

2001

## **A Tradition of Doubt: Women and Slavery in Nineteenth-Century Virginia**

Leslie C. Hunt

*College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd>



Part of the [African American Studies Commons](#), [African History Commons](#), [United States History Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

---

### **Recommended Citation**

Hunt, Leslie C., "A Tradition of Doubt: Women and Slavery in Nineteenth-Century Virginia" (2001). *Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects*. William & Mary. Paper 1539626320. <https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-s1xf-dd19>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@wm.edu](mailto:scholarworks@wm.edu).

A TRADITION OF DOUBT:  
WOMEN AND SLAVERY IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY VIRGINIA

---

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History

The College of William and Mary

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

---

by

Leslie Hunt

2001

APPROVAL SHEET


This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of

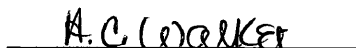
the requirements for the degree of

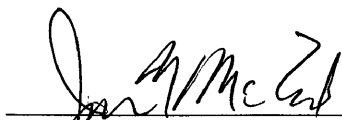
Master of Arts

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Leslie C. Hunt

Approved, May 2001

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Melvin P. Ely

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
H. Cam Walker

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
James McCord

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	v
INTRODUCTION: SLAVERY AND THE SOUTHERN TRADITION	2
CHAPTER I: TRADITIONS OF THE OLD SOUTH	10
CHAPTER II: THE DEBATE ABOUT SOUTHERN WOMEN	17
CHAPTER III: VIRGINIA WOMEN'S VIEWS ON SLAVERY	23
CHAPTER IV: WOMEN AND SLAVERY IN THE PUBLIC ARENA	50
CONCLUSION: THE LEGACY OF SLAVERY	58
BIBLIOGRAPHY	64
VITA	68

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer wishes to thank Professor Melvin Ely for his generous insights, guidance, and encouragement, all of which contributed immensely to the successful completion of this paper. She also wishes to thank Professors Carol Sheriff, James McCord, and Cam Walker for their time and their thoughtful criticisms.

The author also extends her thanks to the archivists at the Virginia Historical Society, who provided many helpful clues and suggestions that often led to important discoveries. Thanks also to the staff at Special Collections at Swem Library, particularly Margaret Cook, who led me to materials that greatly aided this research. Special thanks to Elizabeth Varon, Marie Tyler-McGraw, Deborah Lee, and Tatiana van Riemsdijk for their ideas, guidance, and generosity.

Lastly, the author wishes to thank her parents and friends, whose unfailing support and encouragement have allowed the impossible to become attainable.

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to illustrate the persistence of moral doubt about the institution of slavery in Virginia. Many in the Revolutionary generation of Americans questioned slavery; less widely appreciated is the continuation of that tradition until the brink of the Civil War. The role of women in the dialogue over slavery has been a focus of many antebellum histories and is hotly debated. This thesis demonstrates the continued existence of doubt about slavery among women of the slaveholding class in nineteenth-century Tidewater and Piedmont Virginia.

An examination of primary documents reveals that white women in Virginia expressed a wide variety of views about slavery, and that some of these views were critical, both overtly and covertly, of the South's peculiar institution. Southern women in the nineteenth century were influenced by the Second Great Awakening, which allowed them greater participation in community activities and encouraged some women to express their sentiments more or less openly. Other women abided by the "separate spheres" ideology that confined women to the home, where they attempted, in some cases, to ameliorate the conditions of slaves in their own households. The forces behind women's views were as diverse as the women themselves. Nevertheless, it is clear that women from some of Virginia's most prominent families had sincere doubts about legitimacy of slavery throughout the antebellum period.

A TRADITION OF DOUBT:  
WOMEN AND SLAVERY IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY VIRGINIA

## INTRODUCTION

### SLAVERY AND THE SOUTHERN TRADITION

*We are human beings of the nineteenth century – and slavery has to go, of course.*<sup>1</sup>

Mary Chesnut's remark, written in the midst of a brutal and cataclysmic civil war, exemplifies the feelings of an indeterminate number of southern women. While Chesnut is no doubt the most widely quoted woman to emerge from the Old South and the war that forever changed it, her opinions about slavery reiterated the sentiments of an uncounted number of southerners. Doubts about the morality of southern slaveholding date to the mid-1700s, but in the nineteenth century, some southern women, traditionally excluded from the public sphere and deemed unable to form opinions on most matters of community and political importance, voiced their discontentment with the institution of slavery. Their criticisms were rooted in the Revolutionary South's tradition of liberty; at the same time, the increasing assertiveness of certain southern women reflects the changing norms of the early decades of the nineteenth century.

In "The Travail of Slavery," historian Charles Sellers stated that "the key to the tragedy of southern history is the paradox of the slaveholding South's devotion to

---

<sup>1</sup>C. Vann Woodward, *Mary Chesnut's Civil War* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981), 246.



‘liberty.’”<sup>2</sup> This paradox made it necessary for white southerners to try to reconcile the American principles of freedom and liberty with a system of slavery that denied basic rights to a significant portion of the population. According to Sellers, misgivings about the institution of slavery pervaded the southern mind from the colonial period until the brink of the Civil War and, in fact, gave rise to a level of emotional discord that helped drive the white South into that conflict.

White southerners manifested misgivings about slavery through a variety of pronouncements and actions, Sellers asserted, but even when moral doubts were seemingly concealed, they “burrowed beneath the surface of the southern mind, where they kept gnawing away the shaky foundations on which Southerners sought to rebuild their morale and self-confidence as a slaveholding people.”<sup>3</sup> Sellers’s argument was reiterated by historian John Boles: “No one who reads deeply the history of the region can miss the pervasive, though often disguised, feelings of guilt for perpetuating an institution which denied both the ideals of the Declaration of Independence and the Golden Rule.”<sup>4</sup> As one prominent Virginian stated in 1833, “A large majority of the Slave holders of Virginia regard slavery as a curse upon our land.”<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup>Charles Sellers, “The Travail of Slavery,” *The Southerner as American* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 40.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>4</sup>John B. Boles, *The Great Revival: Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.; Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1972), 194.

<sup>5</sup>John Hartwell Cocke, December 1833, as quoted in Martin Boyd Coyner, Jr. “John Hartwell Cocke of Brems: Agriculture and Slavery in the Ante-bellum South.” (PhD. diss., University of Virginia, 1961), 318.

Despite this curse, southern slaveholders were unable to disentangle themselves from slavery; it was the cornerstone of a well-entrenched way of life. Prominent members of the slaveholding class could not have achieved their financial successes without forced labor and investments in human property. In an uncertain agrarian world where one's social and economic condition was often precarious and unreliable, slave labor was a means to achieve success, measured in dollars, cents, and social status.

Charles Sellers's theory that southern whites suffered from the psychological effects of guilty consciences is a contested one, however. By the dawn of the nineteenth century, many white southerners were accustomed to the lifestyle that they and the generations before them had created through the labor of others and were not inclined to change a system that ensured their success and their family legacies, no matter how morally reprehensible they may have felt it to be. Southern society was driven by a lust for land and a need for capital. It was in this ruthlessly competitive culture that many worked untiringly to turn their ambitions into profits. Inspired by successes and determined to persevere after failures, forward-thinking southerners envisioned "unbounded expansion, unprecedented abundance, and white supremacy." This type of attitude gave many white southerners sufficient reason to dismiss their feelings about the paradox of slavery. Historian James Oakes labels the ideology of ambitious whites who were dependent upon land, money, and slavery as "the southern version of the American creed."<sup>6</sup> This creed was based upon upward mobility and equal opportunity, a concept that was tailored to whites and based upon

---

<sup>6</sup>James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Knopf, 1982), 127.

the exploitation of black labor, which became increasingly necessary in order to acquire status-enhancing wealth and property.

Noted historian Eugene Genovese's interpretation of slaveholders' rhetoric described the southern conscience as guiltless: complaints about the southern "curse" were not moral objections of remorseful slaveholders riddled with guilt, but were simply the gripes of guiltless southern elites who regarded blacks with such condescension that they believed slaves enjoyed a condition superior to that of free laborers.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, the paternalism that white slaveholders exhibited towards slaves was not only a result of these feelings of superiority, but also a product of slaveholders' need to justify their ownership of other humans. Although the consciences of these white southerners seemed to be clear, Genovese acknowledged that paternalism actually "grew out of the necessity to discipline and morally justify a system of exploitation."<sup>8</sup> Paternalism therefore not only grew from slaveholders' awareness that involuntary labor needed to be justified, but also allowed them to make peace with this system by persuading themselves that their actions were in the best interests of the slaves.

Even Genovese's thesis conceded that the relatively guilt-free life that paternalism helped whites achieve was the result of keen moral sensibilities that acknowledged the intrinsic vice of owning slaves. Charles Sellers not only argued that slaveholders harbored deep-seated feelings of guilt about slavery, but also

---

<sup>7</sup>Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 75-86. Genovese often depicts slaveholders as paternalistic tyrants who sometimes complained about slavery because of its demands on their own time and resources.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.

proposed that these sentiments were so burdensome and overwhelming that southern whites became defensive, and eventually, openly hostile to the northern neighbors who accused them of immorality. That southerners' feelings of responsibility for and remorse over slavery sparked the Civil War is a bold assertion reliant upon psychological generalizations. Some southerners did indeed continue to feel guilty about their slaveholding status; benevolent masters and proslavery arguments existed and evolved, at least in part, as a result of the need to reconcile slavery with its inherent religious and moral conflicts. The events of the years between the Revolution and the Civil War chronicle the development of these attitudes and indicate the white South's ambivalence about an institution that contradicted the principles of democracy. Nowhere was that ambivalence and discord more compellingly expressed than in the state of Virginia.

During the early years of the republic, the free black population of Virginia grew rapidly as private manumissions, legalized in 1782, increased in number. Some leaders also proposed either gradual or general emancipation. Americans' ideology was influenced by "the natural rights ideology of the American Revolution and religious equalitarianism of the Great Awakening," which "heightened Virginians' hostility to slavery itself."<sup>9</sup> Prominent Virginians such as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, George Wythe, Patrick Henry, and St. George Tucker criticized slavery; Jefferson and Tucker actually devised plans for emancipating slaves.

Conservative factions in Virginia worked to have the manumission law repealed or limited, however. Legislation passed in 1806 significantly curbed the

---

<sup>9</sup>Alison Goodyear Freehling, *Drift Toward Dissolution: The Virginia Slavery Debate of 1831-1832* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 88.

manumission trend by mandating that all free blacks leave the state within a year after receiving their freedom, a fate that benevolent masters were reluctant to impose on blacks. Then, in 1831, Nat Turner's insurrection in southeastern Virginia forced officials and legislators yet again to re-evaluate slavery as it existed in Virginia. The slavery debate that occurred in the Virginia House of Delegates in January 1832 has been generally perceived by historians as a turning point in Virginia's attitude toward slavery and the beginning of the development of a proslavery ideology that would continue until the Civil War.<sup>10</sup> For the next several decades, Virginians would continue to struggle with the issue of manumission and puzzle over what to do with manumitted slaves and the free black population.

In the 1830s abolitionism received a great deal of attention in the United States, and southern whites became more aware of sectional differences that stood between them and their northern brethren. Slavery was no longer in style in most parts of the world, a fact that isolated southerners from more industrial regions and countries. Although abolitionism was anathema to many Americans, including northerners, the press contributed to its growing audience and politicization. Most white Virginians were hostile to abolitionism and responded defensively to calls for emancipation. One young man, encountering abolitionism as a student at Yale, remarked disdainfully, "They seem determined to set our negroes free at all hazards and raise them to a level with the white population and if possible a little above it."<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup>This argument was advanced by Joseph C. Robert in his book, *The Road from Monticello: A Study of the Virginia Slavery Debate of 1832* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1941).

<sup>11</sup>George Wilson McPhail to Mary Carrington, 18 August 1834, Carrington Family Papers, VHS.

