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# Defying civility: Female writers and educators in nineteenth-century America

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Defying Civility: Female Writers and Educators in Nineteenth-Century America

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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## Dedication

I would like to dedicate my thesis to my late granddad, Kendell Ray Warren. (1942-2016)

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## Abstract

This thesis project investigates how northern American women in the nineteenth-century defied civility and what the consequences were. Primary and secondary source research of poetry, prose, letters, government documents, and personal accounts reveal that these women were able to step out of the domestic sphere to create a new world for themselves without the aid of males. This paper and accompanying online exhibit, *Civil War Successes*, explores how defying the notions of a civil woman paved the way for an earlier women's movement than the twentieth-century. A nation torn apart by civil war saw women creating outlets for their thoughts, inspiring others, as well as liberating and acculturating African Americans in the South Carolina Sea Islands.

## Introduction

The Civil War was an era that constituted a watershed moment for women advancing their agendas in the public sphere. Pioneers during this time influenced future female generations to prove their worth during the twentieth century, especially during America's engagement in the first and second World Wars. These time periods parallel with the Civil War because opportunities for women to enter the public sphere were readily available. Northern white and African American women during the Civil War proved that they could lead a nation with their words and teaching abilities. They stepped beyond the domestic sphere to enlighten others, especially males, that they were meant for more than rearing children; in effect, defying civility. A civil woman in the eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries was defined as one who was expected to be submissive to her husband and other male figures she came into contact with, be silent about political and social matters, and adhere to household and wifely duties.

Scholarship covering gender norms during the war focuses more on southern examples. The concept that historian Drew Faust posits is that southern women were forced into a life of duty by the war in the public sphere.<sup>1</sup> In contrast, research shows that northern women were ready to add more responsibilities to their repertoire without any coercion from men. They sought to perform actions in the public sphere and not just take care of children. Historians Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber argue that southern women's lives were changed as a result of the war, but once the conflict was resolved, those same women readily went back to performing domestic duties. The public sphere

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<sup>1</sup> Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

was not permanently changed in the South as a result of women's actions.<sup>2</sup> What has not been realized by these historians is that women in the North are just as worthy of study because they stayed in the public sphere and contributed to society without going back to the domestic sphere. Other historians, such as Barbara J. Fields, focuses on southern slavery and racial ideologies and makes no comparisons with the North.<sup>3</sup> Lyde Cullen Sizer's *The Political Work of Northern Women Writers and the Civil War, 1850-1872*, gives a critical assessment to northern writers, such as Emily Dickinson, and outlines the importance of their work and what it meant in social and political circles. Sizer highlights how these women were writing on their own and how some publicly performed the content of their prose, but she does not expand her arguments to include these crucial issues.<sup>4</sup> Thus through prose and educational techniques, northern middle-to-upper-class white and African American women defied the notions of civility and re-emerged as driving forces in society, creating a more dynamic women's movement.

The construction of more northern schools by 1850 that admitted women of the middle class, compared with a minute selection for the South, helped northern women gain knowledge essential to forming their understanding of politics and social conflicts.<sup>5</sup> Education coupled with ambition equaled a remedy to stand up for change. Specific women addressed below are essential to understanding women's positions in the North during the Civil War.

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<sup>2</sup> Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Barbara J. Fields, "Of Rogues and Geldings," *The American Historical Review* 108, no. 5 (2003).

<sup>4</sup> Lyde Cullen Sizer, *The Political Work of Northern Women Writers and the Civil War, 1850-1872* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Sun Go and Peter Lindert, "The Uneven Rise of American Public Schools to 1850," *The Journal of Economic History* 70, no. 1 (2010): 2.

Emily Dickinson, Louisa May Alcott, and S. Emma E. Edmonds emerged into the public sphere through their writing. Whether they wrote for themselves or for publication was not important; the significance, rather, was the topics they chose and how those topics revealed the thoughts and feelings about the wider world. They hoped their writings would reverse the nation's views about women. Laura Towne, Ellen Murray, and Charlotte Forten took their talents as teachers to educate free African Americans in the South Carolina Sea Islands, known as the Port Royal Experiment. Scholarship on the Port Royal Experiment has minimized the role of women in its success. Historian Willie Lee Rose's *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* fails to outline women's unselfish motivations and willingness to act without male guidance. Instead, Rose argues that male leaders of aid organizations and other interested parties instructed women to perform tasks, such as taking care of the freedmen, which men believed was below their stature. To Rose's credit, women are discussed in more length than in Kevin Dougherty's work. In addition, Rose uses Port Royal as an example of how the South operated during Reconstruction.<sup>6</sup> Dougherty's work focuses more on what he believes was a male-dominated project, though the evidence is clear that women worked separately from males before, during, and after the experiment. His work demonstrates conflicts between aid societies, private parties, and the United States government rather than focusing on women's contributions to the experiment. Dougherty chooses a technical and political approach to his narrative, but leaves out critical sociological aspects that would credit women with Port Royal's success.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (Athens & London: University of Georgia Press, 1964).

<sup>7</sup> Kevin Dougherty, *The Port Royal Experiment: A Case Study in Development* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014).

Towne, Murray, and Forten opened the Penn School, one of the most successful schools on St. Helena Island. All African Americans could attend and scores of them graduated with new abilities and knowledge that led them to continue their education, become teachers, own their own businesses, and hold other prestigious occupations. Definitions of what a civil woman constituted were forever changed for the better and these women were the leading pioneers. All six women represent a larger percentage of women who made successful ventures during the nineteenth-century. Whether they worked alone or with other women, their motivation encouraged men to rethink what women were capable of achieving. The measure of these successes is evident as written records and other sources have captured positive outcomes of which historians are beginning to realize today.

In combination with the written chapters of this study is the online exhibit *Civil War Successes: Northern Women in the Civil War*, which captures the lives of Emily Dickinson, Louisa May Alcott, S. Emma E. Edmonds, Laura Towne, Ellen Murray, and Charlotte Forten. Short biographies and corresponding pages of visual elements are available for each woman that gives visitors a better idea of what the women's lives were like. The Port Royal Experiment and the Penn School are also explored through pictures and additional links with more information.

## CHAPTER 1

The American Civil War took a major toll on northern and southern women. Sudden demands were made upon them that drastically disrupted their domestic routines. As men left their families to fill the ranks, women had to not only sustain their households but also manage communities and support efforts until the conflict was resolved. Thus women emerged in the public sphere and consequently rules of civility had to be rewritten. Before this occurred, it was considered uncivil for women to work outside of the domestic sphere, hold public office, vote, voice their concerns about governmental policies, and conduct themselves in a masculine fashion, such as fighting in a war. However, as women performed these taboo acts they ignored society's admonishment of them and began to show the world what can be achieved when women step outside the borders of civility.

In tracing the word civility, one learns of its evolutionary origins during the founding of the Roman Republic in 509 B.C.E., where white elite males ruled over the civilization. Over time, civility was recorded as *civis*, meaning citizen, or males who owned property, which then developed into *civitas*, used to describe duties of citizenship. *Civitas* was the last transition before the Modern Era adopted civility. Civil males had a responsibility to serve with cohorts, vote for leaders in assemblies, and form public policies. The English version of civility comes from the French word *civilité*, defined as the proper etiquette of men who had to conduct themselves with respectability in every facet of their lives.<sup>8</sup> *Civilité* developed as a reaction to violence in Europe during turmoil within the Catholic Church. After such upheaval, the question became how could men

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<sup>8</sup> Larry Schaefer, "History and Civility," *The NAMTA Journal* 40, no. 1 (2015): 104.

become civil to each other again? New rules were written to gain control of societies again.<sup>9</sup> The Renaissance and Enlightenment invoked more rules of civility for males to follow, including properly articulated speech, respect of others, European education (thought of as the most sophisticated), a nobility of attitude and living for one's honor; in summation: conducting oneself as a gentlemen.<sup>10</sup> Scholar Desiderius Erasmus claims that by practicing civility humans separate themselves from barbaric peoples and exhibit proper moral sentiments if they respect their relationships with others. Those who embrace civility exclude vulgarity in their vernacular, listen to contrasting ideals, and take the time to listen.<sup>11</sup>

From America's founding up to the nineteenth century, women were expected to tend to the welfare of their homes and not trouble themselves with outside affairs.<sup>12</sup> They were not permitted to vote or hold any public office nor interfere in politics; upon stepping outside the home a woman was expected to be escorted by a male lest she be labeled as a "public woman," or simply a prostitute. Religion played a prominent role in the expectations of women's civil behavior as well.<sup>13</sup> For example, congregations upheld the content in St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians that states: "Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but *they are commanded* [St. Paul's emphasis] to be under obedience, as also saith the law."<sup>14</sup> Clearly

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<sup>9</sup> Stephen L. Carter, *Civility: Manners, Morals, and the Etiquette of Democracy* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), 155-156.

