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## Gender, Race, and Class in Various Aspects of American Literature: A Portfolio

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**Gender, Race, and Class in Various Aspects of American Literature: A Portfolio**

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Final Master's Portfolio

Submitted to the English Department of  
Bowling Green State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in the Field of English  
with a Specialization in Literary & Textual Studies

May 2020

Dr. Bill Albertini, First Reader  
Ms. Kimberly Spallinger, Second Reader

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### Analytical Narrative

Ever since I was a young child, I had a love for literature. I constantly had a book in my hand with my nose inside of it, escaping to worlds existing only in my imagination. I never lost my love of literature, and this passion has given me a career path. After completing my bachelor's degree in English and now my master's degree in English literature, I want to bring my love of literature and writing into the classroom. Bowling Green State University (BGSU) has given me the opportunity to learn, grow, and educate others during my two years in the MA program. In this time, I have delved further into my passions by taking classes that piqued my interests and pushed me to think more critically than ever before. In this portfolio, I have revised three of my favorite pieces that I wrote during my two years at BGSU, and I have also turned each one of these essays into a conference-length paper. As a result, I have three revised pieces to send to employers and Ph.D. programs, and I also have three accessible conference presentations coming out of the MA program and into the professional world.

Over the course of my two years at BGSU, I consistently wrote about gender, class, and race using various types of texts. I knew these were my key interests before beginning the program, and my experience at BGSU allowed me to delve deeper into theoretical implications, new ideas, and fascinating pieces of literature concerning each subject. The three papers in this portfolio attest to the fact that gender, class, and race have been my primary focal points, as I consider these three areas in complex ways throughout the papers included here. However, I use various types of texts as entries into examining gender, class, and race. As a fan of women's country music—a very important distinction from all country music—I consider the differences between women's agency and visibility in the 1960s. Moving into movies, I focus on racial implications in Jordan Peele's film *Us*. I then finish with a look into southern white women's

diaries and journals from the American Civil War. Being in the program, I came to appreciate all types of texts as literature, and I feel as though I represent my various interests through these three pieces and their respective conference-style papers.

It is important to note that all of my papers deal with American literature, and that has been my primary focus throughout the program. I have always loved early American literature, and I had the great opportunity to work with professors who shared the same appreciation for it as myself. Every professor who I have had, however, has challenged me to think about American literature in complex and difficult ways, and I was always up for the challenge. By writing about so many different periods, aspects, and types of American literature, I feel as though I am leaving BGSU with a deeper understanding of what American literature is, how American literature can relate to other types of literature, and how to effectively write about various texts in American literature. While my primary interest has been women's working-class literature from the Civil War era, which I have not shied away from, I have branched out into other areas of inquiry that I may never have had the opportunity to do if it had not been for my time at BGSU.

One of my greatest struggles and achievements was during Dr. Jolie Sheffer's course entitled ENG 6750: The 1960s in Contemporary American Culture. Considering my interests with early American literature, I never thought that I would find myself in a course about the 1960s; however, I really wanted to take a course with Dr. Sheffer, because I knew she would challenge my thinking in ways beyond the subject matter. While I was writing my final paper for the course, I thought it was excellent. Being a long-time fan of women's country music, I was eager to trace the roots of the genre in the 1960s and connect them to contemporary country radio. I was even more excited to present and receive feedback from both Dr. Sheffer and my peers. Unfortunately, it was not as great as I thought in the moment, and I ended up receiving a

“B” for the course. I was crushed. I took some time away from the paper, and when I revisited it for the portfolio, I could more easily see the areas that needed to be improved. I could see that there was significant room for improvement, and so I was motivated and determined to make this a paper I could be proud of writing regardless of the letter grade on my transcript.

Working from the comments Dr. Sheffer gave to me on the paper, I knew that I needed to really clarify my argument that there is an important difference between the sudden rise in the visibility of women performers in country music in the 1960s and their actual agency. While it is easy to conflate the two, visibility does not guarantee agency, and it did not for those performers. I knew what I wanted to argue, but it was not translating onto the page. I also wanted to go deeper into my close readings of the songs I chose to examine, because there was so much more information to pull from them. After numerous rounds of revisions with Dr. Bill Albertini, my portfolio adviser, I ended up with a version I love. In the edited text, my argument is much clearer, my examples are more focused, and the paper highlights my voice instead of the voices of the scholars I cite by drawing on evidence that more clearly demonstrated the complex forces that both elevated and controlled many women country music singers in the 1960s. The editing process for this paper was quite long and grueling, but I would be happy to send this to a future publication or present it at a conference in the coming year. While finding this piece a proper home in the current conditions we find ourselves in with the COVID-19 pandemic has been challenging, I am confident that I will find a journal or anthology where this text will shine. I hope to also find a space to present this work and receive even more feedback in a conference setting once everyone can get back to typical daily life.

On a completely different note, the second paper I have included in this portfolio has already found success and is being published with the *Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies* this

spring. I wrote “‘It’s Us’: Mimicry in Jordan Peele’s *Us*” for Dr. Piya Lapinski’s course, ENG 6070: Theory and Methods of Literary Criticism. I am thrilled that this piece is being published, because the work I did in the piece is important and culturally relevant.

In terms of editing the piece, I used the comments from Dr. Lapinski and from the journal editor, Victoria Burns, to make some minor changes. Dr. Lapinski wanted me to more explicitly state why I did not use critical race theory in the piece and instead used postcolonial theory. Burns had the same suggestion, and she also wanted me to clarify some of my readings of Homi Bhabha’s work. I found that I could make these changes easily, because I spent so much time on the writing process itself. Finally, Dr. Albertini gave me some comments to help make the piece even better, and I appreciate those very much. However, Dr. Albertini and I decided that I should include the published piece without his additional comments here in the portfolio. Again, I am extremely pleased that my work is being published as an MA student, and I am proud to include it in the portfolio.

The third piece I am using for the portfolio is my paper from Dr. Sue Carter Wood’s course, ENG 6800: Convincing Women: Nineteenth-Century U.S. Women’s Rhetoric Tactics and Practices. This piece specifically and the course as a whole challenged me to consider my primary research interest through a rhetorical lens, focusing on the tone, style, and format in which these women were writing. This allowed me to think about these journals and diaries in a way that I had not previously contemplated. While I have been researching women’s literature of the Civil War era, thinking about these women’s writings as spaces of rhetorical importance really opened my mind to a whole new perspective on the ways and reasons they wrote the ways they did. Women and men had very different rhetorical strategies, especially during the Civil War, and examining southern white women’s diaries proved to be very revealing of their

opinions on the war. Keeping that in mind, I argue in the essay that Southern white women used their diaries as spaces of agency during the Civil War to discuss wartime events and personal conditions to have their voices heard in society.

In terms of editing, Dr. Carter Wood wanted me to include additional scholarship to really frame the rhetorical importance of diaries and journals in the nineteenth century. Diaries were spaces of public opinion and influence, and the women writing at this time knew their words would eventually become public. Therefore, I had to read between the lines of their writing more closely to fully consider the extent of their writings about the war. Dr. Wood also urged me to make my conclusion have some inquiries for further research. This is something that I consistently struggle with in my own writing, but once I included some lines of thought for further consideration, my conclusion became much more meaningful as a whole. I also used the feedback from Dr. Albertini to clean up the paper for infelicities, and also to put additional scholarship into the paper in an effective way. I believe that the paper is much more critically focused, and the argument is much more nuanced. I eventually would like to find it a home in a journal for rhetoric, but I think it would benefit from, as Dr. Wood also recommends, having me present it at a conference before it reaches that stage. I think that the Feminisms and Rhetorics conference would be a great place for me to present this paper and receive feedback from those already in the field, and it will help me get this paper ready to stand on its own in a journal.

Finally, I have included potential conference papers for all three of the pieces I edited for the portfolio. The papers for both Dr. Sheffer's and Dr. Wood's respective courses have simply been condensed, and the entire argument is still present in the conference proceedings. I was able to effectively argue my points with effective examples in a smaller space, and I am very happy with how those turned out. I am also pleased with my conference-length paper for Dr. Lapinski's

course; however, I had to take more drastic measures to craft an effective conference paper. The entire argument would not condense very easily because of all of my close readings and emphasis on theory. Therefore, I decided to focus on only the relationship between Adelaide and Red on the basis of gender, race, and class, rather than including examples from the entire film. While this disappointed me at first, it helped me learn how to frame a proper conference paper when the argument is substantial, and it urged me to pick and choose what points are of the most importance in the paper itself. I am really excited to have the opportunity to present my research post-pandemic, and I am leaving BGSU with three presentations ready to go.

Before I conclude, I just want to use this space to thank everyone at BGSU who has helped me get to this point—especially Dr. Albertini. He has been an excellent mentor since my first semester in the MA program, and I am forever grateful that he agreed to be my first reader for the portfolio. He has helped me to become a better scholar, a better writer, a better teacher, and a better person.

With the completion of my master's degree, I plan on taking my love of literature into the classroom. I have always had a passion for both reading and teaching, and I hope to bring that to future students of mine. In a couple of years, I also plan on applying for Ph.D. programs, and this portfolio will help me in that I will have three polished writing samples for consideration. I also plan on presenting all of this research in my time outside of academia, so the conference papers will come in handy in that regard. Ultimately, I am so appreciative of my time at BGSU in the Department of English, and I am confident that I am leaving the university with a greater confidence in myself and my scholarship.

## “Honkytonk, Heartbreak, and Hit Songs: The Evolution of Women in 1960s Country Music”

(REVISED)

In the early 1960s, Nashville, Tennessee, became the quintessential hub of country music, which brought about a major change in the sound of country music—especially women’s country music. The centralization of the genre in Nashville itself has become part of the complex culture of country music, influencing the sounds, producers, and writers of country music for decades. Leading country music scholars, such as Jocelyn R. Neal from whom I build upon throughout the paper to support and expand my argument, attest that country music lacked a core identity throughout the 1950s, but the establishment of one city as the capital of country music unified the people creating country music in the 1960s and 1970s (Neal 187). The establishment of an industry center in the South made it easier for artists to connect with a wider swath of their mostly rural, white, working-class target audience. At the same time, the establishment of Nashville as the center of the industry allowed artists, especially women country singers who rarely entered the industry before the late 1950s, to be exploited and consumed by the emerging power of the country music industry (Neal 187-88, Hill 3). While the country music of the 1960s offered more visibility for women in the genre than ever before, such success necessitated the dependence on radio hits, sales, popularity, and—of course—money to appease the executives in charge of producing music for female country stars.

The new Nashville sound of the 1960s represented a major change from the sound and tone of women’s country music previous to that decade. Before the 1960s, many female country artists fell stylistically in line with outdated styles of country music (Hill 35-36). Yet, the dependence on sales and popularity within the context of newly emerging Nashville big business essentially forced women to produce music that could become popular on country radio. While

this would allow female country artists to gain in popularity, much of it was at the hands of record producers whose primary goal was to make money and earn prestige in the city rather than see women in the genre succeed for the sake of women's advancement. Therefore, many up-and-coming female artists of the time, such as Patsy Cline, Tammy Wynette, and Loretta Lynn, fell into the stereotypical "heartbreak crooner" sound that became quite popular on early-1960s country radio. By the end of the decade and into the 1970s, however, some of these women and new female country artists broke free from such sounds, and their music was not dependent on often-misogynistic tales of sorrow and heartbreak to gain traction on country radio. Nevertheless, the expanding visibility and presence of more women on country radio in the early 1960s did not result in increased agency as previously thought. While one may assume, based on the rise of female stars within the industry and the changes in lyrical content of their hit songs, that the 1960s represented a significant increase in women's agency within the country music industry. In fact, these artists were being exploited by record producers for their own popularity and financial gain in the newly emerging sounds and politics of Nashville at this time.

The earliest formations of country music as a definable genre left women on the sidelines in most cases. The few women who did manage to make a name for themselves in the early days of the genre and through the 1960s further struggled with societal expectations for women, because "social propriety dictated that 'nice girls' did not entertain publicly or travel without proper chaperones" (Neal 33). Therefore, women did not have the same chances of having their voices heard on the radio due to the nature of their essential ostracization from the early country music scene, and the ones who were heard were kept under close control and monitoring from both record executives and male fans of country music. According to Neal, "Women were involved in every aspect of country music from its beginning, but social and economic

conditions dictated that few of them became commercial stars, and fewer still were acknowledged for their roles” (Neal 33). Even more so, when women did become more prominent figures in the genre in the 1960s, much of their success was tainted by the patriarchal structures that came along with the changing sounds of Nashville. They, too, were being surveilled, just like the women who came before them.

One of the first prominent female country stars of the 1960s was Kitty Wells, who went on to become one of the most famous and groundbreaking female stars of all time. Early in her career, without the industry centered in Nashville, Wells had no choice but to record simple country tracks in her hometown. However, Wells released “It Wasn’t God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels” in 1952, and her popularity skyrocketed very quickly over the course of two months, giving her the ability to travel and record more openly. Despite the track’s and Wells’ popularity in the 1950s, Wells could not break free of the social expectations placed on women of the era. Many critics—a group largely made up of white men—condemned the song, claiming that “its premise [is] that hypocritical, deceitful men are responsible for fallen women” (Bufwack and Oermann 178). Wells does criticize men in the song, singing such lines as “It’s a shame that all the blame is on us women,” because “Most every heart that’s ever broken / Was because there always was a man to blame” (Wells 10, 13-14). She is revealing the double-standard in heartbreak, and she is putting more of the blame onto men for something women would have almost exclusively been condemned for in the 1950s. In fact, the song itself was banned from numerous television broadcasts and from being performed at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville for being “too suggestive,” yet the fans—especially women—loved Wells’ sound and style (Bufwack and Oermann 179). Her powerful delivery of each word really made this a tune that was impossible to forget. In this one song, Wells allowed women to connect with her and with

country music, prompting them to go out, purchase her record, and help make a space for her in the extremely conservative, male-dominated genre. By recording songs that women could relate to, Wells opened the door for other female artists to write and sing such songs, and she demonstrated to the white, male executives in the honkytonk era that women could make a name for themselves in country music by playing songs written for and sung to primarily women when given the freedom to do so.

