A Domestic Nation: The Relationship between Nation and Family in the Confederacy

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Acknowledgments

Given that my journey to unearth the contradictions and uncertainty of the Confederacy has been quite dizzying at times, I would like to take the time to express my deep gratitude to those individuals who have accompanied me in this process. First and foremost, I am forever in the debt of Professor Chandra Manning, who served not only as my advisor, but who has had a profound impact upon my collegiate experiences since I met her nearly two years ago. When I first entered her class back in the fall of 2007, I was what I like to call a wandering History major, unsure if I had made the right decision to study history. Professor Manning’s enthusiasm for the subject and her span of knowledge not only put me in awe, but helped to shed any doubts about my future plans. I have gained immeasurably because of her constant guidance and her unparalleled commitment to ensuring her students’ success. Furthermore, her knack for translating my incoherent ramblings is truly beyond par and this thesis is the better for it.

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Finally, I have to thank my family, who continued to pick up the phone even though they knew I was most likely calling to complain about my thesis. My parents have provided me with an endless supply of love and support throughout my entire education, without which I would surely not be the person I am today. Although I am most definitely not a neo-Confederate, it is perhaps the bond of love that ties my family together that has provided me with a better understanding of why Confederates placed such importance upon the institution of the family.
Note about Sources

For the most part, I have preserved both the spelling and syntax as written within the original letters. Thus, the reader should expect grammatical variations within quotes throughout the thesis.
—Introduction—

In the wake of her husband’s departure for war in late 1861, Tivie Stephens of Florida lamented in a letter to him, “I miss you sadly…I can not realize that this is only the beginning of worse.”¹ Aware of his wife’s anxiety, Winston Stephens reassured Tivie that his duties to the nation did not preclude the fulfillment of his duty to her. “[I]t is only two things that induces me to make the sacrifices I am making,” wrote Winston. “One is a duty I owe to you and the other is a duty I owe my country…”² Winston Stephens illustrated that a soldier could don a uniform without removing his fatherly garb; that the roles of defender of nation and of family were mutual. This link between nation and family pervaded the letters of many Confederates. James Francis, Jr. of Alabama wrote to his family, “I do not regret that I have to go (altho tis a death blow to my future). Yet when I think of the little ones at home, then duty prompts me to their protection.”³ For Confederate soldiers, fighting the enemy implicitly involved protecting one’s loved ones, a theme echoed by calls for enlistment. One poster exclaimed, “You await but the order to march, to rendezvous, to organize, to defend your State, your liberties, and your homes!”⁴ Although a cry common to many wars, the Confederates’ appreciation for both nation and family was significant in comparison to the Union soldiers, who separated their obligations to nation and to family, and often put the nation above the family.⁵

The deeply related interests of nation and family stemmed from the unique nature of southern society. The institution of slavery had created a hierarchical social structure, based

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upon the relationship between the master and the slave, ensuring the former’s dominance over the latter. The social structure gave the master not just control over his slaves, but granted him exclusive power over his individual household and its dependents, including women and children. Control over dependents did not solely mean the ability to direct their actions, but more importantly, this power contracted the household leader in the care of his subordinates. While slavery paved the way for hierarchy’s presence in the South, a southerner did not have to own slaves to participate. Stephanie McCurry has argued that yeomen, those who were less likely to own slaves, participated in this hierarchical society, claiming ownership over their own households.\textsuperscript{6} White Southerners, regardless of class differences, embraced a social structure based on hierarchy, both inside and outside the household.\textsuperscript{7}

The obligation of household leaders to protect their dependents motivated many Confederates to join the army when war began in April 1861. Confederates proved willing to fight because they saw the government as the representative of the larger Confederate family. The government’s agreement to protect its dependent citizens encouraged individual families to join hands with the nation. With this partnership in mind, men like Winston Stephens and James Francis could commit themselves to both nation and family because they understood both aspects as intertwined. This collaboration of nation and familial interests in the early days of the war thus established the Confederacy as a domestic nation.

Moving beyond the opening stages of the war, the familiar tune of nation and family, previously led by a chorus of voices, became dissonant. In the early summer of 1862, Louisiana

\textsuperscript{6} Stephanie McCurry, \textit{Masters of Small Worlds: Yeomen Households, Gender Relations and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

soldier Edwin Fay articulated his weariness with a war that kept him separated from his family. He wrote, “I would give all I possess if this horrid war would close… I have satiated my military ambition long since and am willing now to quit.” Fay’s military duties increasingly conflicted with his family, a tension that became especially apparent when his wife fell sick a few days later. Concerned for her well-being, Fay wrote to her, “if you desire it my dearest one I will come home at any cost for I hold that my first duty is to my family, my country is secondary.”

Fay’s tale is noteworthy for its ostensible negation of the connection between nation and family, heretofore viewed as a common doctrine in the Confederacy. His increasing homesickness and concern for his distant family illustrated the strains that war added to the domestic nation. Although Confederates initially attached their loyalty to both nation and family, the stress of war rendered it difficult to meet the demands of both parties because they often conflicted, as in Fay’s case. The question then becomes, and it is this question upon which this thesis will focus, what was the response of Confederates to the strains of war: did they choose the nation, their families, or was there a different response?

Any answer to this question must begin with the works of other historians that have importantly shaped this thesis. Two schools of thought exist with regards to the question of Confederate loyalty. One school maintains that Confederates remained loyal to the nation until the war’s close, putting national interests above other concerns, including the family. Gary Gallagher helped give shape to this argument, using the voices of diehard Confederates to argue that the Confederates expressed a fervent attachment to the nation that endured until the war’s

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9 Edwin Fay to Sarah Fay, June 23, 1862, “This Infernal War.” Fay repeated this placement of family above country in two additional letters to his wife: Edwin to Sarah, July 27, 1863, 305; Edwin to Sarah, October 23, 1863, 350.
end, only falling short because of the superior capacity of the Union Army. Anne Rubin’s more recent work offered a better appreciation for gray areas within Confederate identity, but still maintained that Confederates espoused a particularly loyal brand of thought.

Historians aligned with the second school argue that disension and disaffection had a much more decisive impact on the Confederacy, hurting its ability to form a strong nation and conduct a successful war. Paul Escott illustrated how problems internal to the Confederacy, especially class conflict, weakened any sense of Confederate nationalism, and thus proved a major cause of the Confederacy’s defeat. In the same fashion, Drew Faust argued that it was Confederate women’s decreased willingness to make sacrifices on behalf of the nation that brought about the end of the Confederacy.

Although both schools make important arguments, they cause no less frustration, which played a key role in the development of this thesis topic. Gallagher’s and Rubin’s statements of strong Confederate loyalty to the nation, although applicable to some Confederates, fail to provide mention of the dissatisfaction of Confederates that harmed the nation. No less incomplete are the accounts of Escott and Faust, which run up against the reality of those Confederates who did not lose hope despite any problems internal to the Confederacy. Focused on placing Confederates within an either-or divide, these evaluations of Confederate loyalty do

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not adequately capture the contradictory nature of the lives that Confederates led. A focus on nationalism then must arrive at Appomattox by one of two roads: strong loyalty to the nation, only falling short due to lower numbers; or, competing loyalties decreased support for the nation, contributing to its defeat. This approach tries to pigeonhole individuals into one of two categories, an interpretation that distorts the lived experiences of Confederates. Life during the war was not an either-or proposition, and Confederates surely did not wake up every morning thinking, “Am I nationalist or not?” If Confederates did not conform to an either-or interpretation, how then did they understand the relationship between nation and family?

A new understanding of the domestic nation requires an examination of the wartime experiences that shaped Confederate attitudes. When the war began in 1861, Confederates were quite successful in the East, where they continued to perform well into 1862, when they repulsed the Union Army from Richmond. However, the story in the West was not quite as hopeful, as Confederates lost key forts along the Mississippi River in early 1862, followed by more costly affairs in the spring months. This uneven balance between fronts continued into the summer of 1863 when disaster befell both East and West at the battles of Gettysburg and Vicksburg. Although both events weighed heavily on Confederate morale, Confederates regained strength in 1864, and moved closer to victory in the summer months. However, the fall of Atlanta, combined with President Lincoln’s reelection in November, dampened the Confederacy’s hopes. Confederates continued to fight however until General Robert E. Lee surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House in April 1865.

Seeking greater insight into this conflict that touched Confederate families in many different ways, this thesis draws upon a number of different sources. Letters between family members are an important resource because they provide the fullest understanding of family
relationships at the time. A host of different sources supplement Confederates’ letters, including diaries, newspapers, and songs. Of particular importance are the letters and petitions that Confederates sent to the Confederate Secretary of War, because they best capture the relationship between nation and family. Furthermore, this account attempts to provide a broad representation of Confederate opinion, socially and geographically. Guaranteeing perfect representation is a difficult goal however, because many of the sources stress the viewpoints of the Confederacy’s wealthier individuals and of those who lived in specific districts. A truthful portrait of the relationship between nation and family thus demands careful examination of the sources.

The variation within the correspondence of Winston and Tivie Stephens emphasizes the importance of a special attention to sources. After nearly two years of war, Tivie exclaimed, “I do wish you could be at home, I feel our separation now more than ever before.”\(^{14}\) Despite his own desire to return home, Winston reminded her that “at present it is otherwise decreed and I hope you will bear the separation with as much patience as circumstances will permit.”\(^{15}\) However, his patience dissipated as the war continued, which he expressed to Tivie. “It does appear to me that I cant be happy away from you, I feel that I want you by me more than I ever did in my life before.”\(^{16}\) Although his loneliness grew, Winston continued to act the part of the selfless patriot, writing at one point, “it is perhaps best for the service that furloughs should cease for a time.”\(^{17}\) This statement differed from one made just a few days later when he exclaimed, “I think if this War lasts much longer I will go crazy and desert.”\(^{18}\) Although Tivie cautioned him, “dunt go “crazy and desert,”” Winston grew frustrated with the nation for his continued

\(^{15}\) Winston Stephens to Tivie Stephens, February 24, 1863, *Rose Cottage Chronicles*, 207.
\(^{17}\) Winston Stephens to Tivie Stephens, December 29, 1863, *Rose Cottage Chronicles*, 298.
separation. He wrote, “I think it is dear bought liberty that keeps us slaves for years before we get our freedom, deprived of home, all that we love and no chance to see them or aid them….” However, he continued, “God knows I want all that a Southern man craves, but I am heartily sick of this state of affairs….” This series of letters reflects the difficulty in trying to position Confederates on one side of the fluctuating relationship between nation and family.

Confronted with a yearning for his loved ones, yet still attached to the Confederate cause, Winston Stephens showed that contradiction, not just a clutter of jumbled experiences, was the key part of Confederate identity growing out of the struggle to meet the demands of both nation and family. That Winston did not conform to an either-or understanding of Confederate loyalty did not make him an exception. Rather, that most Confederates expressed a continued appreciation for both nation and family, despite the strains of war, renders necessary an examination of the often contradictory interests that comprised the domestic nation.

Although various factors played a role in the development of the domestic nation during the war, the elements studied in this thesis include military service, letters as a form of communication, material hardships, enemy interactions, and death. Each factor not only illustrates how the war challenged the initial compact between nation and family, but also shows how Confederates endeavored to ease the strains of war, often turning to imperfect means of support. Unable to control completely the strains placed upon the domestic nation, Confederates confronted an increasing divide between nation and family. Rather than make a stark choice between two values that they equally appreciated, Confederates worked to avoid making that very choice, and in so doing, prolonged the war.

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20 Winston Stephens to Tivie Stephens, January 18, 1864, Rose Cottage Chronicles, 308.
1. The Domestic Uniform: The Family in the Military

Brimming with excitement in the initial fever of war, Samuel J.C. Moore, a Virginia native, exclaimed to his wife Ellen, “I feel now full of enthusiasm for our glorious cause, and think I am prepared to risk everything in defence of my mother State, and of those within her borders who are more than life to me…”1 Meanwhile, nestled on her family’s plantation in Louisiana, Kate Stone confided in her diary upon the departure of her brother for war, “They go to bear all hardships, to brave all dangers, and to face death in every form, while we whom they go to protect are lapped safe in luxurious ease.”2 In the early days of war, Moore and Stone maintained an idealistic faith in the relationship between nation and family. Keeping in mind the nature of this relationship, the frame of focus shifts to North Carolina in November 1864, where Amanda McRaven, struggling to cope with the separation from her husband, David, penned, “I dont know how you can keep from deserting [to] come home.”3 Despite one return visit home, the McRavens’ separation continued, increasing David’s anxiety, as he wrote, “I want to see you worse than any of [them] that run off but I could not [look] you in the face if I was to desert…”4 The McRavens showed that many Confederates no longer articulated a seamless link between nation and family. In fact, military service had changed dramatically in 1862 with the introduction of conscription, which brought into relief Confederates’ contradictory desires to support the Confederate cause, yet remain close to their families. However, as the war continued and families grew farther apart because of military service, Confederates proved unwilling to

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1 Samuel J.C. Moore to Ellen Moore, May 17, 1861, box 1, folder 2, Samuel J.C. Moore Papers, Southern Historical Collection (SHC), University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.
create a divide within the domestic nation. Assisted by certain aspects of conscription that somewhat lessened its impact, Confederates struggled to meet the demands of both nation and family, a dual sense of loyalty that caused the war to continue.

During the initial mobilization rush, Confederates not only prepared physically for war, but also psychologically, drawing together the family and the nation. The widespread use of domestic imagery within contemporary conscription materials, songs, and poems articulated man’s obligation to protect his dependents. A North Carolina “Call to Arms!!!” poster reminded men to “think of the maidens, the wives, and the mothers,/...Your hearthstones are looking to you for protection!”5 This ubiquitous link between family and nation also appeared in the poem “The Gathering of the Southern Volunteers,” which reminded its readers, “Our country guards our children’s slumbers....”6 Recruitment literature also used the threat the enemy posed to a man’s family to pull at his emotions. The poem “Men of the South!” proclaimed, “Look upon your smiling homes,/Think, when the proud usurper comes,/Ashes and ruin must mark the spot/Where now you bless your happy lot—/Still can ye wait!”7 Inundated with similar appeals to fight, the correspondence of volunteers reflected the growing link between nation and family. Samuel Moore thus told his son, “I would rather see a thousand of them killed around me, than to know that they had done any harm to my wife and dear little boys.”8 Dick Simpson of South Carolina wrote, “We are now in the land of danger, far, far from home, fighting for our homes and those

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8 Samuel Moore to Scolley Moore, May 16, 1861, box 1, folder 2, Samuel J.C. Moore Papers, SHC.
near our hearts.”

Answering a call to “defend the rights…and interests of our Mothers and sisters and homes,” a Georgia soldier declared his will to fight in a letter to his sister. “We are the ones to fight for you, and we are the ones that will fight for you!”

The Confederate soldier thus had a keen understanding of his dual duty as both man and soldier: in fighting for the nation, he was also fighting for his family.

If war required of men to leave their families as a means of protection, then the war required women to sacrifice their men to the cause in return for protection. Women frequently stressed their agency in sending men to war, including Georgia mother Charlotte Branch, who noted in a song, “My children I have sent thee forth/…Strike for the Mother that gave you birth/Your native home and fires…."

Literature too captured the willingness of women to send men to war. “My lip can bid thee, best beloved, go!” said the speaker of a contemporary poem. “Here is thy trusty blade! Take it, and…defend our firesides….”

Women proved willing to sacrifice men to the cause because they recognized the threat the enemy posed to their homes. Martha Read of Virginia thus wrote to her husband, “Hard as it would be for me to give you up, dearest one, I would rather that you & many others would fall in sacrifice to Lincoln’s bullets than that his ruffian hordes should lay waste our country, and desolate its firesides…."

This desire of white Southern women to sacrifice men to the cause in return for protection created a contract between both parties.

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13 Martha Read to Thomas Read, August 9, 1861, “Read Family Correspondence,” *University of Notre Dame: Rare Books and Special Collections*, http://www.rarebooks.nd.edu/digital/civil_war/letters/read/5015-06.shtml.
The flag presentation ceremony prior to the soldiers’ departure for war illustrated this contract. Women typically presented a unit with a handmade flag during the ceremony, followed by a speech that reinforced women’s agreement to sacrifice loved ones in return for protection. In one instance recounted by *The Daily Picayune*, the women gave the men a flag “as a token of the deep interest they feel in the cause your arms are called upon to defend on the battle-field.”

The flag served as a means of connecting the women to the battlefield, as she called upon the men to “let it carry your minds homewards, to the thousands of trusting hearts, who have committed their all to your guardianship.” After the men received the flag—the symbol of female sacrifice—a military representative stated, “each and every one of my comrades and self pledge ourselves to the last drop of blood to defend, support and maintain the sacred cause to which our hearts, lives and fortunes are all devoted.” The flag served as a fusion between home and army, as he affirmed, “with your beautiful banner floating over our tents, camp life will be a pleasant dream of home.”

The flag presentation ceremony reinforced the strong relationship between the nation and the family, as both men and women articulated a mutual contract.

While military service traditionally emphasized the battlefield, the nature of the mutual contract made the home front of equal importance in the Confederacy. Although Confederate women did not have the opportunity to experience victory on the battlefield, their sacrifice to the cause gave them a sense of possibility. A Virginia mother exclaimed to her son, “I believe this war is going to make a heroine even of me. I think of nothing all my waking moments but the soldiers, and what I can do to make you or any of the needy around you more comfortable.”

The formation of Soldier’s Relief/Aid Societies was a common example of women’s

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contribution to the war effort. The preamble of a Virginia society reflected the willing sacrifice of women, who promised to economize their wardrobes, to purchase only southern-made goods, and to help the poor and sick citizens.\textsuperscript{16} Sewing too took on especial importance as a means of supporting the nation, so much so that Kate Stone’s neighbor was “horrified” to learn that she “had not taken a stitch in the Cause.”\textsuperscript{17} Knitting became “the fashionable amusement among the fair sex” of northern Virginia, as Laura Williams described herself as “a second Madame Defarge.”\textsuperscript{18} Women thus went to great lengths to help the soldiers, as Martha Read, the Vice President of the Bethlehem Soldiers’ Aid Society, wrote, “We are all willing to deny ourselves any thing to afford them every relief.”\textsuperscript{19} Women wished to fulfill their part of the mutual contract brokered at the war’s beginning, because they found it “a great satisfaction to be able to help a little, to do something…for those who have done and suffered so much for us,” as one South Carolina woman noted.\textsuperscript{20}

While Confederate soldiers articulated a great desire to protect the loved ones who made such sacrifices for them, life in the army made that desire difficult to sustain. Accustomed to controlling their own lives, Confederate men had trouble adjusting to the regulations that pervaded the army.\textsuperscript{21} The \textit{Richmond Enquirer} touched upon the difficult nature of this shift, writing that soldiers “unused to the strict subordination” of the army, needed to learn to “curb the ignoble desire which would seek the gratification of our own ends regardless of the necessities of

\textsuperscript{16} “The following preamble and resolutions of the ladies…,” \textit{Warrenton Flag} of ’98, May 9, 1861, \textit{19\textsuperscript{th} Century US Newspapers}.
\textsuperscript{17} Stone, July 9, 1861, \textit{Brokenburn}, 39.
\textsuperscript{18} Laura Williams to Julia Howe, September 8, 1861, subseries 1.6, folder 45, Chilib Smith Howe Papers, SHC.
\textsuperscript{19} Martha White Read to Thomas Griffin Read, August 20, 1861, “Read Family Correspondence,” \textit{University of Notre Dame}, http://www.rarebooks.nd.edu/digital/civil_war/letters/read/5015-07.shtml.
our country.”\textsuperscript{22} The Confederate government, attuned to the adjustment problem, sought to reinvigorate the soldiers in December 1861, when Congress passed a bill granting soldiers a furlough of sixty days and a fifty-dollar bounty.\textsuperscript{23} The government’s failure to implement its own system however, garnered the ire of Confederate soldiers, who showed themselves unwilling to submit to a system so hostile to their individual interests. Native Virginian Fred Fleet discussed this idea in a letter to his parents, writing, “a great deal of the patriotism which animated the soldiers of last year has...died out by the treatment that they have received. If the men had only been paid up promptly and been allowed furloughs in as large numbers as could be well spared, I think there would have been little difficulty in causing them to reenlist, but as it is they are disgusted with the service.”\textsuperscript{24} Miller Francis emitted even stronger criticism, stating that the government believed “that they were the masters & the men were slaves.”\textsuperscript{25} The soldiers’ complaints illustrated that they were suspicious of a government that failed to address the interests of its citizens.

Soldiering not only restricted man’s self-interest however, but in so doing, added strain to the relationship between nation and family. Initially convinced of a short war, Confederates were unprepared as the war continued into the autumn and winter months of 1861. Emily Moxley grew “lonesome” in Alabama without her husband. “It is the hardest trial I have ever had, by far...I do not know how I shall come out,” she lamented.\textsuperscript{26} Although many Confederates struggled to accept the continued separation demanded by the nation’s army, the contradictory

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{24} Fred Fleet to Pa, February 3, 1862, \textit{Green Mount}, 102.
\bibitem{25} Miller Francis to James Francis, January 28, 1862, \textit{When This Evil War Is Over: The Correspondence of the Francis Family, 1860-1865}, ed. James P. Pate (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2006), 71.
\end{thebibliography}
ties between desire to see one’s family and duty to the nation became increasingly apparent.

Samuel Moore, who had initially expressed a fervent connection between nation and family, captured this subtle shift:

I do not mean now to express an opinion as to which call should be first obeyed—that of Country or of family—Should the day come (which I trust is far distant) in which there is such a conflict of duty and obligation as this—my family on the one hand demanding imperatively my presence, and my Country on the other requiring my services, I shall then endeavour to decide the question….27

Although Moore put off making a choice between nation and family, the day that he envisioned was not that distant on the horizon.

While Confederates grew restless at the changing nature of the military service, the government, threatened by these rising concerns, searched for a way to enforce its military standards. The solution that it ultimately settled upon—conscription—transformed Confederate military service. The First Conscription Act of April 1862 called up all white men between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five, while retaining all first-year volunteers for the remainder of the war. The response of Confederate families—ambiguous at best—renders difficult an easy understanding of conscription. Moreover, any attempt to place conscription within an either-or historiographical model, as either a minor inconvenience or an example of class conflict, proves unsatisfying.28

Although conscription was by no means an attractive proposition, many Confederates, motivated by concerns of honor, withdrew their criticism of the act. Miller Francis, who had initially compared the soldiers to slaves and President Jefferson Davis as their master, decided to remain in the army. “It has been an arduous undertaking, but character & reputation is at stake &

27 Samuel J.C. Moore to Ellen Moore, October 9, 1861, folder 4, Samuel J.C. Moore Papers, SHC.
it is a full determination of mine to carry out my part with credit & honor to myself & name.”