<sup>10</sup> Schaefer, "History and Civility," 105.

<sup>11</sup> Carter, *Civility*, 68, 140.

<sup>12</sup> Adam B. Seligman, *The Idea of Civil Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 9.

<sup>13</sup> Glenna Matthews, *The Rise of Public Woman: Woman's Power and Woman's Place in the United States, 1630-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 3-6.

<sup>14</sup> 1 Corinthians 14:34 (King James Bible).

the men of the public sphere meant to uphold these edicts and gave little thought to the abilities of women in the nineteenth century.

According to political scientist Ann Towns, civilized societies, especially the United States, upheld the exclusion of women from the public sphere well into the nineteenth century. Societies granting political power to the “weaker sex” were considered by American male government officials as “savage,” inevitably demoting their nations’ competence with diplomatic trust, thus measuring the successfulness of a civilization depended on the status of women.<sup>15</sup> Across Europe and North America, most women were barred from any political involvement; however, in nineteenth-century America, women were actively petitioning the government. For example, in 1832, Great Britain’s House of Commons prohibited women from voting and by 1848 they could not partake in political associations or clubs.<sup>16</sup> The physical and mental strength of men correlated with the appointment of office. These men were credited with the ability to reason benefiting common virtues of the public and argued that women would reveal their selfish nature if included in the public sphere.<sup>17</sup> Women could not obtain citizenship and many nation-states, including the United States, disenfranchised all women. Thus it became commonplace to enact laws forbidding the political inclusion of women. Nations adopted these ideas from Greek teachings that declared women as lesser men. Further, the physical and mental attributes of women were deemed substantially inadequate, never measuring up to men. Women were condemned as consistently exhibiting emotional behavior that could create an obstacle to govern a nation. They were thought to lack

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<sup>15</sup> Ann Towns, “The Status of Women as a Standard of ‘Civilization,’” *European Journal of International Relations* 15, no. 4 (2009): 682-685.

<sup>16</sup> Towns, “Status of Women,” 685-687.

<sup>17</sup> Towns, “Status of Women,” 697.

reason and thus could not speak for the common good of a body of people. Rather they could only speak for a smaller group, such as their family. Michael Chevalier, a Frenchman on assignment from the French government to comment on construction methods in America, wrote in a letter from Charleston, South Carolina, in 1835 that the rule has been established for all Anglo-American women to care only for the home and to never labor in the fields. Chevalier later wrote, "It is the glory of the English race that they have ever and everywhere as much as possible interpreted the superiority of the man to the woman as reserving to man the ruder and harder forms of toil. A country in which woman is treated according to this principle presents the aspect of a new and better world."<sup>18</sup> Hence, the ideal that women existed to manage the domestic sphere was firmly established. Philosopher Iris Marion Young claims that "extolling a public realm of manly virtue and citizenship as independence, generality, and dispassionate reason entailed creating the private sphere of the family as the place to which emotion, sentiment, and bodily needs must be confined. The generality of the public depends on excluding women."<sup>19</sup>

Founders of the American Republic believed in public spiritedness. They challenged the new citizens to embrace sacrifices for the community as a whole and never let selfishness take precedent over selfless acts. Motivated by their exclusion from the public sphere, women gravitated toward attending to the concerns outside of the family. They sought to promote their civic virtue or public spiritedness, by addressing the government's failure to solve public problems such as those caused by industrialization

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<sup>18</sup> Michael Chevalier, *Society, Manners, and Politics in the United States: Letters on North America by Michael Chevalier*, ed. John William Ward (New York: Anchor Books: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1961), 330-331.

<sup>19</sup> Towns, "Status of Women," 691.

or conflicts with social justice. According to Alexis de Tocqueville's American depiction of democracy in the 1830s, women wanted "to wrest community priorities from the imperatives of economic development" and "mold communities that were graced by social institutions offering services beyond those connected to commerce." These acts came to the forefront during the Civil War, when women learned how to organize and lobby, fundraise and petition for their causes.<sup>20</sup>

Women would need to use a medium to circulate their ideas to achieve these goals, thus middle-to-upper-class literate white women living in the North during the American Civil War chose to take up their pens as if they were swords ready to strike down unreasonable notions of a proper woman. They wrote and published narratives, poems, and songs to let the nation know of their suffering, patriotism and contributions to the war effort, self-consciously placing themselves into the public sphere. In particular, northern women struggled with internal conflict and used writing as a tool to unite and come to their own conclusions about national conflicts. It is important to note that some women wrote during the war and some wrote after, and not all wrote specifically to be published. Every woman, however, used her wartime experiences to support her stances on civility. In some cases, as with Emily Dickinson and Louisa May Alcott, it took several years for them to process the war; thus, their compositions reflect a deeper, more pronounced illustration of the war as opposed to the raw material written as events unfolded. General northern compositions were symbolic of female incivility, defined for these purposes as language or actions within a written work that challenged the common "civil" notions of how northern women were expected to act properly inside and outside

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<sup>20</sup> R. Claire Snyder, "Radical Civil Virtue: Women in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Civil Society," *New Political Science* 26, no. 1 (2004): 52-65.

of the domestic sphere. While women separated themselves from society by breaking these ties, they boldly asserted that they had an idea of war even though they were disconnected geographically. They expressed inner turmoil caused by military conflict and blurred gender lines. This did not create a recipe for disaster or a life of seclusion; on the contrary, it accelerated women's appearance into the public sphere and laid the groundwork for the women's rights movements of the twentieth century.

Historians Cody Marris, Elizabeth Young, and Alice Fahs have produced works on women in the nineteenth century that have revolutionized the way other historians study women. Specifically, literate women fill the pages of their books and articles encapsulating aspects of women's culture, what they thought, what they were able to achieve, and the significance of their world view. These historians' conclusions have produced new questions about the domestic and public spheres within which these women lived. Marris has analyzed women's war exposure and how that triggered the use of their pens. Elizabeth Young has published works on literary culture in the North during the Civil War, while Alice Fahs has focused on women's patriotism during both the American Revolution and the Civil War. All three have inspired this work and prompted this exploration of how, despite being labeled "uncivilized," women were able to use their writings to inspire their own generation to fight for rights they deemed necessary for all Americans.