The pivotal influence in country music that brought more visibility for women in the genre throughout the 1960s was the switch from honkytonk into the “Nashville Sound.”<sup>1</sup> Honkytonk-style music emphasized the simplicity of country music instrumentation, using very few instruments to accompany the artist’s voice (Neal 195-96). The accompaniment, though, did not blend seamlessly or with the vocal recording, leading to a more disjointed sound (Neal 195). Particularly, the steel guitar created a very distinct “‘crying’ sound [that] stood out so prominently in the musical texture of honky-tonk recordings” (Neal 195). This crying sound in the background is meant to mimic a human cry or elicit some emotional response to the music. Therefore, many artists—especially women—used this sound in their own music to create a mood of sorrow and heartbreak. However, the disjunction in the honkytonk style instruments gave listeners a somewhat uncomfortable listening experience, because there was not a seamless blending of vocals and instrumentals. And, since female artists tended to be accompanied by this style very frequently, their music and prominence in the genre was inhibited more greatly than their male counterparts. Producers quickly realized, though, that the honkytonk sound needed to be adapted in critical ways in order for country music to have a better chance at gaining traction on popular radio.

In an attempt to make country music both more palatable and mainstream in the 1960s, producers and artists adopted the style known as the Nashville Sound. Jeremy Hill contends, “the Nashville Sound quickly became the symbol for a new incarnation of country music: slick, overproduced, and expressly commercial” (Hill 36). The sleek tone and overproduced sound are vastly different from the 1950s honkytonk style, and the commercialization of country music was essentially a brand-new component due to the establishment of Nashville at the center of the genre. And, for country music listeners, this was an abrupt, almost sudden change stylistically. While some of the instruments remained consistent between honkytonk and the Nashville Sound, they were used in different ways. The steel guitar was toned down, sounds more seamlessly blended together, and influences from popular radio sounds were implemented into country music. For instance, Neal claims that “Nashville sound recordings used the full extent of available recording technologies [including] echo and reverb; stereophonic recording, which plays back the instruments in different spatial relationships to a left and right speaker, and overdubbing” (Neal 196). Many of these characteristics are typical of popular music songs, and the Nashville Sound uses those characteristics blended with country music elements to create popular country music. Therefore, the Nashville Sound is a blending of popular music elements and country music elements to create a unified sound—a sound that completely changed the face of the genre into the 1960s.

Notably so, the change in sound also changed the target audience for country music as a genre. Such fans claimed that the newly evolving sound of country radio took on too much inspiration from outside genres, such as pop and R&B, and the true flavor of country music had been lost in favor of creating popular mainstream music. While this change allowed for country music to gain in popularity with wider audiences in the 1960s, it essentially isolated the earliest

listeners of the genre if they did not want to adapt to the changing sounds of Nashville. As artists, writers, and producers flocked to Nashville in the very late 1950s and early 1960s, the sound did move away from pure country influence and took on elements of other genres for the sake of commercial success (Hill 41). By moving past honkytonk, traditional country sounds were left by the wayside in favor of the development of the Nashville Sound (Hill 42-43). This left the typical target audience of rural, white, working-class men feeling dejected, as many of these fans complained that “country music was the authentic music of the specifically rural and working-class people of America, and that the musical changes brought about by the Nashville Sound were destroying this connection” (Hill 43). Because the Nashville Sound was so simple to produce, it began to seem that anyone could now sing country music. The idea that country music stems from a country lifestyle started to fade at this time.

While country music was becoming more diverse in sound and audience, the traditional roots of the genre still managed to remain present with the development of the Nashville Sound thus appeasing early fans of country music. According to Tex Sample, “Within the music, however, is a significant core that from its beginning and throughout its history embodies working-class life with all its sense of loss, dislocation, alienation, celebration, defiance, holding on, making it, and hope” (Sample 14). This history, then, allowed the space for artists to connect with their audiences as long as they could tap into the very roots of country music in this new commercial space. The Nashville Sound did keep traditional instruments from honkytonk but instead blended them differently, and the lyrical content of the songs expressed themes of love, heartbreak, and nostalgia for the country, most notably in the works of Loretta Lynn and Tammy Wynette. The common themes the artists sung about allowed audiences to buy into the new sounds and songs, but the addition of creating an aura of nostalgia for old times appeased the

previous target audience of rural white, male, working-class men. By upholding and supporting such themes, then, women in country music could have a real chance to make a name for themselves, especially with the new sounds and shifting audiences. Therefore, country music could still be for them despite the change in sound and style, but the genre could open itself up for new listeners, particularly more urban working-class men and both rural and urban working-class women.

Considering the influence of the audience in the implementation of the Nashville Sound in country music, homogenous groups of producers and record executives strove to create popular songs in an effort to solidify their own importance in the city by producing songs that would be popular at country radio. Two of the leading men responsible for the creation of the new sound were Owen Bradley of Decca Records and Chet Atkins of RCA Records (Neal 191). These men capitalized off of the artists who fell in line with the Nashville Sound, with the result that “their collective sound was featured on almost all the records made in Nashville during those years, regardless of who the lead singer or star was” (Neal 193). Therefore, Bradley and Atkins had their hand in most of the changing tides of Nashville and the Nashville Sound, making their presence and influence extremely important in the 1960s. Additionally, these men largely used the same backing bands and production teams—made up entirely of white men—to create the music coming from Nashville at this time (Neal 193). This system made it so that the same team could create numerous hits simultaneously by easily placing a different artist into the recording booth each time, allowing for executives and producers to make a lot of songs very quickly, and, therefore, a lot of money. In turn, both Nashville and country music, then, were dominated by an exclusive group of white, male executives, which consequently impacted the songs being created and the ones becoming massive radio hits. Keeping in mind the changing target audience for

country music along with the behind-the-scenes production politics in Nashville, the songs being produced were created by elite white men and being marketed toward white, working-class men, leaving little to no space for women to adequately have their voices heard and adequately represented by the genre of country music.

One of the major reasons for this discrimination against women was the long-standing tradition of needing a certifiable country experience to create authentic country music; however, the switch to the Nashville Sound left this idea behind, allowing more women to participate in the genre despite their lack of agency within it. Wells, falling into the honkytonk tradition of country music, grew up on the outskirts of Nashville in a farmland setting (Bufwack and Oermann 177). Therefore, she had the certifiable country experience of living life as a young, working-class white person that helped give her a claim to country music in the early days of her career. For instance, she alludes to this background in “It Wasn’t God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels,” when she sings, “As I listen to the words you are sayin’ / It brings me memories when I was a trustful wife” (Wells 3-4). Wells fit the cycle for a southern, white, working-class woman of her time, showing that she lived, worked, and loved in the same area. Asserting her identity as a wife, she permits her audience to believe her story, thus giving her the credibility and ability to sing such a song. By the 1960s, though, the need for an authentic country experience faded quite quickly, and anyone who could sing country music had the chance to become a country artist due to the ease of the Nashville Sound. According to Hill, “They [music executives] positioned the new sound as a necessary shift in the service of an admirable commercial aspiration that allowed country music’s stewards to transport the genre from a kind of mythical originary rural space outward into the cities and beyond” (Hill 45). This shift into a city<sup>2</sup> allowed for country music

artists to have roots in the genre regardless of birthplace, making the 1960s sounds of Nashville more universal which was in line with popular radio productions.

This shift to the city also allowed more women to follow in the footsteps of Wells and become successful country music artists, yet the politics and big money of Nashville undercut their success in numerous ways. The early 1960s in county music saw the emergence of one of the biggest stars in country music history: Patsy Cline. Cline managed to balance her honkytonk, working-class roots with the new city lifestyle and sound of Nashville, leading to her incredible success in the industry. However, this switch was not inspired by Cline herself. She fell in line with the elite white executives who wanted her to gain success for their personal benefit, affording them a prominent space in the emergence of the new sounds of country music at Cline's expense. Early in her career, Cline "displayed remarkable yodeling ability, and she always thought of herself as an up-tempo honky-tonker rather than a heartbreak balladeer" (Bufwack and Oermann 255). Cline did find success with her honkytonk style, particularly with one of her first major hits "Walking After Midnight" (1956), but this trend was quickly fading in the realm of country music. While she wanted to remain true to her original sound, Owen Bradley, the chief executive officer of Decca Records, worked with Cline in the early 1960s to alter her sound to fit the new tides of Nashville, and she is the artist who eventually set the tone for the Nashville Sound (Bufwack and Oermann 255). Cline herself, in this way, did not necessarily care about the popularity; she wanted to make music for the sake of making music. Nevertheless, the pressures from record executives pushed her into the Nashville Sound where she did manage to carve quite a notable place for herself in spite of her exploitation.

Cline's massive hit that set the tone for the Nashville Sound, "I Fall to Pieces" (1961), was not written or produced by Cline herself. Rather, a team of all white men wrote, produced,

and released the song with her as the chosen artist for the hit. The song reached heights of wild popularity with audiences in both country and pop music, demonstrating that a female country artist could reach levels of major success using the Nashville Sound. In the song itself, Cline sings:

You tell me to find someone else to love,  
Someone who love me too  
The way you used to do,  
But each time I go out with someone new,  
You walk by and I fall to pieces. (Cline 16-20)

Clearly, Cline is using the heartbreak and heartache style song that became popular after she introduced it here in 1961. This style was meant to replicate the heartache a woman should feel or would feel when a breakup occurred, hence the fall into pieces at what could have been. As evidenced in the lyrics above, Cline plays the role of the victim of heartbreak, as she falls apart at the hands of a man. It seems as though she is the one unable to get over the heartache, and she continuously “falls to pieces” over him instead of moving on with her love life. Coming from the tradition set forth by Wells who pointed the lens at men who exploit women, Cline’s style and lyrics seem quite different from where women in the genre seemed to be heading just a few years prior. Cline positions herself as the one who is broken, with nothing to be done about it. Nevertheless, such themes became incredibly popular with country music audiences, and artists and producers alike continued to write and release such songs because they sold and made a lot of money. To this point, Bufwack and Oermann write, “Patsy finished 1961 as the Number 1 female vocalist,” scoring numerous pop and country hits through 1962, and this momentum lasted until her untimely death in 1963 (Bufwack and Oermann 257). Although her life was cut

short, Cline managed to inspire the Nashville Sound in its earliest days, setting a major precedent for female country artists to follow later into the 1960s which was not always the best source of inspiration for other women in the genre going forward.

Unfortunately, the precedent set by Cline was embedded in musical politics of Nashville in the 1960s. Other up-and-coming women in country music followed Cline's model which resulted in numerous songs in the same vein to be continuously written and produced. The latter half of the 1960s saw a slight shift in the sound of women's country music, as it took on more influence from the changing tides in pop music by artists such as the Beatles and Bob Dylan (Neal 214). The Nashville Sound, with its reliance on blending country and pop sounds, adapted to the sonic change, yet the lyrical content remained consistent. Therefore, female country artists could still fit the mold for the Nashville Sound (Neal 217). Music producers, especially Bradley of Decca Records, could then exploit the successes of these artists. Due to the increasing popularity and marketability of female country stars, songs were now being written for white, working-class women specifically, because it was a market that was quickly expanding in a very lucrative way as more women's voices were being heard on the radio. Yet, the sound of a woman's voice on the radio did not necessarily result in agency for these artists.

In 1966, Loretta Lynn shot into a position of prominence in Nashville and country music with her hit song "You Ain't Woman Enough (To Take My Man)." Like Cline, Lynn began her career in the honkytonk tradition of the 1950s inspired by Wells, but the music executives at Decca Records pushed her toward recording in style with the burgeoning Nashville Sound (Bufwack and Oermann 307). For example, in the song, Lynn both writes and sings, "Sometimes a man start lookin' at things that he don't need / He took a second look at you, but he's in love with me / Well I don't know where they leave you, oh, but I know where I'll stand / And you ain't

woman enough to take my man” (Lynn 10-13). While this is clearly not a heartbreak song, the lyrics stylistically fall in line with the trend, because Lynn is guarding herself from even feeling heartbroken in the first place by being defensive over the man by criticizing the other woman for his actions. By arguing that the other woman is less of a woman due to the man thinking about sexually pursuing her, Lynn is making the case that women need to defend and protect their men in an effort not to lose them. While Lynn had minor hits on country radio throughout the early part of the 1960s, “You Ain’t Woman Enough (To Take My Man)” was an instant crossover hit with pop radio. Much of this popularity, however, is associated with a “country-gal spunk” that was refreshing for listeners (Bufwack and Oermann 309). Nevertheless, this song is still tied closely with the inherent sexism embedded in heartbreak crooner anthems of the early 1960s. Despite the spunkiness Lynn delivers in this song in both lyric and vocal performance, it keeps true to the tune of sexism in country music at this time, falling in line with previous songs of heartache and women’s disenfranchisement.