Honor also played an important role in Chris McKinney’s decision to reenlist, because as he told his wife, “[I never] intend to do any thing that will disgrace you or my children[,] no I would stay from you and them an other twelve months before I would do any thing that would bring any reproach on you or them…”

The importance of honor as a motivating factor stemmed from the value’s pivotal place within southern society. Unlike in the North, where each individual possessed dignity, or intrinsic worth, southerners stressed that society determined a person’s worth, making honor akin to reputation. Honor thus played an important role in the debate over conscription because of the stigma attached to a draft, which meant that men did not join of their own volition, but only out of obligation. A group of Virginia soldiers looking to reenlist reflected the disdain with which many regarded the draft. The men wished to reenter the army because they did not “want it to be said that we suffered a draft for on the month of April last we came forward and volunteered our services to defend our country.”

A recruiting poster also stressed opposition to the draft, exhorting, “To Arms! To Arms! $50 Bounty. Do Not Wait To Be Drafted, but Volunteer!!” The importance of retaining a positive social standing demanded that many Confederates avoid the dishonor of the draft, and thus enlist in the Confederate Army.

While many proved willing to forego continued separation from their families for the sake of honor, other Confederates proved unwilling to relinquish their loved ones. Giving voice

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29 Miller Francis to James C. Francis, January 28, 1862, When This Evil War Is Over, 72.
32 John H. Stuart, Robert S. Purkins, H.E. Minor to Secretary of War, March 3, 1862, Letters Received, Confederate Secretary of War (LRCWS), RG 109, M-437, Reel 70, 278-279, National Archives (NA), Washington, D.C.
to an opinion usually not emitted by women, Mary Milling of South Carolina wrote to her husband, “the idea of your entering the service of the war produced painful anxious feelings. Perhaps I am not patriotic enough to be willing to give you up….“ Mary Dedrick too, tired of the separation from her husband, begged him, “I do sincerely hope that you may never volunteer again for no one...knows how bad I want you to be in peace at home again.” Both statements perhaps illustrated a limited willingness on the part of women to sacrifice their men to the cause. And yet, with their husbands continuing to fight, many women had little choice but to learn to submit to their fate. Susan Caldwell, made anxious by her brother’s absence, straddled the line between dissatisfaction and submission. “I feel very unhappy about him being so far from me and placed in positions of danger...These are the times to try men’s souls...it seems very hard for us to have to give up our loved ones,” she wrote. Despite the opposition of some, they had to learn to submit themselves to a harsher fate, one that undoubtedly imposed further strains on their relationship with the nation.

Most Confederates held contradictory opinions of conscription however, because while they supported the cause, they also wanted their loved ones closer to home. Speaking of the need for soldiers to reenlist, Martha Read wrote, “I don’t know what they will be thinking of, if they don’t,” implying that all men should reenlist, while in the same letter asking her husband to put off his own reenlistment. Although supportive of the cause, her own personal hesitation illustrated that while many could avow Confederate principles, it became much more difficult to abide by those ideals. The case of George and Kate Peddy presented another complex example

37 Martha White Read to Thomas G. Read, February 16-17, 1862, “Read Family Correspondence,” University of Notre Dame, http://www.rarebooks.nd.edu/digital/civil_war/letters/read/5015-10.shtml.
regarding enlistment in the army. Unable to bear further separation from George, Kate begged him to not reenter, because “if you do, I shall know you don’t love me as well as I do you; for I could not stay from you any longer. I want you to promise not to go in till I will release you from the promise.”38 George willingly agreed, responding, “Honey, you asked me to promice you that I would not go into the service until you said so. My dear, I will not. I never intend to leave you any more when my term of service expires.”39 Despite his promise, George reenlisted as a surgeon days later, to which Kate surprisingly relented. “Certainly but I dont want [you] to leave me any more if you can possibly avoid it. I know that I ought not to be selfish, for so many women have to bid adiew to those they love as well as I…. “40 Although George agreed to reenlist, he curiously opposed conscription, writing, “Our soldiers are very much opposed to it & I am also…It is the same law that France has & she is nothing but a military despot. The people of the Confederate States will revolt against it.”41 The ever-changing contours of the Peddy example reflected the uncertainty with which many Confederates regarded conscription, as well as the strain that the latter put on the domestic nation. Many Confederates, although still tied to the nation because of their support for its values, became hesitant of a system that mandated further separation from loved ones. Seemingly contradictory, this logic made perfect sense to those Confederates who had agreed to fight for both nation and family, and thus demanded that the government give equal attention to both components.

Whether one supported conscription or not, it was undeniable that the Act changed in dramatic fashion the relationship between nation and family, gleaned from the correspondence of

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38 Kate Peddy to George Peddy, January 30, 1862, Saddle Bag and Spinning Wheel, being the Civil War letters of George W. Peddy, M.D...and his wife Kate Featherston Peddy, ed. George Cutino (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1981), 47.
39 George Peddy to Kate Peddy, February 4, 1862, Saddle Bag and Spinning Wheel, 48.
40 Kate Peddy to George Peddy, February 25, 1862, Saddle Bag and Spinning Wheel, 64.
41 George Peddy to Kate Peddy, April 14, 1862, Saddle Bag and Spinning Wheel, 87.
an 1862 volunteer. The tone employed by Grant and Malinda Taylor of Alabama contrasted with the fervent attachment between family and nation articulated by 1861 volunteers. Grant highlighted this difference when he wrote to Malinda, “I feel like that if it was not for being away from you and the children that I could enjoy myself pretty well but being away from you kills my joy but we must cheer up and do the best that we can.”42 While still trying to remain true to the nation, grief at separation from one’s family frequently cut into letters, as Malinda wrote, “Dont make yourself uneasy about home. Enjoy yourself iff you can. I want you to get a furlough, if you can, and come home. I want to see you so bad.”43 Malinda’s correspondence, rather contradictory, reflected the increasing competition between nation and family, as the war made it ever more difficult to maintain the relationship between them. Grant too expressed contradictory sentiments, writing, “Now we are separated by hundreds of miles by a sterne necessity with many chances against our ever seeing each other again…But do not, dear Malinda, think me miserable for I am much better satisfied than I expected.”44 Although trying to maintain cheer amidst the “sterne necessity” of military service, the difficulty of doing so shone through in the Taylor correspondence. Whereas prior to conscription, sentiments of family and nation meshed well together, the Taylor letters reflected the undeniable strain that conscription placed on families. Their contradictory statements were not likely an attempt to rationalize their frustration, but rather, an honest expression of their torn emotions. Although not all families expressed as divided of an opinion, the Taylors captured the complexity of understanding the relationship between the family and the nation in the wake of conscription.

While conscription added strain to the relationship between nation and family, certain

43 Malinda Taylor to Grant Taylor, April 26, 1862, This Cruel War, 10.
44 Grant Taylor to Malinda Taylor, June 1, 1862, This Cruel War, 28-29.
aspects of the Act helped to ease the separation between loved ones, allowing Confederate families to fight on. Although the relief provided by each measure often proved unsatisfactory, Confederates were relentless in their continuous struggle to balance their contradictory obligations to nation and family. One such measure was that of substitution, which allowed for men eligible for conscription to find someone who was not eligible to take their place. Although designed as a means of utilizing some men for industrial purposes, many Confederates realized that substitution could mitigate the problems inherent to conscription, especially separation from loved ones.\footnote{Moore, \textit{Conscription and Conflict in the Confederacy}, 27-51.} Although James Barr of South Carolina was not “tired” of the war, he thought of substitution “on account of being at home with you and the children.”\footnote{James Barr to Rebecca Barr, May 1, 1863, \textit{Confederate War Correspondence of James Michael Barr and Wife Rebecca Ann Dowling Barr}, ed. Ruth Barr McDaniel (Taylors, SC: Faith Printing Co., 1963), 80} Although of vast appeal to many Confederates, the steep prices of substitutes guaranteed a class bias in favor of the wealthy. Aware of the possibility for class conflict, an Alabama soldier commented that substitution “is doing mischief...Demagogues and tories are already insinuating that this is “the rich man’s war and poor man’s fight”, and the withdrawal of all men of property from the ranks will give color to the allegation.”\footnote{[Illegible] to Secretary of War James Seddon, June 10, 1863, LRCSW, RG 109, Reel 85, 1048, NA.} Texan soldier Will Neblett stated that wealthy soldiers should avoid substitution, because “the envy of many poor men is such that when men of property get out of the army that has the effect to demoralize them.”\footnote{Will Neblett to Lizzie Neblett, August 25, 1863, \textit{A Rebel Wife in Texas: The Diary and Letters of Elizabeth Scott Neblett, 1852-1864}, ed. Erika L. Murr (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001), 145.} The perversion of substitution into a privilege of the wealthy made it ever more difficult to draw a connection between families of all classes and the nation. This threat of class division, combined with the abuses of the system, drove the Confederate Congress to end the practice in January 1864,
putting “all classes upon an equal footing,” as one Louisiana soldier remarked.49

The elimination of substitution did not curb all problems however, but rather, unearthed deeper complexity. Despite the elimination of substitution, an Alabama soldier remained convinced that the wealthy benefited from hidden privileges. “The poor men are fast getting tired of fighting while the Rich are being exempted. Let it be equal, and all will be well.”50 Despite the soldier’s assertion that the wealthy reaped rewards, many of those Confederates who had hired substitutes were unhappy when the government eliminated substitution. Robert Priddy of Virginia, who had hired a substitute so he could care for three families, maintained that his duties at home were “indispensable to the welfare + protection of these families and the proper management of these slaves….“51 A North Carolina father was no less upset that his feeble son would have to return to the army, causing him to wonder what had happened to the “honest Government” he had initially supported.52 Although the practice of substitution was often cast as an example of class conflict, the reality was of a more ambiguous nature. Surely Confederates felt the hardships of conscription differently, but the examples show that Confederate families, rich and poor, shared in the fundamental strains of military service.

Apart from substitution, the government granted exemptions to certain occupations, in an attempt to curb the degree to which conscription imposed itself upon the Confederate populace. The occupations that were eligible for exemption, including politicians, mail carriers, ministers, teachers, and newspaper editors, all performed necessary tasks.53 Although intended for official purposes, exemption, like substitution, became a tool to ease the suffering of families.

50 L.H. Davis to Jefferson Davis, January 27, 1864, LRCSW, RG 109, Reel 125, 177, NA.
51 Robert Priddy to Secretary of War James Seddon, January 16, 1864, LRCSW, RG 109, Reel 137, 616, NA.
53 See Moore, Conscription and Conflict in the Confederacy, chapter 5.
Neighbors of a Georgia man sought his exemption because “he is a poor man entirely dependent upon his labor for the support of himself and family, [and] that his wife has been in a totally helpless condition.” Likewise, a Virginia son asked for an exemption to care for his aged and widowed mother who was “entirely dependant upon him for support.” Despite the overwhelming amount of exemption requests, many families failed to benefit because of the government’s refusal to grant requests or systemic abuse.

The most contentious exemption, passed in October 1862, was the infamous “twenty-slave” law, which exempted one white owner or overseer for farms or plantations of more than twenty slaves. With the men off at war, many Confederates feared that loved ones at home might fall prey to slave uprisings. In this vein, neighbors of a seventy-year old Virginia widow, who lived with three disabled daughters, sought the exemption of an overseer because, “there are a great many negroes and she is at the mercy of them and...shows the necessity of some protection for her family.” While all Confederates accepted this need to protect family members and slavery, the exemption sparked class conflict, because the poor believed that they could guard the slaves just as well as the slave owners and overseers. Aware of this tension, a Mississippi man noted that because of the exemption, “not a few of our soldiers have deserted in consequence of this distinction, in citizens, and if not amended I fear will ruin our army [...]”

Given the fervor that the exemption created, the government instituted the fifteen-slave law to appeal to smaller slaveholders, while also mandating that slaveholders provide the government with foodstuffs in exchange for exemption. Although important to recognize the presence of

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54 Petition from Citizens of Marion County, GA to Secretary of War, April 30, 1862, LRCSW, RG 109, Reel 71, 99, NA.
55 Richard Stargall to Jefferson Davis, Received November 1863, LRCSW, RG 109, Reel 73, 181-182, NA.
56 Thomas J. Stanley & others to Secretary of War Judah P. Benjamin, April 3, 1862, LRCSW, RG 109, Reel 70, 707, NA.
57 C.W. Martin to Jefferson Davis, November 26, 1862, LRCSW, RG 109, Reel 63, 1184, NA.
58 Moore, Conscription and Conflict in the Confederacy, 85.
class conflict over the twenty-slave law, historians must not exaggerate the extent of dissent. Slaveholders and nonslaveholders desired the protection of slavery as it ensured their liberty and equality because of their shared skin color. The exemption system, no less than other aspects of conscription, lent itself to contradictory experiences, illustrating that no panacea existed to soothe the strains of military service, which kept Confederates searching for solace.

Conscription gave the Confederate government unparalleled control over the lives of its families, as it coordinated the distance and time spent apart from one’s loved ones, a power the government attempted to allay with the use of furloughs. Although the Conscription Act permitted furloughs, it stated that they would be granted “at such times and in such numbers… most compatible with the public interest,” even though the military’s definition of public interest differed markedly from that of the actual public. The success of the furlough policy varied erratically throughout the war, as General Lee for instance froze the issuance of furloughs in 1862; expanded the practice to two men per one hundred troops after Gettysburg in 1863; and finally allowing twelve per one hundred when the war slowed towards the half-point of 1864. Even if a soldier was lucky enough to receive a furlough, they were rather short, as South Carolina’s Tally Simpson wondered, “Would not the parting, after so short a time, destroy all the pleasure occasioned by my presence for a few short days!” Nevertheless, furloughs could inherently improve the relationship between nation and family, as one Georgia soldier noted after not having been home in sixteen months. “[T]o grant me furlough you will not only benefit myself and family, but in my humble opinion, advance the Cause of our Country.”

60 Richmond Examiner, in Fayetteville Observer, April 17, 1862, 19th Century US Newspapers.
61 Glatthaar, General Lee’s Army, 157, 225.
62 Tally Simpson to Anna Tallulah Simpson, August 9, 1863, Far, Far from Home, 270.
63 William Shores to Secretary of War George W. Randolph, October 27, 1862, LRCSW, RG 109, Reel 73, 178-9, NA.
furloughs could ease the strain between family and nation, which they admittedly did for some, their rarity only worsened the problem in other cases.

Frustrated by a system that kept them away from their families, some Confederate soldiers chose to desert the army. Drawing this connection between a lack of furloughs and desertion, a Mississippi soldier remarked that if furloughs had been given regularly, “It would have saved many of our men to us & prevented them from running off to see their families…” 64 Consumed with anxiety about their loved ones, many soldiers saw no choice but to leave the army. As Virginia soldier Benjamin Jackson wrote to his wife, “Some call it deserting. Those that leave call it going to protect their families, which I think is a man’s duty.” 65 Although desertion did occur within the Confederate Army, the severity of the act varied throughout the war, making it difficult to state how many men actually deserted. 66 Nevertheless, those soldiers who chose to desert put themselves at extreme risk if captured. Speaking of the likely punishment, a Virginia soldier wrote, “They would sentence [a soldier] to [the] penitentiary for 5 years or shoot him if he was to leave without good papers. There is a man to be shot here today at 4 o’clock for deserting and going home.” 67

Despite the severity of this punishment, the government proved gentle at times.


66 Only a few secondary sources exist on the topic of desertion, and among those works that do, there is little agreement. Aaron Sheehan-Dean argues that Virginia soldiers deserted the most during the autumn months of 1862, followed by a decrease in 1863. See Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought*, 91-96. Mark Weitz found that the first four months of 1864 saw the highest amount of desertion in the Confederate Army to the Union Army (projected total of 12,336), as opposed to the period spanning from October of the same year to February 1865 (projected total of 7,653). See Weitz, *More Damning Than Slaughter: Desertion in the Confederate Army* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 246, 252. Ella Lonn however cites the latter part of 1864 as the period with the highest amount of desertion (not just to the Union Army), noting the figure of 72,000. See Lonn, *Desertion During the Civil War* (1928; reprint, Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1966), 27.

Cognizant of the strains that military service put on families, President Davis issued an amnesty proclamation to deserters in August 1863. Soldiers appreciated attempts to reconcile the interests of nation and family, as illustrated by a soldier’s later call for amnesty. While he noted that many of his comrades deserted to protect their starving families, he informed the Secretary of War, “if your all will issue a Proclamation of amnesty to those that are absent now without leave the army would be increased considerably….68 Even among those soldiers who deserted, a willingness to maintain ties to the nation existed, rather than a distinct fissure between nation and family.

Those Confederates who did not openly disavow the Confederacy no less missed their families, which resulted in an uneasy balance between nation and family. Alabama soldier Joshua Callaway wrote to his wife, “I am as sick of the war as any man who ever deserted. But do not you think I have any notion of a similar course. No, never.”69 Jorantha Semmes of Mississippi also grew weary at her husband’s absence, lamenting, “I try hard to console myself with the patriotic thought that you must be willingly spared by me whilst you are doing so much good to the army, but the earnest desire to see you will rise uppermost…I long for your society infinitely more than any bride of a few months….”70 Although Confederates missed their families, they could not reconcile their feelings with continued service to the nation. Nearly two years after Samuel Moore had attempted to choose between nation and family, he still proved indecisive:

Truly the most severe test to a man’s patriotism is when his duty to his Country and his family seem to conflict with one another…I have been much at a loss to decide whether my true path of duty was to continue to serve my Country in the

68 Anonymous to Secretary of War, July 25, 1864, LRC SW, RG 109, Reel 118, 520, NA.
70 Jorantha Semmes to Benedict Joseph Semmes, April 24, 1863, folder 8, Benedict Joseph Semmes Papers, SHC. Originally from Memphis, Semmes became a refugee in MS in 1862. Will thus refer to her as from MS.
field, or to seek some place where I could better provide for and look after my family…and I have not yet decided the question in my own mind."

Once again, Confederates proved unwilling to choose between the increasingly contradictory obligations to nation and family, which prolonged the war.

Further demands in the way of conscription only exacerbated the burdens of Confederate families, and as a result, worsened the strain of the domestic nation. After the Second Conscription Act of September 1862 had extended the age range of soldiers from thirty-five to forty-five, the Third Conscription Act of February 1864 both lowered the limit to seventeen and raised it to fifty. Making light of the increasing demands of the nation, a Virginia girl quipped, “I suppose they will search the graveyards and swear them to the length of them they have been dead.” Not laughing were the families who depended upon the assistance of elder men in the absence of their usual superiors. Harriet Perry of Texas became convinced that the act would take both her father and father-in-law, the latter of whom she had moved in with earlier in the war. Although her husband expressed some concern, he recognized that in order to protect the domestic nation, “the army must be recruited at all hazards.” A Richmond paper similarly noted that to defeat the enemy, “the people must sacrifice their comforts, and, if necessary, endure hardships and want….” However, some Confederates resented demands for further sacrifice, an illustration of the growing strains that military service placed upon the domestic nation. One Virginia man warned “there will soon be no Confederacy…The people will not always submit to this unequal and unjust and partial distribution of poor and wholesale

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71 Samuel Moore to Ellen Moore, October 24, 1863, box 1, folder 12, Samuel J.C. Moore Papers, SHC.
74 “The prompt and patriotic action of the army in re-enlisting,” Richmond Enquirer, February 5, 1864, Civil War Newspaper Perspective.
conscription of the poor...over 5/6 of a people are in the army is it not enough? Can any people bear more than this?” 

This question proved prescient not only because of the further sacrifices demanded of families, but specifically as a result of the slave enlistment issue that arose at the close of 1864. General Patrick Cleburne had first proposed the idea of slave enlistment at the end of 1863, only to receive ridicule and a denial of promotion. Out of growing necessity, President Davis and then General Lee warmed up to the idea in the winter of 1864 to 1865. With government backing, a bill passed Congress in March 1865, allowing for twenty-five percent of the male slave force, aged eighteen to thirty-five, to serve in the army, yet making confirmation of freedom dependent upon the master’s approval. Albeit passed too late to have any impact on the field, it remained a contentious issue in public, illustrating once again the contradictions within the Confederacy.

Confederates who supported the enlistment of slaves understood the act as necessary for the survival of the domestic nation. Rather than focus on the seeming contradiction between Confederate ideals and emancipation, many Confederates agreed with the sentiment articulated by a Georgia soldier. “Duty to our country...makes it imperative that this proposition be accepted in all its measures,” he wrote. The opposition could choose to focus on the subversion of Confederate ideals, but as the Richmond Enquirer reminded its readers, after “all this has been said, still comes back the urgent question—how to meet the formidable and multitudinous hosts of a vindictive invader this very spring.” Aware of the threat at hand, the paper stated, “If we must use negroes in defence of our homes, let us do so.”

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75 J.M. Radford to Secretary of War James Seddon, October 11, 1864, LRCSW, RG 109, Reel 140, 111-114, NA.
76 Edward Pollard to Jefferson Davis, January 13, 1865, LRCSW, RG 109, Reel 150, 354-356, NA.
77 “The idea of employing negroes to help in the defence of their homes, has greatly ripened in the publick mind...,” Daily Richmond Examiner, February 16, 1865, 19th Century US Newspapers.
Confederates then, the defense of their families and nation came before the ideals of the Confederacy. However, others stressed that the Act did not specifically grant emancipation to slaves, but left that decision to the slaveholders. Many supporters of the Act thus did not see the plan as subversive of Confederate ideals, but rather, as a means of ensuring victory and thus keeping slavery intact, a plan also used by the ancient Romans, for whom the Confederates had great respect. Despite these nuances, the Act appeared to have no shortage of support, as the Daily Richmond Examiner reported, “Public opinion has definitely declared in favor of arming the negroes.”

The paper’s vast generalization glossed over many Confederates who disapproved of slave enlistment as anathema to the domestic nation. Many of the nation’s defenders found the idea abhorrent, because as one Alabama man noted, “if negroes were put in the army as soldiers it would demoralize the army.” In the eyes of many soldiers, to enlist the slaves was a reversal of their efforts, as noted by Grant Taylor. “[T]o think we have been fighting four years to prevent the slaves from being freed, now to turn round and free them to enable us to carry on the war. The thing is outrageous…for if we are to depend on the slaves for our freedom it is gone anyway.” More importantly, any action that challenged slavery thereby endangered not only the hierarchical southern society that depended upon slavery, but also the safety of loved ones at home. With both threats in mind, The Charleston Mercury warned of the social upheaval threatened by putting the poor at “the level of a nigger” and the physical threat free slaves posed

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78 For a similar argument, see Aaron Sheehan-Dean, Why Confederates Fought: Family and Nation in Civil War Virginia (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 185-187.
79 A similar argument is made by Bruce Levine in Confederate Emancipation: Southern Plans to Free and Arm Slaves during the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).
80 “The question of negro soldiers we consider as settled. Public,” Richmond Enquirer, February 18, 1865, Civil War Newspaper Perspective.
81 C.G. Richards to Jefferson Davis, January 23, 1865, LRCSW. RG 109, Reel 150, 653-654, NA.
82 Grant Taylor to Malinda Taylor, January 11, 1865, This Cruel War, 322-323.
to white women and children. For those Confederates who opposed slave enlistment, any attack upon the institution of slavery was an attack upon Confederate families, adding not just strain to the relationship between the nation and the family, but possible ruin of the latter.

