

James Blair Historical Review

Volume 7 *James Blair Historical Review, Volume 7*

Article 1

2016

Volume 7

The James Blair Historical Review

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Recommended Citation

The James Blair Historical Review (2016) "Volume 7," *James Blair Historical Review*: Vol. 7 , Article 1.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/jbhr/vol7/iss1/1>

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James Blair
Historical
Review

College of William and Mary
Volume 7, 2016

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Table of Contents

| | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Gripping a “Wolf by the Ear”: Thomas Jefferson’s Paradoxical Reaction to the Haitian Revolution By Cy Ray | 6 |
| Purity & Sexuality: Vietnamese Bar-Girls and Prostitutes During and After the Vietnam War By Alexandra Boscolo | 17 |
| Expanding their Sphere: Walking the Line Between Ideal and Radical in Post-Civil War America By Anna Brichacek | 33 |
| The Consumer Revolution: The Birth of Colonial Protest By Evelyn Strobe | 47 |

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Cy Ray: Gripping a “Wolf by the Ear”: Thomas Jefferson’s Paradoxical Reaction to the Haitian Revolution¹

Between 1791 and 1804, news of the slave revolt in Saint-Domingue sent shockwaves around the world – particularly towards the island’s western hemispheric neighbor, the United States.²³ The Haitian Revolution was unprecedented; never before in history had black slaves successfully risen up against their white colonial masters and gone on to found an independent nation. American politicians and plantation owners in the South were seriously concerned that the tidal wave of revolution brewing in the Caribbean might strike the United States and undermine white hegemony. They feared blacks would be inspired to take up arms against their white masters and take back their liberty by force. Thomas Jefferson acted as a central voice in this conversation, especially because he was a plantation owner who owned hundreds of slaves⁴ as well as a prominent lawyer and politician, holding the highest office in the U.S at the turn of the 19th century. While on a personal level Jefferson helped perpetuate chattel slavery, on a political level, his position was more complex. To suggest that Jefferson was merely a racist who sought to protect this brutal institution because of his ideas about white superiority is partially true,⁵ but it is far too simplified a view that does not do credit to the complex person Thomas Jefferson was.

Jefferson’s genuine views on slavery may be elucidated by examining his writings and policies prior to, and in reaction to, the Haitian Revolution. In such an endeavor, however, historians should exercise caution so as to avoid exporting Jefferson’s domestic agenda towards slavery onto Haiti. His attitudes towards slavery and emancipation in the geographically distant island differed significantly from his views on the matter within the U.S. This paper argues that although Jefferson himself was a revolutionary, he was not particularly fond of the idea of a black slave rebellion in Saint-Domingue. The surviving historical record fails to prove that Jefferson’s policy views were defined by his racism alone. Primary source evidence comes from Jefferson’s personal letters (addressed to colleagues William Short, John Holmes, Fulwar Skipwith, St. George Tucker, and others), statistical information on trade between the United States and Haiti, the American State Papers from the U.S. Congress. It highlights ongoing debates between modern academic historians by critically analyzing secondary source material. These sources show that Jefferson was primarily motivated by three factors: first, the trade interests of the United States; second, geopolitical concerns -- especially Jefferson’s interest in improving relations with France; third, Jefferson’s fear of the Haitian Revolution inspiring a similar insurrection in the South (although these sentiments were felt more strongly by southern congressmen and plantation owners than they were by Jefferson himself).

¹ “Wolf by the ear,” The Jefferson Monticello, accessed 13 December 2015, <https://www.monticello.org/site/jefferson/wolf-ear>.

² Laurent Dubois and John D. Garrigus, *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804: A Brief History with Documents*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pg. 86-129.

³ Tim Matthewson, “Jefferson and the Nonrecognition of Haiti”, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 140 (1), American Philosophical Society, 1996, pg. 30. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/987274>.

⁴ William Cohen, “Thomas Jefferson and the Problem of Slavery,” *Journal of American History* 56, no. 3 (1969): 503–526, pg. 510.

⁵ Thomas Jefferson, “Notes on the State of Virginia: Chapter 14 (1785)”, accessed 13 December 2015, <http://www.stolaf.edu/people/fitz/COURSES/Jefferson--Notes.htm>.

Jefferson was born on April 13, 1743 in Shadwell, Virginia, and lived there throughout his formative years. In 1767, he was admitted to the Virginia bar. During his time as a lawyer, Jefferson took on many freedom suits, cases where he tried to help blacks escape slavery and have their rights protected. On one occasion he even gave some money to a slave, which he used to escape from his master and start a new life of freedom.⁶ The paradoxical nature of Jefferson is already readily apparent by the fact that in 1764, he inherited approximately 40 slaves from his recently deceased father, Peter Jefferson.⁷ In 1768, Thomas Jefferson began construction on his plantation house, Monticello. In the following decades, Jefferson came to own hundreds of slaves and expanded his plantation until it became one of the largest in all of Virginia.⁸ In spite of Jefferson's alleged belief in incentivizing slaves with "gratuities" rather than the "threat of the whip", slaves on the plantation were not always treated well.⁹ They were stripped of their freedom, whipped and beaten by cruel overseers, and subject to inhumane living and working conditions.

Even within the domestic sphere, it is difficult to precisely pinpoint Jefferson's views on slavery. He was unquestionably a hypocritical racist who personally benefitted from the financial and social advantages of the institution. At the same time, however, his political behavior and writings indicate that he held conflicting sentiments about slavery on a systemic level. In one of the first drafts of the 1776 Declaration of Independence, Jefferson attacked King George III for Britain's participation in the slave trade – only to have these potent lines removed from the final edition because of protest from other delegates at the Continental Congress.¹⁰ Jefferson expressed disdain towards the slave trade, which he viewed as a "violation of human rights", and repeatedly demanded that congress render it unlawful (which they finally did in 1807).¹¹¹²¹³

Jefferson, as a slave owner, was reluctant to criticize the institution as it was practiced within the United States. He readily condemned the international slave trade, but chattel slavery on plantations within the country's border was something that Jefferson hesitated to fight against. This was partially because of America's dependency on it, and also because he believed Southerners would turn against him if he adopted an abolitionist position. To Jefferson, uniting the country against the British aligned with his own political interests, whereas dividing the country over the controversial issue of slavery was a matter best left for a later time, or perhaps something to be avoided all costs.

Jefferson compared the antebellum South's reliance on slavery to clutching, "a wolf by the ear, and we can neither hold him, nor safely let him go. Justice is in one scale, and self-preservation in the other." He called slavery an "abominable crime," a "moral depravity," a

⁶ Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family*, W. W. Norton & Company, 2008.

⁷ "Plantation and Slavery: Property", The Jefferson Monticello, accessed 13 December 2015, <https://www.monticello.org/site/plantation-and-slavery/property>.

⁸ Lucia C. Stanton, "Free Some Day: The African American Families of Monticello", *Those Who Labor for My Happiness: Slavery at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello*.

⁹ "Property", *The Jefferson Monticello*.

¹⁰ "Historical Documents: Rough draft of the Declaration Of Independence", Thomas Jefferson, 1776, *PBS: Africans in America*,

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part2/2h33.html>.

¹¹ John Paul Kaminski, *A Necessary Evil?: Slavery and the Debate Over the Constitution*, 1995, Rowman & Littlefield, pg. 256.

¹² John Chester Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears: Thomas Jefferson and Slavery*, University of Virginia Press, 1980, pp. 145–46

¹³ Willard Sterne Randall, *Thomas Jefferson: A Life*, Harper Collins, 1994, pg. 583.

"hideous blot," and a "fatal stain" that deformed, "what nature had bestowed on us of her fairest gifts."¹⁴¹⁵ However, he feared that abolishing slavery would divide the North and the South and shatter America's recently formed political union.¹⁶ This case in point demonstrates that Jefferson often had to take political considerations into account when he crafted policies and declarations on behalf of the American government. Similar factors came into play when Jefferson was confronted with the issue of a slave insurrection in Haiti.

By 1791, Saint-Domingue was out-producing every other colony in the Caribbean. The colony mainly grew and exported three staple crops: sugar, coffee, and cotton.¹⁷ Most of these resources were channeled between the colony and its mother country, France. However, approximately sixteen percent of all American exports actually came from Saint-Domingue. Hundreds of American merchant ships traversed the waters between United States ports and the coast of Saint-Domingue, transporting food, lumber, military equipment, dyes, and other commodities. Saint-Domingue had become a lucrative trade juncture in the Caribbean, especially for the United States. When the Haitian revolution erupted, trade flows with Saint-Domingue became a key issue for the nation's first Secretary of State, and previously minister to France, Thomas Jefferson.¹⁸

Although Jefferson was a racist who perpetuated the cruel institution of slavery, he also had something in common with the black slaves in Haiti: he was a revolutionary. He argued in the Declaration of Independence that human beings had a right to overthrow unjust and oppressive governments. In Jefferson's own words, "When a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce [mankind] under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security."¹⁹ However, Jefferson never extended this argument to declare that the black slaves had a right to rise up against the French government, abolish slavery, and found an independent nation.

In Jefferson's letter to his colleague, American ambassador William Short, dated November 24th 1791, he reveals his initial reaction to the revolution. In his discussion on how the, "insurrection...Negroes assumed a very threatening appearance," Jefferson does not talk at all about moral issues of race or slavery. He is primarily concerned in this letter with, "matters of commerce," and diplomacy. Jefferson goes on to discuss how one of his main objectives is to preserve the "union" with France. Even as the slaves continued to gain ground against French soldiers, at this point in time Jefferson did not consider developing positive diplomatic relations with the revolutionaries. Jefferson argues in this letter that it is in the best interests of the United

¹⁴ Thomas Jefferson to William Short, in *William & Mary Digital Archive: Letter*, Monticello, September 8 1823, Albemarle County, Virginia, <https://digitalarchive.wm.edu/handle/10288/15368>.

¹⁵ Lucia Stanton, "Thomas Jefferson and Slavery", The Jefferson Monticello, February 2008, <http://www.monticello.org/site/plantation-and-slavery/thomas-jefferson-and-slavery-0>.

¹⁶ Thomas Jefferson to John Holmes, in *Library of Congress*, 20 April 1820, <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/jefferson/159.html>.

¹⁷ Leslie Bethell, "Chapter 6: Haiti and Santo Domingo, 1790 - c. 1870", in *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, Volume 3, pg. 237-276.

¹⁸ Joseph A. Boyd, "'Under the bloody hatchet of the Haitians': Thomas Jefferson's foreign policy concerning the Haitian Revolution, 1791-1806" *University of South Florida Scholar Commons Graduate Thesis/Dissertation*, 2007, accessed 13 December 2015, <http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1642&context=etd>.

¹⁹ "The Declaration of Independence: A Transcription", 4 July 1776, *The Charters of Freedom*, accessed December 13, 2015. http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/charters/declaration_transcript.html.

States to do what is necessary to support French control over this colony, by sending them arms and other provisions.

What is most notable about this letter is that Jefferson never says he supports the French because he believes in white superiority, or because he believes that blacks must remain enslaved for moral reasons. Jefferson is against any kind of independent Haitian nation, ruled by blacks or whites, stating, “We conceived it to be strongly our interests that [Saint-Domingue] should retain their connection with their mother country.” Jefferson expresses support for the French over the revolutionaries primarily for geopolitical and financial reasons, and only secondarily because of his racist views. Jefferson tried to avoid provoking a war with France, while he helped grow the American economy by satisfying, “a common interest with [France] in furnishing them the necessaries of life in exchange for sugar and coffee for our own consumption.”^{20,21} In Jefferson’s other letters, there is a repeated emphasis on trade and maintaining good economic relations with, “the French West-Indies, where our commerce has greater need of protection than anywhere.”²² Jefferson argues in another letter that it would be highly advisable for the United States, “not to intermeddle in the least, by word or deed, in the internal disputes of the colony, or those with the mother country: consider this as a family affair, with which we have neither the right nor the wish to intermeddle.”²³

Over the following years, as it became increasingly clear that the blacks were going to succeed in their revolution, there was a strong reaction in the United States. Many people, including Jefferson, expressed serious concerns that the Haitian Revolution would give slaves in the United States ideas about rebelling as well. Southern politicians and plantation owners believed that the goal of liberty was infectious, and that black slaves needed to be controlled in order to prevent a violent uprising stateside. This fear mongering was spread by newspapers that published one-sided and sensationalized graphic accounts of black violence during insurrection.²⁴ Jefferson quotes Virgil’s, the *Aeneid*, in one letter detailing the history and future of emancipation:

Perhaps the first chapter of this history [of emancipation], which has begun in St. Domingo, and the next succeeding ones which will recount how all the whites were driven from all the other islands, may prepare our minds for a peaceable accommodation between justice, policy and necessity, and furnish an answer to the difficult question: whither shall the colored emigrants go? And the sooner we put some plan under way, the greater hope there is that it may be permitted to proceed peaceably to its ultimate effect. But if something is not done, and soon done, we shall be the murderers of our own children. The ‘Murmura, venturos nautis prodentia ventos’ has already reached us; the revolutionary storm now sweeping the globe will be upon us, and happy if we make timely provision to give it an easy passage over our land. From the present state of things in Europe and America the day which begins our combustion must be near at hand, and

²⁰ “The Thomas Jefferson Papers: The Jefferson Presidency”, *Library of Congress*, accessed 13 December 2015, <http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/connections/thomas-jefferson/history6.html>.

²¹ Thomas Jefferson to William Short, Philadelphia, Nov. 24, 1791, in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson Digital Edition*, Volume 22, ed. Barbara B. Oberg and J. Jefferson Looney, Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 2008-2015.

²² Thomas Jefferson to William Short, New York July 26. 1790, *Papers of Jefferson*, Volume 17.