Holding strongly to this particular trend in country music, one of the genre’s most notorious and beloved songs was released in 1968 just after Lynn’s precedent: “Stand by Your Man” by Tammy Wynette. In fact, “Stand by Your Man” is one of the best-selling songs in all of country music even today (Bufwack and Oermann 333). Not only was the song a number one hit on country radio, it quickly made its way into the top twenty songs on the pop charts in 1968, achieving the goal of what the Nashville Sound set out to do (Bufwack and Oermann 333). Yet, the song itself is steeped lyrics that limit women’s agency from Wynette herself and Billy Sherrill: “But if you love him you’ll forgive him / Even though he’s hard to understand / And if you love him, oh, be proud of him / ‘Cause after all he’s just a man” (Wynette 6-9). This song plays into the ideology becoming solidified in country music at this time, particularly with the

emphasis on staying in a relationship with a man that may not be ideal. While placing this in terms with the 1960s audience it lent itself to, Wynette clearly struck a chord with her white, female, working-class audience who may have made a similar decision to stay with a man based on societal pressures. She related with these women through her lyrics, demonstrating that many women were suffering the same fate at the hands of men, but they had to “stand by [their] man / And show the world [they] love him” in order to participate in and be accepted in society (Wynette 14-15).<sup>3</sup> As Bufwack and Oermann claim, “Her gripping, teardrop-in-every-note vocal style seemed to weep for every working-class woman who’d ever tolerated a beer-swilling, unfaithful slob; who’d ever slaved for a pack of ungrateful brats; who’d ever endured neglect and abuse. She was the choked-with-heartbreak victim, a doormat for her man and society” (Bufwack and Oermann 333). While Wynette encourages other women to simply forgive their male partners for whatever wrongdoings they commit, even if it comes at the expense of the woman’s own health or happiness, they could relate to the pain in her voice. Her expressions of anger, sadness, and even hope show that many women were in a similar situation, and they—for whatever their reasons—chose to also stand by their men.

The songs being performed by the women of country music at this time were obviously quite conservative, as they were making an effort to please their audiences in an attempt to produce music that would become popular on country radio. In turn, they would become very successful, as would the white male elite executives in charge of their careers, encouraging them to create more music in the same vein. The implementation and upholding of this approach created a new moral standard for country music itself, forcing artists to fall in line with such more conservative notions at the sake of their music. Therefore, female country music artists could release anthems under the guise of upholding the standard values of conservative, white,

working-class families, thus affording them the airspace on country radio. Contrasting the popular narrative of the 1960s and 1970s, “Many country songs stressed moral, upright, family-oriented values that were a contrast to the much-publicized, sexually free, dope smoking, ‘anti-American’ hippies” (Bufwack and Oermann 326). Despite the historical narrative Bufwack and Oermann present, the country music scene did not really fall in line with this trend. For the most part, the women artists themselves were buying into what they were singing about on their records, as women also took on an active role in conservative movements. Of course, the target audience for their music tended to be steadfastly conservative, as country music still tends to fall into this line of conservatism today, but many of these women were not proponents of the newly developing feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s in favor of the “Stand by Your Man” and “You Ain’t Woman Enough” expressions of thought. Aligning with such ideas would give them a claim to their rural, working-class roots, allow them the space to remain popular in the genre of country music, and keep their voices on their airwaves.

However, not all female country artists bought into the more conservative trends of the women before them, and some well-known and up-and-coming artists went against the grain to produce massive hits. For one, Loretta Lynn released “You’re Lookin’ at Country” with Decca Records in 1971, positing that she is what country music looks and sounds like. In the song, Lynn belts out, “I’m about as old-fashion [sic] as I can be / And I hope you’re likin’ what you see / ‘Cause if you’re lookin’ at me, / You’re lookin’ at country” (Lynn 5-8). She demonstrates that she has “old-fashion” values and experiences as a product of the southern working-class experience of the time, yet she is simultaneously going against this narrative by placing herself in the center of the conversation. While she’s putting her own image as a woman at the center of country music, her attributions back to her core values gave this song the space to grow in

popularity. For one, she expresses that she is the emblem of country music due to her prior experiences living in the country setting, playing into the nostalgia factor the genre appreciates. Lynn, in the song, also stakes a claim into her only being kind to a man if he will agree to marry her. By writing and singing the song in this way, Lynn allows her typical audience to relate to the song and its message, all the while very slowly turning the tide of country music by claiming that herself—a woman—is what country music is and should be. However, Lynn does not directly associate herself with the Women's Liberation movement of the time, as she goes on the record in 1976 stating, "I'm not a big fan of Women's Liberation, but maybe it will help women stand up for the respect they're due" (Lynn qtd. Buffwack and Oermann 309-10). While this statement may come across as anti-Women's Liberation, there is an inherent part of it that still advocates for women's advancement. It is within this space between progressivism and conservatism that Lynn creates music for her audience. At its core, "You're Lookin' at Country" is not a feminist anthem and Lynn is not a feminist, but showing that women could be something other than the heartbreak crooner mourning over a breakup are more frequently present at the end of the 1960s and the start of the 1970s.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Dolly Parton started to carve a new space that was more in line with the Women's Liberation energies that were more widespread outside of the slow-to-change field of country music. Interestingly, Parton was not signed under Bradley's Decca Records, the company responsible for creating many of the traditions for female country artists using the Nashville Sound. While Parton was part of a larger recording company headed by white men, they gave her the space to be her authentic self (Edwards 2-3). One of her earliest hits, "Dumb Blonde" (1967), has very little inspiration from the honkytonk tradition, and she does not fall victim to the heartbreak crooner stereotype as in Cline's "I Fall to Pieces." Rather,

Parton sings, “Just because I’m blonde, / Don’t think I’m dumb, / ‘Cause this dumb blonde ain’t nobody’s fool” (Parton 17-19). Instead of taking back the unfaithful man or standing by him, Parton insists that she will not be taken as a fool on the sake of her womanhood. While she may be upset over the loss of her lover, she does not cry for him or miss him—she goes on without him. More importantly, “Dumb Blonde” is the opening track of her debut album entitled *Hello, I’m Dolly*. By sending this message first, Parton is informing her audience that just because she’s blonde, a woman, and a country artist does not mean that she can be taken advantage of or fooled.

Parton has continued in this style throughout her entire career, and she outwardly critiques earlier notions of women’s representations in country music by playing into a hyperfeminized stereotype. In this way, Parton manages to use the ideas of the stereotype to be heard in the realm of country music, especially at the start of her career coming up against the products of white, male executives before her time. Yet, she still has managed to carve out a space for her voice to be heard, resulting in one of the first examples of true women’s agency in country music. Leigh H. Edwards contends, “Parton makes her gender critique by uplifting a negative image and linking it to a positive one, mixing the country music trope of the innocent and virtuous ‘mountain girl’ with her ‘hillbilly tramp’ persona” (Edwards 30). Parton’s performativity as the working-class “hillbilly tramp” allows her the space to continuously make strong gender critiques and be taken seriously by her conservative-leaning audience. In the present moment and even at the very onset of her career, Parton never shies away from her femininity, placing her image as a woman in country music at the heart of all of her work (Edwards 31). Parton, just like many of the other women before her and alongside her, had working-class experiences. However, Parton acknowledged her history and embraced her

womanhood at the same time with pomp displays of femininity. Parton's image, sound, and tone all combine to make her a very prominent artist in country music, and, her unapologetic lean and performance of her femininity has made her one of the most famous country artists of all time. Even placing this idea aside, Parton has never shied away from who she is and has always presented herself to her audience, thus giving her immense credibility and notoriety within the genre. Therefore, Parton created a new tradition for women in country music rooted in feminism, gender performance, and independence that goes against the lyrical content set forth by the white male elites who created the Nashville Sound in the 1960s.

Despite the mass visibility that the 1960s-era Nashville Sound brought to women in country music, these women did not experience agency within the industry. They had an emerging visibility in the genre; however, they were left without much power to control their own images, write their own music, or resist the ideologies of country music. The forces that shape country music today have both maintained and changed since then. In the 1960s, as Nashville emerged as the center of country music, female country singers were left without power. In a strange reversal that has not truly reversed the gender politics in the industry, women in the genre today have much more power, but suffer from a lack of visibility relative their male counterparts. For instance, in contemporary Nashville, Carrie Underwood, Miranda Lambert, Kelsea Ballerini, and Maren Morris are some of the most popular, groundbreaking artists in country music today; however, they are still not being played on country airwaves nearly as much as their male counterparts despite their country-pop influence. This trend of not playing women's records on country radio is relatively new, as countless women from the 1950s throughout the early 2010s saw striking success on the charts (Tsioulcas). Earlier artists' use of the burgeoning Nashville Sound greatly influenced their success, as they delivered music by

white men for white men; however, today's artists tend to shy away from catering to a male audiences for the sake of popularity. Even though female country artists still rely on their working-class roots, urban Nashville experiences, and pop music influences to cater to wider audiences similar to artists in the past, it's no longer working for them; however, it's still working for the men. In this case, increased visibility for female country artists could be extremely beneficial, which would lead to more agency for them within the genre. Looking at the 1960s as a source of inspiration for lyrical content may not be realistic for modern artists and their audiences, but the equitable radio play for men and women in the genre absolutely is. With an increase in airplay, modern female country artists can have the power and agency their 1960s-era counterparts did not, allowing them to make real structural changes in the politics of Nashville and on country radio.

## Endnotes

1.) In order to hear this change from honkytonk to the Nashville sound sonically, I would suggest listening to Kitty Wells' "It Wasn't God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels" (1952). The typical conventions of honkytonk, such as the fiddle and crying steel guitar, can clearly be heard unblended with one another and with the vocalist. For further listening in the realm of the honkytonk sound, I would suggest Ernest Tubb's "Travelin' Blues" (1956) and the Everly Brothers' "Bye Bye Love" (1957). Moving into the Nashville Sound, I would recommend first listening to Patsy Cline's "I Fall to Pieces" (1961). This song specifically has a seamless blending of instruments along with the vocal track to elicit strong emotions from the listener. For further listening, I would suggest George Jones' "She Thinks I Still Care" (1962) and Tammy Wynette's "Stand By Your Man" (1968). In these two songs, the evolution of the Nashville Sound can be heard, particularly in the sophistication of instruments and the lessening of vibrato to affect the mood of the song. Interestingly, elements of the honkytonk sound are making a comeback in contemporary country music, particularly in songs like (the incredibly sexist) "Honkytonk Badonkadonk" (2005) by Trace Adkins and "Heaven is a Honky Tonk" (2019) by The Highwomen. This demonstrates that the origins of country music are deeply ingrained in the culture of the genre, and the country emphasis on tradition remains important even today.

2.) The initial establishment of Nashville at the heart of country music was widely criticized throughout the 1960s due to Music Row's proximity to black families in the city (Hill 49). While the Country Music Association "looked to provide the genre with a markedly new socio-spatial identity while still preserving the music's rural spirit and deep connection to 'ordinary' Americans," it was at the expense of black families who had to deal with mostly white newcomers encroaching on predominantly African American neighborhoods for the sake of

creating a more city-focused identity for the genre (Hill 55). Much of the move to Nashville involved the forced removal and relocation of black families within the city to establish Music Row and Music Row Boulevard (now referred to as “Broadway”) (Hill 60). However, black families did try to fight back against the gentrification occurring in the city by enlisting the help of governmental agencies and the NAACP; however, they were still forced out by the white executives of Music Row and the white migrants in the city. This forced black people to purchase new homes well above market value, creating a massive state of black poverty in the city (Hill 61). This led to intensification in segregation in the city, and racial issues intensified in Nashville due to the forced relocation of black families in the 1960s (Hill 62). Therefore, this shift into the city for country music was largely at the expense of African Americans.

3.) It is important to note that many female country artists still occasionally sing this song, because it has been so influential in the scope of women’s country music. However, most versions of the song that are sung today play with the tone of the line, “‘Cause after all, he’s just a man” (Wynette 9). For instance, Carrie Underwood performed a live version of the song in an all-female country medley on her *Cry Pretty* arena tour. Tracing the origins of women in the genre, Underwood began with “Stand by Your Man,” though she quasi-mocked the idea that a woman should always stand by her man. By singing the line above quite sarcastically, she told her audience that, while Wynette’s song is historically important, the tone of the song can truly change with time.

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“It’s Us”: Mimicry in Jordan Peele’s *Us* (REVISED)

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## Women on the (Home)Front Lines:

### Southern White Women's Diaries as Rhetorical Spaces during the Civil War (REVISED)

#### **Introduction**

The act of writing in diaries, journals, letters, and other forms of inscribed expression are typically seen as solitary acts in today's culture and society; yet, most American women in the nineteenth century used any number of these tools to speak publicly about their conditions. Such expressions are necessary for organizing thoughts, feelings, emotions, and ideas both generally and concerning specific topics. For the white women in the American South during the Civil War (1861-1865), personal writings became a cornerstone for self-expression during a time of immense struggle. Despite their largely solitary and more isolated position in the South, these women managed to become active rhetors in their own sphere, as defined in their personal writings. Such written forms of expression were intended to be read or seen by close friends and family, or even the general public—as is the case with Mary Boykin Miller Chesnut,<sup>1</sup> for instance—and the act of writing as a means of expression, thought, and idea is a form of rhetoric that needs to be examined more closely to fully understand how the war shaped women's experiences in the South in the 1860s.

Despite the copious amount of writings from southern white women from this time period, there has been very little rhetorical analysis of their works.<sup>2</sup> While southern women were writing diaries in much larger numbers than northern women both before and during the war, their experiences seem to have been even more overlooked than those of northern women (Clabough xii). Casey Clabough argues that “the volume of female writing [from the South] is significant enough to have helped shape what the war meant to the South as a whole” (Clabough xii). With women from both the North and South documenting their wartime efforts at home, it is

peculiar that their contributions have been so widely forgotten. However, Mark M. Smith claims that women's voices in the South were not seen as important, and their writings are oftentimes pushed aside for the "Great Men" exemplified within traditional historical narratives (Smith 14, 7). Smith argues that we ignore the marginalized experiences of women, labeling their experiences—and thus rhetoric—as unimportant (Smith 13-14). With this in mind, an analysis on southern white women's writings during the Civil War has not been adequately examined. By taking a closer look into the diaries some southern women left behind, the rhetoric of these women is of great importance to understand what was happening in small, local southern communities in both the antebellum and wartime South.

