibid, 166.

exactly who the innocent and the guilty refer to in her entry, but presumably she would not describe herself as guilty. Even so close to the end of the war, she held onto the belief that the mission of the Union was wrong, and that northerners were guilty, perhaps because they ruined her and her enslaved peoples' "happy" and "celebratory" life together. She refused to acknowledge what the war was really about, except when she considered the question of whether or not slavery was completely evil. She also excused her role in the maintenance of the institution, and convinced herself that she was not evil because she tried not to make the lives of the people whose labor she exploited unpleasant.[141] It was easier for her to continue to victimize herself, her children, and even the people who she owned than to confront the reality that this war presented a life-changing opportunity for the people she has subjugated for so many years, and claimed to care about.

The letters of Mary Jones reveal similar sentiments: it is clear that she was also beginning to distrust the people she enslaved, but her letters still maintained an undertone of paternalism. In an 1863 letter she wrote to her son, she seemed suspicious that Cato, who was the driver on one of Jones' plantations, was lying to her about the number of cattle on the plantation. She wrote: "I mounted, rode to the cow pen, counted and took down in memorandum book the number of cattle present, which Cato reported to be all. But there is quite a discrepancy between his account and that of your dear father....Thirty-two head were sold last winter; six oxen sent to Indianola.... Montevideo some have died.... But still the number is less than it ought to be. Twenty head were sold from this place.... *All told* with Cato's account we have only sixty-four head. This includes Maybank and Montevideo. We had at *Maybank* alone last summer sixty-three."[142] It is especially

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[141] Ibid, 156.
[142] Robert M. Myers, ed., "Letter from Mary Jones Jones to Charles Colcock Jones, May 29, 1863" (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 586–87, https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cdocument%7C4338027.

significant that she was beginning to grow suspicious of Cato, because he was the enslaved person that her husband trusted the most for many years. Additionally, when Mary wrote to her son about her plan to leave one of their plantations to go to Montevideo, she expressed distrust of the people she owned as a whole. She wrote to her son, "I am much perplexed at the thought of leaving people and place without some white protection and control."[143] Clearly, she had an awareness of the fact that the people she owned did not feel loyal to her. Perhaps she was also afraid that they would "steal" from her in her absence. She could no longer see her enslaved people as family and their relationship as mutual- this was particularly true as she distinguishes that she wanted a *white* person there to control her plantation- and this person was likely not a family member.

However, some paternalistic rhetoric remained in letters throughout and even right after the war. In the letters that she wrote to her son, she would often sign them with some sort of expression about their "servants." Sometimes it would be that they said hi, or she would write something along the lines of "I hope our servants are doing well."[144] Moreover, on April 22 1865, just days after the war had ended, she wrote to her brother: "My dear brother, I am deeply concerned for my poor servants, and for the fate of my home, containing everything of value that I have in the world. Do if possible send an occasional message to my people."[145] It is unclear why she would be deeply concerned *for* her "poor servants," as they were closer to freedom than ever before. It seems that what she was actually deeply concerned about was the fact that they

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[143] Robert M. Myers, ed., "Letter from Mary Jones Jones to Charles Colcock Jones, January 20, 1863" (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 563–64, https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cdocument%7C4338013.
[144] Robert M. Myers, ed., "Letter from Mary Jones Jones to Charles Colcock Jones, January 20, 1863" (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 563–64, https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cdocument%7C4338013.
[145] Robert M. Myers, ed., "Letter from Mary Jones Jones to William Maxwell, April 22, 1865" (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 836–37, https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cdocument%7C4338136.

will leave her, and she will have lost everything that had made her so wealthy and secure for her entire life. Whether or not she admitted it, her concern and anxiety was certainly misplaced. She knew that it was her, not the people she enslaved, who would experience a huge loss if the North were to win the war.

Chapter 4: After the War

After the Civil War everyone in the South had to adapt to a new life without slavery. Throughout the war, these women expressed growing anxiety and willingness to protect their property. For Mary, this meant protecting her three plantations -- Arcadia, Montevideo, and Maybank -- and the 1,000 people her family enslaved. For Dolly, this meant her 900 acre plantation and 100 enslaved people, and for Martha, her "family" of 13, which included the people she owned. Towards the end of the war, as the reality dawned on them that they would no longer maintain their status of plantation mistress and wealth derived by exploitation, they reacted differently.