If the interplay between family, nation and the military has shown anything, it is that ambiguity more often than certainty, defined the Confederate experience. While specific quotes give evidence of favoritism towards the nation or the family, a close examination of several accounts unearths a complexity of experience. The importance of contradiction with special attention to military service warrants a final look at a soldier’s story.

In the closing days of the war, the story of Grant Taylor stuck out for its complex nature. When Taylor fell sick in the fall of 1864, his wife, Malinda, exclaimed “Some times I think you are simple for staying in the army another day. Thare are thousands deserting evry day. I am almost temted to persuade you to come home and never go back.” Although Grant cited the government’s “meanness” for not giving him a furlough, he remained reluctant to runaway. And yet, he did not rule out the possibility completely, writing, “But I do not know what I may be driven to.” Continued separation from his family, which he once again attributed to the government’s “meanness,” rendered even more precarious the partnership between nation and family. Growing more distrustful, he informed Matilda, “I intend to come home next April if I do not get a furlough before then and they do not pay me off or I will be caught and brought back in the attempt.” Nonetheless, as his hopes of returning home grew dim, he rejected the idea of desertion, writing, “I cannot bear the idea of that yet although we are treated like dogs.”

However, upon receiving orders to follow his regiment to North Carolina, Taylor returned home

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83 “Men Run Mad,” The Charleston Mercury, January 26, 1865, Civil War Newspaper Perspective.
84 Malinda Taylor to Grant Taylor, November 24, 1864, This Cruel War, 308.
85 Grant Taylor to Malinda Taylor, December 3, 1864, This Cruel War, 310.
86 Grant Taylor to Malinda Taylor, January 4, 1865, This Cruel War, 321.
87 Grant Taylor to Malinda Taylor, January 24, 1865, This Cruel War, 327.
without leave, before ultimately heading back to rejoin his regiment before the war ended. Taylor’s story reflects neither complete loyalty to the cause nor complete disloyalty, but a gray area that allowed him to express discontent, condemn desertion, “return home,” and return to the army.

At the war’s beginning, the experiences of Grant Taylor would have seemed incomprehensible. Confederates were confident that service on behalf of the nation was in the best interest of their families. The naiveté of Confederates became apparent as the war progressed, and life in the army put strain on the relationship between nation and family. The shift to compulsory service not only guaranteed the Confederates’ loss of individuality, but also mandated a physical separation between loved ones. While Confederates both accepted and criticized the act, many gave a mixed response, reflective of the contradiction inherent to the domestic nation. However, certain elements of conscription, including substitution, exemption, and furloughs, helped to distract Confederates from choosing between nation and family, allowing the war to continue. Despite the help of those imperfect distractions, the demands of military service continued to bombard Confederates, who rather than choose between nation and family, sought new ways to relieve the strains of military service, a constant struggle that prolonged the war.
2. Hearts in Print: Letters as Wartime Communication

Martha Read sat next to the fire at her home in Virginia in early 1862, writing a letter to her husband, Thomas, who had volunteered to fight in the early months of the war. Despite the growing sense of separation imposed by the changing nature of the military service, Martha penned an ostensibly trite statement at her letter’s close, “O, if we could meet “face to face”! but let us be thankful that we can write to each other!”1 Although the letter as a form of communication seems relatively obvious, it becomes possible to take for granted the significance of the letter itself when focused on its content. While military service rendered difficult a close physical interaction between those at home and their loved ones in the army, Confederates employed letters and other items not only as a means of closing the gap between family members, but also to ease the strain on the relationship between nation and family. While letters did much to close the gap between the home front and the battlefield, the letter, or lack thereof, created further problems for Confederate families. John Cotton anxiously wrote to his wife Mariah in Alabama: “it is with much dissatisfaction that I rite you a few lines to let you no that I am well... but not satisfyed I hant got nary letter from you yet I hant herd a word from you...I am afraid the mail is stopped....”2 Unfortunately, the precarious nature of the mail service, susceptible to the vicissitudes of war, caused delays, making separation between loved ones more prominent. Rather than soothe the domestic nation, letters provided uncertain comfort, as their content often worked to destabilize family relations, and in some cases, undermine the relationship between nation and family. Letters had their shortcomings, but overall they helped lessen the distance between family members, allowing war to continue, despite the separation

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1 Martha White Read to Thomas Griffin Read, February 16-17, 1862, “Read Family Correspondence,” University of Notre Dame: Rare Books and Special Collections, http://www.rarebooks.nd.edu/digital/civil_war/letters/read/5015-10.shtml.
induced by the military service.

Deprived of the opportunity to have personal interactions with loved ones, Confederates grew dependent on receiving letters as a means of soothing the strain created by military service. Expressive of this idea was Benedict Semmes, who confided in his wife, “Your letters are the only cause of my patience with the separation from you and reconcile me to the laborious position isolated as it is from almost all my world.” Descriptions of letters as a “balm” illustrated the curative impact that letters had on separated families. Seeking relief for her sadness, Harriett Perry of Texas begged her husband, “do write often, for all the pleasure I have depends on it...I read & reread your letters, especially when I feel sad.” For both the soldiers in the army and their family members at home, the letter thus had the especial purpose of easing the isolation caused by wartime separation. South Carolina soldier Tally Simpson discussed this ability of letters to divert attention from the hardships of military service.

Far away from home sweet home and the loved ones there, surrounded mostly by strangers, and always in anticipation of a bloody struggle with the enemy, [the soldier] sees but little pleasure in the things transacted in camp...But there is a moment of his life which is transcendently sweet...and that is the moment he is made the recipient of a precious letter from home. It matters not in what he is engaged, what troubles and vexations are harassing him, [a] letter from home renders him oblivious of all his trials and sends him dreaming such dreams as thoughts of home can alone suggest.

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3 Benedict Joseph Semmes to Jorantha Semmes, February 24, 1863, folder 8, Benedict Joseph Semmes Papers, Southern Historical Collection (SHC), University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Originally a native of Memphis, his wife became a refugee of Mississippi (see Ch.1, note 70). Will not label him with a specific state as done with his wife.


Letters thus served as a private space within the midst of a public struggle, allowing families to continue their relationships despite the demands of the war and the Confederate nation.

More than a piece of paper, letters afforded Confederates the opportunity to have extended conversations. Samuel Moore of Virginia cherished corresponding with his family “through the dumb medium of the pen,” because “although dumb the pen yet speaketh, and in your care and mine says many things upon a great variety of subjects.” An Alabama soldier similarly imagined, “When I am writing to you it seems as if I were talking to you, and when I read your letters it seems like you were talking to me.” Not just a feeling of the soldiers, North Carolina wife Emma Clayton wrote to her husband upon receiving his letter, “[I] felt as though you was at home again talking to me.” Understanding a letter as a conversation in progress, rather than words on a page, underlines the fact that the letters themselves were an essential part of wartime life.

Confederates emphasized this importance of letters, lavishing extra attention on moments when a letter arrived. William Crow, writing to his parents back in Alabama, discussed his eagerness for their letters, “I am so glad [with] every letter that comes from home that no matter what I am doing I have to read my letter the first thing,” he wrote. The arrival of letters itself often became a family affair, which Lucy Buck of Virginia discussed. Upon the arrival of a letter from her brother, Lucy noted, “We compromised by settling ourselves down on the front step,—Father, Ma, Grandma, Laura, Nellie, myself, Carey, Orville, Nannie, Willie, Evred and

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7 Samuel J.C. Moore to Ellen Moore, September 4, 1861, box 1, folder 2, Samuel J.C. Moore Papers, SHC.
9 Emma Clayton to Thomas Clayton, February 3, 1864, series 1, folder 5, Clayton Family Papers, SHC.
Frank—Ma read while we listened with absorbing attention.”11 Amanda McRaven of North Carolina read her husband’s letters as her children crawled on her lap, anxious to see what their father had written.12 Albeit a mere piece of paper, a letter captivated Confederates because it was a physical symbol of the family’s enduring connection.

Apart from the emotional significance of letters, tangible objects sent along with letters reinforced familial relationships. Reminders of home dotted the page itself, including kiss marks from children, as Harriet Perry mentioned, and Texan Martha Ingram wrote, “The little boys have kist this sheat of paper and they say you must kiss it and then you will have a kiss from all of yore boys.”13 Other physical imprints within letters included the tears of Alabama wife Emily Moxley and the hand pattern of Henry Dedrick’s son.14 Seemingly inconsequential items, the physical imprint bore the markings of a loved one miles away, yet much closer given the evidence on the page. Other domestic tokens that created a link between writer and reader were locks of hair, one of which Alabama soldier Grant Taylor received with great pleasure. “Oh how I yearn to press the sweet head it grew on to my aching heart,” he wrote to his wife.15 Benedict Semmes acknowledged how such a seemingly insignificant item could provide solace for Confederates separated by war. Writing to his wife about her lock of hair, he declared, “It is a great comfort to me to possess the sweet treasure, and you would be pleased to see what good

13 Harriet Perry to Theophilus Perry, August 3, 1862, *Widows by the Thousand*, 9; Martha Ingram to George Ingram, February 29, 1864, *Civil War Letters of George W. and Martha F. Ingram, 1861-1865*, compiled by Henry L. Ingram (College Station: Texas A & M University, 1973), 70.
company it affords me when I feel all the loneliness of our separation.”16

More common items sent between family members were pictures or likenesses, which bore a stronger resemblance to one’s loved ones, providing an even better link between home and the military. So enamored was North Carolinian Cornelia McGimsey of the likeness of her beau, Lewis Warlick, that her sister told him, Cornelia “kissed your likeness til it is as greasy as fat..., if she keeps on it will be so dim in a short time she will have nothing to look at but case and glass.”17 Similarly, Mollie Phelps of Georgia told her husband that she found it a “[great] consolation to look at your likeness, which will bear some resemblance of your features, in memory of old times when we lived together with so much pleasure and never thought of living separated for such a length of time.”18 The memories evoked by a picture thus helped prolong the ability of family members to withstand the pressures of war, in the hopes of soon creating similar memories. Looking at a picture of his daughter and wife, Theophilus Perry informed the latter, “[I] try to console my-self with the hope, that I will yet live to see a clear political sky, and enjoy with you both a rich shore of domestic happiness.”19 Both the personal likenesses and the physical reminders of loved ones sent with letters provided further solace for hearts saddened by the separation forced upon Confederates by service in the military.

Although soldiers welcomed any item from loved ones at home, food was one of the most documented. Deprived of quality rations in the army, many soldiers requested food from their loved ones, including Tally Simpson. “Oh how I wish I was at home and had as many possums as I could eat. I have been wanting something good to eat till I am nearly dead... Is there no way

16 Benedict Joseph Semmes to Jorantha Semmes, June 7, 1863, folder 9, Semmes Papers, SHC.
19 Theophilus Perry to Harriet Perry, December 14, 1862, Widows by the Thousand, 72.
of sending us a box of some kind?”20 The soldiers soon learned that if they requested, they certainly did receive, marked by a wide variety of goods. Georgia soldier Hamilton Branch received a trunk filled with “syrup...cake, candy, pickles,” among other things, while Thomas Smiley’s mother sent along “a piece of Cheese and a few cakes.”21

Not just a mere influx of goods, food reminded Confederates of life at home. Opening a box of “Sugared Pears & Figs,” Theophilus Perry wrote to his wife Harriet, “These little delicacies made me think much of my happy home.”22 Certainly no substitute for a meal at home, the arrival of food provided a psychological boost for soldiers, as acknowledged by Lewis Warlick. “You do not know how proud I was of it—to think that I had a friend among the fair sex of old Burke who thought enough of me to send at a distance of five hundred miles something that we poor soldiers could eat,” he penned to his sweetheart.23 The significance of food went beyond any nutritional value then, feeding the lonesome hearts of the soldiers. After a Virginia soldier’s superior received wine from the boy’s mother, he expressed to her his gratitude. “The wine was a good domestic wine and very grateful to the taste, but as coming from a true Virginian Mother, of her own making, it was cordial to the heart the savour of which will last far longer than the flavour of grapes.”24 Food, another tangible connection to home, allowed soldiers to repress thoughts of the poor rations in camp, preserving in their minds a taste of home.

Letters not only provided physical reminders of home, but they also reinforced familial

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20 Tally Simpson to Mary Simpson, November 10, 1861, Far, Far from Home, 90.
22 Theophilus Perry to Harriet Perry, January 8, 1864, Widows by the Thousand, 191.
23 Lewis Warlick to Cornelia McGimsey, July 6, 1861, My Dearest Friend, 32.
roles. With the men departed from home, many women feared that distance would weaken the relationship between father and child. With her husband absent, Mary Milling of South Carolina worried, “It is a source of much grief that the children have grown so large with little or no knowledge of their father.”

Even in the initial absence of her husband, Floridian Tivie Stephens feared that her daughter, Rosa, would forget her father’s name. “Rosa has not yet forgotten to say Pa Pa, though she is too often reminded to forget how to say it, if she does not forget to whom it applies.”

Despite the concern that separation caused, Confederate soldiers, husbands and brothers especially, used the letter to maintain their authority over young dependents. One important thread seen within soldiers’ correspondence with their dependents was the command that they maintain good behavior. In this vein, Samuel Moore informed his son, “You must be a good little man while Papa is away—it will make me so glad to hear that you have behaved yourself well in every way. Say your lessons regularly as well + above all say your prayers.”

Georgia soldier Edgeworth Bird similarly remarked to his daughter, “try and perform all your duties honestly and faithfully.” Tied in to proper behavior was the importance of obtaining a good education. “You must study hard & do all you can for cultivation,” was the advice an Alabama soldier gave to his sister. An interesting way in which the authority of fathers and brothers manifested itself with specific regard to letters was the constant correction of dependents’ grammatical errors. A Georgia soldier, concerned about his son’s spelling, remarked, “He must

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27 Samuel J.C. Moore to Son, May 16, 1862, folder 2, Samuel J.C. Moore Papers, SHC.
29 John Francis to Mary Emma Francis, March 11, 1863, When This Evil War Is Over: The Correspondence of the Francis Family, 1860-1865, ed. James P. Pate (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2006), 117.
take a dictionary by him when he goes to write and see that he spell[s] every word correctly."30 Tally Simpson sought to inspire similar learning in his correspondence with sister Mary, to whom he wrote, “After a period, you oftentimes neglect to begin with a capital letter, and in your haste, you pay very little attention to punctuation.” In the same vein, he continued, “But from the fact that you are a sister, I deem it a duty as well as a privilege to report to you your mistakes.”31 Referring to his corrections as part of a larger “duty,” Simpson illustrated that through letters, male figures worked to maintain their authority over dependent children, one further way in which letters helped to soothe the worry of separation’s negative consequences upon the southern family.

Not only did men utilize letters to maintain their role as the protector of children, but also as a means of serving the needs of dependent women. Adopting the ‘male’ role at home, many women became responsible for the success of the farm, an undertaking that proved disconcerting for many, unused to doing the work alone. Faced with the responsibility of the cotton crop, Texan Lizzie Neblett realized her dependence on her husband Will. “I don’t know what to do, and wish more heartily that you were at home to ride around & see about it & get it done. I am so sick of trying to do a man’s business when I am nothing but a poor contemptible piece of multiplying human flesh….”32 While men were unable to physically assist their wives, the letters sent by soldiers helped to maintain the masculine gender role. Trying to remain informed about life at home, men asked several questions of loved ones. Will Neblett thus pestered wife

Lizzie, “What did you do about that side of leather Dr Brown owes? and what do you expect to
do about tanning this year? What debts have you paid. I expect these are as many questions as
you will find it convenient to answer at one time.” Other men adopted a more commanding
tone in their letters, including James Barr of South Carolina, who wrote to his wife Rebecca,
“Have all the mold rubbed off the meat, and you would better have the hogs that are up killed for
I don’t think they will get any better. Keep the meat smoked till it is dry.” Confederate
soldiers thus used letters to maintain the patriarchal structure of the family, showing that
soldiers’ commitment to the nation had not completely interrupted their obligation to the family.

Insofar as the men retained control over their dependents, they remained dependent
themselves on the supportive abilities of the women at home, which helped to preserve the
feminine gender role. Women anxiously wondered how men survived without their capable
hands to care for their every need, especially as camp life forced men to take care of the cooking
and cleaning. Mary Smiley sarcastically asked her brother, “How does housekeeping go You
always thought at home it was very easy work & I reckon you know a little about it now.”
Taking more seriously her husband’s fate, Martha Read pestered, “You have not written me a
word about your fare; who makes the bread? How do you get your clothes washed?” These
women need not have felt disconcerted about losing their place of importance within the lives of
their husbands, who expressed their continued dependence on the women back at home. “I never
knew my complete dependence upon you till I lost your support,” wrote Edgeworth Bird to his

33 Will Neblett to Lizzie Neblett, January 17, 1864, A Rebel Wife in Texas, 296.
34 James Michael Barr to Rebecca Barr, January 29, 1863, Confederate War Correspondence of James Michael Barr
35 Mary Smiley to Thomas Smiley, May 7, 1861, “Smiley Family Letters,” VoS
36 Martha Read to Thomas Read, August 7-12, 1861, “Read Family Correspondence,” University of Notre Dame,
http://www.rarebooks.nd.edu/digital/civil_war/letters/read/5015-06.shtml.
wife Sallie. Soldiers especially relied upon the women at home to provide them with needed clothing. While Milton Leverett of South Carolina asked his sister to sew buttons onto his shirt, Georgia soldier Will McKee sent his sister a list of desired items, including “My jeans coat/A jeans vest/A pare of pants/2 striped shirts/2 pare of drawers and/Some sox….”

Showing his appreciation for his wife’s help with his pants, George Peddy of Georgia reaffirmed the feminine gender role, stating, “You are a helpmate, perennial ally, as well as evry other accomplishment.” Happy to act as the helpmate, Harriet Perry told her husband, “your comfort and convenience is all I think of, night after night. I think what I can do or send that will add to your comfort.” While the separation of war drove family members apart, risking the family’s destabilization, letters helped them to surmount challenges, emphasizing the family’s continued strength.

Insofar as letters helped to stabilize the institution of the family, wartime shortages of the necessary writing materials rendered uncertain the ability of letters to ease the burdens of war. Writing to his father, Frederic Leverett spoke of the problems that plagued Confederate letters. “I expect you will find much difficulty in reading this letter, so poor is the paper & pale the ink,” he wrote. Rebecca Barr also lamented to her husband, “I don’t know that you can read this letter. It is the worse paper I ever wrote on.” Paper and ink were noticeably lacking in homes and camps, not only because of high prices, but also because of a general shortage, caused partly by a

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39 George Peddy to Kate Peddy, July 3, 1864, Saddle Bag and Spinning Wheel, being the Civil War letters of George W. Peddy, M.D...and his wife Kate Featherston Peddy, ed. George Cuttino (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1981), 261.
40 Harriet Perry to Theophilus Perry, September 24, 1862, Widows by the Thousand, 39.
41 Frederic Leverett to Father, January 28, 1863, The Leverett Letters, 192.
42 Rebecca Barr to James Michael Barr, January 25, 1863, Confederate War Correspondence, 28.
lack of paper mills in the South. This lack of supplies put into jeopardy the ability to write letters, as Milton Leverett wrote to his mother, “I won’t be able to write as often as I have been doing as I am entirely out of envelopes and nearly so out of paper.”

Desperate to maintain communication to ease the strains of war, Confederates wrote on paper of different sizes and colors, and even resorted to making homemade ink from the extract of trees.

Having been lucky enough to produce some form of a letter, Confederates faced the challenge of sending the letter, the first step of which involved securing postage. The expensive nature of stamps deterred many Confederates from corresponding with loved ones, confirmed by an editorial in an Atlanta newspaper. “We know that we don’t write half as many letters now as we did when postage was five cents...We feel sure the same may be truthfully said of a great majority of the people.” With the high cost, many Confederates did not keep stamps on hand, which increased the number of requests heard throughout the nation. “Send me a few stamps if you can get them handily,” wrote James Barr, while Susan Caldwell confirmed the great need, “My postage stamps have been called for all over town.”

Unable to locate postage, one Confederate resorted to writing “Soldier’s letter” on the front, hoping that his status would secure safe passage of the letter.

Even with postage, letters faced a tough journey because of the unorganized delivery of mail in the Confederacy. The inefficient nature of the Confederate Postal service caused

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43 Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Ersatz in the Confederacy* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1952), 139-147.
44 Milton Leverett to Mary Leverett (mother), March 27, 1863, *The Leverett Letters*, 207.
widespread mail delays. One Kentucky Confederate woman waited almost five months before receiving in April 1863 a letter that her husband had written in November 1862.\textsuperscript{49} Dependent on letters as a source of solace, Confederates became frustrated with the delays. Having failed to hear from her sister, an Alabama woman noted that “much grumbling has been done against the mails lately.”\textsuperscript{50} James Barr too, bothered by his wife’s failure to receive his letters, remarked, “Our Postmasters surely are very careless. They ought all to be sent in [the] service and the Ladies act as Post Mistresses.”\textsuperscript{51} Unwilling to subject themselves to the vicissitudes of the Confederate Postal Service, many Confederates sent letters via soldiers who were leaving for or returning from a furlough. This method proved error-prone as well, as Susan Caldwell noted, “I do not put much faith in the soldier. He will oftentimes forget and letters are not mailed, only in their pockets.”\textsuperscript{52}

Beyond the delays caused by failures on the part of the Postal Service or soldiers, the perpetual evanescence of a soldier’s life made letter writing an arduous task. The letters of certain soldiers showed the physicality of letter writing, including those of South Carolina soldier Milton Barrett, who remarked, “i got all of my paper wet and muddy. you can see by this sheet and it is badly rote owng to the sir comstances. i have to write seting flat on the ground a riten on my knea and the boys jabring all a round.”\textsuperscript{53} Difficult circumstances also afflicted Confederate prisoners of war, who struggled to deal with the strict censorship policies in Union prisons. Having written fifteen letters to his mother without a single response while imprisoned at Fort Pulaski, Sanford Branch discovered that his mother had not received his letters because he was


\textsuperscript{50} Laura Williams to Ellen Howe, July 14, 1861, subseries 1.6, folder 44, Chiliah Smith Howe Papers, SHC.

\textsuperscript{51} James Michael Barr to Rebecca Barr, December 18, 1863, \textit{Confederate War Correspondence}, 181.

\textsuperscript{52} Susan Caldwell to Lycurgus Caldwell, April 22, 1864, ‘My Heart Is So Rebellious,’ 218.

only allowed to send one letter per week on a regulated sheet of paper.⁵⁴ Similar regulations delayed for over four months letters Thomas Read had written to his wife from prison.⁵⁵ The reasons for letter delays were thus many and often quite particular to certain situations. For instance, Emily Moxley of Alabama failed to receive mail for a number of weeks because “the mail boy’s mule had died,” while Kate Stone’s family did not receive mail in Louisiana because the delivery boat stopped working.⁵⁶ The mail delays that stemmed from the vicissitudes of war illustrated that uncertainty tainted Confederate correspondence, making it difficult for weary Confederates to derive solace from letters, a problem that added further strain to families.

