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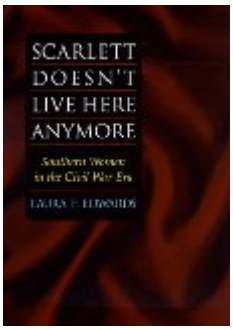

Laura F. Edwards. *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era.* Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000. x + 271 pp. $29.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-252-02568-6.

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Moving Away from the Myths of Southern Women's History

Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore endeavors to look behind the faade of Scarlett O'Hara and her idyllic Tara plantation and discover the complexities of southern womanhood. Laura Edwards laments that the recent growth of research on southern women "has not filtered into the classroom, general histories, and traditional publications" (p. 2). Her goal is to "bring together current literature on southern women and make it more accessible to wider audience while showing how the inclusion of women changes our understanding of the period" (p. 2). To do so, Edwards adopts a chronological approach and ambitiously concentrates on the nexus of gender, race, and class in the former Confederacy. Within each division, she examines the lives of planter class women, yeomen class women, and African-American women, synthesizing primary sources with recent historiography.

Planter-class women in the antebellum period lived with a central contradiction in their lives: "the privileges that gave them power as members of the white, planter class also defined their subordination as women" (p. 16). From an early age, elite southern women prepared for a life subordinate to male authority and acquired the skills necessary to fulfill their roles as wives, mothers, and mistresses of slaves. Social relationships, kinship networks, and religion "supported as well as constrained" women and "discouraged girls from seeing themselves as individuals" (p. 20). During the war, planter class women enthusiastically supported secession because they "had more invested in the cause than other southerners did." They understood that duty, honor, and liberty were the "cornerstones that grounded . . . position and power in the southern social structure" (p.71-72). But war's glory and romance soon faded.

Left to maintain the plantation, planter-class women faced wartime hardships and had to "confront the limitations and vulnerability of their legally and culturally defined dependence" (p. 74). Slave management was often their undoing. Lacking the authority possessed by their husbands and overseers, planter-class women gradually came to fear dealing with slaves outside the plantation

more than they did the Yankees. To some, slavery had become more trouble than it was worth. Their appeals to exempt men from conscription to "keep the slaves down" and their willingness to accept emancipation or colonization is a telling comment on the growing disillusionment with the war (p. 78). Ironically, the war planter class women had embraced as the means to affirm and secure their social standing became the instrument of its destruction.

But the elite class of southern women refused to abandon the old order and transferred the blame for their losses to the North and African-Americans. "The fundamental premise of the southern ideal of womanhood was that women to be ladies had to have servants" (p. 173). Without slavery to distinguish them from other white women, elite southern women relied on rigidly enforced racial boundaries and new social organizations to separate themselves. Many women sought to do something "creative and intellectually stimulating that would bring public recognition" (p. 184). They created the United Daughters of the Confederacy to mythologize the "Lost Cause" and "installed domesticity as the new standard of elite womanhood" (p. 182). Through these values, they were also able to better define their prejudices against blacks by portraying them as childlike and in need of civilizing.

Southern yeoman women, "suffered under the same restrictions as planter class women," but experienced them differently (p. 32). The largest, yet "most invisible," of the three classes Edwards' examines, these women added to the independence of the antebellum yeoman male (p. 149). They were resourceful, worked in the fields, added value to male-produced raw materials, and most importantly, reproduced to augment the family's labor resources. Sexual virtue was perhaps less valued than the ability to reproduce, and yeoman women showed more of a willingness to cross racial, social, and gender boundaries, not in protest of such standards, but as a means of survival. Although manual labor was the "class barometer" in the antebellum south, yeoman women shared some similarities with their planter class counterparts (p. 37). Religion and family ties offered a measure of stability and companionship for poor white women as well as for the wealthy, but these institutions served to underscore their subordination to males.

The war wreaked havoc on yeoman women and their households. These women had supported the war at first, believing they had some shared interest with the slaveholding class; however, the legal and governmental institutions of the Confederacy began to infringe upon men's family responsibilities as the war progressed. The loss of male labor for military service, the confiscation of livestock and machinery, and having few, if any, slaves meant the yeoman women had to work even harder for less. Unable to provide for their families and assure some measure of independence, many yeomen women withdrew their support for the Confederacy. They manifested their displeasure by encouraging desertions, assaulting government officials, conducting strikes, rioting, and raiding abandoned plantations. These actions further undermined the already tenuous Confederate experiment and accelerated its downfall.