In her book *The Rhetoric of Rebel Women: Civil War Diaries and Confederate Persuasion*, Kimberly Harrison lays the fundamental groundwork for much of my analysis here. Framing her argument, Harrison writes that women in the wartime South "needed to present themselves effectively to their publics—to family members, the local community, slaves and former slaves, soldiers (both Union and Confederate, and their God" (Harrison 3-4). Therefore, the white women writers at home in the South used their personal writings to make sense of the changing aspects of a wartime situation. In their diaries and journals, these women could express their thoughts and opinions about the war, but their ideas would be influenced by their potential audiences. While such writing helped to give them a voice that would be heard in southern society, their true thoughts, feelings, and emotions may not have been fully expressed over fears of public scrutiny. Furthermore, these types of writing are not the most widely known or studied; however, the local impact these women had on their communities is of great importance to understanding southern women's rhetoric of the time (Harrison 5). In this way, private thoughts turned into community influence, thus shaping the ways in which these women thought about

and wrote about the Civil War, which, in turn, had an effect on both their private and public rhetorics.

While rhetoric tends to focus on the art of persuasion, most of the women's diaries in this analysis were not widely read in their time; however, this does not mean that the personal writings from these women were not persuasive in practice, especially in their local communities. To understand this more clearly, a consideration of Kenneth Burke's *The Range of Rhetoric* is critical. Rhetoric can take on various forms and be persuasive in a variety of ways. Burke theorizes the difference between identification and persuasion by articulating, "[We] might well keep it in mind that a speaker persuades an audience by the use of stylistic identifications; his act of persuasion may be for the purpose of causing the audience to identify itself with the speaker's interests; and the speaker draws on identification of interests to establish rapport between himself and his audience" (Burke 46). Thinking in terms of the diary writing of southern white women from the Civil War era, much of this audience relation is internal. These women were largely trying to make sense of their situations, making themselves their own primary audiences. This bridging of the gap between antebellum life and wartime is persuasive for the primary audience. Additionally, these women use their personal diaries and journals as spaces to enhance their community involvement due to the communal nature of the diary at this time, because the persuasive notion of rhetoric extends beyond the page and "sets its mark upon all human relations" (Burke 46). Therefore, Burke's theory of identification with an audience and persuasion of an audience are central to understanding this analysis, because women rhetors wrote for themselves, and their writings then extended into their rhetorical communities when sharing these ideas with others in similar circumstances.

Returning briefly to Harrison's argument, she makes the point that "Although wartime responsibilities and contexts often thrust them into roles usually reserved for men, women's rhetorical acts frequently served to sustain Southern cultural ideals and the class, gender, and racial hierarchies that defined antebellum elite Southern society" (Harrison 7). These ideas Harrison discusses in her argument can clearly be found in southern white women's diaries from the period, and they absolutely sustain gender, racial, and class hierarchies. However, I argue that many southern white women regardless of their position as either an elite or working-class woman upheld similar core values in the wartime society, as evidenced in their writings. Southern cultural ties to conservative gender, race, and class run throughout the society as a whole, and the women's writings analyzed in this paper demonstrate that these women had a general sense of connection based on their inherent whiteness and womanhood in the wartime South. Since the war was essentially in their backyards, southern white women banded together to uphold their antebellum cultural ideas and experiences regardless of societal position or newfound occupation, grappling with new expectations per the wartime situation they found themselves living, which can be clearly seen when reading their journaled experiences rhetorically.

### **New (War) Fronts: Reading Written Personal Experience as Rhetoric**

Due to the proximity of the war in the South, most women could express some sort of agitation or stress that came with the changing wartime conditions. In order to combat these feelings and discuss them in detail, many southern white women kept extensive diaries. According to Mary Elizabeth Massey, "Some [women] might have said they were scarcely aware that a conflict raged, most would have noted varying degrees of stress, and many would have reported direct involvement in the horrors of war" (Massey xxi). Clearly, the South was

changing, and women were taking note. Southern women had to take on positions that they may not have chosen for themselves, such as nurses, teachers to enslaved children, and even field hands. Much of the anxieties over these changing positions and the loss of a familiar lifestyle were expressed by these women in their diaries, and the ways they write about their changing societal positions can be analyzed rhetorically to understand their true thoughts, feelings, and opinions on what the war was doing to their own communities.

Margo Culley makes the claim that “[w]omen diarists in particular wrote as family and community historians” before the war broke out, but the use of their personal diaries changed as the war raged (Culley 4). Women’s writings at this time turned more personal, yet they demonstrate how their personal experiences have a larger impact within their local communities. Sarah E. Gardner nuances Culley’s claim, arguing, “Diary keeping provided southern white women with a sense of calm during troubling times” (Gardner 21). In a sense, these women could ground themselves within their own writings, and their intimate expressions of fear, stress, and anxiety over the war and their own personal conditions serve to reveal much about the war at home. Kimberly Harrison extends the notion of diary writing in the Confederate South rhetorically: “[O]ften the diarists’ conception of rhetorical responsibility extended beyond their ability to convince soldiers to spare their property to their ability to maintain rhetorical self-control even as they lost control over their homes and belongings. Often these entries were rhetorical acts in themselves as by writing, diarists prepared for dreaded encounters with their enemies” (Harrison 53). At this time, many women were uprooted from their homes—or limited within their homes—once soldiers came in to fight. This limitation of their personal livelihoods became a cause to write, as Harrison expresses, in order to mentally and emotionally prepare for the eventual upheaval of their common existences. No matter the case, the women examined in

this paper have all undergone major changes in their lives as southern women due to the war, and reading their diaries and experiences rhetorically can serve to highlight the full struggle they had endured.

Arguably, the most famous diary of the Civil War era is Mary Boykin Miller Chesnut's *A Diary from Dixie*. In her account, Chesnut details life as an elite southern white woman who is tasked with new challenges as her husband leaves to fight in the war, and she is left managing the plantation back home in Virginia.<sup>3</sup> For Chesnut, managing a plantation is a position she never would have imagined holding in society. Surprisingly, Chesnut is pro-abolition, yet her rhetoric is largely embedded in incredibly racist ideas. In her account, she writes, "It is a crowning misdemeanor for us to hold still in slavery those Africans whom they brought here from Africa . . . Those pernicious Africans!" (Chesnut 129-30). While she wants slavery to end, her sentiments are not with freeing the enslaved people on the basis of their enslavement; she believes that the system is too challenging for her to uphold and endure, thus her call to end it. Chesnut clearly is ingrained in the same thought process as the society around her in terms of race, but her stance on abolition is slightly different than the beliefs of those around her. Having to manage the plantation, Chesnut expresses her fear with dealing with the enslaved people as well, which is a cause for her to hold the opinions she does. An acquaintance of Chesnut was killed by an enslaved person, leading Chesnut to fear for her own life while managing the house and plantation (Chesnut 128). Reading this in terms of her thoughts on abolition for her personal benefit, her stance begins to make more sense for her personally. Her fear and new position are leading her to develop and consider such thoughts despite their inherent racism. As expressed in her diary, she does not want the positions of slaveowner and plantation manager, leading her to grapple with slavery in her own way.

Chesnut continues to express more progressive ideas embedded in racist and sexist notions of thought throughout her diary, especially on the basis of women's rights. While Chesnut is not a staunch advocate for the advancement of women in nineteenth-century American society, she does make the argument that women deserve more credit than they are given due to the conditions they are forced to endure, particularly during the war. Considering the new jobs and positions women undertook in the wartime South, she writes, "Women will not stay at home; [we] will go out to see and be seen, even if it be by the Devil himself" (Chesnut 164). Before the war, southern women tended to stay at home unless there was a social function that necessitated their presence. This urging from Chesnut for women to be seen and heard is largely attributed to the effects of the war on these women. Since many of them took on new positions or were uprooted from their homes in various ways, their commonality as women allowed them to have a voice in southern society that previously limited their agency. Chesnut sees what is happening with other women (particularly elite women) and using her own experience to demonstrate that women deserve more of a place in the South, because they are also struggling through the war as well.

Chesnut may have strange, complex ways at coming to her opinions on the war, but there is a rhetorical importance in her examination of her own beliefs. While she eventually adopts an abolitionist stance rooted in racism and advocates for the agency of women, her rhetoric cannot be separated from the social contexts of the South. For instance, Harrison makes the argument that Southern women "played an active role in the construction and support of a collective Confederate identity" (Harrison 171). While many Confederates may not have necessarily agreed with her views, they would be more apt to listen to her because of her societal position and

experiences under the war. Therefore, her written published experience helped shape the Confederate identity post-war as her diary was available for the public to read.

Furthermore, Chesnut remained pro-Confederacy throughout her diary and for her entire life. After the war officially ended, Chesnut expresses her intense feelings toward the North: “We are scattered and stunned, the remnant of heart left alive within us filled with brotherly hate” (Chesnut 390). In this excerpt, she is speaking on behalf of the entire Confederacy. She is expressing that only hate remains toward the North, especially due to the physical state of devastation the South in the immediate postbellum period. With broken morale, physical destruction, and pent-up hostility, all Chesnut could feel is a sense of intense disdain, which would make the reconstruction process quite difficult. To further this notion of hatred, she refers to President Abraham Lincoln as a “drunken tailor” who will carelessly stitch the nation back together. Little did she know, Lincoln would be assassinated before he had a genuine opportunity to reconcile the divided nation, but those feelings of hatred toward the North and Lincoln after the war were not held solely by Chesnut. For instance, Harrison continues her argument of how Confederate women shaped the rhetoric of the Confederacy postbellum, arguing, “During the war, and even in its aftermath as many continued to pine for the Confederacy, these diarists implied that it was not only the public speeches of politicians, military officers, and ministers that shaped the cultural landscape, cultivated nationalism, and affected the lived realities of those touched by conflict” (Harrison 171). Everyone who endured the war in the South had a claim into what postwar conditions would look and feel like, thus shaping the reunited nation as a whole. Therefore, the experiences Chesnut faced during the war were shared with many other women at the time whose accounts may not have been as acclaimed, and their collective

experiences as evidenced in their diaries did manage to shape the ideas of the Confederacy and the post-war South.

Matching the sentiments of Chesnut, Alice “Nannie” Edmonds Rudasill was a southern woman with strong nationalist ties both during and after the war. For example, as the war was raging, Rudasill made the claim in her diary that she would rather have everyone perish than to be “left alone to the mercy of Lincoln” (Rudasill 3). Rudasill’s thoughts are on full display in her diary, and she does not shy away from direct criticisms of the Union. Her strong ties to the Confederacy, given that her husband was a soldier enlisted in the Confederate army and that she was left to care for a young son on her own, are incredibly apparent from the start of her writing (Rudasill 1). Her strong disdain for the North shows the strong feelings and opinions women had and developed over time as the war progressed, and Rudasill personally did whatever she needed to do to ensure the South would have a conceivable victory in the war.

The main way Rudasill contributed to the war effort in the South was by caring for Confederate soldiers. Mainly, Rudasill would supply them with additional food and comfort items, and she would give what she had to them before she would utilize it for her own family. For instance, she writes of two soldiers stopping by her residence to spend the night in her home with her, her aunts, her cousins, and her child. By the morning, to Rudasill’s complete surprise, a general and over two hundred privates appeared at her doorstep for assistance (Rudasill 7-8). Rudasill and her family took all of the supplies they had at hand, and they gave everything to the troops; however, this took a great toll on the family personally and financially. Rudasill writes, “Ma got some apples [for] \$5.00 per bar. today & butter 25 cts. per lb. Poor soldiers I expect they will have to tribble it” (Rudasill 13). Since giving all they had to the soldiers, the family had little left for themselves; yet, Rudasill was still insistent on giving to the soldiers. Even when she

had nothing, she still strove to give the soldiers the apples. This shows her commitment to the war effort at home, and her writing demonstrates her pride in doing so. Her documentation of such a simple yet important event highlights the pride and nationalistic fervor she feels when giving everything to the Confederate soldiers needing assistance. From her rhetoric, it is clear that she is pleased with her decision even if it means suffering for the cause.

Rudasill's strong sense of Confederate nationalism is evident in her rhetoric, and this is further expressed through her actions. By feeding the soldiers and giving them all she had, she could help bring the Confederacy to victory. While this action may seem small and individual, it is moments like these that helped perpetuate the war effort in the South. This action, then, can be read as rhetorical because she is showing her interests as similar to her audience (Burke 46). While her writing might originally have been meant for herself or a familial audience, Rudasill herself becomes her audience, and she is able to express her pride in her actions to herself in an open, safe space. In turn, the action of caring for the soldiers promotes her own personal ideas of Confederate values and southern heritage over the course of the war. Such ideas can be traced through the works of other diarists as well, showing that Rudasill's experiences and ideas may not have been unique, but rather a more universal shared rhetoric.

While Chesnut and Rudasill may have had similar rhetoric concerning the spirit and value of the Confederacy, Cornelia Peake McDonald did not have such sentiments until later in the war. At the very beginning of the war, McDonald was forced from her home by Confederate troops, leaving herself and her nine children left to fend for themselves, because her husband and their father was fighting the war (McDonald 3). From her diary, it is evident that McDonald held a clear resentment for the army and for the war as a whole; she was simply trying to care for her numerous children, and the war completely derailed her entire life. This initial bitterness toward

the war is quite different from Chesnut and Rudasill, showing that not all women initially encouraged and supported wartime activity. The war destroyed towns, ripped families apart, and forced families—such as McDonald’s—to relocate. Therefore, many women resented what the war did to them, further affecting their actions and, in turn, their rhetoric around wartime conditions.

After securing shelter for herself and her children just outside of Winchester, Virginia, McDonald remained fearful that her life could be completely uprooted once again. Virginia was a popular state for battle due to its proximity between the North and the South, leaving her in a state of vulnerability to the horrors of war. Knowing a battle was on the horizon, she writes, “I sent all the children to bed early, put out the lights, and fastened the doors in the lower story, then took my seat up stairs [sic] by my chamber window to await whatever might come” (McDonald 20). Understanding that her life may completely change again, McDonald remained prepared for the worst, yet also quite fearful for what was to come. McDonald did manage to retain her home, but her wartime anxieties of forced relocation did not fade. Later in her diary, she explains, “Early the next morning the enemy began the bombardment of the town . . . [and] some shells went through the houses, frightening the inhabitants terribly” (McDonald 186). For McDonald, the fear was ever-present, and her rhetoric clearly expresses this. While she notes instances where she cared for soldiers in war, her main goal was to keep her children safe in one space (McDonald 186-88).