Abolitionism, which “produced a most violent excitement,”<sup>12</sup> provoked heated political and moral debates about slavery, dividing the country and encouraging the development of a new proslavery ideology that defended the institution. The South became increasingly isolated in the mid-nineteenth century. As one fire-eating politician declared, “Abolition and the Union cannot co-exist . . . We of the South will not, cannot surrender our institutions.”<sup>13</sup> Heightened awareness of abolitionism led southern proponents of slavery to develop an ideology that described slavery not as merely benign, but as beneficial.

Even as proslavery arguments emerged in the 1830s, a current of thought that questioned slavery continued to exist among southern whites. The broad spectrum of feelings about the legitimacy of slavery spans eight decades, from the early days of the republic until the brink of the Civil War. Although manumissions dwindled significantly in the years following 1806, they continued to occur throughout the nineteenth century. According to Sellers’s argument, the American legacy of liberty “kept most Southerners openly apologetic about slavery for fifty years following the Declaration of Independence.”<sup>14</sup> Alison Goodyear Freehling’s *Drift Toward Dissolution* demonstrated that Virginia’s slavery debate did not represent a clean break from the more liberal traditions of the past and the creation of a new avowedly proslavery philosophy. Rather, the debate was the result of “an ongoing contest

---

<sup>12</sup>Anna Howe to Emily Howe, 23 August 1835, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

<sup>13</sup>John C. Calhoun, “Speech on the Reception of Abolition Petitions,” in *Slavery Defended: The Views of the Old South*, ed. Eric McKittrick (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), 12. This speech was originally given in the United States Senate, 6 February 1837.

<sup>14</sup>Sellers, 45.

between a white community irrepressibly divided by slavery,”<sup>15</sup> and the view that slavery was not a positive good but an evil, albeit perhaps a necessary one, long survived the Virginia convention. Although a distinct proslavery argument emerged during this period, lingering doubts about the peculiar institution perpetuated action and rhetoric that evinced white southerners’ misgivings through a broad spectrum of implied challenges to the status quo, ranging from benevolent slaveholding to colonization to private expressions of despair and dismay.

This trend is visible in the letters and recollections of nineteenth-century women, some of them members of Virginia’s most prominent slaveholding families. Ordinarily excluded from the public sphere and deemed unable to form opinions on most matters of community and political importance, these women voiced their dissatisfaction with slavery through a variety of means and for many different reasons. Although nineteenth-century expressions of antislavery attitudes are most often associated with western Virginia, the existence of a number of women from slaveholding families in the Tidewater and Piedmont regions who questioned popular justifications of slavery shows that the white South remained more ambivalent than the institution’s most ardent defenders liked to admit.

---

<sup>15</sup>Freehling, xii.

CHAPTER I  
TRADITIONS OF THE OLD SOUTH

The history of women in the antebellum South is often seen as one of exclusion and subjection. Virginia Cary's popular 1828 book, Letters on Female Character, prescribed the role of the proper southern woman. More often than not, the female sphere was confined to the household. As Cary, a daughter of the elite Randolph family of Virginia, stated in her influential work, "When women are taken out of their appropriate sphere, not only individual but national misery will be the result."<sup>16</sup> Women were to fill their days with domestic activities and take careful note that "there is a decided inferiority in the intellectual strength of women."<sup>17</sup> Therefore, ladies should concern themselves with the affairs of their households and the happiness of their husbands. Unrelenting faith in God and the consistent practice of religion were to be the means of attaining domestic harmony and salvation.

Despite Cary's opinion that women ought to have "discretion enough to determine that they had better keep what was allowed them in peace,"<sup>18</sup> it became increasingly clear that many women were simply not content to be idle and detached from important issues and community affairs. Cynthia Kierner's recent work,

---

<sup>16</sup>Mrs. Virginia Cary, *Letters on Female Character* (Richmond, Va.: A. Works, 1828), 22.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 106.



*Beyond the Household*, has shed light on the increasingly public and political role of women in the early nineteenth century. According to Kierner, one of the ways that women were able to expand their involvement in non-household matters was simply by augmenting their influence in the home. But while Kierner states that “some southern writers . . . idealized the competent housewife, who wielded both moral and managerial influence in the family circle,”<sup>19</sup> there were other women who were not content with such a subtle influence. These were the supposedly misguided young women who had fallen under the spell of the “dangerous” Mary Wollstonecraft, whose “incompatible theories”<sup>20</sup> constituted a threat to good society everywhere.

It became clear in the early nineteenth century that the domestic sphere of the female world was expanding and allowing women to exert more influence in the home. The notion of Republican Motherhood played an important part in this expansion of women’s roles. Mothers were to preside over many household matters and were to ensure the proper education and instilment of republican values in their children, a crucial function for American civil society. Along with this notion came more opportunities for women to gain education.<sup>21</sup> The domestic sphere became a more important force as women began to carve out new identities based upon feminine virtue. In the early 1800s, women were able to stretch the limits of their

---

<sup>19</sup>Cynthia Kierner, *Beyond the Household: Women’s Place in the Early South, 1700-1835* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998), 181.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 105, 106.

<sup>21</sup>Linda Kerber introduced the theory of Republican Motherhood in *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

influence and gain moral authority, even though they were still largely confined to the home sphere.

The conception of women as powerful within the home, yet ultimately subservient, placed women in a difficult situation. They had to walk a tightrope between exerting their own influence and bending to their husbands' will. The notion of nineteenth-century womanhood that permitted women to gain power in the home sphere finally recognized the work that women had always performed and the influence that they naturally exerted. While it is possible to view this emerging ideal as a sign of female empowerment, an alternative interpretation can be advanced: affirming the role of women in the home and crediting their influence there might make them less likely to pursue power outside the home. Although women were able, in some cases, to use their influence to great advantage, it is possible that "new ideas about womanhood were an attempt to talk women into settling for half a loaf."<sup>22</sup>

Regardless of the motives behind the increased recognition and influence that women received within the home, this change marked a small but important step forward for women. Although women's voices were only supposed to be heard within the household, they were not expected to be silent. Female prescriptive literature like Virginia Cary's condoned submission, but women's subtle influence in the home would be combined with other nineteenth-century developments that

---

<sup>22</sup>Suzanne Lebsack, *Virginia Women 1600-1945: "A Share of Honour"* (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1987), 66. Lebsack's study discusses the prescriptive ideal of womanhood and the "propaganda" of the theory that women could yield a "powerful influence" at home.

allowed women to expand their sphere of influence by cultivating traditional feminine virtues.

Perhaps more important than the political ideology associated with Republican Motherhood was the phenomenon of religious revival in the early nineteenth century. The Second Great Awakening was a period of major revivals in numerous Protestant denominations, including the Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist churches. Barbara Epstein, whose *The Politics of Domesticity* chronicled the Second Great Awakening, reported that women attended these revivals in disproportionately high numbers; men were unlikely to convert and often disapproved of their wives' and daughters' involvement in religious activities. Women were able in some instances, however, to encourage the men in their households to become more religious.

Epstein argued that this was a crucial development because “women stayed within the limits of feminine behavior and at the same time managed to assert themselves and even impose their wills upon men.”<sup>23</sup> Women expressed fear about the lack of religion in men's lives; this is evident even in Cary's book, which stated that “it is a melancholy truth, that we see few instances of vital religion in full exercise among men.”<sup>24</sup> Cary insisted that religion was of paramount importance in a woman's life: “Of all the moral monsters which abound on earth, women without religion are the most disgusting and mischievous.”<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup>Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1981), 60.

<sup>24</sup>Cary, 18.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 20.

Religion was, in fact, something of a battleground of the sexes in nineteenth-century America. Men often opposed what they saw as excessive piety and resented women's involvement in revivals and other religious activities. The feelings of many women that their husbands would not and could not achieve salvation must have made life at home inharmonious at times. But to many men, the most troubling aspect of the Second Great Awakening may have been the participation of women in societies and meetings, which was largely unprecedented. Historian Donald Mathews's *Religion in the Old South* showed that men resented their wives' participation in church activities, insisting that it took too much time away from their domestic work. Mathews even discovered evidence that men lashed out at preachers and ministers for interfering with home life.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, evangelical women in the South were faced with the reality of slavery and the contradictions it posed to their morality. Mathews argued that because women were "powerless in most public acts," and therefore could make no measurable difference in public issues, they "could be humored in their attempt to change the quality if not the fact of slave society."<sup>27</sup>

While Mathews accurately assessed the limitations on most southern women's influence, as mandated by their ultimate submission to their husbands, he underrated the possibility of religion as an outlet for activism. Women's use of religion as an arena for public acts and moral activism is the focus of Kierner's *Beyond the Household*. Kierner observes that "religion was the key loophole

---

<sup>26</sup>See Donald Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 103.

<sup>27</sup>Mathews, 118.

through which most white women, southern and northern, entered public life.”<sup>28</sup> By distributing religious tracts and becoming involved with religious societies and Sunday schools, women inconspicuously entered the realm of public life and became active, albeit quiet, forces in their communities. The benevolent associations and societies that were a result of the subtle change in women’s roles would become more prevalent as time passed and women began to voice opinions that they would not have felt free to express before.

Women in the Early Republic began to question their surroundings and write and speak their thoughts on issues that were not confined to the domestic arena. Although traditional views of women’s role in the household and the limited conception of their role in the social order often hindered women and prevented them from taking action outside of their own homes, Elizabeth Varon’s *We Mean to Be Counted* documents women’s political activities in nineteenth-century Virginia and finds that “elite and middle-class women played an active, distinct, and evolving role in the political life of the Old South.”<sup>29</sup> Varon focuses on the ways that Virginia’s women amplified their political voices on an array of topics, including slavery. By participating in volunteer groups and political campaigns, distributing published writings, and organizing and executing legislative petitions, many women emerged from their traditional domestic spheres and transformed the concerns of their consciences into causes for political action. Even the benevolent associations that did

---

<sup>28</sup>Kierner, 181.

<sup>29</sup>Elizabeth R. Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 1.

not appear to divorce women from their domestic sphere provided a means for discussion and action that drew attention, and in some cases, caused commotion.

It is impossible to generalize about the views of white women toward slavery in the nineteenth century. Repeated references to slavery in the writings of women who openly doubted its validity demonstrate a variety of specific responses to the slave labor system and illustrate the many different outlets and means they used to mitigate an institution that they viewed as imperfect. There were women of the slaveholding class who repeatedly questioned slavery, and in some cases strongly condemned it. For the “first families” of Virginia – the Randolphs, Carters, Pages, Custises, and other families that composed the well-established planter elite<sup>30</sup> – slavery was a way of life that had been adopted in the seventeenth or early eighteenth century. Nonetheless, even some women from these families express a disdain for slavery. Many historians have attempted to record the views of southern women toward slavery, and a historiographic debate surrounds the issue.

---

<sup>30</sup>For the purposes of this paper, plantation households are those with twenty or more slaves.

## CHAPTER II

### THE DEBATE ABOUT SOUTHERN WOMEN

Anne Firor Scott's groundbreaking 1970 work, *The Southern Lady*, presented the theory that many southern women who belonged to the slaveowning class expressed reservations about the institution of slavery and were in favor of doing away with it. According to Scott, "a number of women saw a parallel between their own situation and that of slaves."<sup>31</sup> Slavery represented a "psychological burden"<sup>32</sup> that placed numerous responsibilities upon southern women that they resented, and this made them eager to see the institution's end. Scott likened the subjection of slaves to the subjection of women and posited that bitterness toward the male's role as master characterized not only slaves, but also wives and daughters. It was their own oppression that elite southern women resented and wanted to eradicate, and this entailed doing away with slavery. Scott thus identified the existence of what has been called "covert abolitionism" among white southern women.