²³ Thomas Jefferson to Fulwar Skipwith, May 13, 1791, in *Memoir, Correspondence, and Miscellanies, from the Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Volume 3, 2nd edition, ed. Thomas Jefferson, Boston: Gray and Bowen, 1830.

²⁴ “Hayti”, *Niles' Weekly Register*, Baltimore, 27 September 1823, accessed 13 December 2015, <http://www2.webster.edu/~corbetre/haiti/history/earlyhaiti/recognition.htm>.

only a single spark is wanting to make that day tomorrow. If we had begun sooner, we might probably have been allowed a lengthier operation to clear ourselves, but every day's delay lessens the time we may take for emancipation. Some people derive hope from the aid of the confederated states. But this is a delusion. There is but one state in the Union which will aid us sincerely if an insurrection begins; and that one may perhaps have its own fire to quench at the same time.²⁵

Here Jefferson's reaction to the Haitian Revolution is to push for emancipation, but not necessarily for moral reasons (i.e. because he believes slavery is an abomination). After all, he did write this letter from his plantation on Monticello, while ruling over hundreds of his own slaves. Jefferson felt emancipation had to occur in order to avoid an uprising occurring similar to that which occurred in Saint-Domingue. To Jefferson, emancipation was a political necessity in order to protect the fragile union. It was also necessary to protect the lives of whites who might be victimized by violent and rebellious slaves. Though these writings can be labelled as racist, they are more aptly be characterized as promoting "racial fear".²⁶ This fear was not entirely unfounded. In the antebellum South, there would prove to be a number of slave insurrections which offered legitimacy to Jefferson's concerns.

From 1796 to 1801, President John Adams led a number of efforts to try and increase trade with Haiti and improve commercial relations. However, towards the late 1790s and early 1800s, there was a strong push in the United States to cease trade with Haiti, in part because of the aforementioned racial fears. In 1799, Jefferson was quoted as stating that, "nothing would be easier than to furnish [France's], army and fleet with everything, and to reduce Toussaint to starvation."²⁷ Still, a desire to align U.S. foreign policy with French imperial interests was motivated by more than just an anti-Toussaint or anti-black framework.

Once he was elected president on February 17, 1801, Jefferson had to weigh a number of political factors in tandem with his racial views, particularly his need to appease France and the southern states, while still taking advantage of the financial benefits of trade with Saint Domingue. In spite of his rhetoric and the embargoes later placed on Haiti, trade during this time still continued – sometimes overtly, and at other times, under the radar. In 1804 the United States was exporting \$3.6 million in goods to the French West Indies (including Haiti). This value rose to \$7.4 million in 1805.²⁸ During this time period the United States exported high quantities of lumber, ore, food, agricultural crops, ammunitions, and other in-demand commodities to Haiti.²⁹ The statistics in the footnote below show that Jefferson allowed the United States to continue fulfilling this demand even after the revolution had occurred – or at the very least, he did not go

²⁵ "Murmura, venturos nautis prodentia venter" is a quote from Virgil's, *Aeneid*, and translates to, "the breezes warning the sailors of the coming gale."

Thomas Jefferson Letter To St. George Tucker, *Papers of Jefferson*, Volume 29, Monticello, Aug. 28, 1797.

²⁶ Boyd, "Bloody Hatchet", pg. 33.

²⁷ The veracity of this "quote" is still debated as it was not recorded directly by Jefferson but based on hearsay from Louis Andre Pichon, a French ambassador in the United States.

Dubois and Garrigus, *Slave Revolution*, pg. 177.

²⁸ John H. Coatsworth, "American Trade with European Colonies in the Caribbean, 1790-1812," *William and Mary Quarterly*, volume 24, 1967, p. 262; Coatsworth notes that U.S. government statistics on American trade with Haiti were not individualized from other data collected on the French West Indies until 1817-1818.

²⁹ Boyd, "Bloody Hatchet", pg. 45.

to great lengths to try and stop it.³⁰ In a letter to Pichon on October 31, 1801, Jefferson stated, “Provided the Negroes are not permitted to possess a navy, we can allow them without danger to exist and we can moreover continue with them very lucrative commercial relations.”³¹ Trade was so prolific and violent that Pichon criticized U.S. merchants for conducting a, “private and piratical war against a Power with which the United States are at peace,” (France).

Up until this historical moment, American traders had been profiting off of both sides of the Haitian Revolution, selling goods and arms to both sides of the conflict.³² In 1804, however, three key factors contributed to a shift in Jefferson’s Haitian trade policy. The first factor was that the revolution ended with victory for the blacks, and Jean-Jacques Dessalines, a black revolutionary whom Jefferson referred to as a despot, declared himself the emperor of newly-independent Haiti. Additionally, Dessalines and his men had massacred numerous white French people in Haiti. Thirdly, there was growing concern over Napoleon and his authoritarian, expansionist policies, which posed a potential threat to the United States. Some historians have referred to the tensions between France and the United States leading up to this time period (1798-1800) as a “quasi-war”.³³ The United States was highly interested in acquiring land in the Floridas, and so Jefferson felt they needed to “appease the French” in order to achieve this objective.³⁴ Because of these three factors, Jefferson adopted a stronger stance against trade with Haiti.³⁵ On March 3, 1805, Congress passed a bill banning the sale of weapons to black Haitians. However, it still allowed trade of legal non-military commodities.³⁶ In 1806, a bill spearheaded by Georgia congressman George Logan and his southern allies, placed an embargo on all trade with independent Haiti.

Jefferson did not consider these embargoes to be the ideal response. Historian Tim Matthewson explains that Jefferson, “favored an agreement that would have protected the security of the southern states and U.S. commerce... But subsequent to the massacres of spring 1804 and horrible atrocities in Saint Domingue-Haiti, he acquiesced in southern policy.”³⁷ On a macroscopic level, Jefferson was more swayed by geopolitical interests, the demands of the South, and trade, than by his racist ideology.³⁸ Jefferson described the possibility of a slave revolt as a “dangerous fermentation”, and regularly expressed his disapproval and fear of a similar case arising in the United States. These fears, along with the other aforementioned geopolitical and economic factors, shaped Jefferson’s overarching goals first and foremost as President of the United States.³⁹

In subsequent years, although trade of goods was legally shut down between Haiti and the United States, cross-border population flows did not cease. In some sense, Jefferson even

³⁰ “Report on the Privileges and Restrictions on the Commerce of the United States in Foreign Countries”, *Yale Law School Lillian Goldman Law Library: The Avalon Project (Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy)*, 16 December 1793, accessed 13 December 2015,

http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/jeffrep2.asp.

³¹ David P. Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution: A Documentary History*, New York, Hackett, 2014, pg. 197

³² Laurent Dubois, *Haiti: The Aftershocks of History*, New York, Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt, pg. 137.

³³ Matthewson, “Nonrecognition”, pg. 32.

³⁴ Julia Gaffield, *Haitian Connections in the Atlantic World*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 2015, pg. 133.

³⁵ Matthewson, “Nonrecognition”, pg. 25-30

³⁶ *Ibid*, 31.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 35.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 60.

³⁹ “St. Domingue (Haiti)”, *The Jefferson Monticello*, accessed 13 December 2015, <https://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/st-domingue-haiti>.

supported these flows – but only in one direction. Jefferson believed that one solution to the question of slavery in the United States was to slowly emancipate slaves over time and send them to Haiti, along with criminal and rebellious slaves who ought to be deported immediately. Jefferson argued that sending blacks outside the United States would make the country safer for whites, and reduce the risk of a slave revolt occurring.⁴⁰ He also entertained the possibility that sending blacks to places like Haiti, or even Africa, could be advantageous for the United States insofar as it could be, “combined with commercial operations, which might not only reimburse expenses but procure profit also.”⁴¹ Jeffersonian apologist Arthur Scherr offers an alternative theory that he, “considered it a means to find justice for African Americans, give them a chance to prove themselves in a society where men of their color ruled, and simultaneously preserve the United States as a White Man's Country where democracy, peace and happiness, albeit only for white people, could finally be attained.”⁴² Evidence proving that Jefferson was seriously concerned with finding “justice” for blacks is dubious. Jefferson considered the viability of Haiti as a space for black settlement out of a desire to protect domestic racial hegemony and ensure the stability of the Union.

Significant numbers of Haitians also came into the United States during and after the revolution, though Jefferson did not welcome them with open arms. The population of Haitians in the Southern United States slowly grew throughout the early 1800s and the result of this immigration was a number of violent uprisings. One of the largest rebellions was the German Coast Uprising of 1811. The leader of this revolution, Charles Deslondes, as well as many of the participants, were born into slavery in Saint-Domingue. Historian Eugene Genovese argues that Deslondes and his followers were, “inspired by the Haitian Revolution.”⁴³ The German Coast Uprising serves as an example of how Jefferson and the South’s fears of revolution spreading north from Haiti manifested themselves in reality.

In sum, Jefferson’s hypocrisy as a “revolutionary” (who spearheaded the American War of Independence) is revealed by his failure to back the Haitian Revolution. This was a revolution successfully led by blacks, which was unprecedented and inconceivable to many whites at the time.⁴⁴ It was a product of the common people, unlike Jefferson’s revolution which was led by white aristocrats. And finally, it produced a fragile nation which did not always promote the

⁴⁰ Dubois and Garrigus, *Slave Revolution*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, pg. 161.

⁴¹ Ibid, 162.

⁴² Arthur Scherr, “Light at the End of the Road: Thomas Jefferson’s Endorsement of Free Haiti in his Final Years”, *Journal of Haitian Studies* 15.1/2, Spring 2009, pg. 203-216.

⁴³ Rhae Lynn Barners, “America’s Largest Slave Revolt, The German Coast Uprising of 1811”, 2015, accessed 13 December 2015,

<http://ushistoryscene.com/article/german-coast-uprising/>.

⁴⁴ One example of this kind of inability to comprehend certain historical realities is discussed in Michel Trouillot’s book, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. In it, he explains how certain historical developments are so antithetical to accepted ideologies that they become unfathomable to those in power. This might be because such events overturn firmly established institutions, they are too controversial, they contradict contemporary moral values, or more generally, they don’t fit within individuals’ worldviews. Trouillot’s critiques of the master narrative help address the difficulty of accepting “impossible” historical realities. During the Haitian revolution, the idea that the blacks could successfully overthrow their white masters was incomprehensible to many whites. Put simply, the success of slave revolts during the Haitian revolution cannot be attributed to disease, internal strife amongst whites, or poor weather conditions; they happened because blacks intelligently organized and rebelled to take back their agency.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1995.

American ideals of democracy and liberalism.⁴⁵ When Dessalines came to power, he explicitly rejected one of his secretary's drafts of a declaration of independence which was modelled after the one Jefferson wrote.⁴⁶

In his biography published in 2005, entitled, *Thomas Jefferson: Author of America*, Christopher Hitchens aptly characterized the president's Haitian policy as "counterrevolutionary".⁴⁷ Jefferson's position was based on fears of a black uprising, as well as geopolitical interests focused on improving diplomatic relations with the southern states and France. These motivations even took precedent over the United States' immediate economic interests in engaging in commercial activity with Haiti. It was only after Jefferson left office, in 1810, that the embargo was finally lifted and trade with Haiti resumed, although the United States did not recognize Haiti as an independent nation until 1862. This paper has attempted to explore some of the motivations behind Jefferson's Haitian policies that provide a more nuanced understanding of his perspective, and explain what motivations he might have had besides his racial views. Jefferson was undoubtedly a racist, but he was also a very complex man with political ambitions and motivations that extended beyond his own pro-slavery, bigoted ideology.

⁴⁵ Gordon S. Brown, "Toussaint's Clause: The Founding Fathers and the Haitian Revolution", Jackson, University of Mississippi Press, 2005.

⁴⁶ Dubois and Garrigus, *Slave Revolution*, pg. 38.

⁴⁷ Ted Widmer, "Two Cheers for Jefferson", 17 July 2005, accessed 13 December 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/17/books/review/two-cheers-for-jefferson.html>.

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Alexandra Boscolo: Purity & Sexuality: Vietnamese Bar-Girls and Prostitutes During and After the Vietnam War

Introduction

The Vietnam War lasted from 1955 to 1975, with American troops on the ground from 1965-1973. Over 2 million Americans served in Vietnam, most of them young men who were soldiers. They went through basic training, served in active battle, and generally strived to be as ‘manly’ as possible. Masculinity was a key part of military service for many of the young men who were conscripted into the U.S military during the Vietnam War. The military exploited American’s cultural “fear of emasculation . . . [its job was] to turn ‘boys’ into ‘men.’” The mythology of the war relied largely on extreme masculinity as an extension of traditional American values, especially patriarchal ones.¹ In this case, an extreme aversion to femininity counterbalanced the manliness of soldiers.²

In order to accommodate all of these foreign men, the prostitution industry in Vietnam exploded, especially in cities like Saigon and around military bases or military centers of operation. As scholar Kathleen Barry writes, prostitution “mobilized” with the growth of foreign occupation.³ Some women were forced out of their homes by destruction in the war-torn countryside.⁴ Other women chose to leave their homes and seek a better life in the city.⁵ Either way, many women who had previously been restricted by traditional Confucian and Buddhist ideals of a woman’s place, patrilocal society, and arranged marriage found themselves working as prostitutes and bar-girls, catering to a never-ending flow of American soldiers and civilians.⁶ Many of these women enjoyed themselves vastly during the war; they could choose what they did and with whom they slept. The military invasion presented them with a novel, acceptable way for women to behave and be.

When the Americans left in the mid-1970s, everything changed for bar-girls. Terrified they would be prosecuted by the Viet Cong, many fled the cities and were forced to return to rural, agrarian life. They burned or buried anything they had that linked them to U.S. forces.⁷ Others, such as those women who had Amerasian children, were not as lucky, and were forced to prisons and ‘New Economic Zones’.

