

Book Review: Stepdaughters of History: Southern Women and the American Civil War. Catherine Clinton. Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2016. ISBN 978-0-8071-6457-0. 160 p. \$27.50.

By: [Kathelene McCarty Smith](#)

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Abstract:

The representation of southern women, during and in the aftermath of the Civil War, is varied and complex. In *Stepdaughters of History: Southern Women and the American Civil War*, Catherine Clinton integrates recent scholarship and historical research to provide a more revealing portrayal of women's wartime participation. Dividing the book into three sections, the author explores the postwar narrative of southern white women who fashioned their own "Lost Cause" legacy, and of southern black women, whose legacy was formed for them.

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Article:

The representation of southern women, during and in the aftermath of the Civil War, is varied and complex. In *Stepdaughters of History: Southern Women and the American Civil War*, Catherine Clinton integrates recent scholarship and historical research to provide a more revealing portrayal of women's wartime participation. Dividing the book into three sections, the author explores the postwar narrative of southern white women who fashioned their own "Lost Cause" legacy, and of southern black women, whose legacy was formed for them.

In the book's first section, "Band of Sisters," Clinton addresses how southern white women formed a "collective identity" through shared sacrifices and wartime experiences. This "band of sisters" remained stoic, supportive, prayerful, and patriotic as their men came back diseased, dismembered, or not at all. Crossing socioeconomic boundaries, they ranged from upper-class women who bore the administrative and supervisory responsibilities of plantations, to poor women who were faced with starvation, sickness, and assault. In many cases, their stalwart facades masked a deeper sense of betrayal and diminishing support for the War. Instead of resulting in a sense of empowerment, their hardships created disillusionment and enduring wounds, causing women to take their wartime legacies into their own hands.

Some of these women gave up conservative lifestyles to contribute more directly to the war effort. In the book's second section, "Impermissible Patriots," Clinton moves beyond the more popular chronicles of women such as Mary Chestnut, and explores accounts written by southern women who were suddenly thrown into unfamiliar duties in the hospital or the field. The author also shares stories of women who threw off the trappings of their gender and became soldiers. One such story is that of Loreta Janeta Velazquez, who even before the War, chose to live a less conventional life than many of her sex. Velazquez's autobiography proved to be a sensational memoir of a woman who, after the death of her husband and children, pursued the life of a male Confederate soldier, then after being caught, a female spy. This narrative reflects the full extent of southern women's more active participation during the War.

Clinton also includes stories of women resisters who used their social influence to fight their enemy, including the well-known account of New Orleans women who defied the authority of Union General Benjamin Butler after the city's occupation in April of 1862. Having little power but "southern civility," the city's female population began to actively ignore or demonstrate rude behavior toward the occupying federal troops. Butler took offense at the women's obvious slights of crossing the street at the sight of a Union soldier, or worse, spitting in their faces. Both sides being completely resolute in their opposition, Butler and the New Orleans matrons began a standoff that would end in jailed women and news of "Yankee horrors" spreading throughout the South.

In the years after the War, southern white women began to actively reshape their own history, attempting to create an honorable legacy from a dishonorable defeat. They began forming their own postwar narrative, successfully contributing to the "Myth of the Confederacy." It was through these well-crafted nostalgic writings that the South "lost the war, but won the peace." Clinton traces this literature from the years following the War until well into the twentieth century, seeking to deconstruct this revisionist history.

The book's last chapter, "Mammy by Any Other Name," focuses on black women's wartime activities and how their contributions were diminished in postwar history. As southern white women created their romanticized wartime narrative, black women were relegated to a role that provided nostalgic comfort and dissipated the cruel and inhuman aspects of slavery and "interracial liaisons." The "Myth of Mammy" began to rise concurrently with the "Myth of the Confederacy," while the true narrative of black women's participation remained underrepresented in Civil War history. The author specifically focuses on two women, Harriet Tubman and Susie King Taylor. Both are strong examples of black women who made significant contributions during the War. The author clearly outlines the importance of Tubman's efforts to transport countless slaves out of the South, as well as Taylor's service with the Union troops, both as a nurse and a teacher to recently freed slaves. But there are also countless tales of bravery and resistance of southern black women during and after the War, and Clinton plays these important narratives against the stereotypical representation of "Mammy."

In *Stepdaughters of History: Southern Women and the American Civil War*, Catherine Clinton provides a complex portrayal of southern women's participation in the War. In doing so, she draws on increasingly important Civil War scholarship and primary source research to define how women viewed their own wartime contributions, as well as their postwar legacies.

Incorporating diaries and correspondence, the author provides moving accounts of the abject suffering of the war-weary female population and the challenge of representing their stories in a truthful and relevant way. This book is a must read for those who seek to fully understand women's history in the context of the Civil War.