Some women, such as Dolly Lunt Burge, were more quick to accept their fate, and adjusted the former economic models of their plantation while remaining as close to normalcy as they once knew. Other women, such as Martha Battey, remained quite resentful about the war's outcome, as the future remained unclear to them and their families. For Mary Jones, she continued to struggle with the fact that she could no longer exert the control and exploitation that she once did, and faced the fact that most of her life had been an illusion that she fabricated.

I. Historical Context

The Civil War ended on April 9 1865, when Robert E. Lee surrendered the last major Confederate army to Ulysses S. Grant, even though the last battle was fought in Texas on May 13 1865.[146] Reconstruction began, and over the next few years congress approved a number of constitutional amendments. The Thirteenth Amendment, passed in 1865, prohibited slavery in the United States. The Fourteenth Amendment, passed in 1868, redefined national citizenship

[146] "Civil War Facts," American Battlefield Trust, August 16, 2011, https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/civil-war-facts.

based on birth that gave rights to include those who were formerly enslaved, and the Fifteenth Amendment, passed in 1870, enabled formerly enslaved men to vote.[147]

As for these women, the Thirteenth Amendment was certainly the most significant. The passage of this law meant that the people they had owned were now free to leave their plantations and create lives of their own. As historian Thavolia Glymph found, "slaves began leaving at the commencement of the war and mistresses began immediately to grapple with what the flight of the household slaves meant for their lives.... The plantation household became a critical site of wartime slave rebellion, forcing mistresses to confront their own self-deception."[148]

II. A New Life

Three weeks after the conclusion of the war, Dolly wrote: "The state of our country is very gloomy. General Lee has surrendered his arms to the victorious Grant. Well if it will only hasten the conclusion of this war I am satisfied."[149] Though she was unhappy with the results of the war, she preferred it to be over than witness the continual bloodshed and horrors of war that she had previously described. The next month, she recorded: "I heard to day that our negroes are all freed by the US government. This is more than I anticipated yet I trust it will be a gradual thing & not done all at once but the Disposer of All knows best & will do right."[150] Now she had to consider how she would proceed in this new world. Compared to the other women this thesis examines, Dolly was more willing to adjust with the times, and perhaps this is because she knew

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[147] "The Reconstruction Amendments: Thirteenth Amendment, 1865, Fourteenth Amendment, 1868, and Fifteenth Amendment, 1870," Bill of Rights Institute, accessed March 20, 2023, https://billofrightsinstitute.org/activities/the-reconstruction-amendments-thirteenth-amendment-1865-fourteenth-amendment-1868-and-fifteenth-amendment-1870/.
[148] Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 102
[149] Carter, *The Diary of Dolly Lunt Burge*, 171.
[150] Ibid, 173.

that it was the only way that her plantation could remain profitable. Now that the people she formerly owned were free, there would be nobody to labor for her unless she changed her approach.

Four days after this entry, she recorded that she had a conversation with Elbert, a man she owned, about freedom and how to proceed. She wrote: "I had a long conversation with my man Elbert today about freedom & told him I was perfectly willing but wanted direction. He says the Yankees told Maj Lees servants they were all free but they had better remain where they were until it was settled as it would be in a months time."[151] Thavolia Glymph notes that "the final months of the war and the first year of freedom saw desperate attempts by former mistresses to salvage something of their prewar status in the face of the steady erosion of slavery."[152] It appears that Dolly understood that the only way to not fall into destitution would be to pay the people she formerly owned, or else they would leave her.