¹ Jacqueline E Lawson. “‘She’s a pretty woman . . . for a gook’: The Misogyny of the Vietnam War.” *Journal of American Culture*, 12.3 (Fall 1989): 55-65. Web. 14 October 2015. 57

² Jeffords, Susan, *The Remasculinization of America* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), xii.

³ Kathleen Barry, “Industrialization and Economic Development: The Costs to Women,” in *Vietnam’s Women in Transition*, ed. Kathleen Barry (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 151.

⁴ Tono Haruhi. “Military Occupation and Prostitution Tourism in Asia.” *Women in Action*, 2.3 (September 30, 1993): 35. Web. 2 December 2015. 35

⁵ Mai Lai Gustafsson. “Freedom. Money. Fun. Love.” *Oral History Review*, Volume 38.2 (Spring/Summer 2011): 308-330. *Project Muse*. Web. 12 October 2015. 312

⁶ In this paper, prostitute is used to describe a woman who was paid to sleep with men. Bar-girl is used to refer to women who were entertainers or dancers in bars or lounges catering to American men. Many bar-girls were prostitutes as well. However, not all bar-girls slept with or interacted physically with American soldiers.

⁷ Gustafsson 323.

Sources written by Vietnamese scholars, especially those published immediately post-war, often claimed that Vietnamese women largely deferred to traditional customs, and that the women who served in bars, massage parlors, or clubs during the war were just another sad example of military exploitation. For example, *Women in Viet Nam*, a 1978 monograph written by Mai Thi Tu and Le Thi Nham Tuyet, describes prostitutes who served American soldiers as “contaminated by the depraved environment [of Saigon].”⁸ While it is true that ideals about family life and marriage played a significant role in the lives of most Vietnamese women, those who worked with Americans during the war were often happy with their choices, and considered it the best time of their life. Afterwards, these women were forced back into the roles they occupied before the war, much to their displeasure. Due to exposure to new ideals of womanhood and freedom, they were largely unable to re-assimilate into Vietnamese society. Many women felt that they deserved American freedoms or the choice to choose the men they slept with and married. Furthermore, those who lived and became rich in the south before the fall of Saigon were forced to return to the poverty they felt they had escaped through their liaisons with G.I.s. This paper will explore how military conceptualizations of femaleness, the role of Vietnamese women, and purity conflicted with the traditional concepts that Vietnamese women had been exposed to their whole lives. For women who chose to be bar-girls, these ideas opened up a new realm of acceptability and ideas about womanhood. Ultimately, however, affected women found themselves unable to reintegrate successfully into Vietnamese society after the American invaders left.

In the study of Vietnam’s wartime prostitutes and bar-girls, it is important to consider how women became culturally indoctrinated throughout their lives. Existing sources focus on Vietnamese culture in comparison with other Confucian societies, such as China, which colonized Vietnam in the first century B.C.E.⁹ Confucianism played a key part in shaping gender roles in Vietnam. Gender relations, specifically during wartime, have been the subject of much study in academic scholarship about Vietnam. However, few historians have focused on the difference between wartime and pre- and post-war gender roles. Finally, the experiences of the women who worked as bar-girls must be considered—an area that is almost completely ignored in historical study. Modern historiography centers on the war’s effects on those who served there, and on American and Vietnamese societies at large. Special interest is shown in many cases to gender, and the role of masculinity and femininity in context of war. However, few scholars have specifically focused on Vietnamese women who served as bar-girls and prostitutes during the war, especially in how they were affected by societal changes impacted by Americans during and after occupation.

Women and Vietnamese Tradition

Historically speaking, Vietnamese women were indoctrinated with ideals about female purity and femininity from birth, even if said ideals did not correlate to actual practice. Since the thirteenth century, when it became the national doctrine, Vietnam has ascribed to the principles

⁸ Mai Thi Tu and Le Thi Nham Tuyet, *Women in Viet Nam* (Hanoi: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1978), 194.

⁹ Marian Darce Frenier, and Kimberly Mancini. “Vietnamese Women in a Confucian Setting: The Causes of the Initial Decline in the Status of East Asian Women.” In *Vietnam’s Women in Transition*, ed. Kathleen Barry (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 31.

of Confucianism.¹⁰ Rulers purposefully aimed to wipe out matriarchal traditions, such as brides continuing to live in their mother's homes after marriage.¹¹ Confucian ideology emphasized "proper familial and filial conduct" and meant that women should work exclusively within the home.¹² Vietnamese women were taught that deference was an important part of proper behavior. Chastity and virtue were emphasized above all else.¹³ This is evidenced in Vietnamese scholarship, such as *The Tale of Kieu*, a nineteenth-century fable that has been called the "cultural bible" of Vietnam.¹⁴

Kieu tells the story of a girl who sells herself into marriage to save her father's life, thus fulfilling the Confucian tenet of filial support and dooming herself to a life of hardship and submission. In the end, because she remains pure, physically and spiritually, Kieu is able to return her family and marry a nice man. Even at her darkest times, Kieu remembered the importance of her role in the family, when she "brush[ed] aside her solemn vows to Kim [her abusive husband]--/ she'd pay a daughter's debt above all else."¹⁵ Kieu had to be willing to give everything up to defer to her husband, and the same was in theory expected of all Vietnamese women. *The Tale of Kieu's* importance in Vietnamese society as a moral tale reflects the importance of Confucian ideals.

In actuality, though, most Vietnamese women were unable to behave according to these tenets. While Confucian tradition was important, for rural peasants, farming and growing enough food to survive took priority. Vietnamese women worked in production of crops long past the introduction of Confucianism and patriarchal society, as they were a valuable force of labor that could not be discarded for many rural families.¹⁶ Instead of obeying Confucian strictures, women altered the practice to work within the structure of their daily lives, based on availability of housing and land.¹⁷ They completed such tasks as sowing, harvesting, and drying of rice, in addition to raising the children and managing the house. In the early twentieth-century, before the partition, families owned their own small plots of land, and all adults were needed to work to ensure the group's survival. Women as rulers of the home—their own separate realm—was an idea that applied more in mentality than in practice.¹⁸

Confucianism did influence women through the construction of marriage and women's ideal relationship with men. In *The Tale of Kieu*, Kieu realizes that a life without a man is a failed life. She wonders if she should "resign herself to loveless nights/and mateless live."¹⁹ However, because she remained true to her spiritual values, she is rewarded in the end with a good match that her family approves. For Kieu, as for all rural women, a wedding to a man approved by her family was the ultimate achievement. Marriage values in rural Vietnam were influenced both by Confucian ideals of devotion and older, traditional customs of patrilocal living and village marriage. Women moved to their husband's family's house after marriage and

¹⁰ Tu and Tuyet 32

¹¹ Tu and Tuyet 46

¹² George Dutton. "Beyond Myth and Caricature: Situating Women in the History of Early Modern Vietnam." *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 8.2 (Spring 2013): 1-36. Web. 11 November 2015. 8-9

¹³ Hy V Luong. *Revolution in the Village: Tradition and Transformation in North Vietnam, 1925-1988* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), 73.

¹⁴ Barry, 31.

¹⁵ Nguyen Du, trans. Huynh Sanh Thong, *The Tale of Kieu* (New York: Random House, 1973), 52.

¹⁶ Frenier and Mancini, 32.

¹⁷ Charles Hirschman and Nguyen Huu Minh., "Traiditon and Change in Vietnamese Family Structure in the Red River Delta," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 64.4 (November 2002): 1063-1079. Web. 14 October 2015. 1064.

¹⁸ Tu and Tuyet 49

¹⁹ Du 87.

lived there at least until another brother married.²⁰ One Vietnamese woman and former bar-girl described her life in the countryside as being like that of a “water buffalo”: ““You work like a water buffalo for your mother, your father. You do everything they say . . . Later when you become big, you marry Vietnamese man and you water buffalo for him. You always busy.”” When she looked back on her life in Saigon after immigrating to the United States, this woman did not ascribe the rosy tint to pre-war life that was highly common amongst interviews of other immigrant women.²¹ Instead, like many of those who found freedom in the entertainment industry during the war, she felt confined by the way she was expected to live.

Pre-war, women were not given opportunities to go to school or to learn a trade outside of farming. Extreme poverty kept them from being held to rigid Confucian standards, but it also made their lives difficult and offered little opportunity for self-actualization or social mobility. One woman recounted that, as a poor villager in the 1930s, she spent her days hoeing 1.5 acres of land, collecting tubers, and catching fish.²² Others spoke of being too poor to ever attend school.²³ Many felt dissatisfied with this lifestyle, especially those who left their villages and went on to become bar-girls or work in the prostitution industry.

The Development of Prostitution

Prostitution existed in Vietnam before the American invasion, but not at the same scale. Throughout Vietnam’s history of colonialization, poverty was rampant in much of the countryside. During the period of French colonialism, many women either chose to or were forced to seek additional income through the selling of goods and of their bodies. The French government had a monitoring system for tracking prostitutes in order to contain the risk of venereal disease, which indicates that the industry was growing under foreign reign.²⁴ Increasing urbanization due to colonial disruption, along with the presence of foreign rule, contributed to the rise of prostitution. Oftentimes, women chose to migrate to cities in the hopes of making a better living.²⁵

Historians have shown that before France invaded Vietnam, Vietnamese peasants tended to “move around in search of cultivable lands, to avoid wars, or to absorb the labor surplus during agricultural slack seasons.”²⁶ Therefore, when French colonization began to concentrate industry and therefore economic growth in urban areas, many women who had previously lived in rural areas started by default to move to cities. Once they were living in cities, some of them inevitably ended up working in the prostitution industry and catering mainly to foreign men. The number of children born to Vietnamese mothers and French fathers clearly evidences the existence of prostitution. Many officials considered prostitution an “invaluable source of dollars

²⁰ Dung Thi Kieu Vu. *An Exploratory Study of Gender Patterns in Urbanward Migration in Vietnam*. Diss. Michigan State University, 2002. Ann Arbor: UMI. Web. 15 November 2015. 6

²¹ Gustafsson 312.

²² Luong 65

²³ Steven DeBonis, *Children of the Enemy: Oral Histories of Vietnamese Amerasians and Their Mothers* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1995), 185

²⁴ Christian Henriot. “Supplying Female Bodes: Labor Migration, Sex Work, and the Commoditization of Women in Colonial Indochina and Contemporary Vietnam.” *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 7.1 (Winter 2012): 1-9. Web. 11 November 2015. 4

²⁵ *ibid*

²⁶ Dung Thi Kieu Vu, 16.

for the State.”²⁷ It is clear that, in Vietnam, the development of sex work had its roots in catering to foreign men.

The colony of French Indochina officially existed from 1887-1954. Throughout this time period, increasing urbanization led to the continued growth of prostitution and movement of women to cities. Defeat by the Viet Minh in 1954 forced France to officially declare Vietnam an independent state. It was left divided—communist North Vietnam and the Republic of Vietnam in the south.²⁸ However, it would not be allowed to function independently for long. In 1965, the American ground war officially began—the Americans supported the south, ostensibly as part of a campaign to eradicate communism worldwide.²⁹ The American invasion brought massive infrastructure and urban growth as thousands of men entered Vietnam. With them, these men brought specific ideas about ‘exotic’ Vietnam, its foreignness, and its women.

The American Military And The Ideal of Masculinity

Historian Sue Sun writes, “by the time of the Vietnam War, sexual adventure with foreign women was regarded by most military leaders as an inevitable part of the modern military experience.”³⁰ In no small part due to American experiences in Korea and previous wars, military culture had come to accept and support service in the army as a time of sexual freedom for enlisted men. Asia especially was seen as a land of exoticism and sensuality, where American men could be free of traditional moral constraints. Military men tended to perceive themselves as saviors who deserved to do whatever they wanted with Vietnamese women. One G.I. explained that “too many of us forgot that Vietnamese were people. We didn’t treat them like people after a while.” Instead, he implies, women were perceived as inferior beings who would let themselves be taken by any man who came along.³¹ The ‘savior’ complex further inflated the masculine ego. The idea of American superiority coupled with the extreme emphasis on manhood meant that many men perceived themselves as not only physically but morally and mentally superior to susceptible Vietnamese women, who would supposedly fall all over themselves to meet and sleep with an American man.

Much of this perception of women came from military ideas about masculinity and the construction of manhood. The Army subjected soldiers to an extreme emphasis on acts of heroism and manly strength.³² A documentary about Vietnam-era basic training remarked, “It’s time to separate the men from the boys.”³³ In order to live up to the ideal of what a young man ought to be like, soldiers constantly needed to prove themselves. As evidenced by the documentary, masculinity in the army was constructed around ideas of heroism and proving that one was a ‘man’ who could be decisive, take risks, and above all, win. Battle was one way to prove strength, and many men fought and killed when it wasn’t entirely necessary.

²⁷ Tu and Tuyet 49

²⁸ Micheal Clodfelter, *Vietnam in Military Statistics: A History of the Indochina Wars, 1772-1991* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1995), 34.

²⁹ Clodfelter 57

³⁰ Sue Sun. “Where the Girls Are: The Management of Venereal Disease by United States Military Forces in Vietnam.” *Literature And Medicine*, 23.1 (Spring 2004): 66-87. *Project Muse*. Web. 12 October 2015, 67.

³¹ Mark Barker, *Nam: The Vietnam War in the Words of the Men and Women Who Fought There* (New York: William Morrow and Company Inc., 1981), 192.

³² Lawson 57

³³ dwtpa97. “BASIC TRAINING VIETNAM ERA PART 1.” Online video clip. 17 November 2009. Web. Youtube. 18 December 2015.