Scott's argument, however, relied heavily upon the diary of Mary Chesnut, and her work has been criticized as a result. Although Catherine Clinton supported Scott's conclusions and further stated that "many southern women viewed bondage

---

<sup>31</sup>Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Second edition, Charlottesville, Va.: University Press of Va., 1995), 50.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 46.

as a curse, and some saw slavery as a cruel and unjust system,”<sup>33</sup> Scott’s argument was challenged frontally by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, who attacked the work of both Scott and Clinton. She concluded that, by and large, elite southern women “supported slavery and its constraints as the necessary price for their own privileged position.”<sup>34</sup> Fox-Genovese acknowledged the existence of antislavery utterances by southern women, yet dismissed them as nothing more than exasperated complaints and grumbings; they were not, she insisted, valid indicators of antislavery sentiment.

Fox-Genovese’s argument overlooked two crucial points, however. First, southern women in the antebellum period could do little more than grumble in most cases; what she construed as female inaction on the subject of slavery reflects a twentieth-century perspective that demands a high level of public activism, an approach that was not available to most women in the nineteenth-century South. Fox-Genovese also overlooked the fact that some women were attempting to ameliorate a situation that they felt was immoral and unjust through involvement in religious and benevolent societies.

Fox-Genovese’s thesis that white women in the South were proslavery is consistent with the argument advanced by Jean Friedman’s *The Enclosed Garden*. Friedman denied the validity of the antislavery statements made in women’s memoirs by asserting that these sentiments “may have reflected the general postwar

---

<sup>33</sup>Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman’s World in the Old South* (N.Y.: Pantheon Books, 1982), 190.

<sup>34</sup>Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 243.



reaction in the South.”<sup>35</sup> This view, which implies that women in the postwar years may have written exaggerated or untruthful memoirs in order to save face by distancing themselves from an institution that many potential readers found reprehensible, denies the relevance of the abundance of journals and correspondence produced during the antebellum era. Moreover, Friedman negated the value of antislavery sentiment among southern women because they did not meet the standards of abolitionism. By setting an unrealistically high standard, this argument denies the impact that slavery did have on southern women, as recorded in journals and letters, and drastically underrates the findings of other historians who have insisted that women were able to subvert slavery, both through influence at home and through the public arena, in which they played an increasingly open role.

Elizabeth Varon is unpersuaded by previous arguments about the antislavery feelings of southern women; she finds that “the tendency of scholars to categorize them either as abolitionist sympathizers or defenders of slavery is misguided.”<sup>36</sup> Through her exploration of white women’s political activities, Varon discovers that studies of women’s political and social apathy and indifference toward the issue of slavery ignore the groups of petitioners who sought to demonstrate the evils of slavery, as well as participants in the American Colonization Society, who championed the cause of gradual emancipation and the possibility of a better life for blacks in Liberia. Virginia’s women, Varon argues, were not the uninterested

---

<sup>35</sup>Jean Friedman, *The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 88.

<sup>36</sup>Varon, 42.

homebodies historians portrayed, but were, in many cases, active participants in public affairs and politically involved in a wide range of issues.

While Suzanne Lebsock did not portray women as politically active participants in public affairs, *The Free Women of Petersburg* identified meaningful discourse and attitudes that fell between proslavery and abolition arguments on the ideological spectrum about slavery. Lebsock posited that white women influenced slavery by observing and manipulating its impact in small ways that affected their everyday lives and those of their slaves. Her analysis of wills left by white women in that Virginia city revealed that there were more than a few women who freed slaves in their wills and also left them legacies of cash and property. Although these women were not abolitionists, their actions were important because “white women were in fact a subversive influence on chattel slavery.”<sup>37</sup> Lebsock located territory between historiographic extremes; she later criticized Fox-Genovese’s work for having “no middle ground, and no space for ambivalence or contradiction.”<sup>38</sup> A synthesis of Lebsock’s and Varon’s ideas would recognize the growing importance of women’s influence in the domestic sphere and their increasing participation in political discourses, both of which sometimes tended to ameliorate or even undermine slavery.

Marli Weiner recognizes the dilemma of white women on plantations who had misgivings about slavery. In her essay “The Ideology of Elite Antebellum

---

<sup>37</sup>Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1984), 138.

<sup>38</sup>Suzanne Lebsock, “Complicity and Contention: Women in the Plantation South,” review of *Within the Plantation Household*, by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 74 (1) (1990), 73.

Women,” Weiner argues that the ideal of woman as a moral superior made slaveholding unappealing to women’s moral sensibilities, yet that their lack of authority and power to make decisions resulted in women’s inability to change the system and inhibited their ability to speak out against it. Weiner finds that “plantation mistresses, facing the difficult daily realities of life on the plantation, were left with no room to maneuver.”<sup>39</sup> Consequently, “most kept their discomfort to themselves or articulated it in contradictory and ambivalent terms to female correspondents.”<sup>40</sup> Although most women were not in a position to challenge slavery overtly because such actions might have incurred the wrath of their husbands and their communities, Weiner believes that “some elite white women did make efforts to mediate some of the harshest aspects of slavery, to the best of their abilities given the circumstances of their lives.”<sup>41</sup>

Southern women’s positions on the issue of slavery were neither uniform nor simple. While most women who spoke publicly about slavery seem to have spoken out against it, that does not necessarily indicate that only women with more progressive views of the female role harbored antislavery feelings. The presence of doubt about slavery in the writings of women who made no attempt to pursue activities apart from the traditional female sphere or to influence public opinion clearly demonstrates that women’s discussion of slavery did not stem solely from

---

<sup>39</sup>Marli F. Weiner, “Mistresses, Morality, and the Dilemmas of Slaveholding: The Ideology and Behavior of Elite Antebellum Women,” in Patricia Morton, ed. *Discovering the Women in Slavery: Emancipating Perspectives on the American Past* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 294.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 290.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 281

new ideologies regarding female behavior. Although a broader perspective on women's role in the household and in public affairs may have provided a forum for some women to voice their opinions more freely, even some women who appear to have rejected the newer perspective commented on their dislike for the institution. A sampling of primary documents shows that a multitude of women from Virginia's slaveholding class voiced, either publicly or privately, disgust and disapproval over the South's peculiar institution. While their views fell far short of abolitionism, either overt or covert, the dissenting mistress was indeed a significant character in antebellum Virginia.

CHAPTER III  
VIRGINIA WOMEN'S VIEWS ON SLAVERY

Slavery was a source of grief for many of Virginia's women for a multitude of reasons. Virginia Cary, who wrote that women were subordinate and inferior to their husbands, also believed that "slavery is indeed a fearful evil; a canker in the bud of our national prosperity; a bitter drop in the cup of domestic felicity."<sup>42</sup> Cary's view that slavery was the origin of problems in the home and a curse for mistresses is a testament to Anne Firor Scott's theory about the trouble slavery caused for elite women. Cary expressed disdain for slaves not because of their status, but because of their ignorance. This type of condescension was not unusual; it is important to note that while many women condemned slavery, few if any were advocates for racial equality, and most did not believe that blacks' spiritual or intellectual potential was equal to whites'. Moreover, women's feelings about slavery traversed a wide spectrum of views, and slavery had outspoken advocates as well as critics.

One of the antebellum South's most outspoken women was Louisa McCord (1810-1879). In an essay published in 1851, McCord insisted that the African race was so inferior to whites that they were destined to become and remain slaves. Regarding the notion that all men should be free and equal, she stated, "No man is

---

<sup>42</sup>Cary, 172.

born free, and no two human beings, perhaps, were ever born equal.”<sup>43</sup> McCord, a South Carolinian and a friend of Mary Chesnut, stated in another essay that women were, by nature, consigned to a lower condition and status than men. The increasing attention to women’s rights and the popularization of feminist writers and figures like Judith Singer Sargent and Mary Wollstonecraft resulted, in McCord’s view, from the vanity of a few women who could not accept the reality of their low station. She felt that this failure to recognize a simple truth made these women appear silly; their attempts to draw attention to a subject that should not be an issue were degrading and humiliating. Stated succinctly, “Woman was made for duty, not for fame.”<sup>44</sup>

Louisa McCord’s views of slavery and the role of women in society coincide with prevailing generalizations that some historians offer regarding women’s lack of involvement in the world outside their household. Her views are consistent with Elizabeth Fox-Genovese’s argument that most southern women were in favor of slavery. Yet in Virginia, evidence exists that even in families where slavery was accepted as a fact of life, women were attuned to the welfare of slaves and confided criticisms of slavery to their friends and family. Their writings indicate that these behaviors went beyond mere affection for individual slaves and implied, if they did not overtly demonstrate, those women’s doubts about an institution that was the foundation of their lifestyle. The views of these Virginians are significant on several

---

<sup>43</sup>Louisa S. McCord, “Diversity of the Races: Its Bearing upon Negro Slavery,” in *Louisa S. McCord: Political and Social Essays*, ed. Richard C. Lounsbury (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia), 171. Originally published in the *Southern Quarterly Review*, April 1851.

<sup>44</sup>Louisa S. McCord, “Woman and her Needs,” in *Louisa S. McCord: Political and Social Essays*, 131. Originally published in *DeBow’s Review*, September 1852.

levels. They undermine the theories of historians who have generalized that white women accepted slavery. Moreover, the outspokenness of certain women who contested the limits of the private sphere and struggled to gain support for their cause clearly shows both the breakdown of traditional gender barriers and the difficulty nineteenth-century women had in ameliorating a situation that they perceived to be wrong.

Some women from the Virginia slaveowning class expressed the belief that slavery was wrong in their letters and memoirs. The reasons behind these sentiments were as diverse as the women themselves. While historians have tended to generalize about the motivations and rationale for women's views on slavery by stating that they were a product of either resentment, empathy, or religious fervor, an investigation of a sampling of papers of women from slaveholding families indicates that all of these factors played a part in women's feelings toward slavery. Women's opinions varied and were the results of personal responses to particular sets of circumstances; there appears to be no widespread ideology or theory that can be applied to their feelings. What is apparent is the presence of doubt in their minds about the legitimacy of and justifications for slavery and the diversity of those doubts. Concerns about slavery had permeated the consciousness of the planter class and had, in some women's minds, developed into almost omnipresent source of frustration.

Not all women responded to slavery with extreme emotion or verbosity. Many women wrote about slavery without ever mentioning the ideology that provided its basis. Nonetheless, such women's letters sometimes express concern

about the health and condition of the slaves in their lives. When writing to her daughter of a certain slave's illness, one woman lamented, "As for me, I have wept myself almost blind, and my heart feels too sad to do anything."<sup>45</sup> This type of attention to the health of favorite slaves was not at all unusual, nor was the sadness expressed by women who faced the sickness or loss of treasured servants.

Other women's writings contain what may be construed attempts to better the situations of slaves. For instance, in the 1820s, Elizabeth Cocke (1809-1849) of Prince George County corresponded with her half-brother, Edmund Ruffin, concerning the affairs of Ruffin's other half-sister, Julianna Dorsey. Cocke's correspondence with Ruffin exhibits her concern for the welfare of Dorsey's slaves, who had been sold to pay her husband's debts. Ruffin had purchased these slaves in order to keep the families together, an act that demonstrates his recognition of the humanity of slaves and the importance of their family unit. In response to Ruffin's dilemma about whether to resell the slaves, Cocke responded with uncertainty: "Poor creatures! I really think they ought to have a choice in the matter, in as much as their own individual happiness is concerned."<sup>46</sup> She feared that, if they were sold, they would not be close enough to see one another.

Cocke's concern becomes more interesting when placed in the context of her brother's beliefs. In 1853, Edmund Ruffin would publish "The Political Economy of Slavery," an essay that provided economic and moral justification for slavery. He was one of Virginia's first secessionists; in 1861 he was allowed to fire the first shot

---

<sup>45</sup>Mary Elmslie Garrigues Higginbotham to Ann E. Hoskins, 24 February 1836, Higginbotham Family Papers, VHS.