Though she was willing to accept the new order, she still expressed her fear of living without slavery. She wrote: "Dr. Williams... came this morning .... He tells me the people below are freeing their servants & allowing those to stay with them that will go on with their work & obey as usual. What I shall do with mine is a question that troubles day & night and it is my last thought at night & first in the morning. I told them several days ago they were free to do as they liked. But it is my duty to make some provisions for them. I thank God that they are freed & yet what can I do without them? They are old & young not profitable to hire."[153] She is certainly struggling with what to do and how she is going to live in the post-emancipation world. It seems that she is hesitant to pay for their labor, as they are "old & young not profitable to hire" but her stance on their freedom has changed: while during the war she convinced herself that they

[151] Ibid, 173-174.
[152] Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage*, 140.
[153] Carter, *The Diary of Dolly Lunt Burge*, 174.

were best off being owned by her, she now thanks God for their freedom.

Not every mistress had the same reaction as Dolly. She seems to certainly be in the minority when she expressed her willingness to oblige to the freedom of her enslaved people. Most mistresses remained quite bitter and distrustful as evidenced in their language. Martha Battey only has two correspondences available from after the war, but in 1867 she wrote to Mary: "our wheat crop has been good and I hope the corn will be- and we may have some money. We have been poor so long and suffered so much surely we are to have better times. I fear to hope sometimes when I look around and see the hundreds of lazy negroes that the Government is feeding and they will not work as long as that is the case." This letter is ironic in a multiplicity of ways: Martha continued to play the victim and wrote of her poverty and how much she suffered, and calls the people who could not own any property, and who were formerly property themselves, lazy. She seems completely blind to the fact that these people, who she owned, worked their entire lives without pay. She adopted a rhetoric that many white southerners turned to after the war: that the planters were the true victims in the wake of the war's end.

Mary Jones aligned more similarly with Martha than she did with Dolly. Her language becomes increasingly racist as she turns on the people who she had called family and believed were "sympathetic" for the decades leading up to the war. After the war, on September 6 1865, she wrote to her son: "... *instigated* by *Cato*, the people at Montevideo had behaved in such a way that Mr. Fennell had been forced to call in the Yankees. They were doing better, and the corn crop was promising. Cato has been to me a most insolent, indolent, and dishonest man; I have not a shadow of confidence in him, and will not wish to retain him on the place.... I must employ those who will be useful, but would prefer those I have known, provided they will be faithful."[154]

[154] Robert M. Myers, ed., "Letter from Mary Jones Jones to Charles Colcock Jones, September 6, 1865," (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972).

This is a man who was born on her plantation in 1809, worked faithfully for her family and was trusted so much that he became the driver; he was Charles's "right-hand man."[155] She has known him for his entire life, yet as soon as he is navigated his newly-found freedom and expressed his protest against the exploitation he was subjected to his entire life, she was no longer willing to pay him for his labor, and did not want to keep him on the place he had lived his whole life.

In her diary, Mary Jones expressed horribly racist sentiments about the freedmen. At the beginning of 1866, she wrote: "with their emancipation must come their extermination. All history, from their first existence, proves them incapable of self-government; they perish when brought in conflict with the intellectual superiority of the Caucasian race."[156] She proceeded to write, "*facts* prove that in a state of slavery such as exists in the Southern states have the Negro race increased and thriven most."[157] Though the war was over, and slavery had ended, she needed to keep her delusion in place, because the alternative would require her to acknowledge what is at stake in her future- that she would no longer have ownership over nearly a thousand people, and that they will never willingly submit to her.

Even despite these abominable claims that call for the "extermination" of freedmen, she still expressed that the life of her formerly enslaved people would be best lived out with her, and that the real enemies were the Yankees.[158] In the same entry, she wrote: "I feel if ever we gain our independence there will be radical reforms in the system of slavery as it now exists. When once delivered from the interference of Northern abolitionism, we shall be free to make and enforce such rules and reformations as are just and right. In all my life I never heard such expressions of hatred and contempt as the Yankees heap upon our poor servants. One of them told me he did not

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[155] Clarke, The Dwelling Place, 54, 286.
[156] Robert M. Myers, ed., "The Diary of Mrs. Mary Jones, Wednesday, January 11, 1866," (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 805-6.
[157] Ibid.
[158] Ibid.

know what God Almighty made Negroes for; all he wished was the power to blow their brains out."[159] Mary is completely refusing to accept the new reality, even suggesting that there might be a world in which the South gains independence from the North and can reinstate a version of slavery with "radical reforms." Her response is the most dramatic of all of the women, perhaps because her holdings were so much greater than theirs. She owned almost 4,000 acres of land and 1,000 people, and it seems she cannot confront the reality that she was going to lose her wealth and her status. After the war, she deviates completely from the language that both she and her husband used to use to describe the people they enslaved. Though it is still racist, she is calling for the extermination or subordination of people who she forced to work for her without compensation for all of her life. She was unabashedly defending slavery. She was now wrapped up in a new delusion: not that the freedmen were her friends or her family, but that the only way that they can exist is in a system of slavery.