However, because masculinity was constructed in opposition to femininity (weakness), sexual behavior proved another way for male soldiers to prove their power and reassert their place in the hierarchy.³⁴ As one man explained sexual acts, “Being in that kind of environment, you give a guy a gun and strange things happen.”³⁵ Like many GIs, he equated the gun with a physical extension of masculinity. In this context, to provide a soldier with a gun was to reinforce his manhood, to the extent that he felt the need to behave in ways towards women that would not be appropriate in other contexts. This tangible manpower reinforced the perceived inferiority of the weak, gun-less, and feminine.

The 1969 Air Force film *When the Girls Are—VD in Southeast Asia* uses the centrality of the soldier to underscore the American man’s dominance of the “exotic and feminized world he encounters.”³⁶ The main character, Peter, is a young soldier freshly deployed. He has a girlfriend back home, but another soldier convinces him to visit a bar, and then a massage parlor, and eventually a prostitute. Peter does not want to at first, but he is eventually convinced—and military higher-ups just look on knowingly. He is reprimanded, but in a gentle, winking manner; after all, boys will be boys.³⁷ The American dominance was centered on an idea of ‘hero’ masculinity; that is, the concept that by sheer masculinity and force, soldiers could save the day. To a certain extent, then, this masculinity gained power from individualism and acts of role breaking. The ideal man followed orders when necessary, but could save the day on his own without being told what to do. Thus, the construction of masculinity profited from this mild, acceptable role breaking. By sleeping with American women, GIs were breaking the rules and enforcing their manhood—yet they were doing it in a way that was subtly accepted and encouraged by the entire culture they were exposed to.

Human nature was often mobilized in order to explain the way soldiers related to women. The interpretation of sexual acts with Vietnamese women as something that men just have to do, as seen in the film and time in time again in war stories and interviews, is indicative of an underlying culture of military misogyny and the need to prove the power of masculinity by dominating femininity.³⁸ Women as actors were largely excluded from this construction; they served solely as objects to reflect male superiority and power. As one character from Bobbie Ann Mason’s novel *In Country* explains, women weren’t “over there,” so they can’t know what it was like. In this fictional G.I.’s mind, women are lumped together as a group that, by definition, cannot understand the ‘Vietnam experience.’³⁹

The Vietnam experience that G.I.s perceived was inextricably linked to violence, power, and sex. Feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe explained that men in the army experienced a kind of “militarized sexuality,” wherein even sexual activity became a part of military activity, and women were seen as just another enemy to be conquered.⁴⁰ Feelings of male patriarchy and

³⁴ Jeffords 107

³⁵ Baker 206

³⁶ Sun 67

³⁷ *Where the Girls Are—VD in Southeast Asia*. Dir. Richard R. Miller, writ. Willia Lundgren. Jerry Warner and Associates, 1969. DVD

³⁸ Lawson 59

³⁹ Jeffords 64

⁴⁰ Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches, and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 74.

superiority were accentuated by the military culture of manliness and became mixed up in the minds of many young soldiers with the land of Vietnam, battle, and women.⁴¹

The construction of masculinity was centered on battle, war, and winning. A man's gun was a physical extension of his ability to win, and thus, his masculinity. The 1962 army television ad "You Want Action?" evidences the importance of technology to the men in the military. As the ad explains, the Vietnam-era military was the most "mechanized" ever. Through the use of powerful technology and engaging in battle, soldiers would see "real-man" action.⁴² The act of fighting and winning in this case was what made soldiers real men, and it was through the use of superior American firepower that they were able to achieve this elevated masculine status. Furthermore, the physical emphasis on the gun as an extension of manhood was closely related to sexuality and power. Many men conflated winning with 'conquering' of women. For soldiers, to be able to defeat a woman in this way was to win off the battlefield, and therefore to reinforce their superiority and manhood. Additionally, many men felt that women, much like battle, were inescapable. One former soldier said,

The whores were amazing. We would sometimes take tremendous pains not to discuss our missions because they were so secret . . . Two minutes after we landed you'd hear 'Putt-putt-putt-putt.' The whores would be coming on those fucking Honda motorcycles, in the middle of the fucking jungles. It was unbelievable how these hookers found us. I don't even know of any roads that were near where we were.⁴³

To soldiers, Vietnamese women represented a physical manifestation of the mysterious, feminized landscape they were struggling so hard to defeat. To have sex with a woman was to gain power over her, and temporarily, to gain power over one's situation and the war.

Freedom, Sex Work, and Gender Construction

Many soldiers chose to have intercourse, consensual or otherwise, with any Vietnamese woman that pleased them, believing them either to be all willing or less than human. However, vast numbers of soldiers and American men also chose to sleep with the prostitutes and bar-girls that made themselves available to them, especially in urban centers such as Saigon. A 1973 article in the *Los Angeles Times* remarked, "downtown Saigon must now have as many prostitutes per square foot as any city in the world."⁴⁴ The *Times*' observation and focus on prostitution is further indicative of the eroticization of Asia and the emphasis on perceived moral differences between it and America. Although prostitution in Vietnam had existed to some degree for many years, American military occupation actually created vast demand for the industry. Wartime destruction of the countryside, via bombing and defoliation, destroyed many rural livelihoods and brought women to the cities, where they discovered that prostitution was an excellent source of income. One Vietnamese minister explained the phenomenon quite well when he said "the Americans need girls [and] we need dollars."⁴⁵ By allowing prostitution, the

⁴¹ Lawson 60

⁴² Jeff Quitney. "Army Recruiting Commercial 'You Want Action?' circa 1962 US Army 60-second spot." Online video clip. 15 Dec 2011. YouTube. Web. 18 December 2015.

⁴³ Baker 207

⁴⁴ George McArthur. "Saigon's Mayor Cracks Down on Prostitutes." *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*: 1. Oct 31 1973. Web. 3 Dec. 2015 .

⁴⁵ Eric. Tagliacozzo. "Morphological shifts in Southeast Asian prostitution; the long twentieth century." *Journal of Global History* 3.2 (July 2008): 251-273. Web. 2 October 2015. 271-272

Vietnamese government accepted the valuation of women as a good inherent in the sex work industry. Legal prostitution enabled women to be exposed to new values about purity in sexuality in a way that was acceptable officially, if not culturally.

Women who chose to serve as prostitutes or bar-girls did make substantial sums of money. Another *Los Angeles Times* article called them the “best paid citizens in Vietnam” and added that “more are flocking daily to the capital.”⁴⁶ The author spoke glowingly of official sanctions of prostitution and strict control of red light districts, indicating that not only were prostitutes successful, but that they were officially allowed to be so. Although many women were forced to leave their rural homes, millions chose to move to urban centers to take advantage of American cash flow.⁴⁷ One woman, Linh, recounted that before coming to Saigon to work as a maid, she lived on a farm in the Hau Giang province. She was not allowed to go to schools because “most of the families were poor, so the girls would stay home and help in the house or outside. I always did far work . . . I have no other skills.”⁴⁸ Although Linh originally moved to the city to work as a maid, she switched to working as a bar girl because a friend told her it was an easy job that paid well, and that she could meet an American man who would provide for her. Thus, she was influenced not only by money but also by the higher living status accorded by said money and by interaction with Americans.

Other women chose to work as bar-girls not to escape poverty but to escape the duties and low status afforded to young girls in rural villages. Hai, another former bar-girl, complained about having to take care of her family in her rural village. She said “They so lazy! They can’t cook food? They can’t feed pigs? . . . Why me? I tell you why: because I’m a girl. And girls don’t mean shit in Vietnam.”⁴⁹ Hai remained in her village until she reached marriageable age. When her parents presented her with her future husband, a man from her village who she had no say in choosing to marry, she chose to leave and try to make a better life for herself in Saigon. Hai and many women like her felt oppressed by Confucian gender norms in rural villages, but often times, they did not know how to escape them without leaving the village.

These women viewed urban centers of military occupation as a way to be free from gender norms that expected them to remain deferent and ladylike while taking from them the ability to make choices about their own future. Oftentimes, they perceived power in interactions with the men they served. Former bar-girl Kim Oanh recounted that she worked in three bars and would always cry and pretend that she was nervous or new to the city. American men loved to take care of her, she knowingly announced.⁵⁰ Kim was playing into the power dynamics that military men were subject to: the weak feminine, the masculine dominance. In her own way, though, she was retaining her power and independence, and creating for herself the freedom to behave how she wanted outside of traditional gender structures. Thus, military ideas about gender and masculinity created a duality: for American men who created and perpetuated the stereotypes, constructions of maleness and femaleness enforced their power and dominance. Yet women were also able to find power in this construction; by expressing their sexuality and femininity, they were able to exploit the desire that the men had to exploit them.

⁴⁶ “Viet Red Light District to be Set Up for GIs.” *Los Angeles Times (1923-Current File)*: 6. Jul 19 1966. Web. 12 Nov. 2015

⁴⁷ Gustafsson 312

⁴⁸ Debonis 187

⁴⁹ Gustafsson 315

⁵⁰ Gustafsson 321

Kim was not the only bar-girl who manipulated men in this way. Linh talked about Saigon tea, as did many former bar-girls. Saigon tea was a special watery concoction that only the women working drank; this way, they could get American soldiers drunk without becoming intoxicated themselves. Vietnamese bar-girls used the construction of their femininity as weak and innocent to gain power in situations where they might not have otherwise had it. Another woman, Binh Minh, recalled that she and several other young girls rented a house from an elderly couple. They told that couple that “one of the girls had seizures and always made a lot of noise [so they could have men over]. We [also] told them the Americans were doctors from the hospital.”⁵¹ Women enjoyed the freedom to come and go as they pleased, to talk to men without the threat of arranged marriage, and to spend their money as they wished. “I was never sad in Saigon,” one woman recalled.⁵² For many bar-girls, working in cities during the war was the best time of their lives.

American men were a valuable catch. Bar-girls coveted their money, and some sought out romantic relationships with these men. In Vietnam, it was common for a man and a woman to live effectively as husband and wife without legally marrying,⁵³ and many former bar-girls or prostitutes referred to their American companions as husbands. Some women lived with men for years and had children with them, while others lived with their husbands for a matter of months. In most cases, the women spoke of these relationships with love and fondness. Despite prevailing cultural ideas—about a Vietnamese woman’s place in the Vietnamese family and a military man’s dominance over and disregard for women—some people were able to have successful relationships, only interrupted by a man’s return to the U.S.⁵⁴

Whether or not they chose to have sexual or romantic relationships with American men, women who worked as bar-girls or as prostitutes were clearly influenced by military ideas of a feminine sexuality. The military exoticized Asian women so that many American men believed that Vietnamese women were just waiting to be taken and dominated.⁵⁵ Vietnamese women were influenced by the construction of their sexuality; in rural villages, they were married off to men without much of a say.⁵⁶ In urban centers, American men would pay them seemingly vast sums for the privilege of flirting with them or sleeping with them, a task which many considered easy or “nothing” work.⁵⁷

Although there is little academic scholarship dealing specifically with bar-girls, in interviews, many say they were very happy during the war. They were often well off and able to make their own choices about who they slept with, if anyone. A survey of 450 prostitutes rounded up by police in 1973 revealed that over 62% of the women wished to continue their work.⁵⁸ Although it is possible that the difficult experiences many of these women had after the war colored their perception of their wartime enjoyment, this newspaper survey makes it clear that many women enjoyed the sexual and gender-based freedom they experienced in the prostitution industry at the time of their work and wished to continue working, even after suffering legal consequences. When Saigon fell to northern communist forces in 1975, these

⁵¹ Gustafsson 320

⁵² Gustafsson 321

⁵³ Le Thi. “Women, Marriage, Family, and Gender Equality.” In *Vietnamese Women in Transition*, ed. Kathleen Barry (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 62.

⁵⁴ DeBonis 188

⁵⁵ *Where the Girls Are—VD in Southeast Asia*

⁵⁶ Luong 74

⁵⁷ DeBonis 161

⁵⁸ McArthur 1

women lost the lives they had cultivated for themselves. Without American presence, they were no longer able to function under the special position they had created for themselves of exemption from traditional family roles.

Post-War Experiences

Military constructions of gender, when juxtaposed with traditional Vietnamese constructions, provide insight into the influences on and behaviors of young women. However, academic scholarship on how this may have impacted women after the war ended is lacking. Scholars tend to focus on the experience of former soldiers; especially with respect to PTSD or inability coping within American society upon their return. Soldiers were not the only ones who struggled with fitting back in and ‘normalcy’; former bar-girls had difficulty assimilating as well.

When the Viet Cong (colloquially known as ‘Charlie’) invaded Saigon, rumors abounded. Out of fear, women chose to burn or bury any evidence of relationships with Americans. Many thought they would be killed or punished if their liaisons with the American enemy could be proved.⁵⁹ One Amerasian child recalled his mother destroying photos after telling him she couldn’t “have a son named William with the Viet Cong around.”⁶⁰ Fear ran rampant. Women usually knew that their wartime activities were transgressions that, while accepted during the war, would not be forgiven in a more restrictive communist society. If Viet Cong authorities discovered that women had slept with Americans, they were sent to “New Economic Zones,” undeveloped areas of land where the relocated were forced to farm and do heavy labor. Many women who were accustomed to the lavish life of a bar-girl struggled with their demotion to farming peasant, even if they had grown up on farms.⁶¹

Communist authorities and supporters hated former bar-girls. VC police accused women of being traitors and supporting the American way of life. One woman, Lien, claims the VC “stole” her personal belongings in the name of communism. She wasn’t allowed to work because of her relationship with an American man. She was forced into poverty, and admitted that

They [the VC] took me to jail, and every morning they take me out to ask me questions. ‘What you do, why you stay with Americans?’ . . . They say I love Americans, I don’t love the VC. They say I work for the Americans . . . and they sent me to the mountains [the New Economic Zone] . . . he [Charlie] don’t care if we live or die.⁶²

Lien’s story shows that for her, along with other former bar-girls and prostitutes, life under communism was less than ideal. Women who had expressed their freedom with Americans were viewed as suspicious not only because they had communicated with the enemy, but because their behavior was highly frowned upon in Vietnamese society. They were simply not supposed to choose who to sleep with and who to love, and a woman who had previously expressed such independence was perceived as a threat to the group mindset perpetrated by communism.