<sup>46</sup>Elizabeth Ruffin Cocke to Edmund Ruffin, n.d., Edmund Ruffin Papers, VHS.



at Fort Sumter. Ruffin was ardently devoted to the Confederacy and committed suicide when the South lost the Civil War. His act of purchasing his half-sister's slaves so that the families could remain together shows how southerners could both defend slavery and recognize the humanity of slaves, even in the same breath.

Despite Cocke's own concern for the slaves' preferences, she made it clear that she would submit to whatever decision Ruffin reached; her willingness to defer to her brother's judgment may have been either a spontaneous impulse or a tactical concession to men's superior power. In either case, Elizabeth Cocke's concern for the slaves reflects benevolence and a desire to ameliorate their condition, yet she accepted slavery, and perhaps even viewed concessions made for slaves' happiness partly as a means to ensure their obedience and productivity.

Betty Bassett (b. 1768) of Hanover County expressed a similar attitude to her son George in 1816. Betty's letter is filled with religious allusions, and in it she urged her son to "not let self interest induce you to break the golden rule of doing as you would be done by." She prescribed how one should care for and feed slaves and reminded her son not to "exact labor."<sup>47</sup> Her letter revealed her concern for her son's religious well being and was a reminder that slaves, too, were people and should be given enough to be comfortable. Although she clearly accepted slavery as a facet of her life and her son's, her emphasis on treating slaves humanely and her religious convictions exemplify the subtle and sometimes ameliorative influence that women had on slavery.

---

<sup>47</sup>Betty Carter Browne Bassett to George Washington Bassett, 26 May 1816, Bassett Family Papers, VHS.

Elizabeth Cocke and Betty Bassett's letters obviously do not contain any type of overt challenge to slavery. Their wish to improve the condition of the slaves or to ensure that they would be treated fairly was compatible with a desire to see that slaves would be obedient and submit to white authority. Still, benevolence toward slaves entailed an acknowledgment of their humanity and marked a step away from regarding slaves as mere chattel. Empathy for the condition of slaves was one point on the broad spectrum of opinions that white women expressed about slavery.

It was not uncommon in the early nineteenth century to emancipate slaves in a will. Through this practice, benevolent slaveowners could ease their consciences about owning slaves while still benefiting from their labor during their lifetimes. The selfish form these manumissions took does not negate the statement this action made about the injustice of bondage. Emancipation by will was even viewed by some as a step toward the gradual liberation of all slaves and reflected the disdainful feelings of some Virginians toward the institution of slavery.

In 1801 Judith Randolph (1772-1816) wrote of her frustration at not being able to free the slaves on her Prince Edward County plantation. Judith's husband, Richard, had written a will calling for all of the family's slaves to be emancipated as soon as possible after his death. The Randolph estate was seriously encumbered by debt when Richard inherited it; almost all the slaves were mortgaged, and as a result, could not legally be freed when he died in 1796, at the age of twenty-six, in spite of Richard's fervent desire to set them free.

Judith, distressed by these circumstances, wrote of the helplessness of her situation, which was "the effect of necessity, but never of choice." She was able to

emancipate a handful of slaves shortly after Richard's death, yet nonetheless found herself surrounded by slaves who had expected their freedom but did not receive it. Confronted with the slaves' lack of motivation to work, Judith was hard-pressed to find a solution to a situation for which she was sincerely sorry. She felt limited in her options, partly because of her "weak & womanish imagination,"<sup>48</sup> yet she was plagued by the complaints of the slaves, the burden of having been entrusted with her husband's ambitious plan, and the principles she held in common with Richard.<sup>49</sup>

It was not until 1810 that the Randolphs' mortgages were paid off and their slaves freed. The emancipated slaves, a total of close to 100 people, also received 400 acres of land, another provision in Richard's will. Although she had stated that the liberation of the slaves would not be at all regretted, Judith apparently did regret the loss of her personal servants, whose services she had never been without. When Richard's slaves had been liberated according to his wishes, Judith, unable to adjust to a lifestyle without servants, actually purchased several slaves for her own use. Despite this seemingly hypocritical act, Judith had worked for fifteen years in order to fulfill her husband's wishes, and she eventually succeeded in securing the freedom of a large number of slaves. This act was one of the boldest of its time and is a clear testimony to antislavery views in Virginia, which often lay dormant, but in this case were expressed with unprecedented fervor and dedication.<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup>Judith Randolph to St. George Tucker, 18 October 1801, Tucker-Coleman Collection, W&M.

<sup>49</sup>Melvin Patrick Ely, *Israel on the Appomattox: A Southern Experiment in Black Freedom, 1796-1870* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, forthcoming).

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*

An example of emancipation trends on a smaller scale can be seen in the actions of Jane Charlton of Williamsburg (d. 1802), who emancipated slaves in her will. Presumably, she found emancipation an easier task than Judith Randolph had. Charlton's will contained explicit instructions regarding the emancipation of her slaves. Originally from London, Charlton arrived in Williamsburg in the 1760s and established a millinery business. She and her husband Edward, whom she married several years after she arrived, operated successful businesses in Williamsburg. Upon her death in 1802, she had amassed considerable wealth. In her will she freed two slaves and provided for the care of two mulatto children until their freedom at the age of eighteen. When they reached that age, Charlton did not want them "sent out naked, penniless, and unprotected to an enfeebling world"; she expected them to receive money from her estate to aid their transition.<sup>51</sup>

More than half of Charlton's will concerns her wishes for the four servants and instructions to her executor regarding the fulfillment of her desires – a testimony not only to her own convictions but also to the esteem she felt for these four people. The actions of Judith Randolph and Jane Charlton exemplify the trend of emancipating slaves at the turn of the nineteenth century. Both these women demonstrated affection for their slaves, and their actions indicate a belief that slavery was an unenviable, even unjustifiable condition. The later writings of Betty Bassett, Elizabeth Cocke, and other women illustrate similar attention to the welfare of slaves and discomfiture with the dilemmas of a slaveholding society.

---

<sup>51</sup>Will of Jane Hunter Charlton, 21 April 1801, Robinson Family Papers, VHS. See also Eleanor Kelley Cabell, *Women and Merchants in Eighteenth Century Williamsburg* (Williamsburg,

Mary Braxton Randolph Carter (1800-1864) is an excellent example of private antislavery sentiment among the Virginia upper class. In the mid-nineteenth century, Mary's husband Hill was one of the wealthiest men in Virginia. Shirley, his enormous estate in Charles City County, was the home of more than one hundred slaves. Mary and Hill were cousins, from two of the state's most prominent families, who had made their sizable fortunes from slavery.

As an intensely religious woman who feared for the fate of her husband's irreligious soul, Mary Carter stated and restated her frustration with Hill's reluctance to pray and his ignorance of the sinfulness of his existence. After Hill recovered from a particularly difficult illness, Mary went so far as to say, "I feel that I would rather see him in that sick and humbled state, than restored to health and all his enmity to God and holy things."<sup>52</sup> She felt her situation at Shirley to be so desperate that several times during the next few years she would think about leaving, but she never did, for fear of appearing "an injured and abused wife."<sup>53</sup>

The record of Mary Carter's circumstances and feelings is found in the correspondence from her life that remains: letters to and from friends and family that depict not only mundane details about her life, but insights into the political and social climate of the time. Her views on education, like her disdain for her irreligious husband, fit the mold of the elite nineteenth-century woman, enlightened

---

Va.: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1988). The author finds that Jane's estate was valued at nearly \$7,000 (122).

<sup>52</sup>Mary Braxton Randolph Carter to Mildred Campbell Walker Moore, 28 October 1850, Charles Campbell Papers, W&M.

<sup>53</sup>Mary Braxton Randolph Carter to Mildred Campbell Walker Moore, 25 July 1853, Charles Campbell Papers, W&M.

by religion and seeking salvation and betterment. She expressed admiration for a female cousin, whose endeavors to open a school she hoped would “get plenty of scholars, and soon make enough to pay all your debts, so as to be a free woman.”<sup>54</sup>

Mary Carter’s views on slavery express similar ideals, which exemplify the frustration and disgust some southern women felt toward slavery:

Freely would I labor for my daily bread in preference to being the partner of one who owns 130 immortal beings. O! the responsibility weighs me down to the earth. I feel that my duties are so great and so imperfectly performed. O! I wonder how any one can approve of slavery, or not feel that in our enlightened age, it is a great sin, national and individual when it can be avoided and I do think it could be gotten rid of if all would unite hand and heart to do so.<sup>55</sup>

This passage reiterates the complicated nature of the relationship between plantation mistresses and slavery. Mary Carter felt that slavery was indeed a great burden to her and opposed it on that count, but she also expressed a humanitarianism that went beyond selfish concern about her own situation.

Carter’s antislavery view can be interpreted not only as an expression of religious and benevolent principle, but also as an expression of resentment of the subordinate situation in which she found herself, dependent on a husband she felt would have no salvation, and helpless to improve her situation through her own efforts. Her attempts to correct Hill’s irreligious ways seem to have had little effect,

---

<sup>54</sup>Mary Braxton Randolph Carter to Mildred Campbell Walker Moore, 12 March 1846, Charles Campbell Papers, W&M. Mary does not indicate in this letter whether her cousin will be teaching the school or simply organizing and supporting it.

<sup>55</sup>Mary Braxton Randolph Carter to Mildred Campbell Walker Moore, 10 March 1849, Charles Campbell Papers, W&M.

although he did promise to “pray to God and read the bible and pray to God to make me better and more worthy of my darling wife.”<sup>56</sup>

Promises like this apparently carried little weight. In November of 1848 Mary wrote to the Reverend Nicholas Okeson, asking his opinion about selling a female slave who had committed adultery. In January of 1849, Mary again solicited Okeson’s advice about the propriety of a woman separating from her husband because he had committed adultery. Whether or not these two incidents are related, is, of course, a matter of speculation. Her husband’s adultery, whether committed with a slave or not, is manifest in the record. Okeson stated Hill Carter’s offenses bluntly:

When your husband married you he obligated himself, as solemnly as it is possible to obligate man, to forsake all others and to keep himself only unto thee so long as ye both should live. This condition of the marriage contract he has not fulfilled. He has violated the law of chastity . . . and he stands before God with the dark and damnable stain of perjury upon him. Hence, it is your privilege and perhaps your duty to separate from him.<sup>57</sup>

This revelation is not surprising when Hill’s own correspondence with his wife years earlier had confessed his feelings for other women with whom he was “desperately in love.”<sup>58</sup> Sexual double standards in the South continued through the antebellum period. In later years, Mary Chesnut would remark, “Every lady tells you who is the father of all the mulatto children in everybody’s household, but those

---

<sup>56</sup>Hill Carter to Mary Braxton Randolph Carter, 7 July 1848, Shirley Plantation Collection, CW.

<sup>57</sup>Rev. Nicholas Albertson Okeson to Mary Braxton Randolph Carter, 30 Jan 1849, Shirley Plantation Collection, CW.

<sup>58</sup>Hill Carter to Mary Braxton Randolph Carter, 28 October 1832, Shirley Plantation Collection, CW.

in her own she seems to think drop from a cloud, or pretends to think so.”<sup>59</sup> The very presence of mulattoes in the South attests to the prevalence of sexual relations between white men and slaves, a phenomenon that was no doubt extremely upsetting to wives of these men.

Mary Carter’s frustration with her husband’s sexual misconduct no doubt contributed greatly to the resentment and bitterness she expressed toward him. Her feelings toward slavery seem to have stemmed partly from the frustration she found in her own situation. Women were expected to maintain sexual purity at all costs. Because they were considered to be more moral than men by nature, it was also their responsibility to exert a moral influence on their husbands and sons, a situation which inherently placed blame for male promiscuity partly on women.<sup>60</sup> Mary was obviously upset and disappointed by her husband’s attitude and actions toward her; in 1854 she stated, “With all his sin his manner to me is as if I was the sinning one and he the injured innocence . . . Help me to pray that my feelings to him may not be anything but Christian.”<sup>61</sup>

The situation of the Carters represents many trends that were occurring in Virginia during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Letters like those in which Mary voiced her opinions were common outlets for women to express their ideas and concerns, and the religious content of Mary’s letters demonstrates the influence of the revivals that were common across the nation at the time. Her

---

<sup>59</sup>Woodward, 29.