After the war, many of the yeoman families remained hopeful for a return to normalcy, but this was not to be. Yeoman class women, poor but proud, struggled to recover independence and self-esteem from the loss of male labor, animals and equipment, and land. Class prejudice still existed against poor whites, especially among the women, and exacerbated by racial prejudice, the defense of traditional gender relations added to the subordination of women. Many southern families became caught up in a cycle of debt, fostered by the rise of commercial agriculture that rendered their small fields unprofitable. A large number packed up and moved to the cities. Once there, some women joined the "cult of domestici-

ty" in an attempt to redefine their old gender roles, but others flat out rejected the notion that women should be confined to household chores. As the end of the century neared, common southern women became more incorporated in the wage economy and politics, and thus, they began loosening the grip of a male-dominated society.

Slave women depended much less on men than southern white women did. Slave marriages were not legally recognized and a slave woman's status was not linked to her husband. The slave family was therefore less dependent on the male and relied upon the mother-child relationship and extended kinship networks. These networks provided for a more flexible support system for children separated at early ages from their parents. Whereas community, family, and religion fostered subordination in white households, they "blunted slavery's sharp edge" in slave households according to Edwards (p. 55). The nontraditional slave families served as "an alternate social space where slaves could drop the mask of servitude" and a place where they "reclaimed their own labor, directing toward the benefit of their loved ones" (p. 55). Resistance to slavery often originated in the family and took the form of groups manipulating the task system for small benefits rather than individual overt actions. However, slave women remained sexually subordinate to their masters, frequently creating tension between themselves and their white mistresses.

During the war, planters made their slaves work harder in deplorable conditions and reduced the amount of support given to their hands. Many slaves suffered hunger and exposure. Female slaves took over the roles of male slaves in addition to their domestic duties. As the Union army approached, planters sent slaves south away from the front, further fracturing slave families and straining the limits of the slave support networks. Black women suffered physical violence and rape from the "racist" and "immoral" perceptions of Union soldiers (p. 109). Still, the war gave slaves the opportunity for increased resistance against the system that oppressed them. They employed work stoppages, ran away in family groups instead of individually, set up businesses in garrison towns, and in some cases, took over the abandoned plantations. Northern relief organizations, unprepared to deal with slaves as families, struggled to institute white cultural and legal institutions upon the freedmen. They considered the slaves' lack of legal marriages a "moral and social crisis" (p. 109). The problem became the most profound among the freedmen joining the Union army. Many black women, though many of them were not legally their wives, earned the ire of many Union officers by insisting they be allowed to follow their men-in-uniform into the field.

Reconstruction proved to be disappointing for the freedmen. Union policy permitted the return of confiscated land to white owners, but the freedmen believed that their years of labor had entitled them to the land. Many freedmen had expected the land to form the basis of their newly won independence. Some saw accepting white culture, especially legalized marriage, as a means to acquire a sense of family security. The majority of black families "remained flexible and fluid," not defined by biological connections and a male head of household" (p. 128). Sharecropping, Klan violence, and strict child custody provisions of the "Black Codes" further jeopardized the formation of traditional families. Some black women hired themselves out to white families for child care or domestic functions, but whites often claimed that hiring out required a full day's work, while blacks perceived it as task only. Eventually, black families turned away from wage labor to remain independent of whites. Black women became more politically and socially active after the war, but their families continued to be defined by white Democrats and Redemption. Edwards claims their struggles during the postwar period were not in vain. "In the process," she writes, "they established a legacy of struggle [for black women] that

would support and inspire future movements for justice" (p. 148).

Edwards summarizes the important contributions of Drew Gilpin Faust, Catherine Clinton, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Peter Bardaglio, James Roark, Victoria Bynum, Stephanie McCurry, Marli Wiener, George Rable, and others on southern women in the first half of the book. Parts I and II are clearly written, contain excellent explanations of the relationship of women to the "cornerstones" of southern society (duty, honor, and liberty), and describe the contrasting family structures among blacks and whites well. Edwards' strength is in detailing how the lower classes of southern women lived, and she makes good use of the Southern Claims Commission files to retrieve their stories. Her emphasis on the parallelisms of womanhood and slavery however quickly becomes the dominant theme imparting a rather oppressive tone throughout the book. Few attempts are made to highlight internal family relationships and activities outside of a labor or legal framework. The omission of such material makes this a good but incomplete survey of antebellum southern womanhood.

Unfortunately, Part III becomes more summary than synthesis. Edwards, author of the highly-acclaimed ***Gendered Strife and Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction***, falls back heavily upon that work for the final section's source material, and at times, loses focus on her subject by providing broad historical overviews of the Reconstruction period. Finally, unlike Catherine Clinton's ***Tara Revisited***, Edwards' commercially appealing title is somewhat misleading. The book devotes little attention to the public's fixation on ***Gone with the Wind*** and perpetuation of the "moonlight and magnolias" legend. Rare references to the book or film are integrated awkwardly into the text. These "history versus Hollywood" examples sometimes contradict Edwards' own argument that Margaret Mitchell's fictional characters bore little similarity to real planter-class women. Regardless of these detractions, Edwards' greatest achievement in ***Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore*** is in relocating black and yeoman women to the center of southern women's history.

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