Women also had to endure hatred from civilian supporters of the northern government. Mai Thi Tu and Le Thi Nham Tuyet’s 1978 work *Women in Viet Nam* blames American forces for dragging Vietnamese women into a downward spiral. The authors claim that “Never before had national culture been undermined so deeply and cruelly. Never before in history had

⁵⁹ DeBonis 270

⁶⁰David Lamb. “Children of the Vietnam War.” *Smithsonian Magazine* (June 2009). Web. 15 November 2015.

⁶¹ Debonis 10

⁶² Debonis 270-271

Vietnamese women been so flouted and humiliated.”⁶³ In their view, former bar-girls and prostitutes had disgraced themselves worse than any women, ever. The social evil of prostitution was perceived as being something foreign and not native to Vietnam.⁶⁴ Thus, Americans and the women they slept with were doubly condemned for having brought this scourge. According to Thahn, who lived with an American soldier, “Vietnamese people look at me very bad.”⁶⁵ Even women who explicitly said that the war was the best time of their lives admit that their experience was unacceptable to many other Vietnamese.⁶⁶

Women who bore Amerasian children suffered especially badly, because they were unable to hide the evidence of their transgressions. In the cultural eye, “mothers of Amerasians were lumped together. . . as whores, and their children as bastards.”⁶⁷ Amerasians themselves were taunted and given inferior treatment in schools. They were commonly called “children of the dust,” and along with their families, they occupied the bottom rung on the social ladder. Their mothers, women who had slept with American men, were literally to be worthless their own society. They were so hated and looked-down upon that they were considered the dust or waste of the war and of Vietnam. Women who had Amerasian children were especially hated in the cultural eye. The children were perceived as a physical representation of their mothers’ transgressions, and like their parents, they were unfit to be included with their full Vietnamese peers. Amerasian children felt cursed from the start, by their own faces that reflected those of the national enemy.⁶⁸ Hatred of the U.S military transferred to these children and their mothers, who were “uniformly treated with suspicion and contempt by their community.”⁶⁹ The reaction to these women was based on not only their relationship with the enemy, but also on their cultural and sexual transgressions.

Ultimately, most women who had served as bar-girls found themselves unable to conceal their past deeds, and were sent to New Economic Zones and viewed as societal outcasts. Even if they were not, forced programs to depopulate cities meant many women returned to the countryside. They had to once again deal with poverty, intensified by countrywide deprivation.⁷⁰ Most of these women were unhappy with this change in status. Feminist scholar Cynthia Enloe wrote about women and war,

Some women are convinced during a war and immediately after that war that any unconventional roles they played were assigned to them only due to extraordinary wartime exigencies. These are the women who will be most accepting of a post-war reimposition of pre-war gendered ‘normalcy’. . . By contrast, those women who see their new wartime skills and responsibilities as challenging older notions about what is ‘natural’ or ‘proper’ for a woman may well be reluctant to squeeze themselves back into pre-war gender conventions once the shooting has stopped.⁷¹

⁶³ Tu and Tuyet 195

⁶⁴ Nguyen-vo Thu-huong. *The Ironies of Freedom: Sex, Culture, and Neoliberal Governance in Vietnam* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008), 215.

⁶⁵ DeBonis 255

⁶⁶ Gustaffson 325

⁶⁷ DeBonis 11

⁶⁸ Lamb 1

⁶⁹ Bok-Lim C. Kim. “Asian Wives of U.S. Servicemen: Women in Shadows.” *Amerasia* 4.1 (1977): 91-155. Web. 15 November 2015. 94

⁷⁰ Gustaffson 324

⁷¹ Cynthia Enloe. “Women After Wars: Puzzles and Warnings.” In *Vietnamese Women in Transition*, ed. Kathleen Barry (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 303.

Women who worked as bar-girls and prostitutes tended to fall into the latter category. Many of them chose to escape rural life and traditional ideals about marriage, family, and motherhood. They sought the freedom of a moneyed life and interaction with whatever men they chose. When Saigon fell and the Communists won, they were unhappy with the reign of prescribed gender roles. These women found themselves ostracized and unable to fit in to a society and set of constructed gender roles that many of them no longer believed in. As one former bar-girl put it, the years after 1975 were “crap.”⁷²

Many women still chose to tell the story of their time as bar-girls as an empowering one, despite the terrible years that followed. They considered themselves enlightened during the war, and to an extent, bought into ideas about superiority and gender roles. In their telling of the years after the war as terrible, they admit that the construction of sexuality and femininity they ascribed to during the war was, in their eyes, more correct than the one presented to them by traditional society. Ultimately, women who worked as bar-girls believed in certain aspects of military masculinity and femininity, but they reinterpreted it in a way that enabled them to find power and self-actualization.

Conclusion

All of the oral interviews of bar-girls cited in this paper were conducted with women who either had already emigrated to the United States or were planning to. This fact perhaps reflects the ostracizing they experienced, and the degree to which they felt they no longer fit into Vietnamese society. In Vietnam, this aspect of the war is still not widely discussed. Republic of Vietnam casualties are not publicly mourned, despite the existence of many memorial spaces for North Vietnamese.⁷³ Similarly, the women who lived in the south and slept with or loved Americans are not yet a part of the public memory. Although there is no statistical evidence, perhaps many of Vietnam’s former bar-girls and prostitutes rejected their old society to the extent that they chose to move to the United States. They were changed by the conceptualization of femininity that they were exposed to during the war, and as a result, no longer accepted traditional gender roles. In their society, they were worthless as women, so rather than re-assimilate, they chose a new culture.

In pre-war Vietnam, women lived on farms and were expected to live their whole lives doing backbreaking labor in deference to their fathers, husbands, and sons. In wartime Vietnam, American soldiers expected Vietnamese women to be deferent and sexually available. The construction of American military masculinity relied on feminine weakness, and men having to constantly prove their dominance over the feminine through battle and through sexual exploration. Despite the degradation of women inherent in this construction, bar-girls and prostitutes found power in their new role. They enjoyed the freedom to make their own choices and express their sexuality and femininity, and were able to understand American men’s expectations and manipulate them to get what they wanted. After the war, the Americans left and the Republic of Vietnam was taken over by the communist Viet Cong. Women were once again subject to traditional beliefs about a woman’s role in the household, and many were forced to go back to farming and rural life. Former bar-girls and prostitutes were especially punished for their

⁷² Gustaffson 324

⁷³ Christina Schwenkel. *The American War in Contemporary Vietnam: Transnational Remembrance and Representation* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2009), 99.

wartime actions and seen as outcasts in society. When they were sent back or moved back to rural areas, they struggled with what they perceived as a demotion in status, as well as the hatred they received from many other Vietnamese people. Further research is needed to understand where bar-girls are today and if they did, in fact, mostly move to other countries. However, wherever they live today, it is clear that these women were changed by their wartime experiences and conceptualizations of femininity, and in the years immediately following the war, they rejected or resented the traditional gender roles they were supposed to embrace.

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Anna Brichacek Expanding their Sphere: Walking the Line Between Ideal and Radical in Post-Civil War America

While inferior status and oppressive restraints were no doubt aspects of women's historical experience... the limitation of this approach is that it makes it appear either that women were largely passive or that, at the most, they reacted to male pressures or to the restraints of patriarchal society. Such inquiry fails to elicit the positive and essential way in which women have functioned in history.

-Gerda Lerner,

*The Majority Finds Its Past*¹

In February 1866, as Margaret Newbold Thorpe wearily stepped down onto the road after a grueling thirteen mile wagon ride over the corduroyed roads leading from Yorktown, Virginia to Fort Magruder, she paused to take in the scene that would be her home for the next several months. Februaries in Virginia often consist of seemingly endless days of frigid temperatures and rain. For a Northerner, the weather may have felt like a betrayal. Any hopes of escaping the Philadelphia winters for the warm weather and temperate climate of the South were quickly dashed. On her own for probably the first time in her life and faced with this dreary backdrop, Margaret found a small decrepit earthwork fort, a remnant of the war so recently fought. She must have wondered what exactly she was getting herself into as she carefully walked across the wooden planks that bridged a now useless moat. She passed through the broken down gates to find three small houses. The nicer brick house was already occupied by the Freedmen's Bureau officer and his family, so Margaret and her companion Martha Haines were left to choose between two vacant wood frame houses. Before they even had time to settle into their new home, the two women quickly set to work on the the reason they made the long journey to Virginia. The Friends Freedmen's Association of Philadelphia sent them to set up a school to educated the black population, something that had until very recently been against the law in the South.

After just two months of tireless work, Margaret and Martha had 158 students enrolled in their day school and at least another fifty in their night classes. The two women were constantly amazed by the dedication and resiliency of their pupils, many of whom walked upwards of three miles each way to get to the school. As Margaret explained, "Ours is not a village, or a camp school, the children come from several surrounding plantations."² The black populations had settled in a sporadic manner around the Fort as they either voluntarily left or were forced off the plantations they had been living on before the war. The Fort had initially been surrounded by a small military village around which the freedmen population gathered. Eventually, they created their own unincorporated town that would last up through the twentieth century. In addition,

¹ As quoted in Cogan, Frances B. *All-American Girl: The Ideal of Real Womanhood in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America*. Vol. 2. University of Georgia Press, 1989.

² Margaret Newbold Thorpe and Richard L. Morton, "Life in Virginia," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* Vol. 64, No 2 (April 1956): 180-207.

many of the freedmen and women that attended the school still lived on the plantations where they had been slaves. In her notebook, Margaret recalled going to one of these plantations and half-heartedly trying persuade the freedmen and women to move out of the wood frame houses where they were no longer welcome by their former master.

At twenty-three and twenty-five respectively, Margaret and Martha left their homes in the North to come to Virginia, a mere ten months after General Robert E. Lee and his Confederate forces surrendered to Union General Ulysses S. Grant in McLean. Margaret Thorpe, the second of four children, had spent her whole life in Philadelphia. Born to Amos Thorpe and Mary Potts Newbold, Margaret was a member of one of the oldest families in Pennsylvania. Her mother was a direct descendent of William Penn, the founder of the original colony.³ This paper will explore the motivations that led Margaret to leave her comfortable life to set up a school and become a teacher of newly freed slaves in the South, as well as the various factors that made it possible.

Margaret's transportation and accommodations were organized by the Friend's Association of Philadelphia and Its Vicinity for the Relief of Colored Freedmen. The foundational source for this microhistory is Margaret's notebook, written in 1881 from correspondence letters, since lost, sent during her time spent teaching freedmen in the winter months from 1866 to 1868. She wrote the notebook while living in New Jersey with her husband, daughter, father, and stepmother and later gave it as a Christmas gift to her only daughter, Alice.⁴ The notebook includes collections of thoughts, reflections, and anecdotes.

When relying on any historical document to draw broader conclusions about the realities of people not included therein, it is important to rigorously examine it for discrepancies and shortcomings. Obviously, Margaret Thorpe's notebook is no exception to this rule. The most glaring problem with basing an argument on this type of source is that it was written almost twenty years after the events took place and drawn from letters that no longer exist. In addition, Margaret gave the notebook as a gift to her daughter, so questions of reliability are of course valid. It is possible that she changed events to put herself in a more favorable light, or simply misremembered, or changed her thinking on an event years later. However, that these factors do not detract from the value of the document as a source of information for the experience of Margaret Thorpe as a freedmen's teacher or as a representative of other women like her. Based on her sincerity and the candidness of her opinions, even if she does embellish in places, Margaret gives us ample opportunity to explore further and her biases allow us to look critically at the shared culture of the time.

This paper relies on Margaret's notebook to examine the wider experiences of both teachers who chose to teach in the South and the lives of women who remained in the North. I will first explore the norms for women throughout the nineteenth century to understand the social constraints under which Margaret operated, including a discussion of the Cult of True Womanhood and the newly transformed profession of teaching. I will then contrast the different organizations, with a focus on the Society of Friends and the American Missionary Association, that sent Margaret and others south to teach freedmen and women and how the structures of these groups affected women's experiences while there. Finally, I will end with a discussion of

³ Society Page, *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, August 3, 1941, <http://bklyn.newspapers.com/image/52606209/>.

⁴ Thorpe, "Life in Virginia," 183.

the ways in which women were able to manipulate and work within these systems to achieve levels of autonomy and agency without threatening male systems of dominance.

Margaret is different from the other women that have traditionally been referenced in texts on northern women teaching in the South. She does not self-identify as a feminist, she does not agitate for equal wages or administrative power, and she certainly does not try to upset the racial order. Yet, she travels unchaperoned, lives outside of male control, foils the plots of malicious southerners, and works tirelessly to educate former slaves. Margaret neither pressed the bounds of the woman's role nor was she unduly backwards. Rather, she was representative of the changing norms for women. Margaret was able to retain the normative ideals for women – nurturing, domestic, and selfless – while at the same time existing outside of the home or a male dominated sphere. This break from tradition is in line with and emblematic of the changing standards during this period.