<sup>60</sup>Weiner 286, Mathews 184, and portions of Fox-Genovese’s work all discuss sexual exploitation of slave women by masters and licentiousness among white men in general.

<sup>61</sup>Mary Braxton Randolph Carter to Mildred Campbell Walker Moore, 1 February 1854, Charles Campbell Collection, W&M.



husband's lack of participation in religious life is characteristic of many men's resistance to the effects of the Second Great Awakening. Mary's desire to see her cousin's school succeed so that she could become a "free woman" may suggest some women's desire to become more educated and less dependent on the patriarchal system that subordinated them in so many ways. And perhaps most telling of all is Mary's disgust with her husband, resulting from his lack of religion, his adultery, and the slave system that gave him his power—including, perhaps, the opportunity to commit that adultery.<sup>62</sup>

Mary Carter's older sister, Landonia Randolph (1798-1863), also appears to have had strong views about slavery and a progressive outlook on education. Expressing her feelings regarding the education of women, she declared, "How delightful, and how to be sought after, are the advantages of education!" Randolph went on to state that parents should be "gratifying themselves for the education of their children" instead of being "so engrossed in household matters."<sup>63</sup>

Randolph, who never married, made her home in Fauquier County. She traveled extensively throughout Virginia, however, usually staying with friends and relatives. In the 1850s she became involved in a lawsuit regarding the ownership of a slave, Sarah Ann, and her family, whom she gave as a gift to Nancy and Ann Kincaid. Randolph gave these slaves to the Kincaids and their family under the condition that, upon Nancy's death, the slaves and their progeny would be

---

<sup>62</sup>For discussions of plantation women and sexuality, see Anne Firor Scott's "Women's Perspective on the Patriarchy in the 1850s," in *Half Sisters of History: Southern Women and the American Past*, ed. Catherine Clinton. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994), 76-92, and also Scott's *The Southern Lady*, 52-58.

emancipated so that they might move to Africa if they wished. After giving the slaves to Nancy, Randolph became fearful that the laws were written in such a way that the slaves could be retained by the Kincaid family, if they wished to keep them, and would never be emancipated. Randolph asked for the return of the slaves, which was refused, and she even offered to purchase the slaves from Nancy for \$1200, a proposal that was also turned down.

A lengthy battle over the ownership of the slaves in question took place, a situation which undoubtedly ruined the relationship between these women, who seem to have been good friends. In a letter to her attorney, Randolph insisted that “the gift of the servants, certainly amounted to nothing more than a loan during the lives of the Miss K<sup>s</sup> on the condition that they should be free at their death.”<sup>64</sup> Although Nancy stated that she was “as much disposed as you [Randolph] are though not to the same ability, to promote the benevolent cause of emancipating, and the relief of the coloured population of this state from the condition of slavery,”<sup>65</sup> Randolph apparently had little faith in Nancy’s word and did not feel that Nancy’s heirs could be relied upon to emancipate Sarah Ann and her family. Randolph was so adamant about giving these slaves their freedom that she sued the Kincaids for ownership and breach of a verbal agreement; when she won the case, the Kincaids

---

<sup>63</sup>Landonia J. Randolph to Mary Braxton Randolph Carter, 25 April 1828, Randolph Family Papers, VHS.

<sup>64</sup>Landonia J. Randolph to John Thompson, 13 May 1854, Shirley Plantation Collection, CW.

<sup>65</sup>Nancy Kincaid to Landonia J. Randolph, 19 November 1853, Shirley Plantation Collection, CW.

appealed. Randolph was relentless in her pursuit of the slaves' freedom, and the lawsuit carried on for seven years, until the brink of the Civil War.<sup>66</sup>

The source of Landonia Randolph's feelings about slavery cannot be ascertained from the letters and papers that exist, but it is very likely Sarah Ann was one of her favorite servants and that she took legal action to regain ownership as a result of personal affection for her. Although Landonia Randolph and Mary Carter were sisters, their attitudes toward slavery and especially their actions regarding slaves coincided only in part. Carter's resentment appears to have resulted from her husband's infidelity, and she kept her feelings confined to her close friends. In contrast, Randolph's feelings about slavery and the right of Sarah Ann and her family to go to Liberia, if they wished, were publicly displayed in a court of law and appear to have resulted from active benevolence and affection toward her former servant's family.

The system of slavery provided numerous other motivations for women to dislike it, aside from resentment of masters' exploitative relations with slaves and women's feelings of benevolence and affection for particular servants. Some women believed, like Judith and Richard Randolph, that slavery was, at its core, an evil and oppressive institution with dire consequences for both the enslaved and the enslavers. One interesting example of this type of thought is the memoir of Nancy Hall (1792-1850), daughter of a Presbyterian minister in Bedford County. In 1844 Hall wrote "The Imaginationist or Recollections of an Old Lady"; this was a supposedly anonymous work, yet she left numerous clues to her identity. Hall and

---

<sup>66</sup>For more information about the lawsuit, including a transcript of the appeal, see Shirley Plantation Collection, CW.

her second husband moved to Ohio in about 1830, and her memoir reflects her perspective on life in both a slave state and a free state.

Hall's father owned a handful of slaves, but she was opposed to slavery from a very early age. She did not openly declare her feelings, yet her views on slavery were quite strong:

All men (I thought) 'were born free and equal:' and for one man to hold his fellow man, in hopeless, interminable bondage (if in his power to improve his situation) is in my view a sin calculated to call down the vengeance of Heaven.<sup>67</sup>

She recalled seeing a slave punished when she was a child and stated that she "felt even then that it was wrong for one man so to overpower & oppress another" and resolved that she never wanted to own slaves.<sup>68</sup>

Hall indicated that her father was also concerned about the institution of slavery, and her remarks imply that he did his best to treat his slaves with as much sympathy as he could. She believed that her father's uneasiness about slavery was knowing that other slaves were mistreated, yet being powerless to correct such a situation.<sup>69</sup> Hall's move to Ohio later in her life would allow her to forgo the emotional burden of having slaves, which she regarded as a physically daunting task as well. Of her differing experience in free and slave states, she wrote

housekeeping operations are carried on with more difficulty and involve much more labour where I was raised than in free states. There are thousands & millions of slaves there, and they must be employed; it is only to keep the poor souls out of mischief, and

---

<sup>67</sup>Nancy Johns Turner Hall, "The Imaginationist or Recollections of an Old Lady, a native of one of the Southern States, now a resident of the State of Ohio in the year 1844," VHS, typescript, 35.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 38.

therefore there is very little pains taken to save labor. One woman here, manages to get along with what it takes four or five to do there.<sup>70</sup>

It is impossible to gauge the accuracy of Nancy Hall's memoir with any certainty, although she insists that it is true to the best of her recollection. One wonders whether she attempted to make her views conform to those that prevailed in her new home. Still, the identity of the author was only discovered by archivists long after her death; the anonymity of her journal's authorship and its lack of publication would have made her feel at ease to speak her mind and tell the truth. She was an independent woman; she married twice, neither marriage lasted more than two years, and she enjoyed being unattached. She believed that marriage should be reserved for those truly in love, she prized education, and she relied on prayer for her peace of mind. She worried that her feelings about slavery would be an impediment if she desired to marry for a third time; perhaps she felt that her sentiments were shared only by a small minority. Her writings about slavery manifest her strong convictions and her unwillingness to repudiate them. Despite her upbringing in a home that relied on slave labor and her own family's seemingly kind treatment of their slaves, Hall's belief that slavery was inherently wrong grew stronger through the years.

While Nancy Hall's opinion of slavery was the same regardless of how well or how poorly masters treated their slaves, the letters of Emily Howe (1812-1883) reveal how the specific treatment of slaves could affect the perceptions of slavery's legitimacy among whites who were exposed to it. In 1836 Emily Howe moved from Princeton, Massachusetts, to Prince Edward County, Virginia, in order to gain

---

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 35.

employment as a teacher. Her upbringing in the North appears to have taught her that slavery was a terrible condition, but in 1836, she wrote a letter to her mother that showed a clear shift in her opinion:

My views of slavery have altered somewhat since living among them. There [sic] condition is in many respects better than I expected and if slavery existed everywhere as in Mr. Dance's<sup>71</sup> family and in some others that I know it would not be so much of a curse as many people imagine, the slaves are not all afraid of being sold in this family as it is against the rule of the Methodist church to sell them and they are well fed clothed and don't work hard at all, go to meetings when they choose.<sup>72</sup>

Emily repeatedly wrote home about her life in Virginia, and her letters reflected her growing belief that the South was largely misunderstood by the North; she found it “astonishing that the people of the North have no more correct ideas of slavery as it exists here.”<sup>73</sup> In 1838, she married Colonel Asa Dupuy, a county representative in the state legislature and a man of considerable wealth. At the time that Asa and Emily were married, at least thirty slaves lived and worked at Linden, the Dupuys' plantation. In just two years, Emily had gone from being a New England schoolteacher to a plantation mistress.

Emily justified slavery on the Dupuy plantation by stating that some slaves could read and that others prayed often and were very religious. She wrote to her family in Massachusetts that when slaves were to be sold, they were often consulted

---

<sup>71</sup>Reverend Matthew Mays Dance owned the plantation where Emily lived and worked.

<sup>72</sup>Emily Howe to Sarah Lucinda Brooks Howe, 1-10 December 1836, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

<sup>73</sup>Emily Howe to Sarah Lucinda Brooks Howe, 15 December 1837, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

about whom they would like to have for a master.<sup>74</sup> In addition to these privileges that were tendered to the Dupuy slaves, she felt that, contrary to common thought in the North, “the Christian master is trying by every means in his power to ameliorate the condition of his servants here and also to prepare them for happiness hereafter.” Although she acknowledged that there were “some very licentious, bad men in Va.,” the slaveowners she knew treated slaves kindly.<sup>75</sup>

Emily’s views are reminders that, while some southern evangelicals and northern abolitionists used religion to discredit slavery, religious arguments were often used to defend the institution. Evangelical religion emphasized the personal experience of salvation, and historian John Boles found that “the southern evangelical had so developed his individual emphasis that he often failed to see slavery as an abstract evil”<sup>76</sup>: the saving of the individual slave’s soul and that of his or her master, and the exercise of “Christian stewardship” over one’s slaves, superseded the earlier idea that the institution itself offended Christian ethics. This interpretation applies also to Emily Howe Dupuy, who judged slavery by the examples of it that were nearest her. By focusing on the slaves she knew, whom she considered well treated, she was able to rationalize the existence of slavery.

Emily indicated that the slaves on the Dupuy plantation had a relative degree of autonomy. They were allowed to grow their own crops to sell, and slaves who chose to work on holidays were paid for it. They were also granted plots of land to

---

<sup>74</sup>Emily Howe Dupuy to Sarah Lucinda Brooks Howe, 20 March 1838, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

<sup>75</sup>Emily Howe Dupuy to Sarah Lucinda Brooks Howe, 9 February 1838, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

<sup>76</sup>Boles, 194.

grow food for their own use. Emily insisted that her husband was very much attuned to their needs and frequently solicited requests from them.<sup>77</sup> In fact, Asa Dupuy was indeed a relatively benevolent master; a large family of free blacks resided on his property and on nearby land. Asa's uncle, General John Purnall, from whom he had inherited Linden, had sold this land to the blacks; they lived there undisturbed during Emily's tenure as plantation mistress, frequently trading with the Dupuys and intermarrying with their bondpeople in at least one instance. The Dupuys, in their own records, recognized the surnames of a number of their slaves, a practice which, though not unheard of elsewhere in the county, set them apart from their slaveowning neighbors.<sup>78</sup>

Emily's letters demonstrate that she accepted slavery as an important part of her life in the South, and that, because of the kindness and privileges extended to slaves by both her husband and her former employer, she came to view slavery as a legitimate labor system that was grossly misrepresented in the North. Her letters also indicate an interest in politics and reflect the way abolitionism was perceived in the South.<sup>79</sup> She voiced an urge to return home for a visit, but was afraid "the Abolition excitement has been so great . . . [that] Mr. Dupuy might be subjected to

---

<sup>77</sup>See Emily Howe Dupuy to Sarah Lucinda Brooks Howe, 22 October 1838, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

<sup>78</sup>See Ely for more information about the relationships between blacks and whites at Linden.