III. A New Life, Though Similar to the Old

Though slavery had been abolished, these women had spent their lives relying completely on the labor of enslaved people, so they felt that they had no choice but to go about business as usual, though this time paying for labor. Through the accounts of all of the women, their day-to-day lives did not change all that much, yet there remained a certain sense of sadness expressed about having lost their plantation mistresses status and wealth.

Mary negotiated contracts with freedmen, and described it in a letter to her daughter. She wrote: "The contract made is of the simplest kind and at the lowest rate -one acre to the women and two to the men, and the ground plowed, only corn and cotton planted; and yet they dispute

[159] Ibid.

even the carrying out and spreading the manure, and wanted a plowman extra furnished."[160] She continued: "Gilbert is very faithful, and so is Charles. They are the exceptions. . . . But we will turn to a more pleasing subject."[161] Despite implementing the simplest kind and lowest rate of contract, she struggled to adjust to pay the freedmen for their labor- and the people she described as "faithful" were people who were not "bothering" her with the amount that they were getting paid for their labor.

Additionally, she remained generally despondent in the majority of her communications after the war. In a letter to her daughter in 1867, she wrote: "A Happy New Year to you, my darling child, and to Robert and the dear children! May our Divine Lord ever abide with and bless you all! The skies with us are very dark: no ray of sunshine since *last year*. It is all in sympathy with our national and domestic gloom. Everything is dark within and without."[162] In the same letter, she then wrote: "My dear child, the anxiety and distress experienced about these people and my situation here cannot be told. Sometimes I feel in utter despair and desperation, and I would rejoice to sell the place tomorrow if I could.... Lucy is very faithful, but they often groan being burdened with freedom. The changes which surround me are marvelous."[163] Essentially, she conceded that the life she had lived was no longer worth living after slavery had been abolished. Even though her tasks probably remain quite similar, she wished to give up the plantation now that she could not have any forced, free labor. Her livelihood depended completely on the subjugation of others, and though the change seems only to be that the people

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[160] Robert M. Myers, ed., "Letter from Mary Jones Jones to Mary Sharpe Jones Mallard, March 4, 1867" (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 942–44, https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cdocument%7C4338185.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Robert M. Myers, ed., "Letter from Mary Jones Jones to Mary Sharpe Jones Mallard, January 2, 1867" (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 934–35, https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity%7Cdocument%7C4338182.
[163] Ibid.

who chose to continue to work for her must be paid, she is so depressed by the outcome of the war and the loss of her enormous wealth and status that it is not even worth the trouble to her.

As for Dolly, though she was more open to a paid labor system, and initially seemed cheery about the prospect, she expressed the same cold-hearted, despondency as Mary. On an entry from Christmas she wrote, "Sadai [her daughter] woke very early & crept out of bed to her stocking.... 'Tis the last Christmas we shall probably be together Freedmen! Now they will I trust have their own homes & be joyful under their own vine & figtrees with none to molest or make afraid."[164] This account was quite optimistic, but when the reality of being alone on her plantation set in, her records were less so. Her entries return to their original style, the form they had taken even twenty years before the end of the war, as she wrote entries such as, "Commenced ploughing up my cotton & replanting" and "Finished planting swamp corn."[165] But with no unawareness that things have certainly changed. She often wrote of how lonely she was after the war, lamenting, "Wandering about lonely & sad. How many such hours do I spend by myself-."[166] In 1866 she wrote: "Oh I am so lonely & no one here but myself. Have read & read & now writing. The weather has changed considerably since yesterday. God is good in not sending the hail upon my fields. Oh that I felt His fatherly goodness & care more. My heart is so cold & hard."[167] These women were realizing- whether aware of it or not- that slavery and their position in the maintenance of it was so fundamentally ingrained into southern culture; it was at the crossroads of the economy, politics, and even their social relationships.