According to author Elizabeth Young, white women dominated the literary marketplace. They published literature about the impacts of the war along with rallying cries for their respective loyalties.<sup>21</sup> The mere application of writing freed women from

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<sup>21</sup> Elizabeth Young, *Disarming the Nation: Women's Writing and the American Civil War* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 4-5.

their domestic prison and opened up a world of power, though learning to write and gaining social acceptance for it took time. For example, early probate records reveal the progression of women's signatures in Colonial New England. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, women often made a mark for their husband's estate because literacy was only gradually becoming a characteristic of civilized women. As social change reflected a growing need to read news reports and markets became more sophisticated, women's talents for writing increased and they learned how to compose business accounts and read about current affairs, all culminating in a desire to write about other topics in the public sphere. Only one in ten women could write in New England by the eighteenth century. Those who did not learn how to write as young girls acquired the skill in adulthood.<sup>22</sup> In Massachusetts around 1850, only 3.6 percent of white women over the age of twenty were illiterate and 5.4 percent were illiterate in 1860.<sup>23</sup> Other literacy rates correlated with rural and urban society. For instance, Indiana townships recorded different rates among white women; 44.3 percent of women living in rural west-central Indiana townships were literate and urban areas in Cass and Jefferson counties in southern Indiana only had 31.4 percent illiterate and 19.7 percent illiterate respectively.<sup>24</sup>

In attempting to understand the Civil War, northern women had a geographic disadvantage because they lived further away from the battlefields. Though they rarely were able to witness direct conflicts, this does not mean that their experiences were any less viable than southern women's experiences. Author Cody Marrs suggests that

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<sup>22</sup> Gloria L. Main, "An Inquiry into When and Why Women Learned to Write in Colonial New England," *Journal of Social History* 24, no. 3 (1991): 1-11.

<sup>23</sup> Maris A. Vinovskis, *Fertility in Massachusetts from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Academic Press, 1981).

<sup>24</sup> Thomas E. Rodgers, "Hoosier Women and the Civil War Home Front," *Indiana Magazine of History* 97, no. 2 (2001): 107.

northern women had to learn of the war through secondhand exposure — mostly through newspapers — which affected how and what they wrote. Lucy E. Bailey at Sam Houston State University agrees and develops the argument further by saying the telegraph and railroads provided faster ways for women to learn about current events.<sup>25</sup> By obtaining information critical to their understanding of the world around them, women used that knowledge in their quest to gain acceptance in a male-dominated society. Women felt that if they were to become enlightened, their status of being labeled as uncivil for intruding in the public sphere would be reversed. Many women followed this strategy with success. The following authors exerted their proclamations through writing for themselves and for the country to read and reflect on.

Emily Dickinson, composing poems after the war, is an example of a northerner separated by distance but drawn closer to the war through her writing. Even though she envisioned the war through available literature, she understood that women in the North were suffering many of the same trials as those in the South. Her publications expressed her ability to grasp the realities of the war in the South. One poem in particular distinguished between civilian experiences of the war and the experiences of those who were shedding the blood of their brothers:

If any sink, assure that this, now standing —  
Failed like Themselves — and conscious that it rose —  
Grew by the Fact, and not the Understanding  
How Weakness passed — or Force — arose —

Tell that the Worst, is easy in a Moment —  
Dread, but the Whizzing, before the Ball —  
When the Ball enters, enters Silence —

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<sup>25</sup> Dr. Lucy E. Bailey, “So Pleasant to be a School Ma’am: The Civil War as an Educational Force for Women,” *Advancing Women in Leadership Journal* 30, no. 1 (2010): 9.

Dying — annuls the power to kill —<sup>26</sup>

Her lines declare that if a soldier falls during battle, he can no longer harm his enemies and he must realize that it is God's will. Once the soldier perishes he becomes a memory, but before this happens he should understand that just because he has fallen does not mean he has failed in his mission; dying is a chance taken in any conflict. Dickinson goes further by suggesting that choosing to die holds power. Death stops a man from further thought and sin, thus giving him control over future actions that could have dire spiritual and physical consequences. If a soldier has been conscripted to fight, he can put himself in the line of fire and let the enemy kill him so that he does not have to take a life, doing so in hopes that God will take mercy on him and save his soul. Ceasing to exist will also halt any damage a soldier could do to another human being, whether it be physical ailments or emotional turmoil.

The poem also describes the act of dying. Being struck by a bullet is something that no one should have to experience, and only those who do experience it are separated from everyone else. Soldiers come to understand that dying is the easiest part of war. The true torture lingers in the minds of those men who survive, or in the case of females, those who are waiting behind the lines to know if their loved ones will come back to them. Dickinson uses this poem to claim that war and death are hard to understand by those who do not witness such travesties and that dying makes any achievement such as victory, or suffering, such as sacrifice, irrelevant.<sup>27</sup> Even if one does not witness war, one

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<sup>26</sup> Emily Dickinson, "If Any Sink, Assure That This, Now Standing—," *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown Company, 1960), 170.

<sup>27</sup> Cody Marrs, *Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Long Civil War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 127.

is pulled to its madness just by putting thoughts to paper, producing a secondary connection that helps one comprehend war more fully even if indirectly.

Dickinson could not find a way to justify death caused by any war, and this theme is articulated in many of her poems. For example:

How the Waters closed above Him  
 We shall never know —  
 How He stretched His anguish to us  
 That — is covered too —

Spreads the Pond Her Base of Lilies  
 Bold above the Boy  
 Whose unclaimed Hat and Jacket  
 Sum the History —<sup>28</sup>

Here war is merely a set of ideas and images and the boy who drowns in death sinks away without a clear justification for his death. He becomes another casualty of war leaving no record of his last thoughts. Was he thinking about his family, his wife, or his children? Could he see and smell the sights and fragrances of his home, or was his mind shut off by fear and struggle? His last breath may have been haggard by the water enveloping his lungs, water mixed with blood from injured and dying soldiers. These bloody ponds swallowed anything that fell into them, including men and boys, but not without just cause. They contributed to the circle of life. Life on earth was created with water and if we were born with this substance in our bodies, it is only fitting that we die from being immersed within it.<sup>29</sup>

The word “History” in the last line signals loss without remembrance and the “Hat” and “Jacket” that belonged to the boy are the only remnants of someone who is lost

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<sup>28</sup> Dickinson, “How the Waters Closed Above Him,” *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, 434.

<sup>29</sup> Marrs, *Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, 128.

to history, unable to be claimed by God.<sup>30</sup> Those who are not placed within the possibility of experiencing a battlefield death can never empathize with the fear associated with it. Most civil women did not write about fear and death or produce any kind of musings on the subject, but Dickinson broke this mold by referencing such topics.

What sets Emily Dickinson apart from other female writers who lived during the Civil War is the fact that she uses nature as metaphors for the perils of war. Dickinson grasps emotions held by the nation and understands that, in her opinion, it would take more than military conflict alone to invoke questions of morality and ethics.

A South Wind — has a pathos  
Of individual Voice —  
As One detect on Landings  
An Emigrant's address —

A Hint of Ports — and Peoples —  
And much not understood —  
The fairer — for the farness —  
And for the foreignhood —<sup>31</sup>

In this poem, southerners have their own voices just like northerners, but they are anguished voices, ones distraught by having to choose to preserve the Union or the southern way of life. Dickinson feels that southerners are foreigners in their own country and their opinions are not being heard by those who run the country. The question that remains is if northerners feel the same way. Furthermore, Dickinson suggests that northerners do not understand the southern culture and questions whether the nation can become one with lingering prejudice. During the war, both armies swirled around each other dealing with this discourse, but only as a means to an end. No matter the outcome of war, men lose their lives and there is always one victor and one who submits to defeat.

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<sup>30</sup> Marrs, *Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, 129.

<sup>31</sup> Dickinson, "A South Wind," *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, 353.

The northerner seems to *feel* the “South Wind,” but it is not translated to any rational understanding and compares to northerners separated from southern battlefields in which they can only be informed about what is happening at other ends of the country. Dickinson frequently used wind to represent destruction and a “harbinger of change,”<sup>32</sup> as war often brings. Marrs suggests this poem represents a war that cannot be deciphered nor given direct cause. Other poems by Dickinson do the same as she chooses to write in the perspective of a carcass, a foreigner, a loaded gun, an emptied gun, a spirit, and a flower, the latter four contributing to her skepticism about never “fully know[ing] the experience of another.”<sup>33</sup>

Her poems also do not historicize the Civil War compared to other female poets; rather, she is skeptical about restrictions of women’s ability to speak out and historical time in general:

A still — Volcano — Life —  
That flickered in the night —  
When it was dark enough to do  
Without erasing sight —

A quiet — Earthquake style —  
Too subtle to suspect  
By natures this side Naples —  
The North cannot detect

The solemn — Torrid — Symbol —  
The lips that never lie —  
Whose hissing Corals part — and shut —  
And Cities — ooze away —<sup>34</sup>

When examining the words “Volcano,” “Life,” and “lips,” one can infer that the still volcano represents living organisms — in this case women — who have so much to

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<sup>32</sup> Marrs, *Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, 136.

