

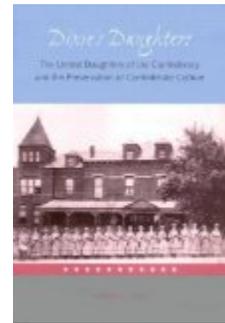
# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Karen L. Cox. *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003. xvii + 256 pp. \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8130-2625-1.

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## The Politics of Vindication

In 1902 a thirteen-year-old Kentucky girl gained accolades from the local chapter of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) when the organization learned that she had been sent home from school for refusing to sing “Marching through Georgia,” a song that the UDC believed glorified “crimes against Southern womanhood” (pp. 118-19). As a result of this act of defiance, the UDC made the child an honorary member. This anecdote exemplifies the thrust of Karen Cox’s examination of the influence of the women of the UDC in shaping Lost Cause ideology from the 1890s until World War I.

In *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture*, Cox illustrates how the UDC perpetuated the values of the Old South through monument building, caring for needy Confederate men and women, and ensuring that the next generation of white southerners would imbibe traditional Confederate values. Using the publications of members of the UDC, the minutes of UDC conventions, pamphlets, and speeches, as well as articles published in the *Confederate Veteran* and interviews with those who joined the Children of the Confederacy in the 1920s and 1930s, Cox ultimately argues that the UDC’s insistence on perpetuating Confederate social and political values was a vital factor in delaying sectional reconciliation.

During the immediate postwar period, ladies’ memorial associations began women’s involvement in the Lost Cause. At first these women concerned themselves with

moving the bodies of Confederate soldiers from mass to individual graves in Confederate cemeteries, where they erected monuments that they decked with flowers. The end of political Reconstruction and the return of Democratic control began a new phase of activism. Without the presence of Federal troops, the focus moved from mourning to vindication.

According to Cox, the move to this celebratory phase of the Lost Cause opened up an increasingly important and political role for the daughters of the Confederacy. They expanded their responsibilities in accordance with a national trend toward benevolence and reform. Although in rhetoric this move represented the tradition of women as moral guardians, in reality it paved the way to a political, and increasingly public, agenda.

From the founding of the UDC in 1895, members saw themselves as emulating the roles of Confederate women, displaying traits of sentimentality and steadfastness. Yet they also adopted a public platform. Thus, Cox argues, the UDC achieved such great success because it simultaneously drew on paradigms of traditional womanhood and “New Women,” an emerging model that included more assertive behavior. Cox places these women at the crossroads of the Old and New South, and in so doing she identifies holes in earlier scholarship on the UDC. Previous studies have recognized women’s roles in monument building during this period and their efforts to honor Confederate soldiers.[1] Cox argues, however,

that it is critical to recognize that the women of the UDC went beyond this goal of memorialization and became active agents in the politics of vindication, a goal that included attention to the education of the next generation of Americans in both the North and the South.

Benevolence is the least well-known of the UDC's activities. Cox maintains that these philanthropic efforts represented a unique brand of southern progressivism. Not only was the UDC involved in providing assistance to veterans and their widows, the members also lobbied to continue this assistance for the next generation. They lobbied for funds to educate the poor sons and daughters of the Confederate generation and thus linked benevolence "to the greater objective of indoctrinating children with the basic tenets of the Lost Cause" (p. 75).

The UDC was especially concerned to combat "wicked falsehoods" perpetuated about the Confederate South (p. 96). The UDC's efforts in this area included collecting materials for museums, archives, and libraries, as well as recording oral histories. UDC members established essay contests, published articles in local newspapers, and even wrote school textbooks. They saw women's roles as vital in teaching what they understood as the true history of the Confederacy. They wrote stories of southern heroes, in particular Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee. They produced tales of antebellum plantations and sentimentalized portrayals of master-slave relationships, all of which played into Lost Cause imagery.

In a more insidious move, in 1903 the UDC endorsed a primer written by one of its members entitled "The Ku Klux Klan or Invisible Empire" and promoted the book's use in schools. The UDC also attempted to reach northern audiences and awarded scholarship money to students at Columbia Teachers' College and at the Universities of Chicago and Pennsylvania. Cox argues that UDC women's deep commitment to vindicating their ancestors proved a powerful motivation.

According to Cox, it was the UDC's "crusade for vindication" that prolonged the bitterness between North and South. In response to a public criticism of their "sinister" effort to "debauch [southern] youth," the UDC re-

sponded that one of their foremost goals was to "command the respect of the North" and that "vindication and sectional reconciliation ... were not necessarily at odds with one another" (p. 145). Cox sees the UDC's general convention of 1912, held in Washington, D.C., as a turning point. Almost 2,000 delegates attended and heard President William Howard Taft express confidence that his successor, Woodrow Wilson, would succeed in reconciliation and that the wounds of sectionalism would finally be healed.

The UDC saw this meeting as a great success, despite the outrage expressed by some chapters of the Daughters of the American Revolution, who attacked UDC members for hampering the healing process. Still, the UDC claimed that it was now an ally of other women's organizations, especially those within the growing peace movement. The UDC established its own Peace Committee in 1914, and Cox notes the irony in the fact that World War I (the very war they had hoped to avoid) gave the Daughters the opportunity to highlight what they saw as a uniquely southern brand of patriotism. Their work was essentially done, for by 1920 the UDC believed that no one could doubt the South's loyalty to the United States.

*Dixie's Daughters* adds a new dimension to the growing scholarship on the creation of historical memory. Cox treats her subjects as vital, influential political actors and integrates them into the Progressive Era by suggesting that southern women displayed their own, unique brand of activism. This is a book that would serve well in the classroom in courses on women's history, southern history, and the Progressive Era.

#### Note

[1]. Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, *New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the Southern States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); LeeAnn Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta, Georgia, 1860-1890* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995); Judith N. McArthur, *Creating the New Woman: The Rise of Southern Women's Progressive Culture in Texas, 1893-1918* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

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