Even though McDonald was not actively aiding the war effort or calling for its continuation, her sentiments are largely shared by many women of the time. The rhetoric around the destructive capabilities of the war is present in almost every southern woman’s account of the time period, because it impacted their lives so drastically. To this idea, Harrison articulates, “In

times of uncertainty, they [women] also relied more upon their diaries as companions, conversing with them in the absence of friends and family and using personal writing as a tool for self-persuasion as they navigated new rhetorical contexts” (Harrison 22). For McDonald, her entire experience with the war was one of uncertainty, which is clearly expressed within her diary. While she clearly wants to aid the Confederacy more closely, her experiences of being uprooted and the fear of removal once again prevent her from doing more. In this way, the war and perpetual fear around it became a part of daily life, and women, like McDonald, had to articulate this new sense of tension in the South in the 1860s.

Lucy Rebecca Buck discusses this tension in her diary, as she became responsible for taking care of her siblings, maintaining the home, and caring for Confederate soldiers as a young teenager. Over time, Buck’s fear of relocation turned into anger and resentment for what the war had done to her home and her personal life. Hailing from Virginia, Buck was in the middle of a plethora of wartime activity, thus forcing her to take on various occupations to better serve the Confederate military. While caring for soldiers at her home in Rose Hill, Virginia, in November of 1862, Buck writes, “The forenoon was pretty much spent in feeding soldiers, running up and down the stairs, and harkening to numberless requests from them” (Buck 157). As her life became increasingly consumed by the war, her hostility toward it subsequently increased. She clearly did not like what the war was doing to her life, yet she continued to aid the war effort as part of her womanly duties and expectations in wartime southern society by performing the role of caretaker for the male soldiers.

In fact, Buck completely resented the life she was living and wanted to return to her elite antebellum lifestyle. This hostility expressed in her diary can clearly be seen when she states, “Living a most indolent miserably useless life today . . . soldiers in bright and early for

breakfast” (Buck 290-91). She sees her efforts toward helping the soldiers as essentially useless, and she does not think about the larger effects of war. Considering that she has previously been consumed with her own society and small, local community, her anger and confusion as a relatively young woman thrust into a state of war makes sense. While she could not express these thoughts openly for the sake of being labeled as unpatriotic, Buck relies on her diary to vent her frustrations, not realizing that this, too, was a public space. Yet, her unabridged thoughts are quite important, because they show that not all women were eagerly helping the war effort. Even though she does live through the war, her resentment while writing about her teenage days under a time of war remain consistent through the remainder of her diary. Clearly, all women had their own encounters and experiences with the war that shaped their personal rhetoric, and their diaries were spaces of rhetorical inquiry about the war and their contributions to the war effort.

As the war was raging, the children in the South still needed to attend school. Therefore, many women became educators due to the overwhelming need for students to earn an education. On the quality of the teachers being produced in the South, Massey argues that “Women who desired to teach were not bothered by a lack of accreditation or certification, for anyone who announced her intention to educate the youth of a community could conduct classes in her home or elsewhere provided she could enroll the necessary students” (Massey 120). Schools were opening in small houses throughout the South, allowing students to continue their education with teachers who had little to no experience teaching. These teachers could then express their opinions and ideas openly with their students without hesitation, offering the younger generation a space to adopt the ideas of women embedded in a wartime structure.

Ann Webster Gordon Christian, one of the new teachers in the wartime South, taught at the Charity School in Richmond, Virginia, for one year and then moved deeper into the South for

the remainder of the war (Christian 1). Relocating to Mississippi for the remaining years of the war, she—separately—taught both black and white children on a plantation about the Word of God (Christian 1-2). Teachers, especially at this time, had great influence over their students, as their voices and ideas shaped what the children thought about the war. Christian understood this fact, and she did not take her position lightly; she reflects on this continuously in her diary. Christian explains, “The children have a few books & will hear others say some of the lessons this morn” (Christian 50). Clearly, Christian did not have the best conditions or materials for teaching, and the students largely relied on her and their peers for guidance. In her diary, Christian expresses her anger toward the inadequate materials, but knows that the children are still learning something from her (Christian 50-51).

A major reason for Christian not having enough materials to teach is that mostly all goods and supplies were being utilized to aid the war effort, and Christian herself was fine with having fewer materials as long as the war would continue (Christian 51). In her reflections on teaching the students, Christian never outright condemns slavery nor does she encourage it; instead, she teaches the Word as it is written and interpreted by her, which is what the students go on to learn<sup>4</sup> (Christian 80). Therefore, she does not require additional materials to teach her message to her students, and she can still reach them with her own words and thoughts. While reminiscing about a lecture she gave her students, Christian remembers stating, “But there are times when the presence of the Spirit is easily discovered. . . . It is this persuasion that gives the believer strength in weakness” (Christian 81-82). Rather than directly focusing on race relations at the time, Christian uses the Word of God to demonstrate the struggles of the Confederate soldiers. In this specific lecture, she calls upon God to give the soldiers strength to keep fighting for the cause. While she is not directly stating her political beliefs to her students, they can be

implied with the rest of her rhetoric. Her students, then, would most likely want and urge for the same ideas. Therefore, her rhetoric directly impacts a larger audience on the nature of her occupation during the war effort.

Despite the various occupations, tasks, and lifestyles these southern white women had to adapt to during the war, each wrote about them in ways that are rhetorically important. Most of them, writing to and for themselves, or perhaps their family members, used their diaries as spaces to reflect on the war and form their thoughts and ideas about daily occurrences. This writing, then, shaped the ways they went about their daily lives, thought about the war, and remembered the war. As Harrison argues, nontraditional rhetoric, such as using real experiences as a space for rhetorical intervention rather than just the written word, is important to understand the entirety of the wartime conditions in the South (Harrison 172). Furthermore, reading their experiences rhetorically offers a space to allow these women's voices to be heard and understood in the direct context in which they produced their diaries during the Civil War.

### **Conclusion: Women's Agency in Wartime Writing**

The women's diaries analyzed here demonstrate how the written word provided these women with a sense of agency in the wartime South—a space that did not actually afford women a space to have control over their own lives. In antebellum southern society, women did not have major roles or spaces afforded to them to begin with, and the war gave them a place to have a new role in their communities that needed to be considered. The war forced and encouraged women to take on tasks not permitted to them previously, and, while many women clearly did not like these new changes, many of the women saw it as their patriotic or noble duty to take up the cause. Yet, no matter their beliefs, the women turned to writing to express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions on the changing tides in the South. Almost like a befriended companion,

their diaries became vessels of social change, written agency, and provocative thought in their respective communities and within their created rhetorical spaces.

As Karlyn Kohrs Campbell points out, “critics attempt to show how a rhetorical act has the potential to teach, to delight, to move, to flatter, to alienate, or to hearten” (Campbell 2). While, in this case, the women were writing mainly for themselves and then for a public audience, they still needed to be persuasive in their own rhetoric to be convincing when contemplating various facets of wartime activity. For example, Chesnut wanted to convince a larger audience that the cause of the Confederacy was noble. Rudasill wanted to prove that small actions made a huge difference toward perpetuating the war. McDonald simply wanted to live outside of a state of fear and raise her children openly. Buck wanted the war to end so she could return to her antebellum lifestyle. Christian sought to teach children about God and, in turn, the Confederate cause. Individually, each woman shaped her *own* rhetoric in her *own* diary to convince herself or persuade herself of something, and these individual persuasions all culminate in one overarching narrative of women rhetors in the wartime South influencing other women’s thoughts and ideas. All of the actions of these women helped perpetuate the war effort in various ways (both physically and ideologically), and each of these women helped shape and contextualize the war at home by writing of their experiences in their diaries. Their experiences, in and of themselves, can also be read as rhetorical spaces where the women lived out their written words, thus further helping the war effort and solidifying their new personal causes. Therefore, southern white women’s diaries from the Civil War can best be understood when read as spaces where agency was both created and acted upon, demonstrating that these women had a much larger role in the Civil War and the Confederate war effort than previously considered in most popular historical and rhetorical accounts.

## Endnotes

1. From the start of her diary, Chesnut knew that her writing would eventually be published (Massey 120-21, Young). She held a prominent position in elite southern society, thus giving her access to social and political information that other women of the time were not privy to.

Therefore, her account would serve as an inside look into the workings of the Confederacy from her own perspective, allowing her the space to critique society as a whole and the politics of the Civil War.

2. In this paper, I will be writing from the perspective Cinthia Gannett so expertly describes in her book *Gender and the Journal: Diaries and Academic Discourse*. She writes that the journal or diary has historically been a public space for people, particularly women, to express themselves and have people listen to them because no space is ever completely private (2). In this way, “discourses and the people who generate them are always historically situated and thus have both historical and social contexts, constraints, and consequences, and that gender has historically played a critical role in situating all readers and writers” (10). Therefore, we cannot separate the fact that women in the wartime South were using the journal as a public rhetorical space to have a sense of agency at a time when their world was rapidly changing and evolving. Gender is an inherent part of the journal and the analysis I bring forward in this paper, and all of the journals in this paper have been read and considered under this lens.

2. The Chesnuts were very political family, and they had close relations with Jefferson Davis, the president of the Confederacy, and Verena Davis, the First Lady of the Confederacy (Young).

While Chesnut’s account may not be the most standard of the time, its fame in the contemporary moment has merit for its analysis here, especially since her work is so frequently examined.

3. It is important to note, as previously mentioned in the text, that Christian taught both enslaved black children and white children while on the plantation in Mississippi. Therefore, we can assume that she taught similar lectures to all of the students due to the emphasis on the Word of God as concrete, and also the fact that she never specifies in her diary which lectures were given to which students.

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**“Honkytonk, Heartbreak, and Hit Songs:****The Evolution of Women in 1960s Country Music” (CONFERENCE)**

In the early 1960s, Nashville, Tennessee, became the quintessential hub of country music, which brought about a major change in the sound of country music—especially women’s country music. The centralization of the genre in Nashville itself has become part of the complex culture of country music, influencing the sounds, producers, and writers of country music for decades. The establishment of an industry center in the South made it easier for artists to connect with a wider swath of their mostly rural, white, working-class target audience. At the same time, the establishment of Nashville as the center of the industry allowed artists, especially women country singers who rarely entered the industry before the late 1950s, to be exploited and consumed by the emerging power of the country music industry (Neal 187-88, Hill 3). While the country music of the 1960s offered more visibility for women in the genre than ever before, such success necessitated the dependence on radio hits, sales, popularity, and—of course—money to appease the executives in charge of producing music for female country stars. While one may assume, based on the rise of female stars within the industry and the changes in lyrical content of their hit songs, that the 1960s represented a significant increase in women’s agency within the country music industry. In fact, these artists were being exploited by record producers for their own popularity and financial gain in the newly emerging sounds and politics of Nashville at this time.

The earliest formations of country music as a definable genre left women on the sidelines in most cases. The few women who did manage to make a name for themselves in the early days of the genre and through the 1960s further struggled with societal expectations for women, because “social propriety dictated that ‘nice girls’ did not entertain publicly or travel without

proper chaperones” (Neal 33). Therefore, women did not have the same chances of having their voices heard on the radio due to the nature of their essential ostracization from the early country music scene, and the ones who were heard were kept under close control and monitoring from both record executives and male fans of country music.

One of the first prominent female country stars of the 1960s was Kitty Wells, who went on to become one of the most famous and groundbreaking female stars of all time. Early in her career, without the industry centered in Nashville, Wells had no choice but to record simple country tracks in her hometown. However, Wells released “It Wasn’t God Who Made Honky Tonk Angels” in 1952, and her popularity skyrocketed very quickly over the course of two months, giving her the ability to travel and record more openly. Despite the track’s and Wells’ popularity in the 1950s, Wells could not break free of the social expectations placed on women of the era. Many critics—a group largely made up of white men—condemned the song, claiming that “its premise [is] that hypocritical, deceitful men are responsible for fallen women” (Bufwack and Oermann 178). Wells does criticize men in the song, singing such lines as “It’s a shame that all the blame is on us women,” because “Most every heart that’s ever broken / Was because there always was a man to blame” (Wells 10, 13-14). She is revealing the double-standard in heartbreak, and she is putting more of the blame onto men for something women would have almost exclusively been condemned for in the 1950s. In fact, the song itself was banned from numerous television broadcasts and from being performed at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville for being “too suggestive,” yet the fans—especially women—loved Wells’ sound and style (Bufwack and Oermann 179). By recording songs that women could relate to, Wells opened the door for other female artists to write and sing such songs, and she demonstrated to the white, male executives in the honkytonk era that women could make a name for themselves in country

music by playing songs written for and sung to primarily women when given the freedom to do so.

In an attempt to make country music both more palatable and mainstream in the 1960s, producers and artists adopted the style known as the Nashville Sound. Jeremy Hill contends, “the Nashville Sound quickly became the symbol for a new incarnation of country music: slick, overproduced, and expressly commercial” (Hill 36). The sleek tone and overproduced sound are vastly different from the 1950s honkytonk style Kitty Wells utilized, and the commercialization of country music was essentially a brand-new component due to the establishment of Nashville at the center of the genre. And, for country music listeners, this was an abrupt, almost sudden change stylistically. While some of the instruments remained consistent between honkytonk and the Nashville Sound, they were used in different ways. The steel guitar was toned down, sounds more seamlessly blended together, and influences from popular radio sounds were implemented into country music. The Nashville Sound is a blending of popular music elements and country music elements to create a unified sound—a sound that completely changed the face of the genre into the 1960s.

Notably so, the change in sound also changed the target audience for country music as a genre. Such fans claimed that the newly evolving sound of country radio took on too much inspiration from outside genres, such as pop and R&B, and the true flavor of country music had been lost in favor of creating popular mainstream music. While this change allowed for country music to gain in popularity with wider audiences in the 1960s, it essentially isolated the earliest listeners of the genre if they did not want to adapt to the changing sounds of Nashville.