Plagued with an increasing sense of isolation due to mail delays, Confederates transferred their frustration onto loved ones, from whom they desired more letters. A North Carolina wife thus asked her husband, “Do please let me hear from you as often as possible—this is my continual song is it not?”⁵⁷ An equally mild-mannered Charlotte Branch told her sons, “[I] [w]as some what disappointed (yes more than somewhat) that I did not get a letter. I do not want to tax you my dear boys but would like to rec[eive] as many letters as you can make time to write.”⁵⁸ Others were rather critical of loved ones, especially Julia Leverett, who scoffed at her brother’s request for more letters. “I intend to treat all that part of your letter referring to my writing with silent contempt...when you write once a week, it will be time to speak of my doing so.”⁵⁹ A Virginia soldier employed a similar tone with his mother, to whom he exclaimed, “If you all dont write oftener, I think I can charge you all with carelessness as you have done us.”⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Sanford Branch to Charlotte Branch, November 3, 1864, Charlotte’s Boys, 213; Sanford Branch to Charlotte Branch, November 4, 1864, Charlotte’s Boys, 213.
⁵⁵ Martha Read to Thomas Read, January 1, 1865, “Read Family Correspondence,” University of Notre Dame, http://www.rarebooks.nd.edu/digital/civil_war/letters/read/5015-29.shtml.
⁵⁷ Elizabeth Phifer to Edward Phifer, May 26, 1864, Phifer Family Papers, SHC.
Confederates did not complain out of mere selfishness however, as the failure to receive a letter often carried a more poignant significance—death. Having not yet gotten a letter from a soldier, a Virginia woman wondered, “I have not heard from you for so long, that I do not know wheater I [am] writing to the living or dead.”61 Jorantha Semmes, distraught by a lack of letters, wrote to her husband from Mississippi, “I had come to the conclusion that you were very ill.”62 A similar fear crept into a Florida wife’s letter to her husband, to whom she wrote, “I have Bine soy one easey A Bot you I ame soe ancious to hear frome you that I cane hardly waite to heare from you I wante you to rite mea.”63 When Mollie Houser received a delayed letter from her cousin, she responded, “I thought you had gotten killed or forgotten the name of the post office or something else had taken place when you didnt write for so long.”64 The genuine relief that Confederates expressed upon the arrival of the mail illustrated the angst caused by delayed mail. Speaking of this difference in her own family, a North Carolina woman wrote to her husband, “I felt so sorry for your Mother a week ago when the mail stopped. She was so sad, and uneasy. Now, she is much better satisfied because she can get letters very regularly.”65 The psychological discomfort caused by the lack of letters illustrated that although letters had the potential to relieve the separation between loved ones, they could just as easily worsen the strain placed on families.

The emotional significance of mail delays illustrated that letters, although beneficial in

62 Jorantha Semmes to Benedict Joseph Semmes, February 26, 1863, folder 8, Benedict Joseph Semmes Papers, SHC.
63 Mary Black to Hugh Black, May 16, 1864, Letters of Captain Hugh Black to His Family in Florida during the War between the States, 1862-1864, ed. Elizabeth Frano (Newburgh, IN: E.C. Frano, 1998), 63.
65 Minnie Gary to Edward Phifer, May 30, 1864, Phifer Family Papers, SHC.
some respects, often complicated relationships between loved ones. For many Confederates at home, the lack of letters symbolized a loss of affection. Matilda Leverett for instance, wrote to her brother, “We have all been so disappointed at your writing so seldom, My dear Minny, that we had begun to think you did not care to get any letters.” Soldiers too interpreted a lack of letters to mean a lack of affection. “I feel almost forgotten by you and every body,” lamented Benedict Semmes to his cousin. “[Y]ou must write Dear Mollie to prevent me having the blues.” Even when family members did receive letters, differences over content created arguments. Frequent were complaints that men focused too much on the “facts,” rather than the “sentiments,” as noted by Lizzie Neblett. Her husband however claimed that she misinterpreted his meaning, writing, “the want of language does not disprove the existence of that feeling which gives birth to sentiment.” The delays and the emotional nuances characteristic of letters thus worked to create friction between loved ones.

A series of letters between George and Kate Peddy captured how letters between Confederates often did more to exacerbate than soothe the strains of Confederate families. After Kate told George about her uncle’s inability to obtain salt for his wife, George in turn ridiculed her uncle in camp. Although Kate wished for him to “streten” out the matter, she did not express anger, but surprisingly added, “Don’t be mad with me.” Despite the relatively neutral tone of Kate’s letter, George interpreted it as a rebuke, growing disheartened as a result. “If you are tired of writing & thinking about me, all I wish is to see you & our dear little child once more. Then I am willing to come back & die if need be in defence of my native state.”

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67 Benedict Joseph Semmes to Cousin Mollie, August 2, 1862, folder 7, Benedict Joseph Semmes Papers, SHC.  
68 Lizzie Neblett to Will Neblett, August 18, 1863, A Rebel Wife in Texas, 141.  
70 Kate Peddy to George Peddy, January 18, 1862, Saddle Bag and Spinning Wheel, 36-37.  
71 George Peddy to Kate Peddy, January 25, 1862, Saddle Bag and Spinning Wheel, 40-41.
letter for George, he realized the extent of his mistake just a few days later, when he begged Kate to “burn up the one I wrote you last,” and implored of her, “let’s never think of it again if you please.” Unfortunately for George, the mail delays of the Confederacy made sure that Kate did not get his repentant letter in time. His letter worried Kate, who wrote, “It would be a greater pain to my heart than any danger could inflict if I thought you did not love me or I did not return that love fourfold.” The correspondence of the Peddys illustrated the easiness with which meaning was lost or misinterpreted within letters. By its very nature then, letter writing, susceptible to mail delays and misinterpretation, often made it more difficult for Confederates to maintain family relations.

Not only did letters have the potential to add strain to family relations, but letters, especially those written by women, held potential consequences for the relationship between the family and the nation. Summarizing the differences between soldiers and civilians, Milton Leverett wrote to his mother, “As regards the war we, soldiers, are too much more hopeful than those at home are.” Florida soldier Willie Davis similarly remarked to his mother, “O! if you only felt the enthusiasm in this cause which I do, and could feel as willing to give me up as a sacrifice for it as I am to suffer it.” Soldiers especially criticized “desponding letters in which they were advised to go home & leave the Army,” as one Alabama soldier wrote. Newspapers frequently rebuked those at home for writing gloomy letters, as reflected by the Charlotte Democrat. “We learn that many of the letters which soldiers receive from their relatives and friends at home induce desertion...Letters of this kind are doing much harm; and bringing

72 George Peddy to Kate Peddy, January 29, 1862, Saddle Bag and Spinning Wheel, 44.
73 Kate Peddy to George Peddy, January 30, 1862, Saddle Bag and Spinning Wheel, 45-46.
74 Milton Leverett to Mary Leverett, February 26, 1862, The Leverett Letters, 110.
75 Willie Davis to Rebecca Davis, August 24, 1862, Rose Cottage Chronicles, 140.
disgrace and death upon many a soldier.” An Alabama soldier also wrote to a Savannah newspaper, “How discouraging to the soldier to be told by his friends at home that there is no use fighting any longer—that our country will be overrun and destroyed—that it is best to give up now, and fight no more.” Although letters helped to ease the relationship between nation and family, certain letters held the potential to undermine that relationship.

However, when examining the content of certain “desponding” letters, it becomes much less clear to what degree those letters caused desertion. This qualification in no way ignores the fact that certain letters did contribute to desertion. One of the most cited of such letters came from Mary Cooper of Alabama, who pleaded with her husband, Edward, “I would not have you do anything wrong for the world, but before God, Edward, unless you come home, we must die…your darling Lucy; she never complains, but she is growing thinner and thinner every day. And before God, Edward, unless you come home, we must die.” Although her letter had the desired effect, as Edward deserted, he returned to camp soon after. At his court martial for the crime, he said that his wife had told him, “O Edward, Edward go back! Go back! Let me and the children go to the grave but save the honor of your name.” Although her letter had caused Edward to desert, her subsequent statement made it much less clear if that reflected her true intention, illustrative of the uncertain meaning of gloomy letters.

And yet, even if the Cooper example showed a clear link between a desponding letter and desertion, that link was not always straightforward. A letter written to a Richmond paper told of a soldier whose wife had sent him a gloomy letter. Part of the letter read, “Dear husband, why don’t you come home and see us all?...Dear husband, do come and see us, if you can stay but one

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77 “We learn that many of the letters....” Charlotte Democrat, in Fayetteville Observer, June 15, 1863, 19th Century U.S. Newspapers.
79 Quoted in Ella Lonn, Desertion During the Civil War (1928; reprint, Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1966), 12-13.
day.” Pointing to similar letters, the article’s author criticized women at home for contributing to desertion, because of their disponding letters. Out of the public spotlight, Harriet Perry wrote equally as downcast letters to her husband, often praying that he would “come some time if not now…” Disappointed that her husband could not come home on one occasion, she wrote, “You can imagine how keen the disappointment was when you wrote you cannot—I am dying to see you…There is no pleasure in life to me, having to live separated from you as I do—I dont care to live—…” No less desponding than the letter from the Richmond paper, Perry’s letter did not cause her husband to desert. That Perry’s husband did not desert illustrates that newspapers exaggerated when they claimed that all disponding letters caused desertion. Although disheartened letters did contribute to desertion in some cases, they were solely a contributing factor to what was a much more nuanced act.

Often examined for their content, letters are hardly ever considered for their significance as a means of communication. For Confederates separated by a conscription system that allowed limited furloughs, letters remained important as a means of maintaining family connections. Apart from the letter itself, various domestic tokens, gifts from the army, and food, were just some of the various items that sustained the memory of a distant loved one. In addition to their tangible significance, letters gave Confederates the opportunity to reinforce the societal hierarchy, furthering the expression of both gender roles. Although letters as a form of communication proved beneficial in helping to close the gap between family members, they also undermined that very goal. Widespread delays in the mail service, caused by a shortage of

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82 Harriet Perry to Theophilus Perry, October 26, 1862, Widows by the Thousand, 50; Harriet to Theophilus, December 13, 1862, 69.
83 Ella Lonn noted various reasons that Confederate soldiers deserted, including, those men who proved ignorant of the issues, and did not care to fight; conscription; a lack of necessary supplies (food, clothing, adequate shelter); and homesickness. See Lonn, Desertion during the Civil War, 3-20.
writing supplies and faulty delivery services, made for many anxious hearts in the Confederacy, who feared the worst. Delays inspired complaints against loved ones for a failure to write, understood by many as a sign that they had lost feelings for them. Letters thus fast facilitated divisions between family members, causing some to lose interest in the cause, articulated in melancholic letters that interrupted the relationship between the family and the nation. And yet, for all the delayed and gloomy letters, Confederates continued to put pen to paper until the war’s end, signifying the lasting importance of letters as the best means of maintaining a connection between family members when separated. Nonetheless, the issues that seemed to weaken the ability of letters to do their job transcended the page, making it important to examine those issues that Confederates proved unable to handle with a mere letter.
Chapter 3. Empty Cupboards: Material Hardships in the Family

Writing in the early months of 1863, Charlotte Gannon, a resident of Darlington, South Carolina, sought a discharge for her son, because her husband was too weak to run the household and she was unable to handle matters by herself. Still a loyal Confederate, she only asked for her son out of necessity, captured in her letter to the Secretary of War. “I should not wish him to leave the army did I not think it impossible to get along without him I am willing to make as many sacrifices as any one for our cause, but my son has done his duty so far to his country and now his family interests...demand his return home.”1 Despite the ability of letters to paper over the tensions between nation and family, they failed to transcend the physical separation caused by war, a source of hardship for Confederates. With the men at war, the family’s survival was put in jeopardy by several material difficulties, including inflation, shortages, and speculation. Although Confederate responses to hardship—threats to desert and riots—put strain on the family-nation dynamic, they did not imply an outright fissure in the domestic nation. Rather, Confederates’ willingness to write to Confederate officials, as in the case of Charlotte Gannon, reflected a mixed expression of continued support for the nation, with a necessary request for attention to family needs. The government’s responses to the hardships of war, including regulatory measures, taxes, and charity, provided imperfect comfort to Confederate families, who proved unable to escape from hardship. Despite the shortages that left many families with empty stomachs, Confederates worked to find a means of sustaining the domestic nation, an ongoing struggle that allowed them to avoid choosing between nation and family.

It was undoubtedly slavery that had shaped the southern economy in the years prior to the war, allowing for the vast growth of an agricultural powerhouse, known for its cash crops. The

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1 Charlotte Gannon to Secretary of War, March 18, 1863, Letters Received, Confederate Secretary of War (LRCSW), RG 109, M-437, Reel 85, 287-289, National Archives (NA), Washington, D.C.
South’s lack of industrial development—compared to the North—made it no less capitalistic; yet an economy based upon land and slaves—not exactly liquid forms of capital—made difficult a transition to war for the Confederacy. Unaccustomed to a more fluid system, Confederates became dependent on printing money to finance the war, a particularly bold move considering that there had been no national printed currency in the United States prior to the war. It was perhaps this lack of experience that caused Confederates to put too much money into circulation, which contributed to inflation. By the close of 1861, the price index had risen sixty percent since January, and would increase by another one hundred percent during the first half of 1862. Complaints were rife among Confederates, who during the first year of the war, began to comment upon the high prices, which only became worse as the war continued. Writing in November 1861, Virginia soldier Thomas Smiley noted, “butter is selling at from 25 to 50, cts a pound in Winchester, that is of a good quality; eggs is 25 cts a dozen...[and] apples 25, cts a dozen...” Moving forward to January 1863, he wrote, “Apples are selling at from $1.50 to two dollars a dozen...Butter two dollars a pound,” illustrating the clear increase in prices in at least two of the goods. Nancy Emerson also commented upon the impact of inflation, stating, “Every article is from two or three time its usual value...Those who have much to sell make great profits, but those who have all to buy and little to sell like ourselves, are in danger of faring hardly.” In North Carolina, Mary Person discussed high prices with her sister, Harriet, to whom she wrote, “Everything here sells so high people think corn will be ten dollars a bushel. wheat is $4.00 a

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bushel[.] Pap sold his for $3.00[.] the meanest sugar you ever saw is 75 cts a pound and every thing in proportion.”

The increase in prices, most noticeably reflected in food, required broad sacrifices from Confederates, forced to give up their former lifestyle for one of shortages. In Mississippi, Octavia Merriwether reflected upon the transition in a letter to her sister, “Oh, Lettie! What awful times we are passing through now, so different from what it was when we last saw each other. It is just as much as we can do here to get enough to eat. I feel thankful for anything to live on.” Shortages impacted even basic goods, especially meat, salt (the primary preservative), flour, and sugar. Recognizing the importance of drastic food shortages, an article aptly titled, “Food! Food! Food!,” pointed out, “The point that the matter of Southern life or death is, after all, a food question, impresses itself more strongly upon our mind every day, and every day we get a little deeper in the dumps about the solution of it.”

Indeed, finding a solution proved difficult, given certain factors that exacerbated the situation, putting further stress on Confederate families. Slavery had become profitable in the South as a means of labor best suited for cash crops, including tobacco and cotton, which left little room for the growth of food crops. With shortages increasingly apparent, Confederates sought to force the growth of more food crops. In this vein, Justina Walton of Alabama wrote, “the life of our country and our soldiers—was of more importance than meat or in other words cotton, that planters must not plant cotton, but try and save the lives of our soldiers.”

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10 Justina Walton Webb to James Webb, March 20, 1862, subseries 1.2, folder 7, Walton Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection (SHC), University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.
editorial in the *Daily Morning News* concurred, “The planters ought strictly to...bestow all their attention upon the raising of corn and provisions, and, with organized and combined action, we have no fears of the result.”¹¹ Even those who did produce edible crops were not safe from shortage, because of the practice of impressment. Faced with varying shortages as they moved around, Confederate regiments often took goods from civilians, an unregulated practice that deprived Confederate families of the goods they needed to survive.¹² Aware of the potential for abuse within the system, the *Richmond Enquirer* advised, “the great delicacy of the duty and the natural objections on the part of the people, indicate that it should never be resorted to without real necessity, and then only through agents of courteous manners and of a reputation for impartiality and integrity….”¹³

The felt impact of shortages became much worse not only because of a lack of produce crops and impressment, but also because of the rampant problems of speculation and extortion, which received no small amount of criticism from Confederates. Both practices worsened the shortage problem, because certain individuals hoarded goods, thus decreasing the supply, which allowed them to charge excessive prices. So great was the impact of speculation and extortion that Mortimer Johnson of Virginia wrote to his wife, “I have refused to join in the mania for speculation that has 1/2 ruined the Patriotism of the south. All speculation here causes the poor to suffer.”¹⁴ Oscar Stuart of Mississippi worried too that the “extortionate prices” of goods “are beyond the means of thousands, and in many instances of the Families of the volunteers who are

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¹² The meaning of the term impressment as used in the Confederacy differed from the practice employed by European naval forces in the early 19th century. On a different note, Confederate soldiers gave families IOUs for the goods that they took, but those notes remained unpaid.
fighting the battles of the Country….“ Speculation caused many Confederates to go hungry because as another Mississippian expressed in a letter to his own family, “the selfish miseric speculators are puling every thing out of your mouths,” noted Leander Huckaby. Martha Ingram of Texas confirmed the harmful impact speculation had on families, writing to her husband, “I pitty the poore Solider. While he is...fighting for the freedom of the contry those low down fellows ar extorting the verry last sent that they can out of the wives and children of the Soldiers.” Left at home, Confederate women and children fell prey to speculators, rendering doubtful their existence in the absence of their protectors. Worried about families, the Daily Morning News noted, “How are the families of soldiers fighting for us in the field, or even the soldier, to exist....”

Beyond the problems caused by shortages, the fact that men were not at home exacerbated the hardships that families confronted. While men provided assistance to a certain degree through directives sent in letters, written commands were no equal match for the physical presence and exertion that the men could provide. Before the war took them from home, Confederate soldiers were the providers for their families, the ones who gave direction to households, enabling them to earn a living. Given this dependence, many women were uncomfortable with the new lifestyle, especially Lizzie Neblett, who wrote to her husband, “Oh Will you don’t know how heavily the burden & responsibility rests upon me of having things done which are highly necessary outside of the farm, and my fear that the negroes will not

15 Oscar J. Stuart to A.G. Brown, January 17, 1863, LRCSW, RG 109, Reel 110, 402, NA.
17 Martha Ingram to George Ingram, December 25, 1862, Civil War Letters of George W. and Martha F. Ingram, 1861-1865, compiled by Henry L. Ingram (College Station: Texas A & M University, 1973), 45.
support themselves, and I know so little about farming.”  

Without adequate help, the inability of women to provide for their families was of constant concern, as Emily Moxley of Alabama wrote to her husband, “I am out of meat, or nearly so...you dont know how I feel to start out to get meat and not one cent of money to get it with...”

The degree to which women felt the impact of their husband’s absence depended upon economic differences; whereas more elite women truly faced new responsibilities they had not previously encountered, those women in poorer households, accustomed to hard work, suffered from a shortage of labor, which made their tasks more tiresome. However, some families’ economic situation allowed them to transcend many of the woes associated with military service, as was the case with Mary Boykin Chestnut of South Carolina. Unfamiliar with economic hardship, Chestnut appeared to have no concept of shortage, as she listed an array of foods, including “mutton, beef, poultry, cream, butter, eggs, fruits, and vegetables,” of which she remarked, “It is easy to live here....” Far from naive regarding her privileged status, she accepted the dichotomy of classes, writing, “Today the ladies in their landaus were bitterly attacked in the morning paper. Lolling back in their silks and satins. Tall footmen in livery &c&c—driving up and down the streets—the poor soldier’s wives on the sidewalks. Old story—rich and poor.”

Indeed, a recognition of a division in Confederate society surfaced in the discourse of many Confederates. The high prices that pervaded the Confederacy certainly made life more difficult for the poorer Confederate families, some of whom proved resentful for their relative

22 Chestnut, April 2, 1862, Mary Chestnut’s Civil War, 323.
situation, as noted by Virginia soldier Fred Fleet. “I begin to hear a good deal of murmuring & complaint among the soldiers & reproaches thrown at “the rich” who have no mercy in grinding every cent out of the poor.”23 The capability for the rich to grow richer while the poor lagged behind, was enhanced by the differential pay scheme in the army. Writing of the differences in pay, one Alabama soldier remarked, “A Lieut get $80 to 90 per month, Capt $130, a Col over $200, when the private only gets $11. That is enough for us to have but the injustice. How can we prosper at this rate?”24 Another soldier from North Carolina discussed the stark contrast between military pay and food prices in a letter to Governor Vance.

Meal $4 to 5 per Bus, flour $50 to 60 per Brl, Lard 70c per lb by the brl, Bacon 75c per lb by the load and everything else in proportion. Now Govr. do tell me how we poor soldiers who are fighting for the “rich mans negro” can support our families at $11 per month? How can the poor live?25

Without adequate pay, many Confederates faced the honest question of how to provide for their families, who remained bereft of their physical assistance. For some it seemed as if a break from the nation was imminent, captured by the same North Carolina private, who warned, “I am fearful we will have a revolution unless something is done as the majority of our soldiers are poor men with families who say they are tired of the rich mans war & poor mans fight, they wish to get to their families...”26

Actions of both soldiers and those at home seemed to give validity to the notion that a brewing storm was on the horizon. Despite the army’s reliance upon impressment, rations were of an evanescent nature, much like the army’s movement. Complaints grew more serious as the

24 James Zechariah Branscomb to sister, April 11, 1862, Branscomb Family Letters, Alabama Department of Archives and History, from HIST-296: Civil War and Reconstruction, Professor Chandra Manning, Spring 2008, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.
26 Goddin, February 27, 1863, North Carolina Civil War Documentary, 98.
war dragged on, especially those of North Carolina soldier John Futch, who wrote, “it looks like starvation here... Very high here pervisions are hardly to be had at No price our rashons are very short....”

More than a listless complaint of those dreaming of packages from home, the rhetoric employed by many in their letters often paired poor rations with threats of desertion. Thomas Smiley commented upon this phenomenon rather early, writing to his aunt, “Yet it would not surprise me if a great many did not desert as the soldier is not getting what is justly due him. There has been several days that they got no meat at all and when there is meat issued it is in small quantities...”

Benjamin Jackson of Alabama similarly quipped, “They are deserting every day. They say they don’t get enough to eat.”

More than a problem in the army, hunger pangs brought forth strained responses at home. The growing despair put into doubt many families’ willingness to remain tied to the nation, as Harriet Perry wrote her husband, “Your Father told me laughingly to tell you if he had known when he gave the secession vote, it would put flour so far away, he should have considered a long time before giving it—we have been entirely without for five or six weeks.”