<sup>79</sup>For some of Emily's references to politics and events, see her letter to Sarah Lucinda Brooks Howe, 1-10 December 1836, and letters to Sarah Howe Skinner, 15 August 1840. Another letter, dated 28 October 1840, contains political observations that are fairly typical of her correspondence. In this letter she describes a politician's visit to the Dupuys' plantation. Abolitionism, a subject that figures rather prominently in many of Emily's letters, was said by this visitor to be less common than supposed, even among Whigs. Emily went on to comment that in neighboring counties, the political parties were nearly split, the Democrats having a slight advantage. Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.



many unpleasant remarks.”<sup>80</sup> It is clear that she was defensive about slaveholding and realized that her friends and relatives in Massachusetts might not be sympathetic to her new position.

Emily’s fears about her family’s response were well-founded. Her older sister Anna Howe (1808-1900) had arrived in Cumberland County, Virginia, in 1834 to work as a teacher, and it was she who obtained employment for Emily and catalyzed her move to the South. Anna’s reaction to living in a slave society for the first time was quite different from the response Emily would evince just two years later. In 1835, Anna wrote home to Emily and offered her opinion on the condition of the slaves near her southern home:

In the miserable bondage in which they are held, my heart bleeds for them. They must labour from morning till night, through heat and cold, wet and dry to enrich they masters and enable them to live in affluence, while they are but scantily supplied with food, have no beds to rest upon, but lie upon the ground floor of their cabins with but a single blanket to cover them even in the severity of winter, they must be separated parents from children, husbands from wives to go they know not where, with the most distant opportunity of ever seeing their friends again.

Anna viewed slavery as a great sin and stated that those who owned slaves would have to reconcile with God in the hereafter. Appalled at the licentiousness she saw all around her, she wrote Emily, “You have no idea to what extent vice prevails.”<sup>81</sup>

Anna was not entirely sympathetic to the abolitionist cause; she considered it impractical to free slaves without properly training them to live as free people, and she also did not advocate the general intermingling of the races. Nevertheless, she

---

<sup>80</sup>Emily Howe Dupuy to Sarah Howe Skinner, 15 August 1840, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

<sup>81</sup>Anna Howe to Emily Howe, 10 May 1835, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

strongly believed that slavery was immoral and stated that, although she was not sorry she had come to the South, she did not intend to remain long enough to “lose all moral sensibilities.”<sup>82</sup>

Although Anna repeatedly expressed a desire to return home, circumstances never worked to her advantage. She stayed in Virginia to earn money for a few years, and married the Reverend Henry Whitteker in 1841. They lived in Ohio briefly, and he died just a few years after they married. Anna had returned to Virginia, perhaps to be near her sister and other acquaintances while still earning a living, when her ailing mother came for a visit. The latter’s frail health compelled Anna to refrain from long journeys, and so it was not until 1863 that Anna managed to return to Massachusetts. Despite the long period of time that she remained in Virginia, her perceptions of the South and of slavery did not change. The upper classes, she found, were exceedingly lazy. In a letter to her sister Sarah in 1840, Anna mentioned that she “heard it remarked by a gentleman not long ago, that two thirds of the white people here were doing nothing for a living.” She found it appalling that whites made their living from the labor of slaves, and asserted that even during hard times, “many of the people seem as extravagant as ever, and indulge in ease luxury and idleness.”<sup>83</sup> She corroborated Emily’s anxiety at traveling North with her slaveholding husband and felt that Emily “would be taken

---

<sup>82</sup>Anna Howe to Emily Howe, 23 August 1835, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

<sup>83</sup>Anna Howe to Sarah Howe Skinner, 22 May 1840, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

to account so strictly, (by her friends and acquaintances who are abolitionists) for marrying a slaveholder, that it would spoil her visit.”<sup>84</sup>

Anna found some solace in establishing a school for blacks, who she thought “learn much easier than white folks.” Her views on slavery had not changed since her arrival in the South, but she was aghast that a friend from home had published one of her letters in “The Emancipator.” She worried that if this became known it would tarnish her reputation and harm her influence with her pupils.<sup>85</sup>

Anna’s letters reflect a growing sense of isolation and loneliness as the years passed and the war drew nearer. She felt that she could not express her views to anyone, even Emily, who lived just a short distance away, because the sisters differed on the issues of secession and slavery. Unable to leave the South until 1863, she felt “confined in a prison” with no sympathetic ear to listen to her. She was distressed by her inability to read news from the North and found it hard to send letters to her kin there.<sup>86</sup> Her growing sense of fear caused her to limit her communications with neighbors, thereby contributing to her isolation; she felt it necessary to keep her strong Union sympathies to herself. Her concern arose partly because she was a woman and it would be improper of her to take a stand on political issues, but she was also certain that even if she “was a man, and expressed

---

<sup>84</sup>Anna Howe to Sarah Howe Skinner, 22 May 1840, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

<sup>85</sup>Anna Howe Whitteker to Sarah Howe Skinner, 8 November 1847, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

<sup>86</sup>Anna Howe Whitteker to Sarah Ann Skinner, 12 February 1861, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

such sentiments, [she] should expect to be driven away.”<sup>87</sup> Despite her trials, Anna did not lose her sense of humor. In a letter to her niece, she asked for some materials for sewing: “We shall all need something to wear, if these Disunited States stand the shock of Mr. Lincoln’s inauguration.”<sup>88</sup>

It is difficult to understand how Anna and Emily Howe would arrive at such different conclusions about slavery and life in the South. Since even their first impressions of Virginia were different, it is logical to conclude that the conditions Anna noted on the Cumberland County plantation where she taught were considerably different from those that Emily encountered in Prince Edward County. Emily seemed to acclimate herself to life in the South very rapidly, and it appears that she adopted the region’s culture completely, while Anna grew frustrated over many years when she wanted to leave the South, but could not. Her disdain not only for the institution of slavery, but also for the elite class of southerners that benefited from it, is apparent, and her flagging correspondence with Emily indicates that the two had grown apart considerably. The situation of these two women, from the very same background and the same beginnings, illustrates the extent to which opinions regarding slavery could be personal and not reflective of any widespread ideology. That Anna and Emily witnessed versions of slavery that seemed to differ greatly in terms of humanity and kindness likewise demonstrates the diverse faces that slavery presented within the South and to the outside world. Emily’s experience in the South changed her opinion about slavery, while Anna’s experience not only

---

<sup>87</sup>Anna Howe Whitteker to Alicia Boylston, 10 August 1861, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

reinforced her opinion, but also added a new dimension of resentment and contempt for the class of people who benefited from slave labor.

Anna Howe Whitteker combined her sympathy for slaves with condescension toward blacks and a fear of racial amalgamation; that combination of beliefs coincides with the feelings of Louisa Maxwell Cocke (1788-1843), who, unlike Whitteker and Emily Dupuy, was a native of Virginia. Like those of so many other women of her generation, Cocke's worldview was largely the product of evangelical ideals. Her family had close ties to the Reverend John Holt Rice, theologian and founder of Union Theological Seminary in Richmond; Rice was a critic of slavery whose mother-in-law, and ultimately his widow, manumitted slaves. Louisa Cocke did not want to be part of a slaveholding household and was distressed that the plantation her husband owned in Fluvanna County was the home of more than one hundred slaves. In her diary, she confided, "I cannot express the pain I feel at being in any way concerned with this species of property, & most joyfully would I adopt any plan that might even lessen the evil."<sup>89</sup> Though she disliked slavery, she felt that blacks were inferior and lamented, "How rarely are any to be found in whom confidence may be placed."<sup>90</sup>

Louisa's husband, John Hartwell Cocke, shared her distaste for slavery and wanted to emancipate his slaves before his death. Aware of the discrimination that faced free blacks and the limited opportunities they would have, John vigorously

---

<sup>88</sup>Anna Howe Whitteker to Sarah Ann Skinner, 19 January 1861, Emily Howe Dupuy Papers, VHS.

<sup>89</sup>Louisa Maxwell Cocke diary, 13 September 1827, as quoted in Louis B. Gimelli, "Louisa Maxwell Cocke: An Evangelical Plantation Mistress in the Antebellum South." *Journal of the Early Republic* 9(1) (1989): 64.

supported colonization and kept his slaves until he was able to include them in the colonization process. Certain that emigration to Liberia necessitated strong morals and the ability to provide for oneself, the Cockes established a school for their slaves so that they could be instructed in these virtues. Louisa helped to instruct them, especially in religion, and in 1833, the Cockes emancipated eight of their slaves and sent them to Liberia, the first of several groups of the Cockes' manumitted slaves who would make the journey.<sup>91</sup>

Louisa Cocke's efforts to ameliorate the condition of the slaves and prepare them for eventual emigration to Liberia, though founded on her religious beliefs, acquainted her well with another objection to slavery: that it was inconvenient. Louisa's constant concern for the spiritual and physical well being of the slaves, condescending though it might have been, was a source of hard work and fatigue, not to mention financial stress, for both her and her husband. Louisa's dedication to the cause of emancipation and colonization, as well as her religious devotion, is evident in her diary:

Alas! What an unfailing source of sorrow does this unhappy race prove to us! We are daily punished for our sins against them here & shall we not have to render an account hereafter for our injustice to them? I am filled with anxious solitude whenever I think on the subject-- & pray that my God would enlighten me & shew me the path of duty -- & enable me to be faithful in the discharge of it to these unfortunate people.<sup>92</sup>

Louisa Cocke came from a religious family and was actively involved in the religious education of the slaves on the Cocke plantation; she and her husband were

---

<sup>90</sup>Louisa Maxwell Cocke diary, 1 March 1832, as quoted in Gimelli, 63.

<sup>91</sup>For additional information about the Cockes' slaves in Liberia, see Bell I. Wiley, *Slaves No More: Letters from Liberia, 1833-1869* (Louisville: University Press of Kentucky, 1980), 33-99.

in agreement regarding the issue of slavery. There were other white southern women, however, whose husbands did not share their views on slavery. Some of these women nevertheless became vocal activists for a cause they took very seriously, finding in their evangelical religion an outlet for a variety of public activities that openly proclaimed their distaste for slavery.

---

<sup>92</sup>Louisa Maxwell Cocke diary, 27 January 1825, quoted in Coyner, 313.

## CHAPTER IV

### WOMEN AND SLAVERY IN VIRGINIA'S PUBLIC ARENA

In the mid-nineteenth century, women throughout Virginia began organizing societies and schools that enabled them to express their views in a more open manner. Female religious societies became more popular, and the establishment of Sunday schools gave white women an opportunity to educate free and enslaved blacks. This type of activity provoked suspicion that the ways of northern abolitionism were infiltrating society; general anxiety, as well as the Nat Turner slave rebellion of 1831, led the Virginia legislature to pass a law that year which made it a crime for blacks to gather in order to learn how to read and write. Some white women, though, were not so easily discouraged and continued to organize and operate schools in the face of many obstacles, including the opposition of their husbands.

