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Mothers Of Invention: Women Of The Slaveholding South In The American Civil War



Synopsis

A New York Times Notable Book of the Year Winner of the Francis Parkman Prize Winner of the Avery Craven Prize In the ante-bellum South, women from elite slaveholding families were raised to consider themselves not so much as "women" but as "ladies," models of dependent femininity. But that ideal was to prove impossible to maintain during the social upheaval of the Civil War, when they found themselves suddenly assuming unaccustomed roles as workers, protectors, and providers. Through the use of hundreds of moving and eloquent letters, memoirs, and diary excerpts, Drew Gilpin Faust, one of the foremost historians of the American South, illuminates the lives of a wide array of Confederate women: from Lizzie Neblett, a housewife facing a life of physical labor for the first time, to Sallie Tompkins, a Virginia aristocrat turned military nurse, to Belle Boyd, a ruthless teenaged spy. An intensely personal work of scholarship, *Mothers of Invention* gives voice to the hitherto silent half of the Confederacy's ruling class and explains how its ethos continues to influence the lives of Southern women even today. "A dramatically revealing study...[Faust looks] directly at the past, with a daughter's hard, steady gaze, and with a daughter's generous heart."--New York Times Book Review

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Faust (The Creation of Confederate Nationalism) makes a major contribution to both Civil War historiography and women's studies in this outstanding analysis of the impact of secession, invasion and conquest on Southern white women. Antebellum images based on helplessness and

dependence were challenged as women assumed an increasing range of social and economic responsibilities. Their successes were, however, at best mixed, involving high levels of improvisation. The failure of Southern men to sustain their patriarchal pretensions on the battlefield also broke the prewar gender contract of dependence in return for protection. Women of the South after 1865 confronted both their doubt about what they could accomplish by themselves and their desire to avoid reliance on men. The women's rights movement in the South thus grew from necessity and disappointment-a sharp contrast to the ebullient optimism of its Northern counterpart. Faust's provocative analysis of a complex subject merits a place in all collections of U.S. history. Photos. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

YA-Privileged, upper-class white women of the Confederacy faced overwhelming changes in their lives as men went off to war and they struggled with new and demanding responsibilities. Having to run farms and manage often insubordinate slaves, learn to perform menial domestic chores, cope with loneliness and shortages of food and clothing, and provide support to the army thrust them into situations that their gender had never coped with in antebellum southern life. Those women found themselves needing to learn new skills, often contrary to their social upbringing. Some retreated into themselves, but many, moved not only by patriotism but also by a reluctant new freedom, crossed social barriers to become teachers, nurses, shopkeepers, and writers. Forced by necessity, they reinvented themselves. Through their own words from diaries, journals, and letters, and from newspapers, Faust carefully analyses the issues of gender and class as well as attitudes regarding race that permeated these women's lives. A thought-provoking study that will be an excellent supplement for women's studies and American history classes. Mary T. Gerrity, Queen Anne School Library, Upper Marlboro, MD Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

I have subtracted one star because Kindle is just impossible for reading footnoted material. I had never given a thought to the Civil War's effects on the ladies left behind, but then, neither had their husbands. I was struck by how heedless to the crying needs and inadequacies of their spouses were the masters who rushed to defend the "peculiar institution" from its inevitable destruction. I was amazed by the ladies' many life skills deficits and found the range of reactions to real life and real war and suffering fascinating. I did find some of the narrative repetitive as the author may have continued to press a point that had already been made clear a few pages back, but maybe I am too

easy convinced. I also thought the author ended the book rather abruptly. In all, this book was revealing to this old Yankee with no connections to the South.

I had to read this book for my History 497 class at Southeastern Louisiana University and I must say it was a good read. I actually enjoyed reading a book that I was forced to read. Ms Faust shows us a different side of the Civil War and the women who lived through it in the South. Much of the book is about the Elite Southern White Women who were left behind to take care of everything at home. It shows how many of them struggled with the new life that was thrust upon them by having to take up tasks that they had never done before. Many were left to run the plantations which they had no idea how to do. These "elite" women learned the hard way how hard life can be.

Starting with the haunting faces of the young women who are pictured on the cover, to the many illustrations through out, we learn of the thoughts and activities that occupied the daily lives of the women of the Confederacy. This book is filled with wonderful diary excerpts, parts of letters and interesting photographs. Through these means we are given an insightful look at the way Southern women lived during the most tragic of times, our American Civil War. I've read a great deal about this particular era, but learned so much from this book. For instance, I had no idea that many men wanted their wives to accompany them off to war. Some of these women did just that and lamented about leaving their children behind with relatives. One young woman said that her husband was "ordering me to Mississippi" in the summer of 1862, and how brokenhearted she was because she feared that her baby would forget her while she was away. Another interesting fact was that numerous ladies wrote personal letters to President Jefferson Davis and requested that their husbands or sons be sent home because they were needed by their families. Other ladies wrote directly to their husbands and clearly told them they had given enough effort to the war, and it was time to come home. Some of the other information that is discussed is how women were often forced to move in with relatives and how their days were filled with unfamiliar work. They also were required, with very little experience, to manage their slave labor and operate plantations or farms. Some women seemed to enjoy the challenge, and for others the burden was too much. The blockade of goods going to the South was another problem to deal with because so many of the items of necessity were manufactured in the North. One of the reasons that the hoop skirt went out of fashion was because a vast amount of material was needed to cover a hoop. Cloth was so scarce that the ladies were making it themselves, and there was little to spare for elaborate clothing. Even the hoops were no longer obtainable after they wore out. Working hard and making do

became the way to survive and these women became the mothers of invention. Drew Gilpin Faust has done an enormous amount of research in compiling all of this information and I believe that it was a labor of love and she is to be commended. I will admit that at times I thought her writing style was a little stiff, and I sometimes resented the conclusions that she made. I thought that the material spoke for itself and needed very little explanation. These are minor criticisms because she has put together a unique and wonderful book. I believe this book will stand the test of time, and be read for many years to come. I chose it to be read by my book group and it generated a lively discussion and we all felt we benefited by reading it.

What a great book this is. Engaging, well-documented and very readable. The book presents insights into the immense impact of the Civil War on Southern women. After reading so many CW books on military themes (famous battles, military strategy, generals...) it was enlightening to read this book and get a glimpse of the CW from a dimension (southern white women) that I had never thought of.

The knowledge from this book enabled me to speak in front of, to, and with a group of middle school students for an hour. They loved it and so did I. This is not easy reading, but it is chocked full of information about the Civil War politics, women, slaves, soldiers, and on and on. Thanks to Dr. Faust for all her research.

Great insight into the hearts of the Confederate women who had to bear so much during the war. They loved their men and their Southern lives and they lost so much. Yet many of them were able to rally around what their new world would be by adapting and overcoming the odds. Very good read!

I purchased this book for research I am doing on nursing during the Civil War. I have only read parts of it, but it seems to be a good resource.

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