Considering the influence of the audience in the implementation of the Nashville Sound in country music, homogenous groups of producers and record executives strove to create

popular songs in an effort to solidify their own importance in the city by producing songs that would be popular at country radio. Two of the leading men responsible for the creation of the new sound were Owen Bradley of Decca Records and Chet Atkins of RCA Records (Neal 191). These men capitalized off of the artists who fell in line with the Nashville Sound, with the result that “their collective sound was featured on almost all the records made in Nashville during those years, regardless of who the lead singer or star was” (Neal 193). These men largely used the same backing bands and production teams—made up entirely of white men—to create the music coming from Nashville at this time (Neal 193). This system made it so that the same team could create numerous hits simultaneously by easily placing a different artist into the recording booth each time, allowing for executives and producers to make a lot of songs very quickly, and, therefore, a lot of money. In turn, both Nashville and country music, then, were dominated by an exclusive group of white, male executives, which consequently impacted the songs being created and the ones becoming massive radio hits.

One of the major reasons for this discrimination against women was the long-standing tradition of needing a certifiable country experience to create authentic country music; however, the switch to the Nashville Sound left this idea behind, allowing more women to participate in the genre despite their lack of agency within it. In the longer version of the paper, I continue to discuss this at length. For the sake of time, I will move on, but I am more than happy to take any questions you have in the Q&A.

This shift to the city also allowed more women to follow in the footsteps of Wells and become successful country music artists, yet the politics and big money of Nashville undercut their success in numerous ways. The early 1960s in county music saw the emergence of one of the biggest stars in country music history: Patsy Cline. Cline managed to balance her honkytonk,

working-class roots with the new city lifestyle and sound of Nashville, leading to her incredible success in the industry. However, this switch was not inspired by Cline herself. She fell in line with the elite white executives who wanted her to gain success for their personal benefit, affording them a prominent space in the emergence of the new sounds of country music at Cline's expense. Early in her career, Cline "displayed remarkable yodeling ability, and she always thought of herself as an up-tempo honky-tonker rather than a heartbreak balladeer" (Bufwack and Oermann 255). Cline did find success with her honkytonk style, particularly with one of her first major hits "Walking After Midnight" (1956), but this trend was quickly fading in the realm of country music. While she wanted to remain true to her original sound, Owen Bradley, the chief executive officer of Decca Records, worked with Cline in the early 1960s to alter her sound to fit the new tides of Nashville, and she is the artist who eventually set the tone for the Nashville Sound (Bufwack and Oermann 255). Cline herself, in this way, did not necessarily care about the popularity; she wanted to make music for the sake of making music. Nevertheless, the pressures from record executives pushed her into the Nashville Sound where she did manage to carve quite a notable place for herself in spite of her exploitation.

Cline's massive hit that set the tone for the Nashville Sound, "I Fall to Pieces" (1961), was not written or produced by Cline herself. Rather, a team of all white men wrote, produced, and released the song with her as the chosen artist for the hit. The song reached heights of wild popularity with audiences in both country and pop music, demonstrating that a female country artist could reach levels of major success using the Nashville Sound. In the song itself, Cline sings:

You tell me to find someone else to love,  
Someone who love me too  
The way you used to do,  
But each time I go out with someone new,

You walk by and I fall to pieces. (Cline 16-20)

Clearly, Cline is using the heartbreak and heartache style song that became popular after she introduced it here in 1961. This style was meant to replicate the heartache a woman should feel or would feel when a breakup occurred, hence the fall into pieces at what could have been. As evidenced in the lyrics, Cline plays the role of the victim of heartbreak, as she falls apart at the hands of a man. It seems as though she is the one unable to get over the heartache, and she continuously “falls to pieces” over him instead of moving on with her love life. Coming from the tradition set forth by Wells who pointed the lens at men who exploit women, Cline’s style and lyrics seem quite different from where women in the genre seemed to be heading just a few years prior. Cline positions herself as the one who is broken, with nothing to be done about it. Nevertheless, such themes became incredibly popular with country music audiences, and artists and producers alike continued to write and release such songs.

Unfortunately, the precedent set by Cline was embedded in the musical politics of Nashville in the 1960s. Other up-and-coming women in country music followed Cline’s model which resulted in numerous songs in the same vein to be continuously written and produced. Yet, the sound of a woman’s voice on the radio did not necessarily result in agency for these artists.

In 1966, Loretta Lynn shot into a position of prominence in Nashville and country music with her hit song “You Ain’t Woman Enough (To Take My Man).” Like Cline, Lynn began her career in the honkytonk tradition of the 1950s inspired by Wells, but the music executives at Decca Records pushed her toward recording in style with the burgeoning Nashville Sound (Bufwack and Oermann 307). For example, in the song, Lynn both writes and sings, “Sometimes a man start lookin' at things that he don't need / He took a second look at you, but he's in love with me / Well I don't know where they leave you, oh, but I know where I'll stand / And you ain't woman enough to take my man” (Lynn 10-13). By arguing that the other woman is less of a

woman due to the man thinking about sexually pursuing her, Lynn is making the case that women need to defend and protect their men in an effort not to lose them. While Lynn had minor hits on country radio throughout the early part of the 1960s, “You Ain’t Woman Enough (To Take My Man)” was an instant crossover hit with pop radio. Much of this popularity, however, is associated with a “country-gal spunk” that was refreshing for listeners (Bufwack and Oermann 309). Despite the spunkiness Lynn delivers in this song in both lyric and vocal performance, it keeps true to the tune of sexism in country music at this time, falling in line with previous songs of heartache and women’s disenfranchisement.

Holding strongly to this particular trend in country music, one of the genre’s most notorious and beloved songs was released in 1968 just after Lynn’s precedent: “Stand by Your Man” by Tammy Wynette. In fact, “Stand by Your Man” is one of the best-selling songs in all of country music even today (Bufwack and Oermann 333). Not only was the song a number one hit on country radio, it quickly made its way into the top twenty songs on the pop charts in 1968, achieving the goal of what the Nashville Sound set out to do (Bufwack and Oermann 333). Yet, the song itself is steeped lyrics that limit women’s agency from Wynette herself and Billy Sherrill: “But if you love him you’ll forgive him / Even though he’s hard to understand / And if you love him, oh, be proud of him / ‘Cause after all he’s just a man” (Wynette 6-9). While placing this in terms with the 1960s audience it lent itself to, Wynette clearly struck a chord with her white, female, working-class audience who may have made a similar decision to stay with a man based on societal pressures. She related with these women through her lyrics, demonstrating that many women were suffering the same fate at the hands of men, but they had to “stand by [their] man / And show the world [they] love him” in order to participate in and be accepted in society (Wynette 14-15). As Bufwack and Oermann claim, “Her gripping, teardrop-in-every-note

vocal style seemed to weep for every working-class woman who'd ever tolerated a beer-swilling, unfaithful slob; who'd ever slaved for a pack of ungrateful brats; who'd ever endured neglect and abuse. She was the choked-with-heartbreak victim, a doormat for her man and society" (Bufwack and Oermann 333). Her expressions of anger, sadness, and even hope show that many women were in a similar situation, and they also chose to also stand by their men.

However, not all female country artists bought into the more conservative trends of the women before them, and some well-known and up-and-coming artists went against the grain to produce massive hits.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Dolly Parton started to carve a new space that was more in line with the Women's Liberation energies that were more widespread outside of the slow-to-change field of country music. Interestingly, Parton was not signed under Bradley's Decca Records, the company responsible for creating many of the traditions for female country artists using the Nashville Sound. While Parton was part of a larger recording company headed by white men, they gave her the space to be her authentic self (Edwards 2-3). One of her earliest hits, "Dumb Blonde" (1967), has very little inspiration from the honkytonk tradition, and she does not fall victim to the heartbreak crooner stereotype as in Cline's "I Fall to Pieces." Rather, Parton sings, "Just because I'm blonde, / Don't think I'm dumb, / 'Cause this dumb blonde ain't nobody's fool" (Parton 17-19). Instead of taking back the unfaithful man or standing by him, Parton insists that she will not be taken as a fool on the sake of her womanhood. While she may be upset over the loss of her lover, she does not cry for him or miss him—she goes on without him. More importantly, "Dumb Blonde" is the opening track of her debut album entitled *Hello, I'm Dolly*. By sending this message first, Parton is informing her audience that just because she's

blonde, a woman, and a country artist does not mean that she can be taken advantage of or fooled.

Parton has continued in this style throughout her entire career, and she outwardly critiques earlier notions of women's representations in country music by playing into a hyperfeminized stereotype. In this way, Parton manages to use the ideas of the stereotype to be heard in the realm of country music, especially at the start of her career coming up against the products of white, male executives before her time. Yet, she still has managed to carve out a space for her voice to be heard, resulting in one of the first examples of true women's agency in country music. Leigh H. Edwards contends, "Parton makes her gender critique by uplifting a negative image and linking it to a positive one, mixing the country music trope of the innocent and virtuous 'mountain girl' with her 'hillbilly tramp' persona" (Edwards 30). Parton's performativity as the working-class "hillbilly tramp" allows her the space to continuously make strong gender critiques and be taken seriously by her conservative-leaning audience. In the present moment and even at the very onset of her career, Parton never shies away from her femininity, placing her image as a woman in country music at the heart of all of her work (Edwards 31).

Despite the mass visibility that the 1960s-era Nashville Sound brought to women in country music, these women did not experience agency within the industry. They had an emerging visibility in the genre; however, they were left without much power to control their own images, write their own music, or resist the ideologies of country music. The forces that shape country music today have both maintained and changed since then. In the 1960s, as Nashville emerged as the center of country music, female country singers were left without power. In a strange reversal that has not truly reversed the gender politics in the industry, women

in the genre today have much more power, but suffer from a lack of visibility relative their male counterparts. For instance, in contemporary Nashville, Carrie Underwood, Miranda Lambert, Kelsea Ballerini, and Maren Morris are some of the most popular, groundbreaking artists in country music today; however, they are still not being played on country airwaves nearly as much as their male counterparts despite their country-pop influence. This trend of not playing women's records on country radio is relatively new, as countless women from the 1950s throughout the early 2010s saw striking success on the charts (Tsioulcas). Earlier artists' use of the burgeoning Nashville Sound greatly influenced their success, as they delivered music by white men for white men; however, today's artists tend to shy away from catering to a male audiences for the sake of popularity. Even though female country artists still rely on their working-class roots, urban Nashville experiences, and pop music influences to cater to wider audiences similar to artists in the past, it's no longer working for them; however, it's still working for the men. In this case, increased visibility for female country artists could be extremely beneficial, which would lead to more agency for them within the genre. Looking at the 1960s as a source of inspiration for lyrical content may not be realistic for modern artists and their audiences, but the equitable radio play for men and women in the genre absolutely is. With an increase in airplay, modern female country artists can have the power and agency their 1960s-era counterparts did not, allowing them to make real structural changes in the politics of Nashville and on country radio.

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**“It’s Us”: Mimicry at Work between Adelaide and Red in Jordan Peele’s *Us***

(CONFERENCE)

After producing *Get Out*, arguably one of the greatest horror films of all time, Academy Award winner Jordan Peele returned to the silver screen with his sophomore horror film *Us*. Starring Lupita Nyong’o as both Adelaide Wilson and Red,<sup>2</sup> the film centers upon her characters and their inherent duality. While all of the characters in the film have a Tethered counterpart, the film emphasizes the experiences of the Wilson family and their interactions with their respective others. This duality between the characters creates the terror felt within the film, and there is a clear sense that horror stems from seeing a reflection of the self in the Tethered (or Other). In this way, the premise of the film can be connected to the ideas of mimicry set forth in Homi Bhabha’s “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse.” The Tethered are almost identical to their aboveground counterparts, and the only differences can be traced to the ideas of privilege and power: the aboveground people have the power and the Tethered have been severely oppressed. There are moments in the film where the Tethered and the aboveground persons interact with one another, revealing the sense of similarity—and even slight difference—between these two groups. The power struggle between them on the basis of class, race, and culture is evidently important within their interactions and their struggle for either gaining or maintaining power—no matter how much or how little—in this context.

While the plot may seem straightforward for those who have already seen the film, there are subtle nuances that frame the critique Peele is making throughout the film. Kinitra D. Brooks at *Elle Magazine* makes the claim that “The doppelgänger is such a rich horror metaphor because it points to how we define humans and the boundaries of humanity. The appearance of such a being causes sheer terror, through confronting one’s own Other” (“*Us* Makes Us Look in the

Mirror”). Bhabha asserts a similar point in “Of Mimicry and Man,” theorizing that “Mimicry *repeats* rather than *re-presents*” (128; emphasis original). In this way, the Tethered are simply repeats or copies of the aboveground people, which falls in line with their existence. It is briefly stated in the film that the Tethered are part of a failed social experiment where the government attempted to clone the body and soul, but the soul could not be copied (Peele). Therefore, the “boundaries of humanity,” as Brooks mentions, are truly that of horror, because the Other looks identical but it is not exactly the same; there is something missing.

The mimicry extends into racial and class dynamics in the plot as well, which I discuss briefly here. However, in the longer version of this paper, I discuss the racial and class dynamics between Gabe and Josh as another one of Peele’s critiques on American society. For the sake of time, I will focus primarily on the relationship between Adelaide and Red, but I am more than happy to answer any questions you may have about this in the Q&A

In order to critique Peele’s film in this way, a postcolonial lens into the storyline seems to be the most effective means of analysis. According to Bhabha in his 1994 publication entitled *The Location of Culture*, he argues, “[Art] renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent ‘in-between’ space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present” (7). *Us* does this perfectly; the film breaks the present in-between space to critique the current sociopolitical climate in the United States today through the use of the Tethered (or Other). In terms of postcolonial theory, the Other is an idea that has been employed over and over again, and the roots of this analysis lie within this theme. Therefore, while the film is American and critiques America, critical race theory would fall short in capturing the true essence of what is happening in the film. Peele uses the doppelgänger (or mimicry) to critique colonial notions of the colonizer and the colonized—an inherent postcolonial approach to reading the film. I argue that *Us* offers a

critique of American society and culture which can best be seen when reading the film through the theoretical lens of mimicry, showing that true horror comes when the Other (or in this case the Tethered) “is almost the same but not quite” (Bhabha 130).