Not all women chose to take an active role in public affairs or extend their influence beyond the borders of their households. Nevertheless, women were far from being politically ignorant and took an interest in political matters. Although they were not permitted to vote, women expressed opinions of their own about current events and elections. During the course of his research, Eugene Genovese has found a multitude of southern women “who acted as trusted advisers and



confidantes to politicians.”<sup>93</sup> References to politics and public affairs appear frequently in the letters of many women. Mary Elmslie Higginbotham (d. 1872) of Albemarle County, anxious about the results of an upcoming election, wrote her daughter that she was concerned as to whether “an abolition or anti-abolition man is elected.”<sup>94</sup> Another woman’s correspondence shows excitement and interest in politics:

very probably you have heard of the election of Mr. Polk, and are rejoicing over it – “Am I not happy? – I am, I am!!!”... There may be some who would laugh at a lady for taking so much interest in politics, but while I think it very improper, and disgusting, for a lady to take an active part in politics, I think every lady should understand the government under which she lives, and take an interest in everything that concerns it, and on a proper occasion, ladies may express their opinions on the subject – I’m sure you agree with me.<sup>95</sup>

Women’s traditional place in southern society provided an excellent opportunity for observation, and many did not hesitate to comment on the state of affairs, even if only to other women. These observations were often intermingled with other news regarding health, visits, and local gossip. In the midst of inquiring about a neighbor’s health and a friend’s wedding, Mary Ann Randolph Custis Lee (1806-1873), a native of Arlington and the wife of Robert E. Lee, casually

---

<sup>93</sup>Eugene D. Genovese, “‘Our Family White and Black’: Family and Household in the Southern Slaveholders’ World View,” in Carol Bleser, ed. *In Joy and In Sorrow: Women, Family and Marriage in the Victorian South, 1830-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 129.

<sup>94</sup>Mary Elmslie Garrigues Higginbotham to Ann Estelle Higginbotham Hoskins, 31 March 1832, Higginbotham Family Papers, VHS. Higginbotham did not say which candidate she favored.

<sup>95</sup>Mildred (unidentified) to Eliza Lewis Holladay, 11 November 1844, Holladay Family Papers, VHS.

mentioned to her mother that the “Colonization cause seems to be again interesting the public minds.”<sup>96</sup>

Colonization blended the religious activism that many southern women embraced with a political agenda based on gradual emancipation. It provided a forum for women who espoused antislavery viewpoints to become active participants in a cause that did not bear the taint from which abolitionism suffered in the minds of white southerners. Many women, perhaps inspired by both the antislavery cause and the newer, broader women’s role that some trendsetters had adopted, found an outlet for their voices in the American Colonization Society. The ACS was founded in 1816 to help send free blacks to Africa. Although the officers and chief members of the society were men, women played an active role in the ACS, and their participation was both valued and encouraged by male leaders. Although most who participated in the ACS believed that they had the best interests of American blacks in mind, the notion of Christianizing Africa also appealed to the nineteenth-century evangelical impulse. Colonization also implied condescension and racism in some cases; the prospect of sending free blacks to Liberia appealed to members who felt that blacks and whites should not mix.

Mary Blackford (1802-1896), an Episcopalian from Fredericksburg, was a prominent member of the ACS and was perhaps the best-known female involved with the colonization movement. Blackford’s husband was also pro-colonization, but the difference in their views highlights not only the differing ideologies that colonization encompassed, but also the new gender relationships that were emerging

---

<sup>96</sup>Mary Ann Randolph Custis Lee to Mary Lee Fitzhugh Custis, n.d., n.p., George Lee Bolling Papers, VHS.

at the time. William Blackford was proslavery and advocated colonization as a means to expel the existing free black population; Mary felt that colonization was an important step toward gradual emancipation of all slaves. Mary's family evidently had a history of benevolence toward slaves and opposition to slavery; according to her grandson, Mary's parents were in favor of colonization and emancipated several of their slaves so that they could go to Liberia.<sup>97</sup>

Despite her disagreement with her husband about the validity of slavery, Mary was highly effective in her role in the ACS. In 1829 she formed the Fredericksburg and Falmouth Female Auxiliary to the ACS, a society that distributed literature and was the most active of its kind in Virginia. Mary received many visitors and made many calls to her neighbors in Fredericksburg. Mary Carter Wellford Carmichael wrote her sister Jane Corbin in 1833, noting the activities of Blackford and the Colonization Society:

Mrs. Blackford has been to see me lately to endeavor to interest me in the Colonization Society . . . I am very anxious that something should be done in its behalf in your neighborhood, and though I do not think it would answer immediately after forming a Tract Society to propose this, yet you know there is a great deal of prejudice to subdue, and ignorance to enlighten on the subject, which may prepare the way for it.<sup>98</sup>

Despite the high profile and public nature of these activities, the society's usage of fairs and its distribution of tracts were tools that were well within the female sphere of benevolent influence.<sup>99</sup>

---

<sup>97</sup>L. Minor Blackford, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: The Story of a Virginia Lady* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954), 29-34.

<sup>98</sup>Mary Carter Wellford Carmichael to Jane Catherine Wellford Corbin, 18 February 1833, Mary Carter Wellford Carmichael Letters, VHS.

<sup>99</sup>Varon, 46.

Others engaged in similar activities. Ann Randolph Meade Page (1781-1836) was an Episcopalian originally from Chatham, in Southside Virginia. Upon her marriage to a large landowner and slaveholder in 1799, she moved to Frederick County, northern Virginia, where she became the mistress of a large plantation with nearly 100 slaves. As a young married woman at the peak of the Second Great Awakening, Page underwent a change in outlook that made her feel guilty about reaping the benefits of a slave society when the slaves themselves had so little. She became interested and involved in the doings of the ACS from its conception onward. Her husband Matthew did not fully concur with her views about colonization, but was “a kind and indulgent husband, and had afforded her many opportunities for doing what she conceived to be her duty.”<sup>100</sup>

Ann Page felt that this duty included the education and preparation of her and her husband’s slaves for emigration to the ACS colony in Liberia. To aid her in pursuing this goal, she established a school for her young slaves and also provided religious instruction for all of them. She prayed frequently, and was not afraid to make her opinions about the evils of slavery known, as shown in a letter to an overseer, which warned him, “It is an awful trust before God, to rule over slaves. I feel that I shall have to render strict account for all that I do, or fail to do, with regard to them. You have the same to answer for.”<sup>101</sup> In Ann’s eyes, slavery was the work of the devil and needed to be remedied as soon as possible. She was sincerely concerned for the welfare of her slaves and expressed a great deal of sympathy for

---

<sup>100</sup>Andrews, 41.

<sup>101</sup>*Ibid.*, 32.

their condition; she wrote that “the anxiety for the poor Creatures themselves, to be delivered from the indescribable state of subjection to deceit and lies, roguery and idleness and filth and all manner of sin, they live in, is a most stressing case.”<sup>102</sup>

Intent on treating her slaves as well as possible and educating them to the best of her ability, she often recalled her mother’s thoughts on the subject: “Your guests see your well-spread table, but God sees in the negro’s cabin.”<sup>103</sup>

The death of her husband in 1826 allowed Ann greater freedom to carry out her plans for colonizing her slaves. Freedom for blacks in America, she wrote, was “a sorry state full of evil.”<sup>104</sup> According to Virginia law, emancipated slaves were not allowed to remain in the state for more than one year, which made colonization in Liberia seem to Ann the best option. Her situation was complicated, however, when it became clear that she would be unable to pay a large debt owed by the estate. Failure to remit the debt led authorities to auction a large number of the slaves whom she was preparing for colonization. Though disheartened by this misfortune, Ann found some consolation in the fact that none of the slaves were sold further south and that many remained near her home.<sup>105</sup>

Ann Page did manage to send at least twenty of her slaves to Liberia. With them, she sent provisions to help them establish themselves and to ensure their survival for at least a year, until they became able to procure their own means of

---

<sup>102</sup>Ann Randolph Meade Page to Mary Lee Fitzhugh Custis, n.d., n.p., Mary Lee Fitzhugh Custis Papers, VHS.

<sup>103</sup>Andrews, 27.

<sup>104</sup>Ann Randolph Meade Page to Mary Lee Fitzhugh Custis, n.d., n.p. Mary Lee Fitzhugh Custis Papers, VHS.

<sup>105</sup>Andrews, 44-45.

living. She sent the first group in 1832, with two more groups following before her death in 1836.<sup>106</sup> These groups of emancipated slaves represented Ann's ideal – that emancipated American blacks might evangelize Africa. She expressed this sentiment in a letter to her fellow colonizationist, Mary Lee Fitzhugh Custis: “O to see western Africa seasoned with divine salt, from American Christians! O to send our best-trained servants to lay the foundation! This, this is what my Soul longs for.”<sup>107</sup>

Mary Lee Fitzhugh Custis (1788-1853) of Arlington was involved with the ACS in northern Virginia. Constantly apprised of the views and projects of the ACS, she and Ann Page were in frequent contact about schools for blacks and the activities of the ACS leadership. Mary's husband was George Washington Parke Custis, stepson of George Washington. Washington's own will emancipated all of his slaves on the death of his widow, and in fact they were manumitted before she died; it seems that ameliorating slavery came to be a family tradition that Mary passed along to her daughter, Mary Custis Lee, wife of Robert E. Lee. Mary Custis, Ann Page, and Page's brother William, a minister, were depended upon by many to aid efforts at colonization and emancipation. One example is the will of Susan Meade (b.1788), who died in 1823. In 1830, Page sent Custis a copy of Meade's will, which provided the three of them with a weighty responsibility in the management of Meade's estate:

Into the hands of the Rev. William Meade, Mrs. Ann R. Page and Mrs. Mary L. Custis, I leave the money now in bonds . . . to apply as may seem best to them, to any charitable or benevolent Institutions. I would name the “Colonization Society for the free People of Colour in Africa” as being an

---

<sup>106</sup>*Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>107</sup>Ann Randolph Meade Page to Mary Lee Fitzhugh Custis, n.d, n.p. Mary Lee Fitzhugh Custis Papers, VHS.

object best worthy of succour as it embraces two objects of dearest importance to mortal and immortal creatures – both temporal and eternal freedom, in dawning of this long injured people, and we who have lived by the sweat of their brow should thank God for the honour and priviledge of seeing this day.

Meade's will also emancipated three of her slaves and asked William, Ann, and Mary to purchase the husband of one of them; if they proved worthy candidates, Meade wanted these blacks sent to Liberia.<sup>108</sup> The social circle in which Page and Custis moved evidently included several women who wished to ameliorate the conditions of slaves and eventually rid their communities of the institution.

The American Colonization Society was the most public, and perhaps the most direct, course of action for women who were opposed to slavery. Other women took a less public but equally meaningful approach and emancipated their slaves when possible. Still others, like Emily Dupuy, felt that by treating slaves well and granting them a limited amount of autonomy, they were rendering a necessary evil more humane. Benevolent slaveholding created a means of justifying the slave system and balancing a way of life that was difficult to reconcile with democratic and religious principles. It seems that many more women wrote about the evils of slavery but felt themselves powerless to stop it than joined the Colonization Society or worked in other ways to alter society. Of these women, many wished that slavery would simply disappear—something that, in the end, turned out to be possible only through a national cataclysm.

---

<sup>108</sup>Will of Susan Meade, signed 3 July 1820, Mary Lee Fitzhugh Custis Papers, VHS.

CONCLUSION:  
THE LEGACY OF SLAVERY

The most striking aspect of the antislavery feelings espoused by slaveholding women, is, of course, that these women claimed to be opposed to some aspects of slavery or even to the institution as a whole and yet owned slaves. For some women, this contradiction can be accounted for rather easily. Although the first half of the nineteenth century saw some advances for women, allowing them to increase the influence they had within the family and permitting them to venture outside the home, women were, for the most part, not allowed to make major decisions autonomously. While some may have aspired to greater freedom of choice and authority, many still deferred to men without protest. Even husbands who tolerated their wives' unorthodox views might not permit them to apply their ideas. For women whose husbands had died, emancipating slaves was an important financial decision and a major responsibility. For the religious women of the ACS, emancipation and emigration depended upon education and Christianization; only the best and brightest were candidates for Liberia, and even these required a major investment of time and resources.