Traditional scholarship on women in New England from the antebellum period through the turn of the century has focused mainly around the concept of the separate spheres for men and women and the Cult of True Womanhood. This historiography teaches that bourgeois values placed women on a pedestal where they were supposed to remain unsullied by the immoral world that was industrializing around them. Physiological and biological arguments underlay and legitimized the reasoning behind female inferiority. Cultural beliefs of the natural physical and mental weakness of women were reinforced through popular media including novels and advertisements. The True Woman embodied the double standard for women in the period: women were morally superior to men, but at the same time they were expected to submit to male protection and domination. Though few could attain the ideal of the demure ivory-skinned domestic maiden, women across all classes were inculcated with this unrealistic standard through widespread periodical literature and they were in turn judged by it.⁵ This understanding of women's experiences is not incorrect, but its narrowness does not allow for the complexity of factors that shaped their lives, including women's own agency. It is important to distinguish between what was the ideal and how women actually lived. In reality, middle-class women were entrusted with large amounts of responsibility within the home. A woman was responsible for the rearing and education of her children as well as the overall physical wellbeing of her family.⁶ Though initially confined to the home, women found ways to move into the wider world while staying within the context of True Womanhood.

Margaret lived in a time of rapidly shifting educational opportunities for women and girls. Though schooling for girls had been steadily increasing since the Revolution, in 1800, female literacy rates still lagged far behind those of their male counterparts even in New England where girls had the best chance of receiving an education. However, the period between 1830 and 1860 marked the first great era of school reform in the United States. Reformers, such as Horace Mann, Massachusetts' Secretary of the State Board of Education, advocated for consistent standards for teachers, a uniform school day and term, and the provision of necessary materials such as books for schools. Mann was also an advocate for the education of women. Mann was a strong proponent of the popular idea of Republican Motherhood, which fit into the

⁵ Catherine Clinton, "Ties That Bound," in *The Other Civil War: American Women in the Nineteenth Century*, Macmillan, (1999), 40-53; Frances B. Cogan, *All-American Girl: The Ideal of Real Womanhood in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America*, Vol. 2, University of Georgia Press, 1989.

⁶ Clinton, "Ties That Bound," 41.

ideal of True Womanhood. He believed that due to their natural role as maternal nurturers, women were an obvious choice to serve as teachers. He also saw female teachers as a way to lower the cost of schooling because women could be paid less than men to do the same job.⁷ These common-school reforms led to what has been called the “feminization of teaching.” It has been estimated that one in five New England women was a teacher at some point in her life. However, for most, it was not viewed as a career. Teaching administration was completely dominated by men and most women taught for no more than two or three years until they got married.

Born in 1842, Margaret grew up right in the middle of these reforms. Based on census records, we know for certain that Margaret was in school in 1850 when she was seven years old. And given that her older sister was in school at that time as well, it is safe to assume that she continued on with her education for few more years at the very least. It is unclear whether or not Margaret attended any secondary school though her options would have been limited as there was only one girls’ high school in Philadelphia at this time, the Girls’ High School of Philadelphia, which had been founded in 1848. However, in the 1860 census, taken when Margaret was seventeen years old, she is listed as not having been in school within the year. We cannot tell whether or not she was one of the 65 young women the Girls’ High School had graduated by May 1860.⁸ What is clear is that regardless of whether or not she received a high school degree, Margaret was able to continue her studies into a teaching career to which she dedicated most of her young-adult life.

Teaching was just one of the ways that Margaret and other women co-opted normative expectations of female roles in order to move beyond their prescribed sphere. Women used their status of moral superiority to devote themselves to many of the various reform movements of this century. In fact, women were often ahead of men on many progressive social issues, such as abolition and temperance. Women used their position as the moral protectors of the home to argue that temperance was a family issue because of the alcohol’s affects on the productivity and volatility of husbands. Despite the gains in freedom and democracy achieved during and after the Civil War for enslaved people, an increasing number of restrictions were placed on the role of women both within and outside the abolitionist movement. First, though they were often more active and involved than their male counterparts, female abolitionists were sidelined because it was deemed inappropriate for women to participate at meetings. Secondly, the rights of women were benched by abolitionist and civil rights activists for what they deemed to be the greater good. In order for the extension of voting rights to blacks to be politically feasible, they believed that the question of female enfranchisement had to be excluded. The enfranchisement of black men and the codification of sexism into the constitution through the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments marked significant losses for female activists who were just starting to get a taste of equality.

Given that Margaret came from a traditionally Quaker family and her involvement with the Quaker organizations such as the Friends’ Freedmen’s Association of Philadelphia, it is likely that she benefited from more egalitarian personal and social relationships than most

⁷ John Rury, *Education and social change: Themes in the history of American schooling*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 76-123.

⁸ Philadelphia High School for Girls, “History,” <http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/schools/g/girlshigh/about-us/our-history>

women at this period. As part of their doctrine, Quakers believe in the spiritual equality of men and women and therefore allowed women more equality in their organizations. Quakers were early advocates for the emancipation of slaves and the ideology and fervor of their abolitionist societies transferred over naturally after the War to education and relief efforts for the freed populations during and after reconstruction.⁹ In Philadelphia, Quaker women were the first to organize these institutions. In March 1862, at the Women Friends of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, they discussed the ways in which they could help aid blacks in the South, mainly through the provision of supplies, such as blankets and clothes. They established the Women's Aid Association of Friends in order to give physical relief to the impoverished freedmen.¹⁰ One of the founders of this organization, Sarah Pennock, was actually the younger sister of Margaret's later teaching companion in North Carolina, Elizabeth Pennock.¹¹

The Women's Aid Association partnered with National Freedmen's Relief Association, whose President was Vice President of the United States, Hannibal Hamlin, to gather funds, collect garments, and make new ones for the "contrabands" prior to the end of the War.¹² A "Report of the Women's Aid Association of Friends for the Relief of Colored Refugees" explains that the organization was in need of funding to meet the "imperative need of clothing the naked, and furnishing some aid to the sick" as well as focus on "the moral elevation of the people, so far as that could be affected though the agency of schools established for their benefit."¹³ The Women's Aid Association worked diligently to raise money for these endeavors. The Report details just how much reach and influence their Women's Association had, listing gifts from Friends' organizations in England and from across the United States.¹⁴ After the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, Quaker men were prompted into action to help aid the freedmen as well, and on January 6, 1864, a large group of Friends gathered at the Meeting House on Arch Street in Philadelphia to establish the group that would later send Margaret to Virginia: the Friends' Association of Philadelphia and its Vicinity for the Relief of Colored Freedmen.¹⁵

After the end of the Civil War, thousands of northern teachers, many of whom had been active in the abolitionist movement, focused their energies on moving to the South to teach and minister to the newly freed blacks. Nearly seventy-seven percent of the whites who left the North to teach were women.¹⁶ Hundreds of missionary schools were set up by organizations like the Society of Friends and the American Missionary Association (AMA). Because of the records the

⁹ Jacqueline Jones, "Women who were more than men: Sex and status in freedmen's teaching," *History of Education Quarterly* (1979): 47-59.

¹⁰ Oliver S. Hickman, "Pennsylvania Quakers in Southern Reconstruction," *Pennsylvania History*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (October, 1946): 251.

¹¹ Rufus Matthew Jones, "Friends' Work for Coloured Freedmen," in *The Later Periods of Quakerism* (London: 1921), 599.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ E.C. Collins, "Report for the Women's Aid Association of Friends for the Relief of Colored Refugees," in *Friends' Review: A Religious, Literary and Miscellaneous Journal*, ed. Samuel Rhoads, Enoch Lewis, vol. 17 (1864) 133.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 134.

¹⁵ Hickman, "Pennsylvania Quakers," 253.

¹⁶ Ronald E. Butchart, "Recruits to the 'Army of Civilization': Gender, Race, Class, and the Freedmen's Teachers, 1862-1875," *The Journal of Education*, Vol. 172, No. 3 (1990): 79.

AMA kept and the numerous accounts by its teachers that have been preserved, the structure and experiences of the teachers who went south through the AMA are the most well documented and researched. In the early scholarship on these women, historian Jacqueline Jones argues that female teachers used their schools in the South to become “more than men.” Her argument uses female freedmen’s teachers who challenged and eventually usurped the power of their male administrators, filling both the male and female roles, and thus becoming more than men.¹⁷ Jones relies on the experiences of women in the AMA who, we will see, had very different experiences from Margaret. I will argue that rather than substantially challenging the male hierarchy, Margaret worked within the gender norms for women to find fulfillment.

Not all women were situated in the same power structures as women who worked with the American Missionary Association. The AMA, which was responsible for sending many of the female teachers to southern states, was not much different in its gendered hierarchical structure from schools in the North. Women’s salary was less than half of their male counterparts. They were also expected to behave under the watchful supervision of “fathers” of their missionary houses. Jones explains that though this was a natural expectation for schools in the North, it do not go over so well in the South. Because of the nature of their work and its demanding requirements, this was a self-selecting group of women who where almost guaranteed to be more progressive and active in seeking what they believed to be justice.¹⁸ Teaching freedmen in the southern states was a natural continuation of the work that many abolitionist and temperance societies had been pursuing before and during the war.

In contrast, because she went to Virginia through the Friend’s Freedmen’s Association of Philadelphia rather than the AMA, Margaret had a much different experience than the women Jones investigates. Aside from the Freedmen’s Bureau officer living in the Fort, there were almost no male supervision or control of Margaret’s actions, and even the officer and his family left after the women’s first year there. Margaret recounts, “While we had the Freedmen’s Bureau all cases of suffering were reported to the officer stationed here and he would give relief, but now we have all this to attend to, and at times my heart aches as if it would bust to do so little to help these heroic patient workers.”¹⁹ While there were several other schools on the Peninsula by 1866, due to the conditions of the roads, travelling even short distances seemed to be arduous.²⁰ So whereas women in the AMA were under strict hierarchical male control, Margaret and other Quaker women would often be outside the male sphere all together, which is in line with the nontraditional role of women in Quaker society.

Margaret and Martha were only accountable to administrative rules on school payment and distribution of goods. In her account, the two women had what seems to be almost exclusive control over the way in which they ran their school. They took the initiative to not only set up both a day and night school, but to also to teach sewing in the afternoon and Bible study on Sunday. While doing all this, the two women still found the time to visit the surrounding black

¹⁷ Jacqueline Jones, “Women who were more than men: Sex and status in freedmen’s teaching,” *History of Education Quarterly* (1979): 47-59.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Thorpe, “Life in Virginia,” 190.

²⁰ Richard L. Morton, “‘Contrabands’ and Quakers in the Virginia Peninsula, 1862-1869,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* Vol. 61, No. 4 (Oct., 1953): 421.

communities to distribute clothes and other needed items that the Quaker Associations had donated. One Saturday in April 1867, a day that was supposed to be their single day of rest for the week, Margaret and Martha barely had time to sit down. Immediately after eating breakfast, they set out distributing articles of food and clothing to the people in their community. They worked straight through lunch, and by the time five o'clock came, they were exhausted and ready to close up shop. However, when a pitiful childlike knock came on their door, Margaret could not ignore it. When she answered she found "a little pickaniny with such an earnest little face, that [she] asked, 'What do you want?'" and the child replied, "Please Miss Maggie, wont you give me a lock of your hair?"²¹ Margaret's devotion to her students and the blacks on the peninsula is evident from her tireless work and selflessness. Margaret's feelings towards the freed community are clearly seen as genuine by the people she is serving given the way they embrace her into their homes and make her feel welcomed.

The women were given guards by the Freedmen's Bureau to protect them, not from the black people, but rather from the white Southerners who viewed them as "damn Yankees" and often harassed them in hopes of keeping them from teaching. Though there were a few southern whites that would associate with them the white community surrounding Magruder and Williamsburg almost completely ostracized the women. In fact, Margaret recounts encounters with the Klu Klux Klan and their attempts to intimidate both the two women and the black population. They also faced threats from average southerners as well. In her third year coming to Virginia, Margaret began teaching at a school in Williamsburg requiring her to commute three miles from Fort Magruder. She had stones thrown at her, bulldogs sicked on her and wires strung across the road to knock her off her horse.²² Despite all this, Margaret still requested that all but one of their guards be removed because the women felt them unruly and unnecessary.²³ The Friend's Freedmen's Association of Philadelphia's break from the hierarchical structure of northern schools and of the AMA allowed Margaret and Martha more freedom to determine their own activities and dictate their own teachings in unprecedented ways.

Freedmen's teachers retained their femininity because teaching was in line with their traditional female roles. They were able to move into a sphere outside the home, and for some, almost totally outside of male control. These new levels of independence are in keeping with women's growing agitation for the expansion of their rights, especially their right to vote. From her comments, it is clear that the imminent suffrage of black males was weighing on Margaret's mind during this period, "Oh this right of suffrage to a people utterly unprepared! We already see a change in the feeling of some of the [black] men toward us, for we oppose with all our strength of will and tongue their efforts to get into office, and we tell them how utterly unfit they are."²⁴ Historian Ruth Currie-McDaniel takes comments like these as evidence that not "all teachers anticipated or worked for a radical change in the caste system."²⁵ She argues that women who did not agitate for radical change were agents of the old systems of power. But when one puts Margaret's words in the context of the years she sacrificed educating and "elevating" freedmen and to then watch as black men received rights that she herself was denied, had to have been

²¹ Thorpe, "Life in Virginia," 196.

²² Ibid, 201.

²³ Ibid, 183-207.

²⁴ Ibid, 202.

²⁵ Ruth Currie-McDaniel, "Northern Women in the South, 1860-1880," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 76, No. 2 (Summer 1992): 295.

painful for not only her but countless other women. Margaret's resistance to the enfranchisement of black men could easily be characterized as resentment. Despite her work on their behalf, she still sees them in need of much improvement. Margaret's feelings towards the black man's ability to participate in the democracy is reflected by many women's rights activists both at this time and in the decades to follow.