Mimicry can be one of the most unsettling, horror-producing themes to come across by the very nature of its theorization. Seeing someone or something that is incredibly similar but not quite the same as the viewer can produce reactions of fear. Bhabha makes the distinction that “mimicry emerges as the representation of a difference that is itself a process of disavowal. Mimicry is, thus, the sign of a double articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which ‘appropriates’ the Other as it visualizes power” (“Of Mimicry and Man” 126). It is in this double articulation of the self and power where horror is produced. Therefore, being a product of mimicry does not limit autonomy and agency; it is a struggle for power within a larger systemic structure, which can clearly be traced throughout the film. Adelaide and Red constantly battle for power within the realm of colonial agency and mimicry until one dies; however, the effects of the mimicry can still be felt long after Red’s eventual defeat. The theory of mimicry can be difficult to grapple with as it is not clearly cut and dry, and Peele’s *Us* highlights this theory in all of its complexities. Therefore, traces of mimicry can be felt long after there is a sense of autonomy, showing that power relations can be interwoven and multi-faceted, creating complex dynamics and relations with the colonizer and the Other.

When the young Adelaide walks through the house of mirrors on the beach in the 1980s, she comes face-to-face with her Tethered counterpart for the first time. In this very moment where the two young girls look at one another in shock and horror, the essence of mimicry is embodied. According to Bhabha, “mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power” (126). The Tethered person, in this moment, is almost identical to

the aboveground person, thus creating an inherent power struggle. Only one of the girls could have power in the situation, and the Tethered girl uses her time essentially under colonial rule to upend the aboveground girl and swap places. In this moment, Adelaide recognizes that Red “is almost the same but not quite,” as Bhabha argues, imposing her to live out the rest of her life within the tunnel system until coming back up to the ground for revenge which creates the lifetime struggle of power between them.

In the meantime, Adelaide has to adjust to living aboveground: she needs to learn social cues, language, and standards of living. She is learning how to be something she is not; she can never fully be an aboveground person, but she can learn to act like them. However, this is not met without challenges. As Bhabha theorizes, “mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference” (126). Before Adelaide fully learns English, she is essentially functioning as a mute. In the film, there is a scene where Adelaide’s parents take her to a clinical child psychologist, because they feel she has been through a traumatic experience that is keeping her quiet. In reality, this Adelaide is not their original daughter, and she is physically unable to speak English (Peele). While she looks exactly like their true daughter, she is showing signs of the slippage: she cannot blend until she learns and understands what it means to be an aboveground person.

Adelaide continues this slippage throughout the film, showing that she is still Tethered at heart. In a scene where she is speaking with Kitty after returning to the beach for the first time in almost thirty years, she is literally at a loss for words. She is unable to remember or recall a response to some of the questions Kitty asks. Luckily, Kitty does not question Adelaide too much, and she equates her lack of a response with shyness. In reality, it seems as though Adelaide cannot muster up full answers to some of the questions Kitty asks her, particularly

about her coming to the beach as a child (Peele). While this can be equated to the fact that talking about the beach, especially when being on the beach where the switch occurred, brings up deep-rooted anxiety and fear, language still escapes and fails her in this moment just as it did as a child. Essentially, Adelaide is in between the colonial state and the original state of nature, as Bhabha theorizes (127). She has memories and recollections her life as part of the Tethered, yet she is trying to live a normal life with the aboveground folks. The beach brings back the original fears of the switch, leaving her speechless; however, she still does not have the words or experiences necessary to complete the interaction with Kitty thus showing her slippage through mimicry.

In terms of language, the Tethered have their own method of communication that Red has seemingly mastered. When Red and her family arrive at the Wilson house, they break in and tether Adelaide to the table. Red instructs her family using various noises, hand gestures, and ticks to get them to do as she says (Peele). They respond without hesitation, and they completely understand what she is telling them to do. However, the Tethered have not reached a level of articulation that the aboveground people can comprehend. While the Tethered seem to be mimics of their aboveground counterparts, their use of unique language gives them a sense of agency, as per Bhabha. He theorizes, “The desire to emerge as ‘authentic’ through mimicry . . . is the final irony of partial representation” (“Of Mimicry and Man” 129). Bhabha is stating that mimicry is not a state of prolonged reality. The Tethered have their own language that has not been taken over by their state of mimicry, and they use it to their advantage to subvert the power struggle of the aboveground over the Tethered.

Red, on the other hand, is living between both worlds, because she has the ability to speak English and communicate with the Tethered. In this way, she “is almost the same but not

quite,” because she does not have the lived experiences of the aboveground people after around eight years of age (“Of Mimicry and Man” 126). Bhabha elaborates on the idea of living between both worlds in his book *The Location of Culture*: “The negating activity is, indeed, the intervention of the ‘beyond’ that establishes a boundary: a bridge, where ‘presencing’ begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world—the unhomeliness” (9). While Red has moved on (via force) from the world and into the tunnels, she is still in the unique space between her original home and the home she knows. She can balance and switch between both cultures, particularly on the basis of language, when necessary. The viewer sees Red interact with her family in the same way she can hold a full conversation with Adelaide (Peele). At the heart of this theory, Red is in a place of “unhomeness,” because she can switch effectively between both worlds regardless of the amount of experience she has in each place. Red toes the line of the inferred boundary between origin and relocation, thus placing her in a very unique position when compared with the rest of the Tethered personas.

While the Tethered seem to be the oppressed and the aboveground people the oppressors in the realm of the postcolonial, Adelaide and Red complicate this comparison. Adelaide manages to escape her life among the Tethered, thus challenging the structure of the aboveground; on the other hand, Red is forced to enter the world of the Tethered, and she is the reason they assemble and organize. While Adelaide is living her life on the ground, Red manages to adapt to her new life while simultaneously getting the rest of the Tethered ready to fight back against their oppression. In this way, Red is both the oppressed and the oppressor, or the colonized and the colonizer. She is among the Tethered, yet she is still an outsider who enters this realm and organizes the people. By including this complexity in the film, Peele essentially

does exactly what Bhabha theorizes by “creat[ing] a crisis for the cultural priority given to the *metaphoric* as the process of repression and substitution which negotiates the difference between paradigmatic systems and classifications” (Bhabha 130; emphasis original). It is unclear which position Red takes within this system. In actuality, she is most likely both; she tends to occupy several spaces and positions at once, placing her in a precarious position compared to the rest of the characters in the film. She is the embodiment of mimicry, yet she can also play the role of the mimicked.

In the film, there is a clear moment when the Tethered realize Red is unlike them, and they want her to save them from their fate (Peele). The Tethered copy exactly what the people aboveground do, just in a more animalistic fashion. However, Red beautifully dances for the Tethered just as Adelaide dances aboveground. They see and realize the beauty and elegance in her dance; it has no traces of being produced by a genuinely Tethered person. The Tethered people realize that Red can save them from their position, almost like a god-like figure. The Tethered see that Red embodies “a difference that is almost the same but not quite” (Bhabha 130). She blends in with the Tethered in terms of appearance, but her dancing abilities set her apart. She breaks the “paradigmatic systems and classifications” set forth for the Tethered, which allows her to eventually organize them to rise and attempt to take over the aboveground for themselves (Bhabha 130). Meanwhile, Adelaide is living her life aboveground, dancing the same dance as Red, and blending in almost seamlessly (Peele). Both women—Red and Adelaide—are subverting mimicry and enforcing it in some way, and this can be seen in this first dance scene in the film.

Interestingly, the Tethered essentially come to see Red as their savior, thus complicating her as part of the oppressed group. She eventually encourages them to rise, but she first makes

them all identical in appearance and provides them with two common goals: kill their aboveground counterpart and link together hand-in-hand (Peele). Once the Tethered do, in fact, come to the surface from the depths of the tunnel system, they know nothing of organized religion. However, Red is still able to recall her faith from childhood, and she makes this known to the Wilson family upon arrival in a very long story that I have redacted her in the sake of time. Despite all of the heartbreaking discoveries about Red's life, she equates the experience to being tested by God. Once the Tethered see her in this way as well, she has the power to assemble, rise, and try to reclaim what was taken from her so many years ago. However, the viewer does not know of the switch at this point in the film, thus causing the empathy to lie with Adelaide rather than Red. Comparatively, Bhabha theorizes that there are "strategies of desire in discourse that make the anomalous representation of the colonized something other than a process of the 'return of the repressed'" ("Of Mimicry and Man" 130). Living among the Tethered, Red is not in a state of repression; however, when compared to the aboveground people, she absolutely is. Peele purposefully makes this distinction complex in order to alter where sympathies lie, because he wants the viewer to grapple with the idea of good versus evil. In the film, this distinction is unclear, because we see these various themes battling with one another for the film's duration. While Red may be the savior for the Tethered, she also plays a role in their subjugation, while she, herself, is continuously oppressed by Adelaide and the rest of the aboveground people.

In "Of Mimicry and Man," Bhabha theorizes, "the visibility of mimicry is always produced at the site of interdiction. It is a form of colonial discourse that is uttered in *intra dicta*: a discourse at the crossroads of what is known and permissible and that which though known must be kept concealed" (130). This site of interdiction, as Bhabha argues, is race: "almost the same but not white" (130). Therefore, there is a racial struggle at the heart of mimicry, which is

complicated in the film. Adelaide and Red are both Black women, yet they still manage to take on some of the themes put forward by Bhabha as mentioned in the section above. However, their blackness does come into question throughout the film as a source of oppression, particularly with the aboveground people. The Tethered really do not concern themselves with race, as they are tethered to their aboveground counterpart; nonetheless, these aboveground people can practice and inhibit racist elements that fall in line with mimicry.

Considering how recently Peele's film *Us* was released, there has not yet been much scholarship produced concerning its central themes. Despite the lack in scholarship at the current moment, many reviews discussing the film have been written and published, as it is critically acclaimed. Brooks's review, as mentioned previously, offers one of the most interesting observations on the film: "Peele asks his audience to face ourselves in this dark hour, as a way to name the terror of not only America's past, but of a present in which all of *us* play a part" ("*Us* Makes Us Look in the Mirror"; emphasis original). Much of this terror, for Peele and for the audience, stems from the use of the doppelgänger. This double makes us think about ourselves, and the role(s) we play in the world, and the idea of being faced with the self can create some of the most terrifying manifestations of thought and emotion.

When examining this position through the lens of Bhabha, particularly that of mimicry in his acclaimed "Of Mimicry and Man," this horror comes to make more sense. As Bhabha repeats throughout the work, the idea of being "almost the same but not quite" evokes a sense of horror while simultaneously asserting the idea of what mimicry truly is (130). When the double looks similar but is inherently different, there is a sense of disturbance for both people. In this sense, "[m]imicry is, thus, the sign of a double articulation" (126). There is something being said about the colonizer and the colonized, and there is a power struggle associated within this articulation.

In the film itself, this articulation comes to a head in the battle between Adelaide and Red, or between the aboveground and the Tethered. While their dynamic is much more complicated, the question of mimicry still is presented at the heart of their struggle. Both characters (in fact, all of the main characters) employ some sense of mimicry in the film to either gain agency or obtain power in some way, allowing the viewer to really grapple with the complex nature of the relationships in the film. Of course, there are racial, class, and cultural boundaries that come into play as well, thus further complicating and challenging Bhabha's central ideas.

Ultimately, Peele wants the viewer to critically think about and reposition challenge their assumptions of typical horror films. When it comes down to a central question, Peele leaves the viewer wondering: who—if any of the characters—is truly evil? While the framing quote from the start of the essay associates itself with the assumption that it is the Tethered who are evil, the aboveground people also have their fair share of injustices against the Tethered. Therefore, this answer is not cut and dry, forcing the viewer to grapple with it in various complex ways. Peele makes sure to leave these conclusions vague in order to keep them thinking about the Other, racial, and class implications, resulting in the audience being left in a state of horror. Through the lens of Bhabha's theory of mimicry, we can begin to make sense of Peele's intentions for the film. Coming face-to-face with the Other—an Other that looks identical—produces fear, anxiety, and horror, leading to a complicated and deeply complex narrative, which Peele makes evident in his latest foray into the genre. While the Tethered and the aboveground may have their fair share of differences, it seems as though something about the nature of the duality of mimicry in this case makes sure that “the soul remains one” (Peele).

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**Women on the (Home)Front Lines:****Southern White Women's Diaries as Rhetorical Spaces during the Civil War**

(CONFERENCE)

The act of writing in diaries, journals, letters, and other forms of inscribed expression are typically seen as solitary acts in today's culture and society; yet, most American women in the nineteenth century used any number of these tools to speak publicly about their conditions. Such expressions are necessary for organizing thoughts, feelings, emotions, and ideas both generally and concerning specific topics. For the white women in the American South during the Civil War (1861-1865), personal writings became a cornerstone for self-expression during a time of immense struggle. Despite their largely solitary and more isolated position in the South, these women managed to become active rhetors in their own sphere, as defined in their personal writings. Such written forms of expression were intended to be read or seen by close friends and family, or even the general public—as is the case with Mary Boykin Miller Chesnut,<sup>1</sup> for instance—and the act of writing as a means of expression, thought, and idea is a form of rhetoric that needs to be examined more closely to fully understand how the war shaped women's experiences in the South in the 1860s.