Questions also arise as to why one group of women would confine their antislavery beliefs to their diaries and letters, while others would go door-to-door soliciting support for their cause, distributing literature and making their beliefs



known to their communities. This disparity may be attributed to differences in personality, personal preference, priorities, or constraints placed upon their activities by others. Yet it is critical to note that, although more than a few southerners, both male and female, entertained doubts about slavery, proslavery ideology was hard at work at the same time. Moreover, the growing conflict between the North and South required that many southerners eschew ideas commonly associated with the North; even the churches split along regional lines. Abolitionism was the “worst” of all northern sentiments; David Grimsted noted in his study, *American Mobbing*, that “after 1835 Southern ideology put one category of person, abolitionists, farther beyond the human pale than even their ambiguous chattel.”<sup>109</sup> The growing fear of slave rebels and their abolitionist sympathizers made it dangerous for southerners to adopt, much less profess, antislavery sentiments.

Southern hatred of antislavery ideology became so intense that “abolition became a pastiche of villainy that blotted out any need to think about the real motives of any person questioning slavery.”<sup>110</sup> Nat Turner’s Rebellion in August of 1831 resulted both in widespread fear of slave uprisings and a readiness on the part of angry whites to take extreme measures to counter such insurrections. When

---

<sup>109</sup>David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828-1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 114.

<sup>110</sup>*Ibid.*, 114. Grimsted takes an in-depth look at the proliferation of proslavery violence, in the form of mobs and lynching, that marred much of the South, including Virginia, in the antebellum era.

Virginia's governor, John Floyd, blamed the rebellion on abolitionism and plantation mistresses' teaching slaves to read and write, tension mounted between white women who had been working to educate slaves and those who argued the alleged ill effects of doing so. This kindled the "notion that women were both unwitting dupes, especially vulnerable to Northern heresies, and effective agents of political propaganda"; it confirmed the fears of "proslavery Virginians who were unsure about the allegiance of Virginia women to the slave system."<sup>111</sup> Under these circumstances, it is easy to see why many would not draw attention to their antislavery beliefs, and it becomes even more impressive that any chose to do so.

While the Turner Rebellion undoubtedly scared a significant number of Virginia's whites, it does not appear to have affected many women's feelings about slavery. The debate over slavery in the legislature conveys a sense of drama and unprecedented urgency regarding slavery, but the frequency with which doubts about slavery are expressed in documents throughout the nineteenth century indicates that Virginians were always conscious of the paradox of slavery. The persistence of colonizationist and antislavery thought and expression among women from the early national period through the 1850s clearly shows the extent to which the issue of slavery permeated southern society and nagged at the white southern conscience.

Some women, though they held strong opinions, may have been fearful of making their views known or simply believed it would be futile. In these cases, the

---

<sup>111</sup>Varon, 48.

tradition of writing letters and keeping diaries was important and provided them with an outlet for their thoughts. For women who lived in the relatively isolated areas of the rural South, letters relieved the boredom of domestic life and gave women something to look forward to each day.<sup>112</sup>

Many educated women of the upper classes were avid readers. Mary Carter's mother corresponded with her often and included lists of books that she believed would interest her daughter.<sup>113</sup> Mary Chesnut's Civil War diary reveals that she was a highly educated woman with a deep affection for the classics. Her love of books was so great that when she was forced to evacuate her home in Columbia, she took her books instead of much-needed food.<sup>114</sup> Love of reading and writing and a lack of other outlets for thoughts and beliefs created a written culture for southern women to express themselves. Letters and diaries furnished an outlet for complaints about slavery that many women could or would express nowhere else.

Through these writings, some of Virginia's well-to-do women questioned the validity of slavery. Though many of these women kept their opinions on this important issue to themselves, others took advantage of the opportunities that their era afforded them and voiced their opinions and even acted upon them. The white

---

<sup>112</sup>See Kierner, 151-161, for a discussion of letters, journals, reading and education of southern women.

<sup>113</sup>See Elizabeth H. Carter Randolph to Mary Braxton Randolph Carter, 12-23 February 1825, Shirley Plantation Collection, CW.

<sup>114</sup>Woodward, xlvi.

South, while largely proslavery and disdainful of differing viewpoints, allowed women to express their opinions through religious societies and other organizations in unprecedented ways.

Women took careful note of the political situation and were concerned as to how it would affect their lives. They began to outgrow the patriarchal system that had silenced and constrained them, and some looked for outlets for their frustrations and their viewpoints. Some women simply wrote letters to friends expressing frustration with their situation; others made their outlooks known and did what they could to influence their communities to make changes that they felt were important and necessary. The views of both groups, while they cannot be classified as abolitionism, were opposed to the institution of slavery, which they dreaded for numerous reasons.

The presence of attitudes that ameliorated slavery through emancipation and benevolence, as well as more forthright expressions of dislike for slavery, indicate the persistence of doubt in Virginia about the slave labor system throughout the first six decades of the nineteenth century. Though northern abolitionism spurred a reaction in the South that fostered the growth of a proslavery ideology, some upper-class Virginians continued to question the institution that provided their livelihood.

Attempts to ameliorate slavery would persist throughout the Civil War, when a movement to reform slavery on larger scale developed in the Confederacy. This programmatic campaign came late; earlier attempts to improve and humanize slavery

would have been perceived as signs of weakness and provided fuel for the abolitionists' argument. Nevertheless, this reform movement stemmed from private concerns about the abuses of slavery that had existed for decades, especially in religious movements. The Civil War provided the first opportunity for white southerners to alter slavery without worrying about the political consequences, the most wrenching of which—civil war—had already befallen them.<sup>115</sup>

The existence of a doubting tradition among white Virginia women of the slaveholding class illustrates the tragic paradox of slavery. That the institution persisted through much of the century despite the nagging doubts of an uncounted number of Virginians, demonstrates that there is some truth in the idea that the South “drove toward catastrophe by doing conscious violence to their truest selves.”<sup>116</sup> Even during the course of the Civil War, southerners like Mary Chesnut, steeped in the slave system of the South, would find it necessary to proclaim that it was “a monstrous system and wrong and iniquity.” Chesnut echoed a sentiment that had been felt by numerous women in antebellum Virginia: “God forgive us.”<sup>117</sup>

---

<sup>115</sup>For information about reforms of slavery during the Civil War, see Bell I. Wiley, “The Movement to Humanize the Institution of Slavery During the Confederacy,” *The Emory University Quarterly* 5(4) (1949): 207-220.

<sup>116</sup>Sellers, 40.

<sup>117</sup>Woodward, 29.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Except where necessary for clarification, all quotations appearing in this paper are in their original form. This was done to preserve the integrity of nineteenth-century spelling and usage, as well as the individual writing habits of the women whose correspondence forms the basis of this paper.

### Primary Sources

#### Manuscripts

Virginia Historical Society (VHS), Richmond

Bassett Family Papers

George Lee Bolling Papers

Mary Carter Wellford Carmichael Letters

Carrington Family Papers

Mary Lee Fitzhugh Custis Papers

Emily Howe Dupuy Papers

Nancy Johns Turner Hall, "The Imaginationist or Recollections of an Old Lady, a native of one of the Southern States, now a resident of the State of Ohio in the year 1844"

Higginbotham Family Papers

Holladay Family Papers

Randolph Family Papers

Robinson Family Papers

Edmund Ruffin Papers

Special Collections, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William & Mary (W&M)

Charles Campbell Papers

Tucker-Coleman Papers

John D. Rockefeller, Jr., Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation (CW)

Shirley Plantation Collection

#### Books

Andrews, Charles Wesley. *Memoir of Mrs. Ann R. Page*. New York: Protestant Episcopal Society for the Promotion of Evangelical Knowledge, 1856.

Cary, Mrs. Virginia. *Letters on Female Character*. Richmond, Va.: A. Works, 1828.

Woodward, C. Vann, ed. *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981.

### Articles

Calhoun, John C. "Speech on the Reception of Abolition Petitions." In Eric McKittrick, ed. *Slavery Defended: The Views of the Old South*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963.

McCord, Louisa. "Diversity of the Races: Its Bearing upon Negro Slavery," And "Woman and her Needs." In Richard C. Lounsbury, ed. *Louisa S. McCord: Political and Social Essays*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995.

### Secondary Sources

#### Books

Blackford, L. Minor. *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: The Story of a Virginia Lady*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1954.

Boles, John B. *The Great Revival: Beginnings of the Bible Belt*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1972.

Cabell, Eleanor Kelley. *Women and Merchants in Eighteenth Century Williamsburg*. Williamsburg, Va.: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1988.

Clinton, Catherine. *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1982.

Ely, Melvin Patrick. *Israel on the Appomattox: A Southern Experiment in Black Freedom, 1796-1870*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, forthcoming.

Epstein, Barbara Leslie. *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1981.

- Fox-Genovese, Elizabeth. *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.
- Freehling, Alison Goodyear. *Drift Toward Dissolution: The Virginia Slavery Debate of 1831-1832*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982.
- Friedman, Jean. *The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South, 1830-1900*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985.
- Genovese, Eugene D. *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1974.
- Grimsted, David. *American Mobbing, 1828-1861*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Kerber, Linda. *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980.
- Kierner, Cynthia. *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-1835*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998.
- Lebsock, Suzanne. *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town: 1784-1860*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1984.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Virginia Women 1600-1945: "A Share of Honour."* Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1987.
- Mathews, Donald. *Religion in the Old South*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.
- Oakes, James. *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders*. New York: Knopf, 1982.
- Robert, Joseph C. *The Road from Monticello: A Study of the Virginia Slavery Debate of 1832*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1941.
- Scott, Anne Firor. *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930*. 2nd Edition. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995.
- Varon, Elizabeth R. *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women and Politics in Antebellum Virginia*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.



Wiley, Bell I. *Slaves No More: Letters from Liberia, 1833-1869*. Louisville: University Press of Kentucky, 1980.

Woodward, C. Vann, ed. *Mary Chesnut's Civil War*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981.

### Articles

Genovese, Eugene D. "Our Family, White and Black': Family and Household in the Southern Slaveholders' World View." In Carol Bleser, ed. *In Joy and In Sorrow: Women Family and Marriage in the Victorian South, 1830-1900*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

Gimelli, Louis B. "Louisa Maxwell Cocke: An Evangelical Plantation Mistress in the Antebellum South." *Journal of the Early Republic* 9(1) (1989): 53-71.

Lebsock, Suzanne. "Complicity and Contention: Women in the Plantation South," review of *Within the Plantation Household*, by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese. *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 74(1) (1990): 59-83.

Scott, Anne Firor. "Women's Perspective on the Patriarchy of the 1850s." In Catherine Clinton, ed. *Half Sisters of History*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994.

Sellers, Charles Grier, Jr. "The Travail of Slavery." In Sellers, ed. *The Southerner as American*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960.

Weiner, Marli F., "Mistresses, Morality, and the Dilemmas of Slaveholding: The Ideology and Behavior of Elite Antebellum Women." In Patricia Morton, ed. *Discovering the Women in Slavery: Emancipating Perspectives on the American Past*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996.

Wiley, Bell I. "The Movement to Humanize the Institution of Slavery During the Confederacy." *The Emory University Quarterly* 5(4) (1949): 207-220.

### Dissertation

Coyner, Martin Boyd, Jr. "John Hartwell Cocke of Bremono: Agriculture and Slavery in the Ante-bellum South." PhD. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1961.

## VITA

Leslie C. Hunt

Born in Willingboro, New Jersey, May 3, 1979. Graduated from Shawnee High School in Medford, New Jersey, in June 1996. Received B.A. in History from New York University in January 1999.

Entered the M.A. program in the Department of History of the College of William and Mary in September 1999.