Others proved not so willing to laugh at their growing troubles, including North Carolinians who wrote to Governor Vance, “we the common people has to hav bread or blood & we are bound boath men & women to hav it or die....” The seriousness of this statement became apparent just a month later when a series of bread riots broke out across the Confederacy. Shortages drove many to action beginning in Atlanta on March 16, 1863, continuing in Salisbury, N.C., Mobile, Mobile,

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30 Harriet Perry to Theophilus Perry, April 5, 1863, Widows by the Thousand, 119.
AL, High Point, N.C., Raleigh, and Petersburg, V.A. The most famous riot took place in the Confederate capital of Richmond on April 2 when a group of women, armed with axes and hatchets, stormed the streets, gathering supporters while taking goods from warehouses and shops. The riot came to a halt when Virginia Governor Letcher and President Jefferson Davis threatened to have the Public Guard fire upon the crowd. The rioters received anything but support in the days that followed, as many heaped ridicule upon them, including the Richmond Examiner, which called the women “a handful of prostitutes, professional thieves, Irish and yankee hags, gallows-birds from all lands but our own.” Added to the image of armed guards, the newspaper’s harsh words showed that little sympathy existed for families affected by shortage problems. Moreover, the occurrence of the riots offered a clear example of the strain that the material hardships of war placed on the domestic nation. To ignore the existence of the riots or to downplay the role financial hardship played in the Confederacy would be to tell an incomplete story of its families. Yet, equally as damaging is the interpretation of the riots as a symbol of a broken connection between nation and family, because most families remained in favor of the Confederate cause. The point is not to deny that some families gave up, nor to ignore those that proved immune to material hardship, but to show that many Confederates, despite material challenges, still proved unwilling to choose between nation and family, reflected within Confederate pleas to the government.

While the petitions Confederates sent to the government expressed clear strain in the relationship between nation and family, primarily due to the urgency of family affairs, they did

33 Chesson, “Harlots or Heroines?,” 138-149. Chesson notes the confusion of whether Governor Letcher or President Davis ordered the Public Guard to fire on the crowd if it did not disperse in five minutes. Although most accounts give credit to Davis, Chesson finds more evidence in support of Letcher. This interpretation is supported by an eyewitness, J.B. Jones, a clerk in the Department of War. See J.B. Jones, April 2, 1863, A Rebel War Clerk’s Diary vol. 1, ed. Howard Swigget (New York: Old Hickory Bookshop, 1935), 285.
34 “A Riot in Richmond,” Fayetteville Observer, April 6, 1863, 19th Century Newspapers.
not express a desire to break from the nation, but rather reflected an uneasy cohabitation of interests that best defined the Confederate experience. Letters sent to the government had as their first goal to establish Confederates’ reasons for dependency upon the government, most often related to pressing family interests. One Virginian woman feared, “with the present exorbitant prices of the bare necessaries of life and the prospect of their being still higher, it is doubtful whether we can much longer escape the peril of starvation unless...one of my sons...can be secured to cultivate the little farm upon which we live.” The harsh nature of the war made it impossible to ignore the extent to which hardship impinged on the families. Further petitions established citizens’ dependent status, as in the case of North Carolina soldier Frederick Bryan, for whom petitioners requested a discharge, because his mother and aunts “are entirely without property or other assistance…and must suffer seriously without him,” as they “have started a small crop barely sufficient for their actual support which will be lost to them without his aid.” Unable to persist without men, families grew ever more dependent on pleas to the government as a means of maintaining faith in the relationship between nation and family. A woman from Georgia thus asked for an exemption for her husband “so that he can support our family...[as] we have five little children...to support and my health is so very bad that I have not been able to do any kind of work for three years....” Rife with descriptions of domestic hardship, writers sought to illustrate how the war jeopardized their familial interests, and how they needed governmental support to guarantee the survival of their families.

Letters thus revisited the contract between nation and family, as Confederates

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35 This argument differs from that made by Amy Murrell, who posits that the petitions illustrated that Confederates held a more “elastic” form of loyalty. And yet, she does not give much credit to the genuine strain expressed in the petitions, and finishes her essay with a citation of Gary Gallagher and Anne Rubin. See “‘Of Necessity and Public Benefit’: Southern Families and Their Appeals for Protection,” in Southern Families at War: Loyalty and Conflict in the Civil War South, ed. Catherine Clinton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 77-99.
36 Catherine Padget to James Seddon, February 14, 1864, LRCWW, RG 109, Reel 137, 778, NA.
37 Citizens of Bethel Pitt Co, No Ca to James Seddon, July 17, 1863, LRCWW, RG 109, Reel 83, 177, NA.
38 Mrs. F.E. Spilman to Judah P. Benjamin, March 10, 1862, LRCWW, RG 109, Reel 70, 317, NA.
emphasized their own sacrifices in order to spur the government into action. Charles Sims of Virginia sought relief from conscription for his community because, as he wrote, “We have furnished all our able bodied men between the ages of 18 and 45,” a reference to the belief that the government should match the sacrifices of its dependents.\textsuperscript{39} Seeking a furlough to care for his dependent mother in Louisiana, Thomas Steele emphasized his service in the army, writing, “for the last 13 months I have done my duty to the best of my ability, and I therefore earned a furlough....”\textsuperscript{40} Other Confederates relied upon mention of the ultimate sacrifice—death—to push the government into action. In her petition for her son’s discharge, Miranda Sutton of North Carolina referred to the loss of her husband and two sons. She wrote, “Your petitioner humbly convieyes that having made such great sacrifices for the Southern Cause her claims humble though she be, will not be overlooked.”\textsuperscript{41} Given that her continued participation in the cause had cost her most of her family, Sutton’s reliance upon language mindful of her sacrifice seemed appropriate as a means of securing government attention. A similar reference to death to appeared in a petition asking that Dobson Surry County of Alabama be released from further conscription. The petition read, “your petitioners are the fathers, brothers, and relatives of soldiers whose blood has freely been poured on the Sanguinary Battlefields...And that the prayer is for the holy purpose of enableing us to sustain, the widows and orphans, of the brave men who have offered themselves as a sacrifice upon the alter of their country.”\textsuperscript{42} Confederates thus reiterated their own sacrifices as a means of reminding the government of its equal obligation to protect its domestic families.

Despite Confederates’ articulation of need and sacrifice, which highlighted the interests

\textsuperscript{39} Charles F. Sims to Jefferson Davis, April 23, 1862, LRCSW, RG 109, Reel 70, 914, NA.
\textsuperscript{40} Thomas Steele to George Randolph, May 21, 1862, LRCSW, RG 109, Reel 71, 302-304, NA.
\textsuperscript{41} Miranda Sutton to James Seddon, January 28, 1864, LRCSW, RG 109, Reel 140, 552, NA.
\textsuperscript{42} N.H. Blackwood to Jefferson Davis, February 28, 1863, LRCSW, RG 109, Reel 81, 811, NA.
of their families, they expressed continued faith in the nation, an attempt to emphasize the dual importance of both nation and family. When Floridian mother Antonica Solana asked for the discharge of her son, stating, “I am dependant entirely upon his exertions for a support,” she argued that he could “be of much more service to his country and to me + himself if he was discharged....” Cognizant of the person to whom she wrote, Solana sought to strike a balance between the interests of nation and family. Confederates did not reject their duty to the nation, but rather envisioned their duty to the family as complementary. Eliza Sibley of North Carolina, in asking for a discharge for her son, wrote, “I would not ask this favor on this our Country’s hour of need, did I not think he would do more good at home than in the army, taking care of his brother’s helpless families and myself.” Not just a means of justification, Confederates truly shared interests in both the nation and the family, gleaned from Mississippi soldier D.W. Saddler, who discussed his need to care for his mother. “I am willing to serve the Country. I am a full blooded southerner in principle + practice. I wish to avoid no duty. It is for my old Mothers sake + the Country’s good that I ask the detail.” An additional petition from his mother, Emily, reinforced this logic, as she wrote, “I have no doubt he would do his country much more service at home than in the army.” In Saddler’s mind, his duties to his family were not anathema to those to the nation, but mutually reinforcing, or for “the Country’s good.” Confederates believed that to serve adequately in the Confederate army, it was necessary to ensure the protection of their family.

While the need to care for their families did not negate Confederates’ attachment to the nation, the interests of both the nation and the family no longer meshed together as they had at

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43 Antonica Solana to George Randolph, October 27, 1862, LRCSW, RG 109, Reel 73, 280, NA.
44 Eliza Sibley to James Seddon, March 16, 1864, LRCSW, RG 109, Reel 140, 926, NA.
45 D.W. Saddler to James Seddon, January 15, 1864, LRCSW, RG 109, Reel 140, 514, NA.
46 Emily Saddler to James Seddon, December 19, 1863, LRCSW, RG 109, Reel 140, 517, NA.
the war’s beginning, but rather rested uncomfortably next to one another. Alabama soldier John Caldwell spoke at length about the dual interests present within his soul.

The head sanctions without cavil, the proposition, “Our Country first”; but the heart reminds me that there are other solemn obligations resting upon me which must not be entirely disregarded. I have at home a wife and four small children, who, without means, are entirely dependent upon my individual efforts, to supply their wants and provide...for their comfort + happiness is my duty, and I crave to discharge it...[but] I do not desire to leave the service. No one would regret more than I the necessity which would compel me to leave the field and sever my connection with the Regt. which I have had the honor to command so long.47

The invocation of both familial and national language reflected an uneasy tension between desires. In the same vein, Sarah McMillan of Mississippi, when requesting for her husband to come home, spoke of his “paramount duty of protecting and providing for his family.” However, she continued soon thereafter, “My husband is not wanting in patriotism as his acts heretofore abundantly prove and nothing but the sterne necessity of the case could induce him to consent for me to make this request at your hands.”48 Not indicative of a clear choice, these letters reflect an unwillingness to make a choice between nation and family. The very act of writing letters to the government, although illustrative of strain, represented a willingness to address hardship in a way geared towards averting, rather than forcing a decision between nation and family.

If Confederates proved willing to write as a means of avoiding a split between the nation and the family, the government did not do itself any favors in prolonging a decision. In many cases, the Secretary of War did not respond to the pleas for help, while in others, the government declined the petition. In response to D.W. Saddler’s petition, an official wrote on the outside flap, “I have no doubt but the facts stated in the Petition are true. But I am compeled to disapprove the Detail, Beleiving that the interest of the Country requires the services of every

47 John Caldwell to General [name not written], February 10, 1863, LRCSW, RG 109, Reel 85, 186, NA.
48 Sarah McMillan to James Seddon, November 14, 1862, LRCSW, RG 109, Reel 63, 1155, NA.
man in the field.”\textsuperscript{49} Similar refrains could be found on other petitions, including the remarks “Declined” or “Kindly declining.”\textsuperscript{50} Despite the government’s unenthusiastic reply to Confederate appeals, it did attempt to respond to the hardships created by war in a variety of ways, many of which, although unsuccessful in the end, helped to prolong the relationship between nation and family.

Cognizant of the problem of shortages that confronted Confederate families, the government worked to curb practices that exacerbated hardship, especially impressment. Unregulated since 1861, impressment faced restraint when the Confederate Congress passed an impressment act in March 1863. Rather than allow soldiers to pay any price they desired for farmers’ goods, the act made the determination of prices less arbitrary, and subject to fair government control. Although the act proved promising, it was an example of a change made by the government that did not completely solve the problem. One man worried that impressment continued to deprive communities of their subsistence crops, and as he feared, “will leave Thousands of our own citizens, destitute and in want.”\textsuperscript{51} Not only did the system legalize deprivation of citizens in favor of the army, but soldiers continued to abuse the privilege. The damaging actions of some Confederate troops caused a Virginia man to lament, “The presence of a Yankee army would be hardly more distasteful to the owners of property here, than that of the Southern Confederacy.”\textsuperscript{52} Continued complaints from Confederates illustrated that impressment, rather than solve the issue of shortages, merely papered over it with simplistic restrictions, turning a blind eye to stories of abuse.

\textsuperscript{49} T.C. [illegible], outside of letter, D.W. Saddler to James Seddon, January 15, 1864, LRCSW, RG 109, Reel 140, 514, NA.
\textsuperscript{50} Mary Lasnett to James Seddon, February 28, 1864, LRCSW, RG 109, Reel 140, outside of letter, 798, NA; Catherine Cowan to James Seddon, April 12, 1863, LRCSW, RG 109, Reel 85, 582, NA.
\textsuperscript{51} J.W. Harrison to M.L. Bonham, September 19, 1863, LRCSW, RG 109, Reel 83, 937, NA.
\textsuperscript{52} Jno M. Both, June 13, 1863, LRCSW, RG 109, Reel 83, 8-9, NA.
In addition to impressment, the Confederacy’s financial policy continued to impinge upon civilians. The over issue of currency used to finance the war spiked the rate of inflation, so that a good that had cost one dollar in 1861, cost seven dollars in 1863.\textsuperscript{53} Aware of the worthlessness of Confederate currency, the government instituted the tax-in-kind, which required a producer to give ten percent of his surplus goods of wheat, corn, oats, rice, sugar, etc. to the government.\textsuperscript{54} However, the tax-in-kind bill only worsened the problem of shortages for Confederate families, given that it sanctioned taking goods from families. Alabama soldier John Cotton complained that the tax was “very hy” and seemed an unfair demand when he was already away from home, fighting for his country.\textsuperscript{55} Nonetheless, some proved willing to endure taxation, because, “Altho the taxes pinches close we ought not to complain of giving a part to support the war for what would be the consequence as suppose the enemy conquers us they will take all without asking permission,” wrote a North Carolina man.\textsuperscript{56} However, the Confederacy failed to discover a solution to the monetary problem, despite the transition from currency to bonds in 1864. Perhaps Julia Fisher captured the gravity of the situation when she wrote in her diary, “Money is not worth shucks...This currency business is a perfect swindle.”\textsuperscript{57} Unable to find a suitable means of stabilizing the system, it spiraled out of control, making the problems of inflation and shortages of permanent concern for Confederates.

Struggling to allay the problem of shortages, the nation and state governments provided relief to poor families. From support for private charity efforts, to a few situations in which

\textsuperscript{53} McPherson, \textit{Battle Cry of Freedom}, 440.
President Davis stopped conscription in some areas, as well as the distribution of some tax-in-kind collections to the poor, the national government provided sparse relief. Despite the Confederate government’s lack of convincing effort on behalf of its troubled dependents, Confederates saw greater relief efforts at the state level. In fact, seven of the Confederate states enacted laws that used tax funds to provide relief for the destitute. Characteristic of state action was a discussion of a bill in Mississippi for “a fund for the support of destitute families of Volunteers in this State and for other purposes,” while the North Carolina legislature provided one million dollars “for the relief of the Wives and Families of Soldiers in the Army.” Although State aid helped thousands, struggles with high prices often prevented states from effectively fixing the level of destitution at hand, which drew opposition from weary Confederates. Disappointed at the lack of relief for the salt shortage in Virginia, Lucy Buck believed her Governor “ought to be starved a while himself and then perhaps he may be less chary of making promises that he will not fulfill.” Going further than Buck was a North Carolina woman, who became upset with the disparity between charity received and the price of goods. Warning Governor Vance, she wrote “I dont know how they can expect the No Ca soldiers to fight and their familys treated as they are.” The failed relief efforts thus had the potential to imperil the relationship between nation and family, spurring some men to return

61 Susan Woolker to Governor Zebulon Vance, April 3, 1864, North Carolina Civil War Documentary, 262-263.
home to protect their loved ones.\textsuperscript{62}

Without adequate federal or state aid, many Confederates relied upon local efforts. Many Virginians experienced a sense of relief from the valiant efforts of local counties and towns, which utilized the tactics of group purchasing, county stores, and charity drives to counter the effects of poverty.\textsuperscript{63} Additional local efforts—often of a small-scale—received attention in the letters and newspapers of the Confederacy. The Leverett family of Columbia, S.C. discussed the Mutual Supply Association as a place of aid where they bought food, especially corn, for cheaper prices.\textsuperscript{64} A similar organization in Charleston, the Free Market, “dispenses the necessaries of life to thousands of families, the protectors of whom are far away, fighting the battles of their country. This is no charity. It is mere justice.”\textsuperscript{65} Additional relief efforts sprouted up in smaller locales, as Harriet Perry noted a charades event in her town that raised about one thousand dollars to benefit the poor and needy widows and orphans of soldiers at war.\textsuperscript{66} Like many Confederate experiences, the results of the relief system were no less contradictory, as some citizens benefited, prolonging their commitment to the nation, while others continued to suffer, seeking further avenues of support.

When government actions proved ineffective, Confederates relied upon themselves to confront hardship. The shortage of goods and decreasing value of currency made Confederates frugal, as Martha Ingram wrote, “My money has got verry deepe in my pocket and I shall not be

\textsuperscript{62} Mark Weitz specifically attributes the lack of aid in northern Georgia to an increase in desertions, because men felt the call of the “higher duty” to return home to protect their families. See Mark A. Weitz, \textit{A Higher Duty: Desertion among Georgia Troops during the Civil War} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 116, 174-5.
\textsuperscript{63} William Blair, \textit{Virginia's Private War: Feeding Body and Soul in the Confederacy, 1861-1865} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 75, 94-96. In contrast to Weitz, Blair argues that in Virginia at least, officials were effective at using relief efforts to both respond to and quell dissent.
\textsuperscript{64} Frances Wallace Taylor, Catherine Taylor Matthews, and J. Tracy Power, eds., \textit{The Leverett Letters: Correspondence of a South Carolina Family, 1851-1868} (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 276; Anne Leverett DeSaussure to Milton Leverett, May 23, 1864, 306.
\textsuperscript{66} Harriet Perry to Theophilus Perry, February 26, 1864, \textit{Widows by the Thousand}, 217.
able to reach it except in some case where I think it really necessary.”67 Many other Confederates embraced this adjustment, including Kate Stone of Louisiana. “A year ago we would have considered it impossible to get on for a day without things that we have been doing without for months.”68 The ingenuity of many Confederates helped them to endure the shortages, especially the lack of food. The “Confederate Receipt Book” carried a number of tips geared towards adjustment to circumstances, including a recipe for “Apple Pie Without Apples,” “Preserving Meat Without Salt,” and how “To Give A Cool Taste To Water” without ice.69 A growing use of substitutes also helped lessen the effects of shortages. Widely popular were substitutes for coffee beans, in place of which newspapers recommended sassafras, an English garden pea, and even a sweet potato, which in the editor’s opinion “tastes like coffee, smells like it, and looks like it.”70 A Raleigh paper was well aware of the bizarre substitute recommendations, yet noted, ““Truly “necessity is the mother of invention.””71

Confederate ingenuity extended beyond food to include clothing, which proved adaptable under necessary circumstances. Reporting the high prices of cloth, a Savannah paper warned, “our fair ladies will be forced to adopt fabrics of their manufacture for dresses.” Rather than mourn the loss of traditional fashion, the paper glorified homespun clothing as a patriotic sentiment. “Now is the time for those who can to do the country a service, and here is an

67 Martha Ingram to George Ingram, July 27, 1863, Civil War Letters of George W. and Martha F. Ingram, 1861-1865, 57.
excellent opportunity.” The lyrics of the popular song, “The Homespun Dress,” embraced a similar idea. “The homespun dress is plain, I know…but then it shows what Southern girls/For Southern rights will do./We love the South, you know—.” Unashamed of their willingness to sacrifice beauty for utility, women like Kate Stone believed that “Fashion is an obsolete word and just to be decently clad is all we expect…” Inspired by the need to economize, Lizzie Neblett used scraps of flannel to make clothing, while affirming, “‘Necessity is the Mother of invention.’” Repeating the adage employed by the Raleigh paper, Lizzie Neblett and others reflected the willingness among Confederates to adapt to the circumstances at hand, which eased the hardships incurred on behalf of service to the nation.

Although the actions taken by the government and individual Confederates helped to ease hardship and thus prolong the war, those actions combined could not wholly avert the problem of hardship. A North Carolina paper that had maintained faith in substitutes as a means of curbing shortages, suddenly warned of a “Starvation Point” in 1865, and the need to avoid its arrival. Afraid for his sister at home, a Virginia soldier remarked, “I am thinking starvation will be the ending of this war yet.” Fellow Virginian Julia Fisher only had memories of prior meals, talking with her family “of the good pies and bread and cakes that linger in remembrance. And yet, Fisher’s dreams of past feasts were a reality for some Confederates in Richmond, where, Judith McGuire remarked, “the most elegant suppers are served—cakes, jellies, ices in profusion,

73 Carrie Bell Sinclair, “The Homespun Dress,” from HIST 296: Civil War and Reconstruction, Professor Chandra Manning, Spring 2008, Georgetown University.
75 Lizzie Neblett to Will Neblett, November 6, 1863, A Rebel Wife in Texas, 198.
76 “Starvation Point,” Fayetteville Observer, February 6, 1865, 19th Century U.S. Newspapers.
78 Fisher, January 6, 1864, “Diary, 1864.” DAS.
and meats of the finest kinds in abundance….” 79 Surely then, hardships were not nearly as threatening of a problem for some Confederates. Comforted by a salary of $162 per month, almost fifteen times that of a private soldier, Georgia soldier Edgeworth Bird showed little concern in a letter to his wife regarding the loss of crops. “Darling, look on the bright side and don’t allow yourself to be ruffled by any annoyance from home affairs.” 80 An array of experiences thus pervaded the Confederacy until the war’s end, highlighting contradiction, rather than certainty, as the story of the Confederacy.

Although strain became a part of life for many Confederates, many of them did not reject their ties to the government simply because of hardship. While shortages continued to weigh heavily upon families, Confederates penned letters to the government until the war’s close, illustrative of their persistent struggle to soothe the burdens that war placed on the domestic nation. Confederates’ unwillingness to choose between their hurting family and the nation caused the war to continue, a prolonged period made somewhat easier by certain government actions and the population’s own ingenuity. Even though Confederates found no panacea for hardship, threats from an outside source helped distract families from their empty stomachs.

79 Judith W. McGuire, January 8, 1865, *Diary of a Southern Refugee During the War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 328.
4. Friend or Foe? : Interactions with the Enemy

Surveying the landscape of Columbia, S.C. in February 1865, Mary Leverett saw only embers, the remaining pieces of the city after the Union Army set it ablaze. Visibly shaken by her community's ill fortune, Leverett did not give in to despair, but exclaimed, “It would make us more determined & drive every man into the field with feelings more embittered & intense than ever. It was a good thing for us.”¹ Considering the prevalence of material hardship within the lives of Confederates, a problem discussed in the previous chapter, Mary Leverett's classification of hardship as a “good thing” seemed an ill-advised sentiment. However, a distinct difference existed between material hardship most easily attributed to Confederates themselves and hardship directly attributed to the Union Army. The Union’s invasion of Confederate homes caused material damage, but more importantly, it inflicted vast psychological damage upon Confederates, illustrated in the cases of refugees, women, and slaves. Responding to the challenges from the Union Army, many Confederates reflected an increased willingness to fight. However, this simple story of Confederate hatred for the Union Army fails to account for those Confederates who displayed weakness in the face of Union strength, or even more important, those Confederates who had seemingly pleasant interactions with the enemy. Anne Smith of Georgia recounted one instance when Confederates in her town “rushed through the streets shouting glory to God the Yankees are come,” after Union soldiers had given them free rein over a wealthy man’s property.² This helpfulness of Union soldiers created contradictory attitudes among Confederates, many of whom supported the Confederate cause, yet required support for

their families, a balance of interests captured within the issue of the oath of allegiance. This contradictory posture towards the enemy accommodated the desire to help both parts of the domestic nation, thus enabling Confederates to deflect further any choice between nation and family.