<sup>33</sup> Marrs, *Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, 126.

<sup>34</sup> Dickinson, “A Still Volcano,” *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, 295.

contribute to society but are confined by the expectations of the domestic sphere, so much so that their thoughts bellow and churn deep inside of them like lava. If they were to erupt like a volcano or move mountains like earthquakes, they will be seen as uncivil, and the line “Too subtle to suspect” symbolizes the minds of men who believe that women impair the world around them when they speak. In addition, men do not realize that women should not be quiet and passive; their notions are important enough to be a driving force during a country’s turmoil. Women will speak what they claim is the truth through their “lips that never lie”, but when this happens they are shunned and “ooze away” to darkness, becoming mute. As a result, writing becomes a way to release the build-up of ideas, desires, and emotions.

These lines clearly show dissolution from the progression of archiving the war. She uses “Corals part” to say we are left with no article of which to record destruction — no books, calendars or archives — time is irrelevant and all we are left with is pure destruction.<sup>35</sup> Tragedy and destruction will happen no matter the circumstances and Dickinson’s poems relate to the realism of such claims. Perhaps her musings would not stray even if the country had not uprooted its republic with civil war. Dickinson is questioning the role of female civility by writing about controversial topics of war, suffering, and time.

Famous for producing *Little Women*, after the war had ended, and working as a nurse at a Union Army hospital in Georgetown, Louisa May Alcott was influenced to write by Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and to become a nurse by Dorothea Dix. It was required for nurses to be literate due to Congress’s legislation

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<sup>35</sup> Marrs, *Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, 135.

setting guidelines for female nurses. Dix, who worked with Florence Nightingale during the Crimean War, pioneered the legislation and created the rule that nurses must be able to read and write. In addition, Dix was concerned with the appearance and reputation of the nurses as well as crushing public resistance to women taking on this role. Dix posited other restrictions for women to work as nurses, such as no woman under thirty years of age could apply to be a nurse; women must be plain looking and wear either a black or brown dress; they could not wear bows, ribbons, or jewelry and their hair could not be curled, and they could not wear hoop-skirts. Dix required women to be ready at any time during the day or night, stay sober, self-sustained, calm, gentle, and active.<sup>36</sup> Dix received an appointment from the War Department to assist in organizing military hospitals in Washington. Though she worked in the North, her guidelines became universal throughout America.<sup>37</sup> This experience aided the construction of Alcott's views about femininity and spurred her examination of internal civil wars within women whose wartime experiences structured their behavior.<sup>38</sup> Alcott pulled anecdotes from her own correspondence with her family concerning nursing wounded soldiers, and soon found herself inspired to write *Hospital Sketches* in 1863. *Hospital Sketches* directly defies female civility because its content discusses her desire to pursue untraditional female roles in society, as well as her reactions to wounded soldiers as a nurse. Within those pages readers discover that it was Alcott's brother who suggested she nurse wounded soldiers when Alcott asked her family what she should do. She no longer wanted to teach

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<sup>36</sup> "No Bows, No Curls, No Jewelry," *Dorothea Lynde Dix*, accessed November 1, 2016, [www.civilwar.org/education/teachers/lesson-plans/additional-lesson-plan-content/curr-bio-now-bows.pdf](http://www.civilwar.org/education/teachers/lesson-plans/additional-lesson-plan-content/curr-bio-now-bows.pdf).

<sup>37</sup> Rhonda Goodman Lesniak, "Expanding the Role of Women as Nurses During the American Civil War," *Advances in Nursing Science* 32, no. 1 (2009): 38.

<sup>38</sup> Young, *Disarming the Nation*, 70.

and was not interested in marrying and becoming domesticated as her sister insisted she should. She carved out her own destiny without the help of men and recorded herself saying “I’m a woman’s rights woman...” which accentuated her position as an independent woman.<sup>39</sup> Alcott performed duties indicative of other nurses led by Clara Barton. Born in 1821 in Massachusetts, Barton served relief societies as a Union nurse in Washington D.C. and organized the American Red Cross. She experienced many of the same emotions as Alcott, questioned motives for women in the domestic sphere, and wrote similar prose as the ones analyzed above.<sup>40</sup> Barton was not as bold as to assert observations of feminine qualities in male soldiers and masculine qualities in female nurses, which, for Alcott, redefined gender roles during the war.

Many of Alcott’s other chapters deal with the masculinized nurse and the feminized soldier. In one of the chapters, Alcott constructs a scene where she nurses a dying Virginia blacksmith who Alcott names John. John is the definition of a strapping hero demonstrating masculine characteristics, but she also gives him feminine characteristics, such as a sincere smile and his kisses being tender like a woman’s.<sup>41</sup> Alcott suggests that women were most successful working in the hospital when they were compared to the men.

[T]o scrub some dozen lords of creation at a moment’s notice, was really — really —. However, there was no time for nonsense, and ...I drowned my scruples in my washbowl, clutched my soap manfully, and ...made a dab at the first dirty specimen I saw...I took heart and scrubbed away like any tidy parent....<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Louisa May Alcott, “Hospital Sketches, 1832-1888,” *Internet Archive*, accessed November 2, 2016, <https://ia902304.us.archive.org/34/items/hospitalsketches03837gut/hspsk10.txt>.

<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth Brown Pryor, Clara Barton, *Professional Angel* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 1, 80.

<sup>41</sup> Young, *Disarming the Nation*, 73.

<sup>42</sup> Alcott, “Hospital Sketches.”

Alcott details the physical suffering of the soldiers and is not describing the patients as reflections of certain ideals. Alcott performs her duties without any reservation, and, like the rest of the nurses, were able to compartmentalize their feelings and understand that they had a job to perform. By clutching the soap “manfully” the women summoned strength to do their duty until it was complete. The fact that Alcott pens “parent” instead of mother in the last line indicates that she sees her role as equal to a male’s role in the context of household chores. Alcott also wrote letters for wounded soldiers to their families and was directed by the men to use language often associated with sentiments of females; thus, the men took on the role of feminized soldiers.<sup>43</sup> In relation to mental attributes, as mentioned earlier, sentimentality characterized civil women. Critical thinking and being trusted with tasks of universal importance were considered male traits and responsibilities respectively. When roles were reversed, as Alcott describes, females were uncivil as they became harbingers of male correspondence. Male soldiers had to rely on females to attend to their business as they were physically and mentally unable to, leaving women to gain leadership skills that aided them in the public sphere.

The war offered Alcott a way to achieve goals through identifying with masculinity. When war was declared with the South, Alcott recorded in her journal that “I’ve often longed to see a war, and now I have my wish. I long to be a man; but as I can’t fight, I will content myself with working for those who can.”<sup>44</sup> This statement alone characterizes the incivility of a woman who wishes she could fight like a man. Statements in *Hospital Sketches* reveal that she conversed with governors and military officials in

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<sup>43</sup> Young, *Disarming the Nation*, 84.

<sup>44</sup> Young, *Disarming the Nation*, 78.

Washington D.C., with whom her trust was earned and she was valued as an excellent nurse.<sup>45</sup> Thus nursing was a way she controlled her inner civil war; by satisfying her hunger to contribute to the war effort, and in becoming a nurse, Alcott believed she felt the way a soldier must have felt when he answered the call to enlist. Her other writings compared her own rebellious nature to the unpredictability of war. Not all northern women acted as Alcott did, thus one could not forecast which women would behave in this way.<sup>46</sup> Alcott is an example of a model for a reconstructed nation still led by men within a disorderly nation. In *Little Women* she envisions politics being led by disciplined white women and reconstructs a nation where men are heavily influenced by female self-mastery.<sup>47</sup> Alcott chose writing to challenge civil expectations of women of the nineteenth century as she clearly laments domestic duties. Along with writing, women took care to act out their thoughts and desires by physically transforming their personas.