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[164] Carter, *The Diary of Dolly Lunt Burge*, 175.
[165] Ibid, 183, 184.
[166] Ibid, 184.
[167] Ibid, 185.

Conclusion:

This thesis has aimed to demonstrate that a full acknowledgement of the layered violence that characterized the institution of slavery is still being discovered. In popular imagination, images of slavery consist of male plantation owners, the slave market, and unknown enslaved people. Recently scholarship acknowledges that is not the full picture. Although white women, or plantation mistresses, could not vote, run for office, or be in some of the physical spaces of the slave trade, they still played a role in upholding the institution of slavery. They were active beneficiaries of and participants in the maintenance of the institution of slavery, and they were also fully engaged capitalists who benefitted from the profits of this unpaid labor in the same way as their husbands, brothers and sons.

Examining these women has shown that we live in a world that still fails to acknowledge the depth and breath of slavery's mark on our nation. Slavery was extremely violent in obvious ways -- enslaved people were not free, their labor was exploited, they were separated from their families -- but there is also a less historically visible violence that was perpetrated by the white women who supported this exploitation for their own gain. This piece of history is crucial to understanding how slavery was maintained for almost two hundred and fifty years.

During the period of the study, from 1850-1870, these women expressed in their own ways a need for slavery. For Dolly, many of her entries before the war described the labor that enslaved people were doing on her husband's 900 acre plantation. In 1858, her husband died, and she was left to run the plantation on her own throughout the Civil War and the early days of Reconstruction. She was aware that her livelihood depended on the continued exploitation of the people she inherited from her husband's estate, and was vehemently against the men she enslaved leaving her to join the Union forces. For Mary, she consistently expressed that if it was

necessary to maintain her property --both nearly 4,000 acres of land, and nearly 1,000 people -- she was willing to go to war to preserve that right. She could not fathom a world in which Black people lived as free citizens, and the bloodshed and ruin was worth it to her if it meant maintaining her holdings. Martha's correspondence to her family used infantilizing language to describe the people that she enslaved, yet on the same page, she expressed her willingness to use violence against them to maintain her dominance over them.

From the 1850s to the 1870s, all three women were aware of the rising political changes, and regularly expressed growing anxiety and a willingness to defend their property. For Mary, this meant protecting her three plantations -- Arcadia, Montevideo, and Maybank -- and the 1,000 people her family enslaved. For Dolly, this meant her 900 acre plantation and 100 enslaved people, and for Martha, her "family" of 13, which included the people she owned. Towards the end of the war, as the reality dawned on each of them that they would no longer maintain their status of plantation mistress and slave owner who held wealth derived by exploitation, they reacted differently. Dolly was the most resigned to the reality, and she had conversations with her freed people about how they could continue working on the plantation for a paid rate. Mary was certainly the most shocked and bitter, as she lost much more than the other two women. She continued to use racist, Old South rhetoric supporting the idea that enslaved people could not survive without being subordinated. Grudgingly, she offered contracts to some of the freed people. Martha turned to Lost Cause rhetoric, lamented about how much she had suffered the past few years, and criticized the government for helping the newly freed people. These women were all active participants in the southern slave economy- they were not clueless, innocent bystanders, and they certainly were not secretly opposed to an institution that their husbands, fathers, and brothers condoned and profited from.

This history has not made its way into Southern popular culture. The Old South continues to be romanticized in ways that go unnoticed. Many former plantations maintain their viability as wedding venues, hunting grounds, or shooting clubs. Glossy magazines, such as *Garden & Gun* glamorize Old Southern tradition in an updated fashion that masks the violence of this history. As long as people are getting married on former plantations, it is evident that we still must continue to reveal and educate ourselves about the full picture of the violence of slavery, and grapple with the racist past of our country. Understanding the role white slave owning women played in this system is a step in that direction.

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