While she was certainly a brave and hardworking woman deserving of recognition, it would be a mistake to look uncritically at the views that Margaret expresses in her notebook. In her letters she writes, "I want to give a true picture of the lives of these people; of how industrious they were, how uncomplaining, how anxious to train their children aright and how they struggled to know how to read and write."²⁶ Margaret continually stresses the freedmen's appreciation for education and their belief in it as a way to better themselves. As a northern woman, and certainly as a Quaker, Margaret is not unusual in her desire to seek the advancement blacks in the South, whom the majority of people viewed as backwards. Ruth Currie-McDaniel points out, "There was little doubt that, for these women, the only effective tool for reversing the effects of slavery was education. The New England faith in the efficacy of education made inevitable the effort to direct power toward the former slaves."²⁷ However, Margaret herself sees the blacks that she teaches in a paternalistic context that is not too far removed from the way that plantation owners saw blacks.

She maintains a sense of superiority to them that is defined not by her status as teacher and theirs as pupils, but rather by their respective races. On multiple occasions she uses racial prejudice to inform her understanding of the people who surround her. In the classroom she says, "there is no question but the mulattoes are far superior in intellect to the bona-fide negroes."²⁸ At other times she falls back on dehumanizing language to describe her interactions, "Many of the children were very comical, indeed we sometimes questioned whether it had not been within a very recent period that they had lost their caudle [caudal] appendage and acquired the power of speech!"²⁹ These statements are unsettling to someone reading Margaret's notebook today, but at the time they were not out of the norm. Margaret's racism is apparent, but her faults do not cancel out many of her many admirable qualities. Indeed, she holds beliefs that even today would seem radical. Margaret is not afraid to point out the injustices blacks faced after the war, including affirming their right to remittances. She says,

We talk of Freedom compensating the negroes for all their woes, and think they should be most humble for receiving as a favor what God gave as a right to every creature created in His image... Where is the compensation for years of toil, for they have nothing to show save hardened hands and scarred backs... Where the compensation for the mothers who saw their daughters sold to a fate infinitely worse than death? And Oh! Is there a woman on earth who thinks aught can compensate those young girls?³⁰

²⁶ Thorpe, "A Yankee Teacher," 185.

²⁷ Currie-McDaniel, "Northern Women in the South," 284-312.

²⁸ Thorpe, "A Yankee Teacher," 203.

²⁹ Ibid, 148.

³⁰ Ibid, 195.

Despite her feelings of superiority to the black population, Margaret clearly identifies with them as human beings and empathizes with the horrors that were inflicted on female slaves through their shared experiences as women. This injustice and the general situation of blacks in the South is clearly very compelling to Margaret, as it must have been to countless other freedmen's teachers.

Understanding what forces originally drove these women to leave their comfortable homes and make the long and arduous journey to the South, a place that they believed to be uncivilized and backwards, will help to fill in the gaps in the female experience in the nineteenth century. The single story of the women's experience restricted to the home in separate spheres clearly does not accurately represent the lives of all, or even most women. The cult of domesticity demanded the ideal of docile and nurturing women. While many women were relegated to the home, either by their own choice or by societal custom, the options for women were expanding. Women sought agency within the systems of power in which they functioned. Historian Catherine Clinton argues "Women perceived that they might extend female jurisdiction in to the public and hitherto male realm by using their 'domestic' role as a lever – wedging themselves into positions of power."³¹ Women who went south to teach in the freedmen's schools were able to manipulate and work within the context of their idealized roles to obtain independence and opportunities for fulfillment outside of the traditional home and family sphere.

While female teachers in the South worked within the context of gender norms, there was a growing movement of women who sought to change the status quo. They not only fought for women's suffrage, but also the rights of married women to retain their property and be able to obtain a divorce while maintaining custody of their children. The movement for women's rights grew out of the flourishing abolitionist movement of the nineteenth century. Although they were fighting for the rights of blacks, male abolitionists were not receptive to extending these ideals to women. Long disenfranchised, women saw no change in their status at abolition meetings. "The decision of the [World Anti-Slavery Society] convention's organizers not to allow elected female delegates to sit with their male peers" rankled activists Lucretia Mott, herself a Philadelphia-based Quaker, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. They resolved to have their own convention of women, and in 1848 at Seneca Falls they drafted the Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions outlining women's grievances with the laws as they stood.³²

The actions of these groundbreaking women marked the beginning of the feminist movement in the United States. They and thousands of others would protest, march, and picket for what they believed to be their fundamental rights as United States citizens. Like Margaret, who was teaching freedmen in North Carolina in 1870 at the time of the ratification of the fifteenth amendment, these women were forced to watch as they were excluded from enfranchisement. Margaret was seventy-eight years old before she finally received the right that she had lectured about the importance of to the freedmen over fifty years earlier. The ratification of the nineteenth amendment in 1920 was the culmination of over seventy years of feminist activism. While it is clear that Margaret believed in the value and importance of voting, it is not clear whether it is a right she openly declared for herself and all women as the feminist activists

³¹ Clinton, "Ties That Bound," 41-42.

³² Rory Dicker, *A history of US feminisms*, (Seal Press, 2008), 29.

of the time did. Aside from voicing her disgust with the government treatment of freedmen in her letters, it does not seem that Margaret ventured much further in her activism.

Why go into the history of feminism and feminist activism if Margaret wasn't really involved in it? Doesn't seem crucial/necessary to your argument

How does Margaret's reality reflect the experience of women more broadly, and would it be right to call her a feminist? Frances B. Cogan defines the Ideal of Real Womanhood as offering "American women a vision of themselves as biologically equal (rationally as well as emotionally)... Moreover, the Ideal of Real Womanhood demanded that the woman's duty to herself and her loved ones was not as True Womanhood seems to suggest, to die, but rather to live; not to sacrifice herself, but to survive."³³ This fits very well with the way that Margaret lived her life. She was hardy and dogged, she didn't back down from a challenge, and most notably she did not depend on men.

Not all women who went South to teach freedmen were as representative of this Ideal. Margaret recounts the events of a day in the winter of 1867 when she and Martha received word that there was a young woman dying at the Yorktown Mission House. Margaret immediately set out with a freedman named William on a harrowing journey through a snowstorm. During the trip, she and William got lost and ended up on an extremely circuitous route. After having had to assure William that there were no "goses" or "sperits" in the woods and nearly freezing their toes off, Margaret and William finally arrived at nine o'clock at night. However, she was just hours too late, as the young woman had already died earlier that afternoon. Margaret was told that when the young woman was informed that she was dying she said, "It is a great disappointment. I hope our blessed Lord will accept the sacrifice instead of the work."³⁴ Margaret does not dwell on this event, and moves on quickly in her notebook. However, the fate of this poor young woman and her submissive acceptance of it is in stark contrast with the vigorousness and resilience exhibited by Margaret. The two women frame well the differences between the Cult of True Womanhood and the Cogan's Ideal of Real Womanhood.

Many feminist scholars would seek to write off Margaret for her conformity to normative standards for womanhood and for her acceptance of many of the prejudices of the racial and gendered order. Does the fact that she did not directly advocate for the equality of women or that she later married and returned home remove the possibility of calling her a feminist? Cogan points to this type of question in her own analysis of Real Womanhood writers at this period. Many of their defining characteristics, "the sense of duty to others, especially duty defined by gender roles, destroys any interpretation" of these women "as feminists and, to the unwary critical eye identifies them to some degree with the self-sacrificing, self-denying maidens of the steel-engraving stereotype."³⁵ Cogan concludes that the Real Womanhood writers fall somewhere on the spectrum of feminism but ultimately attempt to draw a line separating themselves from it by continuing to embrace separate spheres for men and women.

While the discussion of whether or not Margaret was a feminist is an interesting conversation to have today, I would argue that it has little pertinence to the actual lives of women at this period and should not really be focused on. The value of exploring Margaret's experience

³³ Cogan, *All American Girl*, 5.

³⁴ Thorpe, "Life in Virginia," 193.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

comes from how it affected the quality of her life and how it differed from what women were able to do before, not from how we choose to label her by today's standards. Margaret's actions were small and focused at a personal level. She worked in her own way to affect the lives of individual freedmen and women whether it was through the distribution of clothes or teaching them to read. In addition, Margaret's choices for herself were highly individual. She did not advocate for the widening sphere of all women; she simply did what she thought to be best for herself and her interest.

In her book *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*, Stephanie Camp makes the argument that enslaved women pursued courses of action that functionally did very little to bring down or rebel against the institution of slavery. However through their small actions of everyday resistance, they were able to create spaces in which they could more fully lead their lives on their own terms, and on a personal level made their lives bearable.³⁶ Margaret fits into this framework. At the age of twenty-four Margaret Thorpe lived independently and pursued work that she was passionate about and that she felt was truly making a difference in the lives of freedmen and women. Cogan's Ideal of Real Womanhood is, in itself, an outgrowth of these personal acts of resistance. Margaret and women like her did not challenge the system in any radical way, but they pushed against and expanded the boundaries of acceptability to find greater fulfillment in their lives. Progressive but not radical, Margaret walks the line of acceptable norms for women, and through her actions exhibits everyday resistance to the constraints of the female sphere.

After her tenure of three winters in Virginia, Margaret Thorpe continued with her freedmen teaching further south in North Carolina where she spent the winter and spring of 1869 to 1870 and the winter into spring of 1871. Upon completing each of her terms in the South, Margaret returned home to Philadelphia to live with her parents for the summer. In 1872, Margaret married Samuel Webster Stokes whom she met years before in 1867 while teaching at Magruder and who later visited her in North Carolina.³⁷ Margaret and Samuel moved to New Jersey where they had three daughters, only one of whom, Alice Stokes, survived to adulthood. Margaret obtained an unprecedented amount of mobility and independence for a woman of her social class, while at the same time retaining her womanhood and respectability. Her transition back into what was by all accounts a normal life after the time she spent on her own teaching in the South might be the best testament to the social acceptability of her activities.

Although there were many female Freedmen's teachers after the Civil War, and though there were even more women who were leaving the home through the teaching profession in general, Margaret Newbold Thorpe is exceptional not only for the simple fact that she left an extremely vivid and detailed account of her activities, but also for the way in which she walked the middle road between independence and conformity. Margaret gives us the ability to see women as more than just liberated or confined. The changing and evolving roles for women in society have required both everyday forms of resistance along with the activist marching in the streets. The former, though often harder to identify or entirely define, makes the later infinitely more successful. When women act in small ways to expand their opportunities, it gives context and legitimacy to the larger demands for change. After her time teaching, Margaret and her story

³⁶ Camp, *Closer to Freedom*.

³⁷ Thorpe, "A Yankee Teacher," 194.

of bravery and sacrifice slips quietly back into the anonymity of history with so many others, but for that brief period she was the changing tide; she was the everyday resistance.

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Evelyn Strobe: The Consumer Revolution: The Birth of Colonial Protest

The consumer revolution of the mid-eighteenth century transformed economic culture in the thirteen British colonies. The demand for British imports, fine goods, and luxuries increased at a dramatic rate between the 1740s and the 1770s. As the quantity of imports increased, so did their quality; goods of many colors, textures, and sizes filled the market with variety. The relationship between colonial merchants and their clients defined the economic system, but the consumers themselves grew to play a much more important role in the colonial economy. With countless new commodities on the colonial market, consumer choice became a powerful determinant of supply and demand. In Williamsburg, Virginia, in particular, prominent men and common townspeople alike participated in the economy, and suppliers of goods and services like Edward Charlton, wigmaker, and Dr. John M. Galt, physician and apothecary fought to meet growing demand. By the late 1760s and early 1770s, this individual commercial agency became political, as the colonists used consumer choice to protest newly enforced parliamentary taxation through nonimportation and non-consumption. The consumer culture, which had given ordinary people a voice in the economy, influenced the development of a political agency for the masses that sparked the move to revolution. In Williamsburg, the consumer revolution catalyzed colonial protest through the nonimportation movement and turned Virginia politics in favor of patriotism, and this example illustrates an overall trend towards individual political agency in the thirteen colonies on the eve of the American Revolution.

The Consumer Revolution in the Colonies and Early Williamsburg

In the mid-eighteenth century, a consumer revolution spread throughout the British colonies as a result of technological innovation and advancements in trade. Previously unimaginable goods, including Indian chintzes and Chinese damasks, appeared on the market, and “items that were once considered luxuries reserved for the highest ranks began to ‘trickle down’ to common households...” as they became more available and affordable.¹ The American colonies quickly acquired a taste for material culture, one that Howell and Powers assert “divided the haves from the have-nots and the knowledgeable from the know-nothings.”² Ordinary people attempted to transcend their status through their purchases purchasing power, and an increasing demand for British imports created an economic system reliant on consumer choice. The colonists controlled what was sold in local stores with purchasing power, especially in Williamsburg, where “the consumer revolution was everywhere on view...”³ The demand for imports pushed merchants to increase supplies and to continue to diversify their selections in order to make a profit; they constantly shifted to reflect consumer behavior. Social trends influenced consumer behavior, and the colonial market responded by offering a greater assortment of goods of that type to meet consumer preference. For instance, the spike in sales of china and porcelain, required for consuming, serving, and preparing tea, reflected the growing social popularity of tea drinking. The popularity of textiles like damasks and chintzes, more readily available through European trade in the Far East, created a source of demand for

¹ Mark Howell and Emma L. Powers, et al., “The Consumer Revolution,” *Colonial Williamsburg*, accessed May 11, 2015, http://www.history.org/history/teaching/enewsletter/volume5/december06/consumer_rev.cfm.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

consumers who attempted to express their newfound economic mobility through sartorial display.⁴ The individual economic agencies of the middling classes defined this new consumer marketplace, and their ability to affect the local economy through their economic decisions produced a socio-political dynamic that proved revolutionary.