Many northern women included stories of cross-dressing soldiers based on the actions of a few. To dress as a man was a direct violation of civility, but what was achieved due to those actions proved that it may not have been harmful to society for women to act accordingly. Historian Kathleen De Grave characterizes this new theme of defying civility as the “confidence woman” narrative which reflects a time of fascination with stories in which trickery and disguise were central elements within the plots. These narratives suggest women used the war to cross gender boundaries and as another way to defy civility. For instance, S. Emma E. Edmonds, a field nurse who treated wounded Michigan soldiers, epitomized Alcott’s wishes of becoming a male who could fight in the

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<sup>45</sup> Alcott, “Hospital Sketches.”

<sup>46</sup> Young, *Disarming the Nation*, 79.

<sup>47</sup> Young, *Disarming the Nation*, 72.

war. Edmonds published *Nurse and Spy in the Union Army* in 1864, which follows her time as a disguised black male slave, a black female slave, an Irish female peddler, a white Confederate soldier and a white Confederate male civilian. She shaved her head, symbolizing masculinity, painted herself black, and obtained a wig made of wool for her transformation into a male and female slave.<sup>48</sup> In becoming an Irish peddler, she was able to find what she deemed appropriate and recorded her steps:

I found a number of articles which assisted me much in assuming a more perfect disguise. There was mustard, pepper, an old pair of green spectacles, and a bottle of red ink...[W]ith the ink I painted a red line around my eyes, and after giving my pale complexion a deep tinge with some ochre which I found in a closet, I put on my green glasses and my Irish hood.<sup>49</sup>

As a disguised man, Edmonds used the alias “Franklin Thompson” and only revealed her sex when pleading for a pension at the end of the war. Edmonds was trying to satisfy her lust for adventure and made her full support for the Union known in *Nurse and Spy*.

Moreover, she reveals the truth about her endeavors throughout the work:

I am naturally fond of adventure, a little ambitious and a good deal romantic, and this together with my devotion to the Federal cause...made me forget the unpleasant items, and not only endure, but really enjoy, the privations connected with my perilous positions. Perhaps a spirit of adventure was important — but *patriotism* was the grand secret of my success.<sup>50</sup>

She sees pre-war femininity as a trap symbolized by the words “perilous positions.” She longs to leave the domestic sphere behind and catch the “spirit of adventure” that drove her ambitions to cross into the public sphere. She felt she had to disguise herself because

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<sup>48</sup> Young, *Disarming the Nation*, 150-151.

<sup>49</sup> Young, *Disarming the Nation*, 152.

<sup>50</sup> Young, *Disarming the Nation*, 154.

of the stigma men would associate her with if soldiers found out she was acting as someone else and not functioning as a domestic woman. Edmonds sought to publish her tales in hopes that people would see that women can achieve whatever they set their minds to no matter what situation they are in, directly challenging the norms of civility. Women need not disguise themselves when they set their mind to doing something in the public sphere. Edmonds performed these acts to escape the ties of womanhood that restricted the amount of freedom available and invoked pride in her nation as another reason for writing about her disguises.

Northern author Louise Chandler Moulton's 1863 poem *One of Many* claimed that the wartime suffering of men cannot compare with women's domestic suffering: "Honor to the brave who fight and conquer, or fight and fall! But is theirs the hardest fate? Do not those suffer more who can not [*sic*] lose in action their fear and anguish? — who must count slow hours, shudder at tidings of onward movements, live on fragments of newspapers?"<sup>51</sup> Women who had to wait at home for the news that their loved one may have been killed in battle or was suffering in a hospital experienced torment, for there was no way to extinguish those fears as most women did not fight alongside their men. Soldiers who fight in any war can figure out by wounds, disease, or the comments from other soldiers and doctors their fate, but those left at home continue to combat the unknown. As with Dickinson's poems, Moulton's composition exemplifies the desire to take matters into their own hands to discover the fate of their relations. Female writers in the South rarely made this claim and it may seem extreme to some readers, but there are more conclusions to be drawn from the above works. Northern writings drew a

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<sup>51</sup> Alice Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill & London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 135.

connection between women's internal strife and their opportunity to work to combat their suffering. In executing public activities, women found better uses for the energy it took to privately grieve. Harriet Beecher Stowe urged women to mourn, but then to create a new meaning in life by working in the hospitals or as educators.<sup>52</sup> Despite everything that women had to combat during the war, they took advantage of emerging educational opportunities that improved the quality of their writing. In effect, civilians were more apt to read and respond to professional writing that helped women's opinions stand out for the benefit of others.<sup>53</sup>

Northern women writers wrote about how they could aid the war effort, in spite of how proper or improper these actions were deemed, and felt they were executing the objectives of their causes. Mary Dodge, a writer and essayist from Massachusetts, wrote under the pseudonym of Gail Hamilton. Her publications, written during the war, revealed how blessed she was to be able to write with a purpose. "I thank God that instead of giving me a wash-tub, or a needle, or a broom to work my work with, he has given me a pen, and a whole country for my family."<sup>54</sup> Dodge also advocated during the war for reviving northern morale and the importance of making sacrifices in her pamphlet "Tracts for the times: Courage!":

Let us tear up our carpets to make blankets for the soldiers, as rebels have done; let us turn our houses and churches into hospitals; let us confine ourselves to two meals a day, and one course at a meal, and no butter to our bread; let us wear old shoes clouted upon our feet, and old garments, and only linsey woolsey for new; let us shiver a little, and famish a little, and be a little shabby, before we begin to give the rein to our despondency. Let us be quite sure that

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<sup>52</sup> Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War*, 138-142.

<sup>53</sup> Bailey, "So Pleasant to be a School Ma'am," 2.

<sup>54</sup> Lyde Cullen Sizer, *The Political Work of Northern Women Writers and the Civil War, 1850-1872* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 83.

we have done something for national honor before we talk about being discouraged from doing anything more.<sup>55</sup>

Rhode Islander Sarah Fales was chosen to fulfill an obligation to keep her family updated on war news, as she was more literate than the rest of her family. By doing this, she stepped into the public sphere. She took notice of military affairs praying that the northern army would choose the best routes for fighting in the Peninsula Campaign. Fales herself sent a son to fight equipped with supplies he needed.<sup>56</sup> Fales and Alcott share similarities in that they did not want to wait passively while men joined the ranks. They wanted to work in the public sphere and pass into that “uncivil” realm to feel connected to what was going on amongst battlefronts.

Female writers expressed that when faced with the option of taking action or staying at home, they chose to take action to prove they were meant for more than adhering to civility in the domestic sphere. Written anonymously when the war began, a poem entitled “The Army of the Knitters” draws connections between women’s actions and soldiers’ duties:

We rouse to the rescue: We’ve mustered in thousands!  
 We may not march on in the face of the foe:  
 Yet, while ye shall tramp to the sound of the battle,  
*Foot to foot* we’ll keep pace wheresoever you go!

Ay, soul on soul, are we knitted together!  
 By link on link, in one purpose we’re bound!  
 God mete us the meed of our common endeavor.  
 And our differing deeds with one blessing be crowned!<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Gail Hamilton, “Tracts for the Times: Courage!” January, 1862, *Internet Archive*, accessed April 4, 2016, <https://archive.org/stream/tractsfortimesco00dodg#page/n0/mode/2up>.

<sup>56</sup> Sizer, *The Political Work of Women Writers*, 18-19.

<sup>57</sup> E. Littell, “The Army of the Knitters,” *The Living Age*, Vol. XV (Boston: Littell, Son, and Company): 287.

The author states that women answered the same call to fight, albeit on the home front and not necessarily on the battlefield, and kept up with their work as men marched to war. Women marched together to perform righteous duties they believed they had a responsibility to do and proved they could keep up with the men and travel the same paths. Both sexes were battling for the same outcome and women would be blessed not to be condemned for following their own path.