Although material hardships continued to make life difficult for Confederates, the focus on the enemy made bearable the often harsh nature of military service. Facing an extended period of separation from his wife, native Mississippian William Nugent was “inclined to kick at the laws which effect a compulsory separation between man and wife,” but stopped himself with the realization that “unless we present a bold front to the enemy…we may expect nothing but vassalage and slavery all our lives.” President Jefferson Davis used this threat of enslavement to gain support for the often-criticized conscription, stating, “Will you be slaves or will you be independent?” Confederates thus realized that while life in the army was not a party, it paled in comparison to subjugation to the enemy. Lewis Warlick of North Carolina, although aware “that a soldier's life was a hard one, exposed to many hardships and severe trials,” believed that “a man should not look to that when his country is invaded with thieves and lawless persons, then every man [sic] should do all in his power for the protection of his much loved country and fireside.” Although material hardships often clouded Confederates’ vision, the presence of the enemy opened Confederates’ eyes to the reality of the threat that they faced. Speaking to this effect, William Nugent wrote, “There are, I am sorry to say, a great many whipped curs among us; and they need some artificial stimulus, some outside application, to open their eyes. This

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will, sooner or later be done for them by Ulysses Grant.”

Confederates did not forget the hardships they faced, but they came to understand that the threat posed by the enemy demanded equal attention to protect both nation and family.

It was the Union Army’s targeting of the Confederate home front that ultimately earned the rapt attention of Confederates. Damage done to personal homes received especial attention, highlighted by Lucy Buck’s description of the disappearance of her family’s fence rails, which seemed “endowed with a strange vitality so rapidly were they spirited away.” Buck’s complaints could not compare to the ashes that remained of Henrietta Lee’s home, burned down during General David Hunter’s 1864 raid through the Shenandoah Valley. In despair, Lee condemned Hunter, “Hyena-like, you have torn my heart to pieces! For all hallowed memories clustered around that homestead; and demonlike, you have done it without even the pretext of revenge, for I never saw or harmed you.”

While the damage done to Confederate homes was not usually so grave, Confederates despaired at any amount of damage done to their personal property. Captivated by the “molestation” of Jackson, Mississippi by the Union Army, Jorantha Semmes described the streets “strewn with the bread from the children’s mouths types books papers clothing furniture sugar bacon dead animals all in one mass of shreds tatters and horrible confusion.” Of the mass of goods laying in the street, it was the theft and destruction of food supplies that especially struck a chord with Confederates, many of whom already suffered from empty stomachs. “We are almost in a state of starvation here,” wrote Laura Lee from behind Union lines in Virginia. “No fresh meat for a fortnight and almost impossible to get eggs and

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6 William Nugent to Eleanor Nugent, August 30, 1863, My Dear Nellie, 130-131.
9 Jorantha Semmes to Benedict Joseph Semmes, May 1863 [no day listed], folder 8, Benedict Joseph Semmes Papers, Southern Historical Collection (SHC), University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.
butter, and what we do get at fabulous prices.” 10 Given that similar descriptions pervaded the Confederacy, the physical damage inflicted upon the Confederate home front by Union soldiers had a particular impact on Confederates.

Although the Union Army left the Confederates feeling violated, as evidenced by the ubiquitous nature of Confederate complaints, the actions of Union soldiers were not nearly as destructive or widespread as some Confederates purported. This qualification in no way demeans the experiences of Lucy Buck or Henrietta Lee, but rather renders clear that their experiences did not represent the whole. Any examination of the Confederate experience that paints the Union Army as the propagators of an indiscriminate swath of destruction, fails to consider the complexities of the Union policy towards the Confederates. The policy that allowed for General Hunter to burn down Henrietta Lee’s home, or even to steal the Buck’s fencing, was not in place at the beginning of the war. The Union kept to a conciliatory policy during the first year, hoping to gently ease secessionists back into the fold. However, conciliation’s lack of convincing success demanded a more pragmatic policy, which permitted the use of harsher tactics where necessary to frighten Confederates into rejoining the Union. Confederates’ further resilience caused the Union to shift to adopt a final policy in early 1864, one which used targeted violence to demoralize the Confederates as a means of ending the war. Albeit true that the Union Army gradually implemented harsher policies to achieve the desired objectives, the Union’s actions were considerably tame when compared to wars throughout world history. Union soldiers kept to a streamlined policy, which had specific targets and which veered away from the savage killings of civilians, or the total destruction of the Confederate home front. 11 The

physical nature of the damage done to the Confederacy thus proved neither as severe or as ubiquitous as Confederates believed.\textsuperscript{12} Albeit not physically damaged in a grave manner, Confederates suffered considerable psychological strain at the hands of the Union Army.

Accustomed to a stable home where their families might flourish, wartime circumstances, including the enemy’s presence, created a population of Confederate refugees distanced from their emotional roots. The refugee population included both the wealthy and the poor, each driven from home by a variety of different circumstances. While the threat posed by the Union Army was the deciding factor for many refugees, other Confederates cited the importance of economic privation or the need to hide slaves from Union forces.\textsuperscript{13} Having fled from Alexandria, Virginia in May 1861, Judith McGuire postulated that Confederates left not only due to the threat of physical damage, but because they could not bear the psychological burden of witnessing the Union Army occupy their homes.

Can [Confederates] see the spot of earth which they have perhaps inherited from their fathers covered with the tents of the enemy…ancestral trees laid low, to make room for fortifications, thrown across their grounds, from which cannon will point to the very heart of their loved South?\textsuperscript{14}

Refugee life thus proved a vast psychological burden for Confederates because the change held unnerving possibilities for the family. Kate Stone, whose own family moved from Louisiana to Texas, referred to refugee life as a “journey to the unknown.”\textsuperscript{15} Clarice Urquhart, on the cusp of a journey that spanned from Louisiana to Texas to Europe, well understood the strain of the

\textsuperscript{12} Paul F. Paskoff, “Measures of War: A Quantitative Examination of the Civil War’s Destructiveness in the Confederacy,” \textit{Civil War History} 54, no. 1 (March 2008): 35-62. Paskoff noted that the war zone only comprised 36 percent of the Confederacy (57 percent without Texas and Florida). Only seven percent of towns destroyed by Union Army.

\textsuperscript{13} Mary Elizabeth Massey, \textit{Refugee Life in the Confederacy} (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964), 11-27.

\textsuperscript{14} Judith McGuire, October 2, 1861, \textit{Diary of a Southern Refugee During the War by a Lady of Virginia} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 66-67.

journey ahead, writing, “It was a sad little group that left the dear old home. We were so overcome with sorrow and terror as to our future fate….” More than the physical shift then, Confederates struggled with a life away from their homes and all that they recognized, which had deep significance for them. Annie Sehorn, originally from Memphis before having fled to Atlanta in February 1862, expressed a longing to return, writing, “my heart clings to the old home, yearns for it and I wish I could live and die beneath the dear old roof that sheltered my infancy & childhood.” Barrington King of Georgia expressed a similar sentiment when faced with the threat of General Sherman in 1864. “It will be hard to have to give up our old home with which every year of my life for many years in full of such pleasant associations all of us your children & grand children will feel it.” Confederate refugees thus faced the burden of having to leave behind all that was familiar, which was a source of great psychological strain.

In addition to the strain placed on Confederate refugees, the Union Army’s treatment of Confederate women challenged Confederate gender roles, and thus the structure of the family. The actions of General Benjamin Butler in New Orleans with regards to women were the primary illustration of the strains that the Union Army added to the Confederate family. Upset by the inhospitable manner with which some women treated his soldiers, Butler issued General Order No. 28 in 1862, or the “woman order,” which stated that any woman who criticized Union soldiers would be viewed as a prostitute, and treated in a like manner. Women across the South found Butler's action reprehensible, echoed by the common refrain “Beast Butler.” Shock overtook North Carolina resident Catherine Edmondston, who wrote, “I cannot find words to

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18 Barrington King to Bessie King, July 20, 1864, Dear Old Roswell: Civil War letters of the King family of Roswell, Georgia, ed. T.H. Galloway (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 2003), 78.
express my horror and indignation. Was such cold blooded barbarity ever before conceived?” A young New Orleans resident, Clara Solomon, equally as stunned, stammered, “Oh! Philomen, I cannot express to you the indignation this awakened, my feelings are akin to a lady, who speaking of the subject, said “I cannot tell you how I feel or what I think.” The shock that the Order caused stemmed not from the threat, but rather from the characterization of Southern women as prostitutes, an affront to the cherished purity of white Southern women. The Order’s degradation of women also angered Confederate men, who, as Solomon noted, “were perfectly exasperated for you know the insult offered to us is also to them.” Butler’s Order incensed the men because by demeaning women, the order challenged Southern patriarchy, or Confederate man’s ability to care for his dependents. An official response to the order stressed this desire on the part of Confederate men to preserve their dependents’ purity. “It is the jewel of your hearts—the chastity of your women—you have to guard,” proclaimed Thomas Moore. Butler’s insult of women not only challenged the traditional purity of women, but in so doing, also undermined the power of Confederate men, making the Order a substantial threat to Confederate families.

While Union treatment of women challenged the Confederate family’s concept of gender, the policy of emancipation struck at the hierarchy and safety of the Confederate family. Although emancipation did not become the stated goal of the Union until late 1862 when Lincoln issued the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, its impact on the Confederacy was wide-ranging. The legitimacy of the white man's power in the South, and his position as protector of

his dependent family members, stemmed from the whiteness of his skin, a distinction reaffirmed by the free versus slave dichotomy. To emancipate slaves thus meant to weaken the power of white men, which diminished his patriarchal grip over the family. Resistant slave behavior, encouraged by talk of emancipation, challenged the traditional family structure of the South. Walter Lenoir of North Carolina thus whipped his cook for morose behavior, because “to have submitted to it would have been in effect to have resigned my position as the head of the family, and have reduced myself to a plaything in the hands of my slaves.”23 More threatening than runaway or resistant slaves was the terror that black Union soldiers created in the minds of Confederates. The history of slave insurrections and the threat slaves posed to white women, worsened the fear of southern women and their protectors. Kate Stone described the terror she felt when black soldiers arrived at her home. “They did not say anything, but they looked at us and grinned and that terrified us more and more. It held such a promise of evil.”24 Challenging both the traditional family structure, as well as the safety of women and children, emancipation proved a considerable burden for Confederate families.

Inspired by the material and psychological damage caused by the Union Army, many Confederate soldiers grew more willing to fight to protect their loved ones. Looking at his family’s flattened factory in Roswell, Georgia, Barrington King resolved, “That this will not make it sinful for me to feel even a stronger desire to use my upmost soul felt desire to drive them from the soil they now pollute, & to recover the homes they have made desolate, yes that they have utterly destroyed until thousands are now homeless.”25 Threats at the very heart of Confederate existence—one's family—led many to express heartfelt desires to defend their

24 Stone, April 25, 1863, Brokenburn, 197.
25 Barrington King to Bessie King, July 25, 1864, Dear Old Roswell, 80.
family from the enemy. Texas soldier Theophilus Perry thus wrote to his wife Harriett, "I shall fight like I was standing at the threshold of my door fighting against robbers and scourgers for the defense of my wife & family." Similar scenes of destruction impressed Tennessee soldier John Thurman, who, upon witnessing the "horrid spectacle" of destroyed Confederate homes, wrote to his wife, "I think of you + my dear little children + my hard involuntary will unsheathe my saber or spring the trigger of my trusty Gun." Driven to sacrifice their own lives, Confederate soldiers proved willing to fight to protect their families in the face of the Union enemy.

If threats from the Union Army encouraged Confederate men to respond to the call to duty, the dependents for whom they fought, especially women, proved no less inspired to combat the enemy. Although Confederate women could not resist the enemy on the battlefield—bearing a few crafty exceptions—they no less expressed their disgust of the enemy through both words and actions. Incursions on the home front of Virginia spurred Martha Read to state, "five respectable women have been the victims of brutal outrage from Federal soldiers. Is it any wonder that in view of such a state of things, we are willing that those who are dearer to us than our own lives should encounter the dangers of a soldiers life to meet such murdering vandals." Women may not have had the chance to participate directly in the conflict, but they were often equally desirous—if not more so—for revenge against the Union soldiers. Susan Middleton of South Carolina, inspired by memories of destruction, hoped for similar treatment of Union

27 John Thurman to Sallie Thurman, April 3, 1862, series 1, folder 9, "John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman Papers,” SHC.
29 Martha Read to Thomas Read, February 16/17, 1862, “Read Family Correspondence,” University of Notre Dame: Rare Books and Special Collections, http://www.rarebooks.nd.edu/digital/civil_war/letters/read/5015-10.shtml.
civilians during the Pennsylvania campaign of July 1863. “I thought of the smoking ruins at Combahee as Oliver had described them, and of a hundred such scenes, and worse, all over our country, and I could not bear it—silently—so I burst out with something very bitter and contemptuous...in the form of a wish...for the utter ruin of the State of Pennsylvania...”  

Adine Hubbard of Alabama echoed this cry for revenge, writing

I do hope and pray that Lee will take everything they have in the way of horses and valuables, then burn houses and scare the women and children until they almost die. I know it is wicked and cruel in me to feel so, but when I think of what our people have suffered (almost without exception) wherever the enemy has been, I cannot help but wish that our soldiers, relative of those that have suffered, may discard every rule of civilized warfare, and let destruction mask their path.  

Beyond these powerful expressions of hatred, some Confederate women inched towards hurtful behavior against Union soldiers, as evidenced by a humorous story told by Nancy Emerson.

A fellow went into [a neighbor's] spring house, helped himself to what he liked, & finally lighted upon a jar of tar. He asked what it was. A daughter of the family, the only person at home, told him it was blackberry jelly. He took it, & made off. She called after him to know if he would have some cream with it. With that he put his fingers in it, & began to suck them, then threw down the jar & went off cursing with all his might.  

Left without the traditional means of resisting the enemy, Confederate women showed themselves equally capable of entertaining feelings of hatred towards Union soldiers, as they relished the opportunity to inflict damage upon the very soldiers who threatened their families.  

The brash rhetoric of hatred used by many Confederates often lost sight of those Confederates, who rather than resist the Union Army, cowered in its sight. Upon the arrival of the Union Army in northern Virginia in early 1862, Lucy Buck grew increasingly forlorn,

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31 Adine Hubbard to Ellen Richardson, July 29, 1863, subseries 1.6, folder 51, Chilah Smith Howe Papers, SHC.  
writing that the enemy’s presence grew like “shadows on my heart.” Fear of the approaching enemy, especially the worry of rape, gripped South Carolinian Grace Elmore, whose despair led her to contemplate suicide. A weakened willingness to fight because of the enemy struck Augusta County, Virginia, where one resident remarked, “Some people think the Confederacy is gon up al ready as the saying is. There has a great many family off to the yanks from Rockingham & some men that had fine farms.” This growing sense of despair also struck a chord with Tivie Stephens, who grew “‘skeered’” as the Union Army moved closer to her home in Florida in March 1862. Abandoning an initial tone of calm preparedness, the threat of the enemy proved too much for Tivie, who lamented to her husband, Winston, “I have tried to write in good spirits to you, for I had some hopes of our State’s being saved, but now all that is gone, I tell you I am miserable, and I say come to me, and let us bear what comes together.” With his family in danger, Winston returned home to guarantee their safety until the threat had passed. These examples illustrate then that many Confederates grew forlorn in the face of the enemy, a reminder that the idea of a vengeful Confederate was not representative of all civilians.

A strict focus on diehard or forlorn Confederates loses sight of the experiences of still many more Confederates whose distaste for the enemy rested unevenly next to their often respectful treatment of and by Union soldiers, a further illustration of the contradiction inherent to the Confederacy. Eliza Fain of East Tennessee had several interactions with the enemy that altogether offered anything but a straightforward interpretation. After one particularly pleasant evening when Union soldiers dined with her family, despite the ongoing disappearance of her

33 Buck, May 20, 1862, Shadows on my Heart, 79.
fence rails, Fain wrote, “I was only a ten-fold stronger Southern woman than when they came.” And yet, just ten days later, after witnessing the destruction of a neighbor’s home, she noted, “every scene of this kind only makes me adhere more strongly to our Southern Cause.…” This burgeoning sense of anger, although present, did not stop Fain from offering breakfast to the enemy the next morning.37

The contradictions that defined Fain’s interactions with the enemy also figured in the life of Cornelia McDonald of Winchester, Virginia. McDonald was nothing if not a true Confederate given her expressions of joy when Confederate forces managed to expel the Union Army. However, her attachment to the Confederate cause did not prevent her from helping to secure parole for a Union soldier, based upon her recommendation that he had been kind to the residents of Winchester. In another instance, McDonald held a Union soldier by the collar until he dropped her pans of warm bread; but, struck by the “ridiculous” nature of the scene, she began to laugh with her enemy, forgetting what had sparked her anger in the first place.38

The uneven balance between Confederate values and respect for the enemy, reflected by Buck and McDonald, stemmed from the atypical behavior exhibited by Union soldiers. It was easy for Confederates to demonize the Union Army as damaging to the family when it acted in a like manner, but became difficult to do so when Union soldiers broke the mold, working to protect Confederate families. Far from bringing widespread destruction to the Confederate home front, the Union Army improved the condition of life for many Confederates. Garrison towns, or those areas under constant Union occupation, were places where Union officials carried out

37 Fain, October 10, 1863, Sanctified Trial: The Diary of Eliza Fhea Anderson Fain, a Confederate Woman in East Tennessee, ed. John N. Fain (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2004), 98-100; Fain, October 20, 1863, 104; Fain, October 21, 1863, 105.
38 Cornelia McDonald, July 4, 1862, A Woman’s Civil War: A Diary, with Reminiscences of the War, from March 1862, ed. Minrose C.Gwin (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 66; McDonald, September 27, 1862, 76-77; McDonald, December 24, 1862, 102.
broad relief efforts, providing rations for starving families, ensuring public health and safety, and continuing to offer an education to young civilians.\textsuperscript{39} Susan Caldwell of Warrenton, Virginia, described how citizens “were treated kindly” by the Union soldiers, who “were all respectful and gentlemanly. We had occasion to meet with them almost daily—for they would call for vegetable and milk—paid in silver and gold.”\textsuperscript{40} Rather than confirming the stereotype of theft-prone Union soldiers, some men even helped Confederates secure safe hiding spots for their valuables, in return for a home-cooked meal.\textsuperscript{41}

Confederates thus recognized that the Union Army gave them the opportunity to prosper in many cases, which caused them to grow dependent, despite the fact that they remained tied to the Confederacy. Receiving kindness from the Union soldiers however demanded polite behavior from Confederates. Discussing the use of the terms “liars, thieves, murderers, scoundrels, the scum of the earth, etc” to describe Union soldiers, Sarah Morgan of Louisiana noted, “Such epithets are unworthy of ladies, I say, and do harm, rather than advance our cause.”\textsuperscript{42} In a similar vein, Cornelia McDonald had “learned by experience that it was much better to be civil to the commanding officer than otherwise….’’ McDonald benefited from adopting a civil tone, illustrated when she convinced an officer to return a friend’s confiscated furniture and when she persuaded a general not to kick her family out of their home. Despite her civil tone, McDonald made clear her continued attachment to the Confederacy, and that she only played nice because of her dependence upon the kindness of the Union Army.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{39} Stephen V. Ash, \textit{When the Yankees Came: Conflict and Chaos in the Occupied South, 1861-1865} (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 82-90.
\textsuperscript{41} Emerson, July 15, 1864, “Diary of Nancy Emerson, 1862-1864,” \textit{VoS}.
\textsuperscript{42} Sarah Morgan, May 14, 1862, \textit{The Civil War Diary of Sarah Morgan}, ed. Charles East (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1991), 73
\textsuperscript{43} McDonald, June 8, 1862, \textit{A Woman’s Civil War}, 59; McDonald, July 28, 1862, 69; McDonald, June 4, 1863, 152-153.
resident Ellen House also reflected this alliance of contradictory impulses when a Union soldier agreed to carry her letter to a Confederate soldier: “The Yankee came for it as he had promised, and I made myself as pleasing as possible, for I thought that he would be willing to do anything for our prisoners again if I treated [him] like a gentleman. I wanted to knock him down and take his boots and gloves all the time.”44 The ambiguous attitude of kindness and opposition that many Confederates adopted with regards to the enemy stemmed from the desire to receive help from the Union Army out of necessity, often coupled with resentment of the necessity.

The issue of Confederates taking the oath of allegiance to the Union best captured the complexity of Confederate attitudes towards the Union Army. Some Confederates virulently rejected the oath out of principle. Judith McGuire proved firm on the matter, writing, “The enemy will dole them out rations, it is said, if they will take the oath! But who [is] so based as to do that? Can a Southern woman sell her birthright for a mass of potage?”45 Annie Sehorn too expressed no sympathy for her own cousin who took the oath, stating, “I do not think any man or woman justified in taking the oath they cannot feel, I would die first.” The deep disdain with which many Confederates regarded the oath stemmed from the oath’s deep significance. Not only did Confederates give their word to transfer loyalty to the Union, but in so doing, they transgressed the code of honor. Annie Sehorn reflected that her opposition to the oath hinged upon honor, as she wrote of her cousin, “If ever I see him again I will tell him to remember his children, to revoke his oath and redeem his character. I have respected & loved him enough to tell him how that oath is regarded in the South.”46 The Reverend B.M. Palmer, in a discussion of the oath of allegiance in New Orleans, also touched upon the intertwined aspects of the oath and

45 McGuire, October 2, 1861, Diary of a Southern Refugee During the War, 66-67.
46 Annie Sehorn to Bettie Kimberly, May 25, 1863, “Kimberly Family, Personal Correspondence, 1862-1864,” DAS.
honor. “It may not be too late to rouse those who are involved in this dire calamity to retrieve their lost position, and to wipe off the dishonor which must else cleave to them forever.”

Confederates deeply criticized the oath then partially because of its violation of the honor code, but also because its significance transcended the page, given the importance of the oath.

While strong opposition to the oath pervaded the Confederacy, the oath’s complexity further emphasized the contradictory nature of the Confederacy's interactions with the Union. Reverend Palmer, who condemned the oath, nevertheless made an important distinction among the takers of the oath. As part of the first group, he identified “those who were never true to our cause,” while denoting another group of individuals “who, in their secret hearts, are still loyal to the Confederacy, and have taken the oath under constraint, regarding it as one of the necessities of war.” Condemning the first without pause, Palmer provided a gentler treatment of the second group, recognizing the argument that many did not truly believe the words they had spoken, although still advising against the latter justification because of “the sin of perjury.”