The early stages of the consumer revolution in Williamsburg followed the growth of the city. Founded in 1699, the city originally encompassed three buildings: the Wren Building of the College of William & Mary, Bruton Parish Church, and the Capitol. Duke of Gloucester Street connected the College and the Capitol, following designer Francis Nicholson's plans for the capital to link education and government as a beacon of light for the colony.⁵ Over time, officials constructed other public buildings like the Powder Magazine and the Governor's Palace, but there were still only a few private residences and businesses. With full-time residency still low in the late 1730s, Williamsburg merchants developed a "commercial district in the vicinity of the capitol, where the throngs of people present during sessions of the General Assembly required food, lodging, and diversion" to draw in a more permanent population.⁶ While this commercial district was comprised originally of taverns that offered such services to travellers, it expanded to provide more market and entertainment opportunities to the public. Visitor and plantation owner William Byrd II's diaries depict these changes in the city. His early entries only discuss the food he consumed at local taverns, including boiled turkey at Wetherburn's in December of 1739.⁷ As early as 1741, Byrd spent his time with friendly company in Williamsburg at social events like dances, meetings over coffee to discuss business, and even dinners with the Governor.⁸ Within just two years, the social services in Williamsburg had grown, encouraging trade and the settlement of new residents. During the rest of the decade and into the mid-eighteenth century, a market that focused greatly on consumer participation formed in the capital to accommodate these new residents.

Mid-Century Consumer Culture in Williamsburg: Producers, Consumers, and Imports

By the 1750s and 1760s, the Williamsburg economy experienced a true consumer revolution as local trades and businesses became more established and diverse. Artisans, furniture makers, milliners, wigmakers, shopkeepers, printers, market vendors, coffeehouse owners, and tavern keepers provided Williamsburg residents with a great deal of services and commercial opportunities. The development of a social scene in the city led to an increase in the number of theatres, coffeehouses, and additions to local taverns, but it also led to an expansion of the variety of goods sold in city establishments. In early 1768, Thomas Jefferson's commercial business in Williamsburg was rare and often limited to his farming needs, specifically fodder,

⁴ Amelia Peck, ed., *Interwoven Globe: The Worldwide Textile Trade, 1500-1800* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013), 83.

⁵ James D. Kornwolf, "'Doing Good to Posterity': Francis Nicholson, First Patron of Architecture, Landscape Design, and Town Planning in Virginia, Maryland, and South Carolina, 1688-1725," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 101, no. 3 (July 1993): 371.

⁶ Mark R. Wenger, "Boomtown: Williamsburg in the Eighteenth Century," in *Williamsburg, Virginia: A City Before the State; An Illustrated History*, eds. Robert P. Maccubbin and Martha Hamilton-Phillips (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2000), 43.

⁷ William Byrd II, *Another Secret Diary of William Byrd of Westover, 1739-1741: With Letters & Literary Exercises, 1696-1726*, ed. Maude H. Woodfin, trans. Marion Tinling (Richmond, Virginia: Dietz Press, Inc., 1942), 17.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 151-153.

oats, and seed for his plantation at Monticello.⁹ By the end of the next year, his purchases became much more frequent and included postage, candles, coffee, foodstuffs, slippers, gloves, books, a Ratten cane, a microscope, and cotton stockings.¹⁰ Jefferson's purchases reflect the rising material culture that comprised the local economy, for the Williamsburg market had grown immensely to accommodate a larger population and catered to upper, middle, and lower class individuals alike.

Williamsburg's shopkeepers and tradesmen played a role in this developing consumer culture by furnishing an ever-increasing supply of goods. Wigmaker Edward Charlton provided goods and services to the public, making and mending wigs and selling grooming products to address the fashion necessities of the local material culture. Both prominent members of Virginia society and ordinary men frequented his establishment, and between 1769 and 1776, he listed Thomas Jefferson, Dr. John M. Galt, Speaker Peyton Randolph, Reverend Bland, Landon Carter, Patrick Henry, and William Prentis as patrons.¹¹ From 1769 to 1773, Charlton sold Jefferson several containers of powder, pairs of curls, and other sundry items, an account totaling £11.17s.9d.¹² In the four-year period between 1769 and 1773, Dr. Galt, local physician and apothecary, purchased brown dress wigs and yearly contracts in shaving and dressing from Charlton adding up to £27.14s.¹³ In his ledgers, Dr. Galt details an array of commodities he purchased in the city, including coffee, quills, apples, paper, gloves, and punch,¹⁴ signifying the ways in which merchants participated as both producers and consumers in the economic system. In the same vein, Charlton was able to dictate the supply of goods and the services he wished to provide, while still being subject to the local consumer culture and its demands. The market industry in Williamsburg experienced dramatic changes as the city's population and political significance increased, and local merchants and tradesmen developed a special relationship with consumers that reflected the importance of consumer choice, supply, and demand.

While local goods and services did influence the mid-century material culture, the steady stream of imports flowing into Williamsburg's shops from the mother country had the greatest impact on the consumer revolution. T.H. Breen indicates that the new consumer marketplace of imports "introduced dynamic categories of comfort and taste into the lives of middling sorts of people...."¹⁵ Those who did not hold gentry status still desired the luxury and quality of British commodities, and the wide selection of goods allowed their consumer choices to have a significant impact on the local economy and on everyday life. Williamsburg merchants often publicized new shipments in the *Virginia Gazette*, advertising goods "lately imported" from overseas. In October of 1767, J. Eilbeck boasted "Irish linen, white and brown sheeting, diaper table cloths, printed cottons, women's bonnets and cloaks, handkerchiefs, check linen, striped holland, osnabrigs, men and women's shoes, Negro cottons, kerseys, and plains... &c." at his

⁹ Thomas Jefferson, *Jefferson's Memorandum Books: Accounts, with Legal Records and Miscellany, 1767-1826; Volume 1*, eds. James A. Bear, Jr. and Lucia Stanton (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 42.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 151-152.

¹¹ Charlton Account Book, Galt Papers (I), Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William and Mary.

¹² *Ibid.*, 79.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁴ Book of Expenses, 1767, Galt Papers (I), Special Collections Research Center, Swem Library, College of William and Mary.

¹⁵ T. H. Breen, introduction to *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), PDF e-book, xvii.

store near the Post Office, sold “at the lowest prices, for ready money.”¹⁶ As the import trade boomed in the early 1770s, the lists got longer; milliner Mary Dickinson advertised her latest shipment in 1772, “just imported from London,” with an inventory of more than 50 items.¹⁷ The breadth and variety of her products reflect clearly consumer demand for the latest in British fashion and represent an overall desire for the luxury and quality of foreign goods. By advertising in the *Gazette*, merchants could reach more clients, stimulating economic interest and supporting an economy ruled by consumer demand.

Move to Revolution: Nonimportation and Nonconsumption

By the third quarter of the eighteenth century, the consumer marketplace had revolutionized the Williamsburg economy. The possibility of consumer choice, which gave everyday individuals the opportunity to make economic decisions that affected themselves and their local economies, created an instrument of social and economic influence. That instrument became political in light of changes in the relationship between the colonies and the mother country. In the mid-1760s, Great Britain rejected a historic policy of salutary neglect in favor of more direct methods of colonial management. After the Seven Year’s War, the British government needed to levy taxes to repay accumulated war debts; the mother country saw her under-taxed colonies as the perfect venue to raise revenue, and decided to impose taxes without the approval of the colonial legislatures. The Sugar Act of 1764 modified import duties indirectly, and proved “destructive to the normal flow of trade” in the heavily consumer-driven economy.¹⁸ The Stamp Act of 1765 took this disruption of trade a step further by imposing a direct tax on print materials, an obvious and intentional symbol of Parliamentary authority.

In an attempt to address grievances, consumers exercised their economic powers of preference through the nonimportation and non-consumption movements. People in Williamsburg and elsewhere perceived British imports, once in high demand, as tangible evidence of the crown’s taxation efforts, and this view compelled them to “probe connections between parliamentary oppression and the consumption of British goods.”¹⁹ In protest, the colonists stopped introducing and buying British commodities, around which they had built a consumer culture only a few years before. The nonimportation and non-consumption movements were enforced by a social system in which each merchant or consumer had to answer to the rest of the community, “[taking] oaths before their neighbours swearing not to purchase certain items until parliament repealed the obnoxious taxes.”²⁰ The Sons of Liberty, a group concentrated in major cities like Boston, New York, and Williamsburg, enforcing participation in nonimportation in local businesses and preventing effective tax collection.²¹ Parliament responded to colonial protests against the Stamp Act by repealing its duties.

Although the British legislative body bent to economic pressures, it stood firm politically by passing the Declaratory Act in 1766, which gave the government the right to legislate for the colonies under all circumstances. The colonies had protested direct taxes, but Parliament

¹⁶ *Virginia Gazette*, 22 Oct. 1767 [Purdie & Dixon].

¹⁷ *Virginia Gazette*, 7 May 1772 [Purdie & Dixon].

¹⁸ T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), PDF e-book, 11.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ T. H. Breen, “‘Baubles of Britain’: The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century,” *Past and Present* 119 (May 1988): 95.

²¹ Philip G. Davidson, “Sons of Liberty and Stamp Men,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 9, no. 1 (1932): 56.

believed that they would shoulder external taxes, even though such taxes jeopardized the consumer-driven import market. The Townshend Acts went into effect in 1767, expanding taxes on imports and driving colonists to again invoke the power of consumer choice to demonstrate their grievances. The Stamp Act protests acted as precursors for demonstrations against the Townshend Acts, for the colonists received evidence that they could affect political change through “enthusiastic participation in a new Anglo-American marketplace.”²² In 1769, Williamsburg residents met at Raleigh Tavern to form the Association, a group designed to enforce nonimportation within the colony. After the Townshend Acts were repealed in 1770, colonists in Williamsburg had only greater proof that “patterns of consumption provided them with an effective language of political protest.”²³ They had affected the market through economic decisions, and those decisions achieved political results that represented new forms of individual agency.

The nonimportation and non-consumption movements culminated with the Tea Act of 1773, turning in favor of patriotism. Although the Act imposed no new taxes, it represented the colonists’ final straw in regards to parliamentary legislation. The statute addressed the perhaps most popular British import to the colonies: tea. Tea was well liked for both social and dietary reasons, and the consumer revolution rendered it a necessity; “the [Tea Act] affected an item of popular consumption found in almost every colonial household.”²⁴ In light of the Boston Tea Party, the Virginia House of Burgesses declared in 1774 that the importation of tea into the colony would cease,²⁵ and here the power of consumer choice is clear. By choosing neither to import nor to consume tea, colonists in Williamsburg made a political statement about the nature of parliamentary taxation. A poem in the January 20, 1774, issue of the *Virginia Gazette*, titled “A Lady’s Adieu to her Tea Table,” illustrates this issue:

No more shall I dish out the once lov’d liquor,
 Though now detestable,
 Because I’m taught (and I believe it true)
 Its use will fasten slavish chains upon my country,
 And Liberty’s the goddess I would choose
 To reign triumphant in America.²⁶

Williamsburg residents chose to give up their prized social beverage rather than to support British legislation and politics, demonstrating an emerging patriot ideology. In doing so, the colonists ensured that the trends in purchasing behavior developed in the consumer revolution became vehicles of political protest.

²² T. H. Breen, *The Marketplace of Revolution: How Consumer Politics Shaped American Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), PDF e-book, 14.

²³ T. H. Breen, “‘Baubles of Britain’: The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century,” *Past and Present* 119 (May 1988): 90.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 84; *Ibid.*, 98.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.

²⁶ *Virginia Gazette*, 20 Jan. 1774 [Purdie & Dixon].

Moving beyond the Williamsburg example, the targeted use of consumer choice through protest occurred throughout the thirteen colonies. Similar imports and similar consumer experiences produced similar results in the form of political demonstrations, and the nonimportation and non-consumption movements created a necessary link between the colonies. Parliamentary taxation affected the thirteen colonies as a whole, and a unified public response was essential in order to combat its economic and political ramifications. The consumer revolution had provided the colonies with comparable powers of preference, and they used those powers to reach desired political results by refusing to utilize or distribute imported goods. The success in the colonial nonimportation movement lay in the recognition of a common goal. After the Boston Tea Party, other colonies rallied behind Bostonians and formalized policies of protest. Shared economic interests propelled the colonies towards cohesive methods of expressing grievances, illustrating that the colonies could work together. Through similar consumer behaviors and participation in nonimportation and non-consumption movements, the colonists “had found a means to communicate effectively with each other, to develop a shared sense of political purpose”²⁷ that would prove essential during the American Revolution.

Conclusion

In the mid-eighteenth century, technological innovations, which made products cheaper and more available, led to increases in the supply and assortment of goods. Reacting to the boost in supply, ordinary people found that they could affect the market with purchasing power. In Williamsburg, this consumer revolution followed the growth of the city itself, expanding customer participation as the thriving population introduced new businesses, trades, and forms of entertainment. A wide variety of goods and services offered by local shopkeepers and tradesmen reflected growing consumer demand, as did the increase in the number and variety of purchases made by local consumers. To a certain extent, merchants dictated which imports would be sold in Williamsburg, but consumer desire and choice determined their economic success. On the eve of the revolution, this consumer economic power proved a vehicle for protest, as the colonists enforced nonimportation and non-consumption movements in the city. The Williamsburg case study illuminates the economic trends that existed throughout the colonies, and which furthered political ideologies in favor of revolution through protest. On a larger scale, the consumer revolution provided American colonists with a means to affect change, producing a political agency for the common man that played an important role in the American Revolution.

²⁷ T. H. Breen, “‘Baubles of Britain’: The American and Consumer Revolutions of the Eighteenth Century,” *Past and Present* 119 (May 1988): 74.

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