Mary Ann (“Mother”) Bickerdyke is an example of a woman who, through reading advertisements and prose, learned of opportunities to serve the community. Bickerdyke became an agent with the U.S. Sanitary Commission (USSC). The aim of this association, established in June of 1861, was to monitor sanitary conditions throughout the Union armies and provide additional funds for the war effort.<sup>58</sup> The U.S. Christian Commission (USCC) had similar objectives. Headquartered in Philadelphia and founded in 1862, the USCC provided spiritual and religious support and was charged with nursing sick and wounded soldiers. They led prayer meetings, read religious literature, and aided their ladies’ commissions to attend to the injuries and illnesses of the men.<sup>59</sup> Bickerdyke nursed on the battlefield, oversaw the work of surgeons, and established diet kitchens for wounded soldiers.<sup>60</sup>

The restrictions put on women to conduct themselves in a civil manner while adhering to their expected domestic duties fueled rebellious activity in the North during the Civil War. Poems, narratives, and other compositions written during and after the war became the main outlets for their voices that helped them enter into the public sphere and

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<sup>58</sup> William Y. Thompson, “Sanitary Fairs of the Civil War,” *Civil War History* 4, no. 1 (1958): 51.

<sup>59</sup> James O. Henry, “The United States Christian Commission in the Civil War,” *Civil War History* 6, no. 4 (1960): 374-382.

<sup>60</sup> Sizer, *The Political Work of Northern Women Writers*, 79.

prove their worth to the opposite sex. Emily Dickinson understood what was transpiring in the South and her poems tell us her views on death, which was not a topic for civil women to be discussing. She associated herself with experiences of the soldiers and articulated voices of opposing views of the war through her uses of nature. Alcott became a pioneer in the nursing profession, and like Edmonds, believed she had a right to change the world for the better by working in the public sphere. Many other women were grateful they were given opportunities to express themselves through writing in spite of the chastisement they often received from men. Females who took up their pens crafted a movement of epic proportions. It was a movement that began long before the 1920s, in which women gained voting rights and occupied paying positions that were formerly held by men. Perhaps more importantly though, middle and upper-class literate white women who transformed their transgressions into acceptable mores invoked respect for themselves and redefined what it meant to be civil during the nineteenth-century.

## CHAPTER 2

Women in the nineteenth-century continuously worked to become accepted as legitimate voices within the public sphere. Distributing their opinions through writing, petitioning the government, and taking over jobs that were once occupied by living soldiers were essential to the acceptance process; however, no occupation was more important than becoming educators. Females excelled in their roles as educators and transformed their pupils' lives which benefited future generations. With patience and persistence, northern women were able to achieve what their male counterparts could not, and that was to educate free African Americans in the South Carolina Sea Islands. The Port Royal Experiment gave women the opportunity to demonstrate that they had a higher purpose beyond the domestic sphere, thus defying civility. They implemented plans for the Port Royal Experiment and followed through well after males moved back to New England. Education, especially for the nation's youth, was vital to the survival of an America being torn apart by civil war. It was important for people to understand the reasons behind such atrocity and what it meant for everyone's future.

In most cases, whenever illiteracy exists educators are called forth to rectify the situation. When those who would be at a disadvantage staying illiterate in a free society happen to be newly freed slaves, not only do teachers combat the problem, but aid societies and abolitionist groups do as well. The call was answered during and after the Civil War at Port Royal, known as the Port Royal Experiment, which was concentrated on the South Carolina Sea Islands lying approximately fifty-five miles south of Charleston, South Carolina. The islands' population was comprised of plantation societies led by white male overseers. By 1861, eighty-three percent of the islands'

population consisted of slaves who were fully capable of conducting all types of manual labor; however, white males claimed slaves did not have equal mental capabilities. Upon the approach of Union forces, white male slave owners fled Port Royal and many were called to enlist by the Confederacy. As a result, the slaves were left without white southern leadership. The question quickly became whether the slaves could transition themselves from performing forced, unpaid labor to farming independently laboring freely.<sup>61</sup> Of course the word “free” was contemplated as well. Should these former slaves become free just because their white owners left the islands? Should they be considered full citizens of the state of South Carolina and obtain the rights afforded them (excluding the right to vote)? In a letter to journalist James Reed Spalding, Frederick Law Olmsted posited that the slaves were no longer subordinate to the white man and should indeed become full citizens. He suggested to Spalding that a bill be presented to the War Department in Washington D.C. that called for gradual compensated emancipation under which slaves could purchase their freedom.<sup>62</sup> This bill was never enacted, but that did not hinder others from vying for the same goal.<sup>63</sup> In addition to earning a living, female and male educators mirrored Olmsted’s pleas by recognizing that free African Americans had to become productive citizens within the community, but the freedmen lacked resources and education to achieve this. Brigadier General Thomas Sherman issued his General Order number nine that stated that “The helpless condition of the blacks inhabiting the vast area in the occupation of the forces of this command calls for immediate action on

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<sup>61</sup> Kevin Dougherty, *The Port Royal Experiment: A Case Study in Development* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 6, 22-23.

<sup>62</sup> Frederick Law Olmsted, *Frederick Law Olmsted: Writings on Landscape, Culture, and Society*, ed. Charles E. Beveridge (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 2015), 184.

<sup>63</sup> Dougherty, *The Port Royal Experiment*, 23, 27.

the part of a highly favored and philanthropic people.... Never was there a nobler or more fitting opportunity for the operation of that considerate and practical benevolence for which the Northern people have ever been distinguished.”<sup>64</sup> Several relief aid societies collaborated to send qualified instructors to the South Carolina Sea Islands to construct schools. For example, the New York National Freedmen’s Relief Association, the New England Freedmen’s Aid Society, the Cincinnati and Chicago Aid Societies, the American Missionary Association, and the Baltimore Aid Society sent teachers whose professions consisted of clerks, doctors, professors, students, divinity students, Underground Railroad agents, socialists, Unitarians, Methodists, and evangelists.<sup>65</sup> They focused on teaching reading and writing, mathematics, history, reason and agricultural practices to survive in a rural environment. St. Helena, Hilton Head, and Paris Islands were the main islands that housed these schools. In 1862 there were twelve schools established and more than thirty a year later.<sup>66</sup>

On February 22, 1862, the National Freedmen’s Relief Association (NFRA) was formed in New York, whose chief aim was to send teachers to the islands to instruct the freedmen in Christian principles along with mechanical and industrial education.<sup>67</sup> The American Missionary Association (AMA), also established in New York, had been operating less than twenty years before the start of the Civil War and was devoted to initiating Christian missions similar to the Port Royal Experiment. Naturally, the AMA contributed heavily by deploying 327 teachers by 1866 on every island where schools

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<sup>64</sup> *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series 1, Vol. 6 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880-1901), 222-223.

<sup>65</sup> William H. Pease, “Three Years among the Freedmen: William C. Gannett and the Port Royal Experiment,” *The Journal of Negro History* 42, no. 2 (1957): 98-99.

<sup>66</sup> Pease, “Three Years among the Freedmen,” 100.