William Nugent, albeit using a condemnatory tone, offered a similar differentiation between the two classes, writing, “To take the oath under compulsion is bad enough and hardly excusable:—to take it freely & voluntarily is an evidence of guilt that would warrant hanging.” Confederates may have agreed upon an absolute condemnation of those who freely took the oath, but responses to those who took the oath under compulsion received less criticism, although the action was still undesirable.

For many Confederates then, the action of taking the oath was a concrete example of the uneasy balance between Confederate sympathies and respect for the enemy. For those

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48 Reverend B.M Palmer, “The Oath of Allegiance to the United States, Discussed in its Moral and Political Bearings,” DAS.
49 William Nugent to Eleanor Nugent, September 20, 1863, My Dear Nellie, 135.
Confederates who faced unbearable discomfort, the issue of taking the oath was not a choice, but a means of survival. Anne Smith discussed the uncomfortable situation that made the oath a possibility in Georgia, where “The Yankees took every article of food which they could find, determined to starve the people into taking the oath.” Similarly, Laura Lee, although opposed to the oath, wrote, “Gen. Milroy is trying to starve us into loyalty. No one is permitted to bring supplies from Md. Except on taking the oath, and then only for their own use.” Susan Caldwell too recounted a particularly trying story about her neighbor, who took the oath at gunpoint.

The pressure applied to Confederates illustrated that taking the oath and believing the oath, could sometimes be two very different things. Lucy Buck spoke to this point, writing of “when men whose whole lives had been unblemished, whose lips had been blameless [were]…compelled to swear to support a government which their very souls abhorred…” Sarah Morgan’s description of her experience with the oath gave credence to the idea that Confederates took the oath, while retaining their distaste for the enemy.

Half crying I covered my face with mine and prayed breathlessly for the boys and the Confederacy, so that I heard not a word he was saying until the question “So help you God?” struck my ear. I shuddered and prayed harder…I experienced no change. I prayed as hard as ever for the boys and our country, and felt no nasty or disagreeable feeling which would have announced the process of turning Yankee.

Although the oath seemed at first to imply a fissure in the domestic nation, many Confederates had no choice but to take the oath to protect themselves and their families. Virginian Maggie Berry thus justified the oath, writing, “if I ever take the oath it will not be binding as I never will

50 Anne Smith to William Smith, June 8, 1864, The Death of a Confederate, 57.
51 Lee, January 17, 1863, Winchester Divided, 78.
52 Susan Caldwell to Lycurgus Caldwell, May 7, 1862, ‘My Heart is so Rebellious,’ 110.
53 Buck, July 26, 1862, Shadows on my Heart, 130.
54 Morgan, April 22, 1863, The Civil War Diary of Sarah Morgan, 486-487.
consent only to save my life.” 55 Torn by the dilemma of the oath, Lou Fleet asked her brother for advice,

If the Yankees occupy this part of the country & tell us we must take the oath or leave our home…which would you advise? Ma thinks she would choose the former, for whither can we go? Thinking at the same time she will help you her child, & any other soldier she could. I think in such a case no one could blame us. 56

Burdened with unbearable circumstances, some Confederates took the oath to protect their families, even though it ostensibly clashed with their obligations to the nation.

The same soldiers that Confederates met on the battlefield also stumbled across their doorsteps, attacking the very homes that made up the Confederate nation. Given the physical and psychological threats that many families experienced, many Confederates articulated an increased desire to harm the enemy. And yet, others weakened at the sight of the enemy, or even treated the Union Army with respect. Regarding those Confederates in the latter group, they found it hard to treat with disdain a foe that acted more like a friend in many cases. Many Confederates thus adopted contradictory attitudes towards the enemy, meaning that they remained attached to the Confederacy, while still ensuring the protection of their families. This incongruous stance towards the enemy lessened the hardships of war for some Confederates, and in so doing, enabled them to keep fighting. While Confederates may have had varying experiences with the enemy, they all shared in the knowledge that the enemy had the ability to kill, which often created further burdens for Confederate families.

Chapter 5. Mending Broken Hearths: Death and Coping in the Family

Struck with despair in the wake of recent deaths, North Carolinian Laura Norwood seemed inconsolable in a letter to her cousin. “All the land mourns, every household is sad for those who are not, and every heart breathes a sigh for the loved and lost, for our dear brave brothers that have perished. Ah, a hard word that! Gone, Gone, we shall see them no more forever!”\(^1\) Effecting the final separation between a soldier and his family, death revealed the uneven obligations to nation and family—that fighting for the nation often demanded watching loved ones perish. Upended by the alienating and shocking concept of death, many Confederate families became hesitant of making further sacrifices for a cause that often contributed to the death of loved ones, rather than their protection. Well aware of the “heavy blow” with which the news of death struck Confederates, J.C. Preston comforted her sister after the death of their brother, writing, “Our dear + noble brother has indeed joined the band of martyr'd heroes who have shed their blood on the scaffold + field in defence of their country + its domestic altars...as a Christian patriot...”\(^2\) Interpreting death as an heroic sacrifice, Confederates tried to make the loss meaningful, but still struggled with death’s continued occurrence. Seeking a more substantial form of hope for their despair, many Confederates turned to religion, which was successful at both the individual and national levels. However, religion too proved an imperfect solution given the doubt that often seized the faithful Confederates. Death certainly endangered the domestic nation, but the patriotic and religious means of coping with death and despair, albeit flawed, soothed many weary hearts, and more importantly, enabled the war to continue in the midst of hardship.

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\(^1\) Laura Norwood to Ellen Richardson, June 11, 1862, subseries 1.6, folder 48, Chilie Smith Howe Papers, SHC, UNC.

Death encapsulated the entirety of the Confederacy, joining together soldier and civilian alike in a fate that proved all too common for its citizens. While the war cost the lives of 600,000 soldiers from both North and South, it proved particularly harsh on the Confederacy, where nearly twenty percent of military aged men met with death.\(^3\) Unaware of the contemporary statistics, Confederates no less understood the extent of death, largely owing to their personal connection to the dead. Lucy Breckenridge of Virginia commented on the fact that “some relative or connection of ours had died every month since June.”\(^4\) In the same vein, Kate Stone wrote in her journal at home in Louisiana, “Never a letter but brings a news of death.”\(^5\) William Moxley of Alabama used a particularly poignant image in a letter to his wife to illustrate the vast impact of death. “[T]his war has caused the sheading of tears enough if gathered to gether to float the great Leviathan in or babtise the whole Lincoln Army in.”\(^6\)

Although easy to presume that most deaths took place on the battlefield, disease claimed twice as many soldiers as did battle wounds, especially as a result of the unsanitary conditions in the army.\(^7\) David Milling of North Carolina was more than aware of this fate, stating that while “The sword has cut down many since this war commenced, disease of various kinds has done no small share.”\(^8\) The ubiquitous nature of disease made it difficult to contain, ensuring the felt impact of death and disease across the Confederacy. Disease in fact tied the battlefield and home front together, in that carriers of disease travelled between realms. Nancy Emerson spoke to this

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\(^7\) Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 4.

basic reality in her own town, where a family member “went to...see her son who was wounded, took the small pox, & she & her husband died.”

Death was thus no less of a threat to those at home then, distant from the battlefield though they lay.

Beyond a mere statistic, the death of soldiers on behalf of the nation added strain to families across the nation. Although Confederates proved willing to let men ward off the enemy for their protection, that sacrifice often came at a steep price, of which Tennessee resident Eliza Fain was well aware. “Let the widow, the orphans, the father, the mother, the sister bereft speak forth [to] the world and what would be the reply. It has cost us our earthly all.”

While Confederates fought to protect their families, that very obligation risked the destruction of the domestic institution. In this vein, a Florida teenager transcribed a poem in her diary: “There is no flock however watched or tended,/But one dead lamb is there,/There is no fireside howsoe’er defended/But has one vacant chair.”

Death thus touched nearly all families, a harsh reality that Jim Francis of Alabama understood. “Point to a family that has not been called upon to give up a near relative? Our entire land is an vast house of mourning.”

The death of soldiers thus cast a shadow over Confederate hearts and homes, aptly described by Virginian Lucy Buck, who noted “how the warm light had died out from the hearthstones and from the eyes that had beamed brightly around them.”

In the wake of a soldier’s death, families immersed themselves in grief, which South Carolina soldier Tally Simpson well understood. Looking upon a pile of dead

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11 Susan Bradford, November 1, 1861, Through Some Eventful Years (1926; reprint, Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1968), 161. Although the diary was published using the name Susan Bradford Eppes, her maiden name is used here because she was unmarried at the time the diary was written.

12 James Francis to Amy Francis, August 26, 1864, When This Evil War Is Over: The Correspondence of the Francis Family, 1860-1865, ed. James P. Pate (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2006), 196.

bodies, he remarked, “Add to this the cries and wailings of the mourners—mothers and fathers weeping for their sons, sisters for their brothers, wives for their husbands, and daughters for their fathers....”\(^{14}\) Confederate families, albeit eager to fight for both nation and family, faced the reality that fighting for the nation often hurt the family, rather than protect it.

The wartime nature of death made the strains on the family worse, because death in the army broke from the traditional idea of death. One of the key components of a “good death” was to die in the company of one’s family, a condition that was not met in the army given the great distance between family members.\(^{15}\) Contrasting death at home and at war, Georgia soldier Samuel Burney remarked, “When a death occurs in a town or a city far away, everybody is aware of it. But here in Virginia think of the thousands who are dying day & night on the battlefield, in the hospitals, or perhaps on the march. Doubtless sometimes the spirit of some poor soldier takes its flight to the spirit-land with out the knowledge of a single individual....”\(^{16}\) Susan Caldwell of Virginia recounted a particularly emotional story of a wife who only arrived after her husband had died in camp. Caldwell noted, “her heart was well nigh broken to learn the saddest of all news to her—that her loved one was buried forever from her sight...yesterday she went to the Graveyard and stretched herself on her husband's grave....”\(^{17}\) The physical separation mandated by military service thus proved particularly painful in times of death.

That Caldwell mentioned the issue of the soldier's burial was unsurprising, as burial practices in the army further violated the proper code of death, making it more difficult for

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\(^{15}\) Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 9-14.


families to cope with the loss. Although dead, the body needed proper attention to ensure care for the part of the identity that remained with the physical corpse. No show of respect occurred in the army, where rudimentary conditions reigned, largely because armies did not have the time, or in some cases, control of the field for a proper burial. Furthermore, the cost for the proper treatment of the body and shipment home to the family was rather high, totaling over $200 in some cases, too much for the families of privates earning just eleven dollars per month. As a result, soldiers’ bodies were often handled in a depersonalized manner. Repulsed by this treatment of the dead, a Georgia soldier wrote to his wife, “This is a wicked war dear and carried on in a wicked manner[.] Soldiers soon get so they loose all respects for humanity. The dead are not noticed atall any where, and when they die they role them up in a blanket and burry them without any box or coffin.”

The haphazard manner in which some Confederates were buried deprived many of their personhood, giving death a certain anonymity. The song, “Somebody's Darling,” captured this message, especially with lyrics that read, “Somebody's Darling, somebody's pride, Who'll tell his mother where her boy died?...Tenderly bury the fair, unknown dead...Carve on the wooden slab over his head, “Somebody's darling is slumbering here.”

This violation of the proper code of death rendered death incomprehensible to many Confederates, who became emotionally vacant, unable to deal with death. Confederates best expressed that inability to comprehend death with the phrase, “I cannot realize it!,” as stated by

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18 Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 62-74
21 “Somebody's Darling,” from HIST-296: Civil War and Reconstruction, Professor Chandra Manning, Spring 2008, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.
Tallulah Hansell of Georgia upon the death of a friend.\textsuperscript{22} Susan Middleton of South Carolina similarly remarked, “It is impossible to realize all the sorrow and suffering this war is hourly bringing to us.”\textsuperscript{23} Death proved so shocking and incomprehensible to some that they retreated into a vacant state. Susan Middleton wrote of one widow who “had not shed a tear since she heard of her husband’s death, but sits motionless, only saying now and then, “Dead, dead, did they say he was dead?””\textsuperscript{24} Unable to process the emotions of such frequent death during war, many “bec[ame] hardened to such scenes.”\textsuperscript{25} Speaking of this lack of emotion, William Moxley noted, “People become destitute of the sympathy they once had. I have seen brother standing over dying brother without shedding a tear.”\textsuperscript{26} Confederates became emotionally sealed off, or as Kate Stone expressed, “one grows callous to suffering and death.”\textsuperscript{27}

This inability to deal with death proved dangerous for the relationship between the family and the nation, as Confederates grew in despair about continuing a war that had cost them so much. An immunity to joy impacted Lucy Breckenridge, who found it impossible to enjoy life after her brother’s death. “Whenever there is anything for me to enjoy now…the very pleasure is turned into bitterness. Johnny and I were so much together and so devoted that I cannot feel reconciled to a life without him,” she remarked.\textsuperscript{28} After the death of her husband, Tivie Stephens of Florida believed “all looks so gloomy now, I feel as though I had little to live for, I...have not

\textsuperscript{24} Susan Middleton to Harriott Middleton, October 9-10, 1862, “Middleton Correspondence, 1861-1865,” ed. Isabella Middleton Leland, \textit{South Carolina Historical Review} 63, no. 4 (October 1962): 204.
\textsuperscript{26} William Moxley to Emily Moxley, December 1861, \textit{Oh, What a Loansome Time I Had}, 73.
\textsuperscript{27} Stone, June 26, 1864, \textit{Brokenburn}, 258.
\textsuperscript{28} Breckenridge, September 30, 1863, \textit{Lucy Breckinridge of Grove Hill}, 148.
the heart to do anything, all the pleasure of my life was wrapt up in Winston....” Tivie articulated the feelings of many Confederate families who no longer had the desire to live after their homes had been pierced by death's sword. Attached to the sinking spirits of Confederate families were the receding hopes of the nation. Many Confederates grew unwilling to sacrifice loved ones to a cause that ultimately failed to protect their families. Victoria Richardson of Texas grew circumspect of further sacrifice because of the Confederacy’s inability to guarantee the safety of her brother. She wrote, “It seems like a wanton sacrifice of life to send out men thus to meet the well armed hosts of the North...If I could only feel assured that you were in safety and no longer connected with the fate of the Government it would be something consoling at least....” Death also lessened Harriott Middleton’s fervor for war, captured when she wrote, “I do not know whether it was this sad death awakening so many painful recollections in overwhelming strength, but I have never before felt so dispirited about the war. It seems to stretch interminably before us, carrying off all the youths and worth of the country. I can see nothing but desolated homes, and broken hopes.” Death thus imperiled the domestic nation, as Grace Elmore of South Carolina noted, “The heart becomes bitter towards the nation that causes so many hearts to bleed.” Although resentful because of the strains inflicted on behalf of the cause, Confederates did not cut ties with the nation, but rather used coping mechanisms to find the strength to continue to support the war.

The interpretation of death as a patriotic sacrifice imparted larger significance to a

30 Victoria Richardson to John Richardson, February 4, 1862, subseries 1.6, folder 47, Chiliab Smith Howe Papers, SHC.
senseless act, and helped to maintain the connection between nation and family. Focusing on this idea of the glorification of death, the obituary for Virginia soldier Robert Haile proclaimed, “Our young friend has fallen another martyr to the cause of the South—another added to the long list of heroes who have trod the same glorious yet bloody path.” The appropriation of the terms “martyr,” “heroes,” and “glorious” bestowed upon death a certain sacredness, a far cry from the image of mangled bodies on the battlefield. In this vein, to die at war was to offer oneself up as a sacrifice for the country, a ubiquitous concept within the Confederacy, especially with the use of the “altar” image. Eliza Fain evoked the idea when she wrote, “Many of our noble brave sons have given their lives on their country altar in this deadly conflict.” A Virginia soldier similarly informed a woman of her husband’s “immolation upon the altar of Patriotism.”

Another letter of condolence to the mother of a deceased soldier glorified death with the phrase, “your brave boy died a patriots death another victim on the Altar of our Country...”

Not any death, Confederates had died for their country, each individual death an important part of a larger goal, ensuring that no sacrifice would go unappreciated. Upon the death of Tally Simpson, his superior comforted the bereaved when he wrote, “You have lost, sir, a noble son; but in giving him to your country, you have contributed liberally to the preservation of that priceless boon—liberty.” A Georgia woman also sought to give meaning to the death of a friend’s son, noting, “he died in a glorious cause and I feel assured that he...died not in vain...we shall yet be numbered among the great nations of the earth....”

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33 Reverend Howard Montague, 1862 [no specific date], *Tell the Children I'll be home when the peaches get ripe: the journals and letters of Robert Gaines Haile*, ed. Robert Tombs (Richmond: Tizwin Pub., 1999), 72.
34 Fain, January 3, 1863, *Sanctified Trial*, 62.
36 Mrs. Sturdivant to Mrs. Phifer, October 7, 1863, folder 2, Phifer Family Papers, SHC.
members. The song, “Oh! Weep Not Mother,” reflected this shift from the sadness to the glory of death. “It seems as if 'tis hard, Mother, yes, very hard to go:/But think thy boy hath died, Mother, unconquered by the foe…Oh! wreath that life with joy,/Think, think we've won this day, Mother, and think not of the boy.” The representation of death as a meaningful sacrifice on behalf of the nation, found favor with many Confederate families, and helped to ease the strain that death added to the domestic nation.

However, the patriotic rationalization of death proved an imperfect coping method for many Confederates. In large part, it was not the bereaved that used patriotic images of sacrifice, but rather, friends or distant relatives who applied those concepts. When contemplating death themselves, Confederates revealed that coping demanded more than attaching glorified words to the dead. Victoria Richardson noted that interpreting death as a patriotic act could not change the stark reality of the loss.

“Died on the field of honor” is a grand epitaph but my patriotism ebbs so low when I think and dread and pray for you that it is entirely lost in the smoke of the battle while the world looks to the grandeur and glory of the result thousands of hearts feel only the horrors of the reality. And for those who seal the sacredness of our cause [sic] with their blood, the sad trophies of the field of carnage, can anything ever recompense us for their lives? Albeit easy to assign death a patriotic significance, that idea was harder to accept because death never disappeared. As Laura Williams of Mississippi acknowledged, “how is it possible to accostome oneself to the idea of death, every new occurrence of it, only makes one dread it more.” Louisiana soldier Edwin Fay further emphasized the failure of the patriotic rationale to provide comfort, when he wrote to his wife of the death of two neighbors. “I had heard of their

40 Victoria Richardson to John Richardson, November 15, 1861, subseries 1.6, folder 46, Chiliab Smith Howe Papers, SHC.
41 Laura Williams to Chiliab Howe, December 10, 1862, subseries 1.6, folder 49, Chiliab Smith Howe Papers, SHC.
deaths before you did,—but the world says “they fell gloriously.” Oh that heart wrapped in ashes that these words are hollow mockery to. What is glory to the bleeding widowed heart? Or what renown? I trust and pray my darling that God in his mercy will preserve you from that feeling.”^42 While Fay confirmed the uncertain ability of the patriotic explanation to comfort weary hearts, he pointed to another means of dealing with death.

Looking for meaning in the void left by the permanent separation of death, Confederates turned to religion, which provided hope for a better future, and thus enabled many Confederates to carry on despite the hardships of war. Trust in God was a theme rife within the condolence letters sent to the family members of the dead. After Charlotte Branch’s son died, a friend encouraged her to turn to God, who “is able to hold you up, to sustain you, yea even to comfort you.”^43 An Alabama woman similarly reminded her sister-in-law, “It is hard [but]...we must submit our will to his who knows what is for our best good + who never willingly afflicts or grieves the children of men....”^44 Not just empty words from distant relatives, the religious means of coping did more than seek to explain death; religion imparted to Confederates the realization that there was in fact life beyond death. Although she confronted the possibility of never seeing her husband again, Martha Read reassured herself and her husband “that we will meet in the better land where all is love and joy and peace, where war & strife can never enter.”^45 Similarly captivated by this idea was Emma Clayton of North Carolina, who wrote, “Perhaps we may never meet again in this world. But there is a brighter home my dear husband, where there is no war nor blood shed...where I hope we will an unbroken family be permitted to meet never

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^43 Sarah Hine to Charlotte Branch, July 24, 1861, Charlotte’s Boys, 47.
^44 Louisa Walton to Justina Walton Webb, August 21, 1863, folder 9, Walton Family Papers, SHC.
^45 Martha Read to Thomas Read, July 16, 1861, “Read Family Correspondence,” University of Notre Dame: Rare Books and Special Collections, http://www.rarebooks.nd.edu/digital/civil_war/letters/read/5015-04.shtml.
to part again.” Despite the possibility for death, religion comforted Confederates with the knowledge that death did not guarantee a final separation between loved ones.

The dream of meeting in Heaven, albeit heartening, demanded the proper cultivation of faith, especially among the soldiers, who were at high risk for death. Family members on the home front thus implored soldiers to “prepare for Eternity.” Writing from Virginia, Thomas Smiley’s mother begged him to “put your trust in the mighty God of Jacob take Jesus Christ for your Saviour and then if you even fall in the battle field you will still be safe....” The possibility of death also encouraged his aunt “to enquire whether you have made this preparation or not...” Religious tracts sent to soldiers similarly focused on the preparation for death, one of which read, “This event is DEATH; and the question is, “Are you ready to die?” Aware of what lay ahead, another tract warned, “Other fields must be made red with human gore, Soldier, you may fall. Oh, be prepared.” Seeking to encourage preparation, women at home, including Harriet Perry, wrote to their husbands, “Read your Bible & say your prayers, dont forget that Husband.” In a similar tone, Emma Clayton reminded her husband, “Don't neglect to read your[r] Bible, and go to church.” Despite the frequent urgings from those at home, combined with the influx of religious tracts, the process of cultivating faith in the army proved challenging.

Although religion existed within camps, the presence of demoralizing activities strained the cultivation of faith, thus endangering religion’s ability to soothe the pain of death. Many

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46 Emma Clayton to Thomas Clayton, April 24, 1864, series 1, folder 6, Clayton Family Papers, SHC.
47 Susan Caldwell to Lycurgus Caldwell, January 22, 1862, ‘My Heart Is So Rebellious,’ 71-72.
53 Emma Clayton to Thomas Clayton, February 21, 1864, series 1, folder 5, Clayton Family Papers, SHC.
soldiers acknowledged religion’s presence in camps, usually noted by the occurrence of nightly preaching or less informal prayer meetings.\textsuperscript{54} Religious tracts and texts proliferated camps as well, including “The Soldiers' Almanac for 1863,” which was composed almost entirely of religious excerpts and appeals, gleaned from its subtitles: “The Hand of God Recognized,” “Our Father,” “Religion in the Army,” and “Reading the Scriptures.”\textsuperscript{55} While it was one thing to mention the existence of religion within camp, it was quite another for the soldiers to express an appreciation for faith. A Mississippi soldier noted the presence of a chaplain, but stated, “he exercised no moral influence in the regiment and commands not the respect of its members.”\textsuperscript{56} A Florida soldier similarly remarked, “We have a good opportunity for embracing religion, but there is but few who avail themselves of this opportunity.”\textsuperscript{57} Samuel Moore too acknowledged, “Camp life is very unfavorable to religious exercises of any sort, under the most favorable circumstances,” largely because of the sinful activities that pervaded the army.\textsuperscript{58} Far from the prying eyes of family members, soldiers engaged in practices deemed sinful at the time, including drinking, gambling, and card playing, while the more daring dabbled in prostitution.