In her book *The Rhetoric of Rebel Women: Civil War Diaries and Confederate Persuasion*, Kimberly Harrison lays the fundamental groundwork for much of my analysis here. Framing her argument, Harrison writes that women in the wartime South “needed to present themselves effectively to their publics—to family members, the local community, slaves and former slaves, soldiers (both Union and Confederate, and their God” (Harrison 3-4). Therefore, the white women writers at home in the South used their personal writings to make sense of the changing aspects of a wartime situation. In their diaries and journals, these women could express

their thoughts and opinions about the war, but their ideas would be influenced by their potential audiences. While such writing helped to give them a voice that would be heard in southern society, their true thoughts, feelings, and emotions may not have been fully expressed over fears of public scrutiny. Furthermore, these types of writing are not the most widely known or studied; however, the local impact these women had on their communities is of great importance to understanding southern women's rhetoric of the time (Harrison 5). In this way, private thoughts turned into community influence, thus shaping the ways in which these women thought about and wrote about the Civil War, which, in turn, had an effect on both their private and public rhetorics.

With this in mind, I am making the case that many southern white women regardless of their position as either an elite or working-class woman upheld similar core values in the wartime society, as evidenced in their writings. Southern cultural ties to conservative gender, race, and class run throughout the society as a whole, and the women's writings analyzed in this paper demonstrate that these women had a general sense of connection based on their inherent whiteness and womanhood in the wartime South. Since the war was essentially in their backyards, southern white women banded together to uphold their antebellum cultural ideas and experiences regardless of societal position or newfound occupation, grappling with new expectations per the wartime situation they found themselves living, which can be clearly seen when reading their journaled experiences rhetorically.

Due to the proximity of the war in the South, most women could express some sort of agitation or stress that came with the changing wartime conditions. In order to combat these feelings and discuss them in detail, many southern white women kept extensive diaries. According to Mary Elizabeth Massey, "Some [women] might have said they were scarcely aware

that a conflict raged, most would have noted varying degrees of stress, and many would have reported direct involvement in the horrors of war” (Massey xxi). Clearly, the South was changing, and women were taking note. Southern women had to take on positions that they may not have chosen for themselves, such as nurses, teachers to enslaved children, and even field hands. Much of the anxieties over these changing positions and the loss of a familiar lifestyle were expressed by these women in their diaries, and the ways they write about their changing societal positions can be analyzed rhetorically to understand their true thoughts, feelings, and opinions on what the war was doing to their own communities.

Margo Culley makes the claim that “[w]omen diarists in particular wrote as family and community historians” before the war broke out, but the use of their personal diaries changed as the war raged (Culley 4). Women’s writings at this time turned more personal, yet they demonstrate how their personal experiences have a larger impact within their local communities. Sarah E. Gardner nuances Culley’s claim, arguing, “Diary keeping provided southern white women with a sense of calm during troubling times” (Gardner 21). In a sense, these women could ground themselves within their own writings, and their intimate expressions of fear, stress, and anxiety over the war and their own personal conditions serve to reveal much about the war at home. Kimberly Harrison extends the notion of diary writing in the Confederate South rhetorically: “[O]ften the diarists’ conception of rhetorical responsibility extended beyond their ability to convince soldiers to spare their property to their ability to maintain rhetorical self-control even as they lost control over their homes and belongings. Often these entries were rhetorical acts in themselves as by writing, diarists prepared for dreaded encounters with their enemies” (Harrison 53). At this time, many women were uprooted from their homes—or limited within their homes—once soldiers came in to fight. This limitation of their personal livelihoods

became a cause to write, as Harrison expresses, in order to mentally and emotionally prepare for the eventual upheaval of their common existences. No matter the case, the women examined in this paper have all undergone major changes in their lives as southern women due to the war, and reading their diaries and experiences rhetorically can serve to highlight the full struggle they had endured.

Arguably, the most famous diary of the Civil War era is Mary Boykin Miller Chesnut's *A Diary from Dixie*. In her account, Chesnut details life as an elite southern white woman who is tasked with new challenges as her husband leaves to fight in the war, and she is left managing the plantation back home in Virginia. For Chesnut, managing a plantation is a position she never would have imagined holding in society. Surprisingly, Chesnut is pro-abolition, yet her rhetoric is largely embedded in incredibly racist ideas. In her account, she writes, "It is a crowning misdemeanor for us to hold still in slavery those Africans whom they brought here from Africa . . . Those pernicious Africans!" (Chesnut 129-30). While she wants slavery to end, her sentiments are not with freeing the enslaved people on the basis of their enslavement; she believes that the system is too challenging for her to uphold and endure, thus her call to end it. Chesnut clearly is ingrained in the same thought process as the society around her in terms of race, but her stance on abolition is slightly different than the beliefs of those around her. Having to manage the plantation, Chesnut expresses her fear with dealing with the enslaved people as well, which is a cause for her to hold the opinions she does. An acquaintance of Chesnut was killed by an enslaved person, leading Chesnut to fear for her own life while managing the house and plantation (Chesnut 128). Reading this in terms of her thoughts on abolition for her personal benefit, her stance begins to make more sense for her personally. Her fear and new position are leading her to develop and consider such thoughts despite their inherent racism. As expressed in

her diary, she does not want the positions of slaveowner and plantation manager, leading her to grapple with slavery in her own way.

Chesnut may have strange, complex ways at coming to her opinions on the war, but there is a rhetorical importance in her examination of her own beliefs. While she eventually adopts an abolitionist stance rooted in racism and advocates for the agency of women, her rhetoric cannot be separated from the social contexts of the South. For instance, Harrison makes the argument that Southern women “played an active role in the construction and support of a collective Confederate identity” (Harrison 171). While many Confederates may not have necessarily agreed with her views, they would be more apt to listen to her because of her societal position and experiences under the war. Therefore, her written published experience helped shape the Confederate identity post-war as her diary was available for the public to read.

Furthermore, Chesnut remained pro-Confederacy throughout her diary and for her entire life. After the war officially ended, Chesnut expresses her intense feelings toward the North: “We are scattered and stunned, the remnant of heart left alive within us filled with brotherly hate” (Chesnut 390). In this excerpt, she is speaking on behalf of the entire Confederacy. She is expressing that only hate remains toward the North, especially due to the physical state of devastation the South in the immediate postbellum period. With broken morale, physical destruction, and pent-up hostility, all Chesnut could feel is a sense of intense disdain, which would make the reconstruction process quite difficult.

Matching the sentiments of Chesnut, Alice “Nannie” Edmonds Rudasill was a southern woman with strong nationalist ties both during and after the war. For example, as the war was raging, Rudasill made the claim in her diary that she would rather have everyone perish than to be “left alone to the mercy of Lincoln” (Rudasill 3). Rudasill’s thoughts are on full display in her

diary, and she does not shy away from direct criticisms of the Union. Her strong ties to the Confederacy, given that her husband was a soldier enlisted in the Confederate army and that she was left to care for a young son on her own, are incredibly apparent from the start of her writing (Rudasill 1). Her strong disdain for the North shows the strong feelings and opinions women had and developed over time as the war progressed, and Rudasill personally did whatever she needed to do to ensure the South would have a conceivable victory in the war.

The main way Rudasill contributed to the war effort in the South was by caring for Confederate soldiers. Mainly, Rudasill would supply them with additional food and comfort items, and she would give what she had to them before she would utilize it for her own family. For instance, she writes of two soldiers stopping by her residence to spend the night in her home with her, her aunts, her cousins, and her child. By the morning, to Rudasill's complete surprise, a general and over two hundred privates appeared at her doorstep for assistance (Rudasill 7-8). Rudasill and her family took all of the supplies they had at hand, and they gave everything to the troops; however, this took a great toll on the family personally and financially. Her documentation of such a simple yet important event highlights the pride and nationalistic fervor she feels when giving everything to the Confederate soldiers needing assistance. From her rhetoric, it is clear that she is pleased with her decision even if it means suffering for the cause. Rudasill's strong sense of Confederate nationalism is evident in her rhetoric, and this is further expressed through her actions. By feeding the soldiers and giving them all she had, she could help bring the Confederacy to victory. While this action may seem small and individual, it is moments like these that helped perpetuate the war effort in the South. This action, then, can be read as rhetorical because she is showing her interests as similar to her audience (Burke 46).

Such ideas can be traced through the works of other diarists as well, showing that Rudasill's experiences and ideas may not have been unique, but rather a more universal shared rhetoric.

While Chesnut and Rudasill may have had similar rhetoric concerning the spirit and value of the Confederacy, Cornelia Peake McDonald did not have such sentiments until later in the war. At the very beginning of the war, McDonald was forced from her home by Confederate troops, leaving herself and her nine children left to fend for themselves, because her husband and their father was fighting the war (McDonald 3). From her diary, it is evident that McDonald held a clear resentment for the army and for the war as a whole; she was simply trying to care for her numerous children, and the war completely derailed her entire life. This initial bitterness toward the war is quite different from Chesnut and Rudasill, showing that not all women initially encouraged and supported wartime activity. The war destroyed towns, ripped families apart, and forced families—such as McDonald's—to relocate. Therefore, many women resented what the war did to them, further affecting their actions and, in turn, their rhetoric around wartime conditions.

After securing shelter for herself and her children just outside of Winchester, Virginia, McDonald remained fearful that her life could be completely uprooted once again. Virginia was a popular state for battle due to its proximity between the North and the South, leaving her in a state of vulnerability to the horrors of war. Knowing a battle was on the horizon, she writes, "I sent all the children to bed early, put out the lights, and fastened the doors in the lower story, then took my seat up stairs [sic] by my chamber window to await whatever might come" (McDonald 20). Understanding that her life may completely change again, McDonald remained prepared for the worst, yet also quite fearful for what was to come. McDonald did manage to retain her home, but her wartime anxieties of forced relocation did not fade. For McDonald, the

fear was ever-present, and her rhetoric clearly expresses this. While she notes instances where she cared for soldiers in war, her main goal was to keep her children safe in one space (McDonald 186-88).

Even though McDonald was not actively aiding the war effort or calling for its continuation, her sentiments are largely shared by many women of the time. The rhetoric around the destructive capabilities of the war is present in almost every southern woman's account of the time period, because it impacted their lives so drastically. Lucy Rebecca Buck discusses this tension in her diary, as she became responsible for taking care of her siblings, maintaining the home, and caring for Confederate soldiers as a young teenager. Over time, Buck's fear of relocation turned into anger and resentment for what the war had done to her home and her personal life. While caring for soldiers at her home in Rose Hill, Virginia, in November of 1862, Buck writes, "The forenoon was pretty much spent in feeding soldiers, running up and down the stairs, and harkening to numberless requests from them" (Buck 157). As her life became increasingly consumed by the war, her hostility toward it subsequently increased. She clearly did not like what the war was doing to her life, yet she continued to aid the war effort as part of her womanly duties and expectations in wartime southern society by performing the role of caretaker for the male soldiers.

In fact, Buck completely resented the life she was living and wanted to return to her elite antebellum lifestyle. This hostility expressed in her diary can clearly be seen when she states, "Living a most indolent miserably useless life today . . . soldiers in bright and early for breakfast" (Buck 290-91). She sees her efforts toward helping the soldiers as essentially useless, and she does not think about the larger effects of war. Considering that she has previously been consumed with her own society and small, local community, her anger and confusion as a

relatively young woman thrust into a state of war makes sense. While she could not express these thoughts openly for the sake of being labeled as unpatriotic, Buck relies on her diary to vent her frustrations, not realizing that, too, was a public space. Even though she does live through the war, her resentment while writing about her teenage days under a time of war remain consistent through the remainder of her diary. Clearly, all women had their own encounters and experiences with the war that shaped their personal rhetoric, and their diaries were spaces of rhetorical inquiry about the war and their contributions to the war effort.

Despite the various occupations, tasks, and lifestyles these southern white women had to adapt to during the war, each wrote about them in ways that are rhetorically important. Most of them, writing to and for themselves, or perhaps their family members, used their diaries as spaces to reflect on the war and form their thoughts and ideas about daily occurrences. This writing, then, shaped the ways they went about their daily lives, thought about the war, and remembered the war. As Harrison argues, nontraditional rhetoric, such as using real experiences as a space for rhetorical intervention rather than just the written word, is important to understand the entirety of the wartime conditions in the South (Harrison 172). Furthermore, reading their experiences rhetorically offers a space to allow these women's voices to be heard and understood in the direct context in which they produced their diaries during the Civil War.

The women's diaries analyzed here demonstrate how the written word provided these women with a sense of agency in the wartime South—a space that did not actually afford women a space to have control over their own lives. In antebellum southern society, women did not have major roles or spaces afforded to them to begin with, and the war gave them a place to have a new role in their communities that needed to be considered. The war forced and encouraged women to take on tasks not permitted to them previously, and, while many women clearly did

not like these new changes, many of the women saw it as their patriotic or noble duty to take up the cause. Yet, no matter their beliefs, the women turned to writing to express their thoughts, feelings, and opinions on the changing tides in the South. Almost like a befriended companion, their diaries became vessels of social change, written agency, and provocative thought in their respective communities and within their created rhetorical spaces. Chesnut wanted to convince a larger audience that the cause of the Confederacy was noble. Rudasill wanted to prove that small actions made a huge difference toward perpetuating the war. McDonald simply wanted to live outside of a state of fear and raise her children openly. Buck wanted the war to end so she could return to her antebellum lifestyle. Christian sought to teach children about God and, in turn, the Confederate cause. Individually, each woman shaped her *own* rhetoric in her *own* diary to convince herself or persuade herself of something, and these individual persuasions all culminate in one overarching narrative of women rhetors in the wartime South influencing other women's thoughts and ideas. All of the actions of these women helped perpetuate the war effort in various ways (both physically and ideologically), and each of these women helped shape and contextualize the war at home by writing of their experiences in their diaries. Their experiences, in and of themselves, can also be read as rhetorical spaces where the women lived out their written words, thus further helping the war effort and solidifying their new personal causes. Therefore, southern white women's diaries from the Civil War can best be understood when read as spaces where agency was both created and acted upon, demonstrating that these women had a much larger role in the Civil War and the Confederate war effort than previously considered in most popular historical and rhetorical accounts.

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