<sup>67</sup> Dougherty, *The Port Royal Experiment*, 43.

were operating. One of the most influential aid societies to travel south was the Port Royal Relief Commission (PRRC). The PRRC was organized on March 20, 1862, in Philadelphia and, unlike the NFRA and the AMA, did not employ paid agents; instead, the group relied on volunteers and donations. Enough funds from churches, sewing circles, and small and large businesses enabled the PRRC to keep a store for the freedmen stocked on St. Helena Island, in addition to providing clothing and English education. The PRRC became the Pennsylvania Freedmen's Relief Association in October 1863 and continued to educate free African Americans in Tennessee, Virginia, and Washington D.C. The entire assumption of every society except the PRRC was that their representatives would only inhabit the islands until the free men, women, and children could support themselves.<sup>68</sup>

The islands experienced a rush of black refugees after General William T. Sherman made his famous march to the sea where he destroyed infrastructure in the southeast. Census records showed that the population of slaves living in South Carolina in 1860 was 57.2 percent and there were 82.8 percent of slaves in Beaufort County alone.<sup>69</sup> Slaves increased on St. Helena Island from 7,673 in 1860 to 11,063 ten years later. During the war many were forced from their homes or fled for the possibility to gain freedom. With so many ex-slaves inhabiting the islands, there were not enough teachers to educate them and most were from low-income families. Their new environments continued to be poor and they struggled to house themselves. On March 3, 1865 the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands was formed to deal with

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<sup>68</sup> Dougherty, *The Port Royal Experiment*, 41-51.

<sup>69</sup> "Distribution of Slaves in 1860," *United States Census Bureau*, last modified December 7, 2016, [https://www.census.gov/history/pdf/1860\\_slave\\_distribution.pdf](https://www.census.gov/history/pdf/1860_slave_distribution.pdf).

this crisis citing certain stipulations for the refugees. The organization would parcel land for loyal freedmen to rent up to forty acres, and after three years they could purchase the land. According to educator Ellen Murray, young female refugees were often either pregnant or were nursing children by the age of sixteen and due to the hard work mothers had to perform while they were pregnant, infant mortality had risen to fifty percent. Gideonites urged the fathers to take better care of the pregnant women to combat such a high number. By 1865, the conditions of mothers and family relations improved and proper time was spent taking care of children. Education continued as well despite the absence of teachers and the lack of resources for the upkeep of the schools. According to author and historian Kevin Dougherty, educators who stayed in Port Royal were determined to stay the course as they were keeping in tune with their own convictions, similar to ones that would comprise the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948. This document states that every human has a right to education, and that is exactly what the teachers upheld.<sup>70</sup>

The creation of northern aid societies, such as the American Missionary Association, addressed these concerns by calling teachers to the fold. Not only did teachers from these societies shed light on poor building construction, inadequate curriculum, and nonexistent learning materials, but they attempted to tackle the biggest question facing the South: what to do with free African Americans. Slavery had kept these men and women bound to the subordination of whites with virtually no opportunities to advance themselves. Most were illiterate, particularly those who occupied the South Carolina Sea Islands, and only knew how to cultivate staple crops. St.

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<sup>70</sup> Dougherty, *The Port Royal Experiment*, 76, 89-95.

Helena Island was one island most revered for the accomplishments of northern female teachers Laura Towne, Ellen Murray, and Charlotte Forten, who transformed an island of displaced African Americans into a rich ground for intellectual development. One of the most successful schools created by Towne, Murray, and Forten on St. Helena Island was the Penn School. Here, education of children and adult African Americans promoted new lives full of purpose and prestige which has benefited generations through the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Throughout the world, education followed certain patterns. In Ancient Egypt, educating the public was the duty of males who were qualified to teach religious and civic roles, and this was a main distinction between men and women. In Japan's Heian era (794-1183), women who belonged to elite families were tutored privately, while their male counterparts attended public institutions. Russia followed a similar pattern, though more emphasis was given to women learning domestic responsibilities. The Protestant Reformation in Europe sparked efforts toward female education to insure women could read and understand passages from the Bible. It was imperative for men and women to understand the word of God for the sake of salvation.<sup>71</sup> During the early modern era in Europe males taught aristocratic women poetry, history, theology, and science inside the women's homes. It is important to note that men were also pushing for female education to solidify their need for intelligent companionship. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, European women spread their intentions to teach female pupils through advertisements. Respondents learned in the home of the teacher or at girls' schools where they became literate and gained domestic expertise. Moreover, when boarding schools

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<sup>71</sup> Hannibal Hamlin, "Women Reading and Writing the Bible," *The Spenser Review* 44, no. 3 (2015): 57, accessed March 9, 2017, <http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/spenseronline/review/item/44.3.57/>.

were constructed, girls gained more opportunities to be taught outside of the home. By the time America was colonized, demands for schools and teachers increased as populations rose, thus women answered the call as women's schools became one solution to instructing the country's youth.<sup>72</sup> However, women who occupied these positions did so with opposition from males who took it upon themselves to manipulate certain situations.

Eighteenth-century America believed in the concept of "Republican Motherhood" that stated that females needed to be educated to raise well-educated sons and thus to ensure the success of the nation.<sup>73</sup> The specifics of this notion ceded any attempt to consider females equal to males. Furthermore, "Republican Motherhood's" main objective was to provide for future generations.<sup>74</sup> Though these women became enlightened, men still held power and prestige in the public sphere because they were able to use their knowledge and skills in government and public policy, whereas women could not. Author and women's historian Mary Beth Norton claims that during the era of "Republican Motherhood" women's lives were controlled by the patriarchy and it was inconceivable for women to take on public roles.<sup>75</sup> In spite of this, women still adhered to what they desired to do: teach.

Women within the United States were well equipped to teach as they instructed their children until they reached adulthood. Young girls were especially taken under their

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<sup>72</sup> Geraldine J. Clifford, *Those Good Gertrudes: A Social History of Women Teachers in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), 5, 13, 18-19.

<sup>73</sup> Linda Kerber, "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment-An American Perspective," *American Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (1976).

<sup>74</sup> "Women's Changing Roles as Citizens of a New Republic," *National Women's History Museum*, accessed March 20, 2017, [https://www.nwhm.org/online-exhibits/education/1700s\\_2.htm](https://www.nwhm.org/online-exhibits/education/1700s_2.htm).

<sup>75</sup> Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1980).

mother's wing as they were expected to take control of the household when the mother was no longer able to do so.<sup>76</sup> When men as prominent as Francis Bacon claimed it “expedient that by public authority schools for women-children [girls] be erected...in every Christian commonweal,” and in addition, taught by “grave, and learned matrons...and that honest and liberal stipends be appointed for the said schoolmistresses,” it seemed inevitable that women would find their purpose and their own space with an educational career.<sup>77</sup> While educating free African Americans in Port Royal, women witnessed selfish and controversial actions which they had to find a way to combat.

In the United States, many interested parties saw Port Royal as an opportunity to advance their personal agendas. Men such as Edward Philbrick, who was a civil engineer, were more concerned with shipping cotton to the north and taking advantage of the opportunity to prove free labor superior to slave labor than they were about the conditions of the African Americans. Unlike the women, Philbrick wanted to maximize profits from the land of the slave owners that had been ceded to the Federal government once they left the islands to enlist. Towne took notice of his schemes and wrote that men like Philbrick would threaten the freedmen back into slavery if they did not do as they were told. She also recorded an event where Philbrick would not allow the freedmen to cultivate their own corn patches instead of working in the cotton fields to line the pockets of the white men.<sup>78</sup> Free African Americans felt entitled to own their piece of land. They believed that

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<sup>76</sup> Clifford, *Those Good Gertrudes*, 2-5.

<sup>77</sup> The United States Bureau of Education, *Report of the Commissioner of Education for the Year 1902, Vol. 1* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903), 503.

<sup>78</sup> Laura Towne, *The Letters and Diary of Laura Towne, Written from the Sea Islands of South Carolina, 1862-1884*, ed. Rupert Sargent Holland (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1912).