As a result of the vast nature of sin in the army, loved ones at home implored soldiers to keep in mind plans for Eternity. Harriet Perry thus wrote with hope to her husband, “May God help you to avoid every temptation to evil & may he give you the comfort of religion & enable us both so


\textsuperscript{56} Harry Lewis to Nancy Lewis, July 30, 1862, in \textit{The 16th Mississippi Infantry}, 94.

\textsuperscript{57} Hugh Black to Mary Black, March 16, 1863, \textit{Letters of Captain Hugh Black to His Family in Florida during the War between the States, 1862-1864}, ed. Elizabeth Frano (Newburgh, IN: E.C. Frano, 1998), 44.

\textsuperscript{58} Samuel Moore to Ellen Moore, August 1, 1861, box 1, folder 3, Samuel J.C. Moore Papers, SHC.
to live...that if we meet no more on earth, we may meet around his Throne in Heaven....”59

Despite the fact that the army gave little welcome to religion, increasing setbacks and the augmented prospect of death altered the religious perspective of many soldiers, signified by the growth of religious revivals. First making a mark in the spring of 1863, revivals grew particularly important in the aftermath of the defeats at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, continuing into the winter months. Although the fervor lessened in 1864, it picked up again during the winter of 1864 to 1865, particularly because of the demoralization associated with Sherman's March and the harsh nature of the winter.60 Speaking to the success of the revivals, a Mississippi soldier noted, “The men seem to be awakening from their lethargy in regard to the salvation of their souls and joining the church rapidly.”61 Fellow Mississippian William Nugent agreed, “There is a better moral tone exhibited here than I have ever seen among soldiers. Thousands have been converted and are happy Christians.”62 An acceptance of faith made military life easier for many soldiers, because religion enabled them to carry out their duties, and to accept God’s will. In this vein, Samuel Moore noted, “The best Christian, I am sure, makes the best soldier, for he conscientiously discharges his duties in Camp + on the march, + he most fearlessly can face death on the field.”63 Fred Fleet's father also discussed this idea, writing, “there comes immediate comfort from the words of the model prayer of our blessed Savior, “Not my will, but thine be done”…It is a blessed thing, Fred, to be a true Christian Soldier....”64

Having accepted the will of God, Confederate soldiers proved ready for death, and for the life

59 Harriet Perry to Theophilus Perry, September 15, 1862, Widows by the Thousand, 31.
63 Samuel Moore to Ellen Moore, August 1, 1861, box 1, folder 3, Samuel J.C. Moore Papers, SHC.
64 Pa Fleet to Fred Fleet, October 12, 1862, Green Mount, 173-174.
thereafter. Able to foresee a pleasant future because of his “unfaltering trust in God,” an
Alabama soldier remarked that if faced with death, “I will go not as the quarry slave, scourg'd &
beaten to his dungeon but sooth'd & sustained by an unfaltering trust in the promises of God.”

Given the widespread conversions of faith, many loved ones at home could rest assured
that their soldiers had died prepared for Eternity. A letter sent to the mother of a Virginian
soldier informed her, “He was I know prepared for the change – four nights before he fell...I
received three notes from him during his trip – he seemed in good spirits, cheerful, warning me
to trust in God – to be cheerful & happy...” Similarly, a South Carolina woman informed her
children, “My Son, & your Brother, gone for all time but safe for Eternity.” Hearts at home
could thus rest easy that though their loved ones might face death, they would one day meet
again, which enabled many Confederates to carry on with life despite the burdens of death.

Although religion appealed to many individual Confederates, that did not necessarily
mean that they would maintain faith in the cause, which necessitated the dependence on religion
at the national level. Confederates rejoiced in the knowledge that their religious interests found
favor with government officials. “We have cause for gratitude more than we can express, that
we have civil [&] military leaders who acknowledge God,” wrote Nancy Emerson. Similarly,
Eliza Fain noted, “I feel our President is a Christian and that when he implores High Heaven for

65 Thomas Taylor to Sarah Taylor, March 21, 1864, Letters Home: The Civil War Letters of Thomas S. Taylor and
The Taylor Family.
66 Maggie Heist to Martha Roadcap, February 17, 1865, “McGuffin and Baylor Families Letters,” VoS,
67 Mrs. William Mason Smith to her children, August 19, 1864, Mason Smith Family Letters, 1860-1868, eds.
Daniel E. Huger Smith, Alice R. Huger Smith, Arney R. Childs (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press,
1950), 135.
68 This point differs from Gardiner Shattuck, who argued that the individualistic nature of southern religion deterred
Confederates from successfully using religion at the national level, and that religion did not help the Confederacy.
See A Shield and Hiding Place: The Religious Life of the Civil War Armies (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987).
69 Emerson, January 1, 1863, “Diary of Nancy Emerson, 1862-1863,” VoS.
protection and aid it is from the depths of the Soul." More than simply an intuition of leaders' faith, the government, particularly President Davis, granted a position of great respect to religion. Davis proclaimed several days of fasting and prayer during the war, when Confederates proclaimed their confidence in the will of God, who, Confederates believed, provided special care for them. That many Confederates embraced this idea was acknowledged by the motto that adorned the Confederate seal, “Deo vindice,” or God will defend us. Rather than focusing on their own agency, Confederates celebrated the fact that “Truly God is a shield. He is our protector.”

Similarly assured of the complete power of God was North Carolinian Laura Norwood, who wrote, “I have ever firmly believed our cause would be triumphant and I look to God for victory in the end. I do not believe men fighting will ever decide the contest....” Recognizing the power of God, Confederates harnessed the relationship between nation and family to religion, indicated by the fast day sermon of Reverend B.M. Palmer. “We strike not only for country and for home, for the altars of our worship and for the graves of our dead; but we strike for the prerogatives of God, and for His kingly supremacy over the earth.”

The idea of God as the special protector of the Confederacy imparted to Confederates an increased self-confidence that enabled them to persevere in the darkest moments of war. A North Carolina man exuded this inflated sense of confidence, writing, “God is on our Side and if he is for us who can be against us.”

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70 Fain, January 21, 1863, Sanctified Trial, 64.
71 Fain, April 5, 1865, Sanctified Trial, 310.
72 Laura Norwood to Ellen Richardson, April 12, 1863, subseries 1.6, folder 51, Chilib Smith Howe Papers, SHC.
74 For a similar argument, see Jason Phillips, Diehard Rebels: The Confederate Culture of Invincibility (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2007), 9-39. Phillips limits his argument to the army, in a larger discussion on the idea of invincibility within the Confederacy.
outside Memphis in February 1862, Annie Sehorn persisted because of her faith. “O God to think of our situation! But I still hope for & trust in God and I believe he will animate our brave defenders with a superhuman power and we will yet drive from our soil the hated invaders,” she exclaimed. Even in defeat, many Confederates believed that God still loved them, and that he was merely chastising them for their sins. Walter Lenoir of North Carolina thus wrote, “If we are on God's side we will know that it is done in mercy, and for our good, and that behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face, that however mysterious it may seem to human foresight, “God is his own interpreter, And he will make it plain.” Equally convinced of God's care for the Confederacy was Sallie Thurman of Tennessee, who wrote, “though the hour of adversity is upon us I will not despair-it has been said that “every cloud hath a silver lining”- &through the vista of the future I catch glimpses of sunnier hours_God will not always be angry…as a tender parent he will have mercy + forgive his erring children.” Confederates' reliance upon God's will helped them to explain the uncomfortable situations of military life, an ideology that hid the problems at hand, and permitted the war to endure.

Although religion helped many Confederates cope with the strains of war, it provided uncertain comfort for others, as evidenced by those Confederates who struggled to reconcile God’s will with the pervasiveness of hardship. After having endured war for over two years, Milton Leverett appeared uncertain in matters of faith. “My faith has been almost staggered by the events of the last few months. A special Providence is what I wish to feel confident in not that I don't believe in a general dispensation of an Almighty Providence but I want to believe and

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78 Sallie Thurman to John Thurman, May 18, 1862, box 1, folder 10, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman Papers, SHC.
feel a belief in a particular dispensation of a special Providence...I am confused by doubt and hesitation and want guidance.” 79 Although careful not to articulate a loss of faith, Leverett grew doubtful because of the horrible fate that befell the Confederacy. Many Confederates struggled to believe that a God who loved them would permit widespread death and despair. Having lost her brother to the war, Lucy Breckenridge lamented, “I am right despondent about the times. It is so hard to believe that war is a punishment to a nation, administered by a merciful and just God.” That Breckenridge had a more difficult time accepting the will of God did not signal her loss of faith. Despite her doubt, she relented in the same diary entry, “But, of course, it is just and wise, as God orders it so.” 80 Her contradictory impulses reaffirmed that as humans, Confederates could not exude perfect faith, but often became wracked with doubt. A similar feeling struck South Carolina’s Grace Elmore, who wrote, “Faith in God has never been more severely tried than now. We see the wicked flourish…we hear nothing but the cry of anguish and the tale of distress, a dead weight rests on every heart, and yet we must trust in God.” 81 In the same vein, a Virginia girl first spoke of her beau’s death as “the will of Him who…doeth all things for the best.” However, a few lines later, she seemed full of doubt, writing, “Oh would, would I could say, from the bottom of my soul -truthfully- “Thy will be done” but I fear I never – never can.” 82 For many Confederates then, religion could not always provide a comforting embrace. However, the doubt that crept into Confederates' minds was not a symbol of a rejection of faith, but rather, a result of faith passing through the sieve of war. That religious beliefs are a highly personal matter emphasized the fact that for many Confederates, matters of

80 Breckenridge, October 10, 1862, Lucy Breckinridge of Grove Hill, 62.
81 Grace Elmore, March 6, 1865, A Heritage of Woe, 106. Editor notes that although written in March 1865, the date is likely mistaken.
faith were not understood in absolute terms, but rather as part of the uncertainty that defined the Confederate experience. 83

From living rooms to distant battlefields, death pervaded the lives of Confederates, an inescapable fact that touched families far and wide. Soldiers drew their last gasps of air separated from home, resigned to death on a barren plain or an unforgiving hospital cot, followed by an even more depersonalized burial. Death's toll not only struck the unfortunate victim, but his distant family, who struggled to understand the loss, growing dispirited with the cause that had cost them their loved one. As death whittled away at the domestic nation, Confederates struggled to impart meaning to the void, an attempt to mend strained hearts. The patriotic rationalization of death as a sacrifice on behalf of the nation comforted many bereaved Confederates, but still proved an imperfect solution to the problem of death. Many Confederates embraced religion instead, which held the promise of life after death. Focused on the preparation for death, loved ones at home exhorted endangered soldiers to cultivate their faith in God, a challenging idea given the demoralization in the army, yet one that proved fruitful, as indicated by the widespread revivals that captivated Confederate armies. Useful at the individual level, Confederates appropriated the special providence of God at the national level, creating a religious ideology that cast a wide-ranging net of denial that enabled Confederates to persevere, even in times of defeat. However, war often tested Confederates’ faith in God, evidenced by the doubt that took hold of some Confederates, although they did not lose complete faith. Attempts to deal with death through patriotic and especially religious avenues, although by no means all-encompassing solutions for Confederates, provided solace for the living, allowing the war to continue in its darkest days.

83 For a different argument, one that prioritizes the loss of faith—at least among southern women—see Drew Gilpin Faust, Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 187-195.
In March 1865, John Thurman appeared gloomy and fatigued after nearly three years in the Confederate ranks. Honest about his disappointment with the current state of affairs, he penned a letter to his wife Sallie. “I am perfectly disgusted, Sallie, sick + worn out with all the miserable patch work of Government.” Upset with a nation that kept him separated from his loved ones, he continued, “it is impossible for a soldier to have any necessity answered that pertaines to his own interest or that of his family.”

His forlorn attitude appeared to illustrate a significant fissure, if not psychological break, between the nation and the family. However, in a letter a few days later, he insisted, “We never can be subjugated,” to which he added, “even after four years [of] hardships [and] Blood…I never will be although the Confederacy may.” Despite his expression for his continued appreciation for the Confederate cause, his wife’s own weariness with their separation did not help matters. Responding to his complaints against the government, she wrote, “Your view of the state of our Country, echoes my sentiments, I do not deem our government worth the sacrifices which are being made to sustain it. Such demoralization I never dreamed of.”

Reading of her angst, John wrote, “every day renders me more dissatisfied for your condition,” after which he promised, “to consider nothing above your necessities….” Nonetheless, he agreed to serve further despite having fought for three years “without any regard for my interest.” He continued, “I am willing to serve still another year provided I am allowed a month or two to see to my affairs at home.”

Weary of further separation, the Thurmans lashed out at the government, while at the same time maintaining faith in the Confederacy. To understand the seeming contradictions

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1 John Thurman to Sallie Thurman, March 6, 1865, box 1, folder 17, John P. and Sallie Ecklin Thurman Papers, SHC.
2 John Thurman to Sallie Thurman, March 13, 1865, folder 17, Thurman Papers.
3 Sallie Thurman to John Thurman, March 18, 1865, folder 17, Thurman Papers.
4 John Thurman to Sallie Thurman, March 20, 1865, folder 17, Thurman Papers.
within the Thurmans’ story is to recognize that the Thurmans did not understand their relationship with the nation as inflexible. Confederates illustrated that more often than not, contradiction rather than clarity was a key point in understanding the relationship between nation and family. Surely wartime placed strain on the domestic nation, but Confederates did not choose either nation or family. Rather, families worked to meet the often contradictory demands of both values, a constant struggle that never found a perfect resolution, but one which prolonged the war.

At the war’s beginning, most Confederates postulated a certain relationship between nation and family; they understood that to fight for the nation was to fight for their families. Louisiana soldier David Pierson had a strong sense of his dual obligations, articulating that he fought for “the defense of our Common Country and homes which is threatened with invasion and annihilation.” This clear cohabitation of Confederate interests that inspired military service changed with the institution of conscription. Conscription cast an ambiguous shadow over the domestic nation, as many Confederates struggled to reconcile their desire to fight for the Confederacy with the increasing separation from the loved ones for whom they fought. Attempts to ease the burdens of military service, including substitution, exemption and furloughs, provided dubious comfort for Confederates and in many cases, added strains to the domestic nation.

Although the sacrifices demanded by the nation grew too much for some Confederates, who deserted the army to protect their families, many more maintained an uncomfortable connection to both nation and family. Samuel Moore, a consistent representative for the uncertainty within the domestic nation, appeared no less so in March 1865.

It is now a serious question with me, what is my duty in the present state of affairs…whether to remain in my present position, or to resign and seek some occupation.

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which will enable me to support my family…I shall give the matter the best and most serious consideration of which I am capable, and then act in accordance with what seems to be my duty.  

Constrained by a system that kept them separated from loved ones, Confederates faced a constant struggle to bridge the growing strains placed on their relationship to the nation.  

Confederate families became dependent on letters to deal with the physical separation caused by military service. The appreciation Confederates showed for letters illustrated the meaning they had for them, as Floridian Tivie Stephens remarked, “letter writing was a great invention. I dont know what I would do if I could not hear from you.”  

Confederates thus came to rely upon the tangible items sent with letters and their written content, both of which facilitated a continued connection between separated family members. And yet, the shortages of writing supplies and the vicissitudes of Confederate mail delivery, rendered uncertain the ability of letters to soothe the strained hearts of distant loved ones. Plagued by delays, letters became a source of anxiety, illustrated by rising complaints over insufficient letters, which many Confederates interpreted as a lack of emotional regard. Martha Jones expressed her despair at the failure to receive letters, writing to her husband, “I feel so miserably at [the] thought of being denied this, the only comfort in your absence.”  

Rather than comfort lonely hearts, letters put further strain on the family, and thus threatened its connection to the nation. Despite the “desponding & patriotism killing letters” which purportedly caused desertion in some cases, their ability to do so proved much more uncertain.  

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6 Samuel Moore to Ellen Moore, March 29, 1865, box 2, folder 15, Samuel J.C. Moore Papers, SHC. 
8 Martha Jones to Willis Jones, January 24, 1863, Peach Leather and Rebel Gray: Bluegrass Life and the War, 1860-1865, eds. Mary E. Wharton and Ellen F. Williams (Lexington: Helicon Co., 1986), 100-101.  
rendered imperfect the genuine consolation that Confederates derived from letters, making separation more difficult.

Although letters provided comfort for separated loved ones, they did little to ease the material hardships that plagued families. Inflated prices spawned vast shortages, made worse by the persistent problems of impressment and extortion. Material hardships weighed more heavily on the less wealthy families, who in some cases rioted out of hunger and frustration. Many Confederates, rather than allow material hardship to snap the domestic nation, sought to balance the obligations to nation and family with the help of the government. Catherine Cowan of North Carolina thus petitioned the Secretary of War for the discharge of her son from service. “I have dutifully submitted + would willingly sacrifice all for the good of my Country but, I find that I cannot sustain myself + family without the assistance of some male,” she wrote.10 Whereas the interests of nation and family had once rested comfortably next to one another, this petition and thousands of others like it, articulated an uneasy relationship between nation and family. Government efforts to curb the strain, regarding impressment regulation, taxation, and charity, although of uncertain assistance, did help prolong the war for many Confederates. Where government efforts failed, Confederates relied upon their own ingenuity to deal with material hardships. Although hardships remained, Confederates’ continued willingness to petition the government for support, albeit illustrative of genuine strain, showed that many Confederates maintained ties to the nation.

Material hardship surely proved a formidable opponent for Confederate families, but the hardships caused by the Union Army alerted Confederates to another pressing problem. The Union invasion of Confederate homes earned the ire of many Confederates, despite the relatively mild nature of the physical destruction from a world history perspective. Nevertheless, the

10 Catherine Cowan to Secretary of War, April 12, 1863, LRCSW, RG 109, M-437, Reel 85, 583, NA.
presence of the Union Army spawned a class of Confederate refugees, challenged the purity of Confederate women, and introduced the specter of emancipation, all of which represented vast psychological challenges to Confederates’ conception of society and family. In response to the damage done, some Confederates expressed an increased willingness to fight the enemy, including Louisiana soldier Reuben Pierson. “How can those who have constant communication with home think of giving up their all?...Who would not protect an aged parent or a loving sister from the abuses of the rabble?” The answer may have been straightforward in Pierson’s mind, but many Confederates did not exhibit a clear-cut display of antipathy towards the Union Army. Apart from those who appeared to lose hope when confronted by the enemy, many more Confederates adopted an ambiguous attitude towards the Union Army. Although remaining true to their Confederate values, many Confederates recognized that they stood to benefit from the Union Army, which often did not fit the mold of a ruthless invader. Many of the Confederates who took the oath of the allegiance did not support the Union, but recognized that both their survival and that of their families depended upon the aid of the enemy. Confederates’ contradictory attitudes towards the enemy—another nation—brought into even closer relief the incongruous nature of the domestic nation.

Despite the varied nature of Confederate interactions with the enemy, the latter was responsible for the deaths of many Confederate soldiers. The pervasiveness of death in the Confederacy, combined with its perversion of the traditional circumstances of death, added significant strain to Confederate families, who struggled to accept death. Many grew wary of making further sacrifices on behalf of a nation that put loved ones in harm’s way, rather than protect them. In an attempt to lessen the strains placed on the domestic nation by death, Confederates attempted to glorify the loss of loved ones. The idea that soldiers had “given their

11 Reuben Pierson to William Pierson, January 30, 1864, Brothers in Gray, 226.
lives on their country altar” may have lent significance to loss, but it proved of little comfort for others, struck by the continual reality of death. Many Confederates embraced religion instead, which offered not only comforting words, but the promise of life after death. Lavinia Dabney of Virginia thus noted, “What would we do now if we did not have a hope beyond this world….” Obtaining relief from religion in preparation for Eternity demanded a cultivation of faith, especially for the soldiers, who stood directly in harm’s way. Although religion initially enjoyed little presence amidst the demoralizing activities, religious revivals gripped the army in the latter half of the war. Religion not only helped individuals deal with the hardships of war, especially death, but it proved of great importance to the Confederacy as a whole. Common throughout the Confederacy was praise for the will of God, as articulated by Charles Jones, Jr. of Georgia. “It is truly wonderful how mercifully and abundantly the good and great God of Battles has encircled our brave men with the protection of His all-powerful arm, shielding them from harm amid dangers imminent and protracted.” Placing absolute trust in the will of God, Confederates diminished their own sense of agency, convinced that with God on their side, no ill would come to them, an ideology that enabled Confederates to persevere in the darkest hours. Many Confederates grappled with religious doubts however, rendering religion a sometimes unsatisfactory means of soothing the strains of war. Although death strained the desire of living Confederates to incur further sacrifices for the nation, many Confederates had a support system that gave them hope that death of family members need not signify the death of the domestic nation.

Examining the experiences of Confederate families, it appears that no story exists

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13 Lavinia Dabney to Robert Dabney, May 5, 1862, subseries 1.3, folder 59, Charles William Dabney Papers, SHC.
because the lives of Confederates reveal no sweeping narrative that gradually grows to a grand conclusion. Rather, the collection of experiences reflects a mess of contradictory letters that fail to make a cohesive sentence. And yet, that collective jumble of experiences, lacking linearity and rife with contradiction, is the story of the Confederacy’s domestic nation. Confederates’ contradictions grew out of the constant need to accommodate the demands of both nation and family, which proved ever changing, requiring different responses in different circumstances for different people. The relationship between nation and family proved too complex and evanescent to fit into an either-or model. Nonetheless, the desire still exists to mold Confederates to one of two extremes, stating that they stayed true to the cause until the bitter end or lost hope somewhere along the way. This notion of a one-size-fits-all box for the Confederacy overlooks the complexity of experiences within the nation.

Contradiction often proves disconcerting for students of history, because it represents an uncomfortable tension between two extremes. It is perhaps this desire for a clear historical narrative, stripped of any complexity, that spawned the creation of a logical story of the Confederacy where none existed. Uncomfortable as contradiction is, it best corresponds to the conditions of war that Confederates faced. Susan Bradford of Florida commented upon the fleeting nature of war, writing, “Life is a complex problem; it is like a kaleidoscope in its changing scenes.”15 That the Confederates’ relationship between nation and family came to fruition during wartime, a time of contradiction and confusion, makes it of little surprise that the domestic nation took the form that it did. Faced with war for their entire existence, Confederates could not look into the future with certainty, making it unfair to provide an answer that renders logical the domestic nation. Perhaps Texas soldier Theophilus Perry best captured the attitude of

Confederates when he wrote, “There is no Reading the book of destiny faster than time turns over its pages.”16 Uncertain of what lay ahead in the midst of war, Confederates did not have the luxury of creating an epic novel, because the vicissitudes of war spawned contradiction rather than clarity. The story of the domestic nation of the Confederacy offers a strong reminder that although life is often rife with contradiction, it is no less significant.

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