“the way we can best take care of ourselves is to have land, and turn it and till it by our own labor.”<sup>79</sup> Small framed structures with vegetable gardens and small proportions of acreage for cotton were already owned and operated by the freedmen. In addition, they were able to buy goods associated with work and living, hence proving that they could sustain themselves without the aid of Philbrick.<sup>80</sup> The freedmen achieved higher amounts of success as students under female teachers. The first land sales took place on March 9, 1863, and continued through the rest of the war. In the same year, one-third of St. Helena was bought from investors, prohibiting freedmen from purchasing and dashing their hopes of continuing to develop stable towns and cities. One tactic used by Philbrick was to have the freedmen bid for land on the auction block with meager funds, which meant that they would easily be outbid by any white middle-to-upper-class male and would be prohibited from owning their own land.<sup>81</sup>

Dougherty disdained such conduct and suggested the Gideonites, abolitionists with strong religious piety who created a curriculum that would only enhance the freedmen’s own religion and not push for Christian convergence, could have stepped in and employed what he labels a participatory approach. According to Dougherty, this method “assumes that societal groups have conflicting interests, and focuses on empowering oppressed groups to transform social structures into more equitable societies.” In other words, the freedmen should have been given more power in choosing and keeping land to sustain themselves and their families and perhaps pacify the whites by some other means. To Dougherty, the freedmen could have also become stakeholders

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<sup>79</sup> Dougherty, *The Port Royal Experiment*, 65.

<sup>80</sup> “National Register of Historic Places: Multiple Property Documentation Form,” (electronic resource, United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, 1988), 7.

<sup>81</sup> Dougherty, *The Port Royal Experiment*, 59, 115.

in economic ventures which would have greatly enhanced their status on the islands. Any attempt at reconciliation was frivolous at best.

Religion played a major role in the experiment as well. Male members of religious societies, such as the northern aid societies, traveled to the Sea Islands with expectations of converting the freedmen to Christianity. However, the societies' idea of conversion consisted of ignoring the freedmen's culture and expecting them to dismiss the way they worshiped. To adopt an entirely new way of life is inconceivable unless it is desired, and the freedmen only wanted to be seen as equal to the whites while sustaining their separate identities. The female members of the societies, who considered themselves abolitionists, grounded their convictions in William Lloyd Garrison's moral instruction regarding emancipation as a required social norm in the 1820s and 1830s. Other followers of Garrison mixed their own beliefs with his and created anti-slavery societies.<sup>82</sup> Gideonites believed in the free-labor ideology which posited that if former slaves learned how to become self-reliant to the point where they grew enough food to sustain families, the marketplace would open up to them and they would contribute positively to the local economy.<sup>83</sup> The Boston Educational Commission followed such a format and promoted "the industrial, social, intellectual, moral and religious elevation of persons released from Slavery in the course of the War for the Union." Later the commission would change its name to the New England Society.<sup>84</sup>

Mutual goals of educating the freedmen gave the advantage to women, in particular Towne, Forten, and Murray, as they were left to their own devices without

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<sup>82</sup> Dougherty, *The Port Royal Experiment*, 17, 40, 61.

<sup>83</sup> Dougherty, *The Port Royal Experiment*, 56.

<sup>84</sup> *First Annual Report of the Boston Educational Commission for Freedmen*, May, 1863 (Boston, 1863), 4, 7.

male supervision, another way in which they defied civility. Each of these women was heavily committed to giving the freedmen more opportunities to thrive and create new lives for themselves. Towne arrived in Port Royal in 1862 and stayed to teach until her death in 1901. She left her work behind in New England because she felt she had a better, more meaningful job to do in Port Royal.<sup>85</sup> Murray felt the same way as Towne and aided her in instructing the freedmen. Forten, a free African American, felt obligated to provide the freedmen with an education as she shared an interest in their culture. All three were fully prepared to see the mission through and produce positive results on St. Helena Island.

St. Helena Island measures fifteen miles long and six miles wide, with Beaufort being its bustling town on the harbor. By the end of 1862, more than 1,700 children and adults were attending the school on St. Helena, while 500 children and adults were being taught on Hilton Head and Paris Islands, and most excelled with their studies. Ex-slaves were extremely eager to begin school and once they received books, took every opportunity to begin studying, even if they were also still working in the fields.<sup>86</sup> One freedman claimed that “Us wants to larn, fur we’ve been in darkness too long, an’ now we’re in light, us wants to larn.”<sup>87</sup> Women, such as Maria Weston Chapman, Susan Walker, Austa French, Laura Matilda Towne, Harriet Ware, Matilda Thompson, and Ellen Murray, recorded their experiences during and after the Civil War and claimed that

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<sup>85</sup> Towne, *The Letters and Diary of Laura Towne*.

<sup>86</sup> “Extracts from Letters Received by the Educational Commission of Boston, from Teachers Employed at Port Royal and its Vicinity,” *American Broad-sides and Ephemera, First Series no. 11211* (Boston: Educational Commission, 1862), [http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/HistArchive/?p\\_product=ABEA&p\\_theme=abea&p\\_nbid=R70D54LQMTQ5MDk5NjQ0Ni41NDc1NDU6MT0xND0xMzQuMTI2LjlxNC45OA&p\\_action=doc&p\\_queryname=11211&p\\_docref=v2:10D2F64C960591AE@ABEA-10F4545904CBAD28@11211-10E0D01329425CD8@4](http://infoweb.newsbank.com/iw-search/we/HistArchive/?p_product=ABEA&p_theme=abea&p_nbid=R70D54LQMTQ5MDk5NjQ0Ni41NDc1NDU6MT0xND0xMzQuMTI2LjlxNC45OA&p_action=doc&p_queryname=11211&p_docref=v2:10D2F64C960591AE@ABEA-10F4545904CBAD28@11211-10E0D01329425CD8@4).

<sup>87</sup> Dougherty, *The Port Royal Experiment*, 65-66.

the African Americans were just as capable of learning as whites. A few teachers believed that it was more important to learn how to do field work and create their own clothing and soap. Elizabeth Hyde Botume wrote that “We were convinced ... [that] needles and thread and soap and decent clothing were the best educators, and would civilize them sooner than book knowledge.”<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, practical and instructional classes greatly aided the African Americans, and many graduated from the schools and went on to become teachers. Most of the schools no longer exist, but the Penn School on St. Helena survived well after Reconstruction, and its buildings are still present today.<sup>89</sup> One reason the Penn School was so successful was due to the efforts of Laura Towne.

Towne was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1825 and was one of six children. Her earliest exposure to politics and public protests occurred in Massachusetts where speeches and appeals to the miscegenation law inspired her to entertain notions of defending her own convictions.<sup>90</sup> Like Alcott, Towne was opposed to living like women whose life’s work was caring for a family as a civil woman was supposed to do. Instead, Towne chose an untraditional approach to work within the public sphere. Towne’s religious beliefs were influenced after meeting Reverend William Henry Furness, an abolitionist. She took Furness’s words to heart when she heard his address to the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society:

“[T]he cause of abolition is not of man’s devising...it is the cause of truth—of all that is just and humane. Freedom, Right, Love, are not human

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<sup>88</sup> Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (Athens & London: University of Georgia Press, 1964), 88, 235.

<sup>89</sup> Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*, 373.

<sup>90</sup> Mary-Lou Breitborde, “Discourse, Education and Women’s Public Culture in the Port Royal Experiment: Interpreting the Life and Work of Laura Towne,” *American Educational History Journal* 38, no. 2 (2011): 430.

fictions. They are a prime interest of the universe, the eternal will of God, all nature is constructed for their furtherance.”<sup>91</sup>

Thus Towne became an advocate for universal human equality and liberty. In 1840, she moved to Philadelphia where she became a teacher and practiced homeopathic medicine, which consisted of the philosophy that a body can heal itself with proper remedies. During her entire upbringing in the North, Towne also volunteered with several charity organizations. She seized the opportunity to become a member of Unitarian groups who believed that society was essentially righteous.<sup>92</sup>

She took her talents to St. Helena in 1862, becoming the first northern woman to begin teaching free African Americans. Towne and Ellen Murray opened a school in the living room of The Oaks Plantation, which eventually became the Penn School.<sup>93</sup> Towne’s journal reveals how motivated she was to better the lives of freedmen when she wrote that “My whole life seems to have been fitting me for the work of instructing these negros [sic].”<sup>94</sup> Their first class contained nine adults. In addition to teaching her students basic reading, writing, arithmetic, and history, Towne used music as a way to teach religion and prevented the use of physical punishment as a disciplinary method for her students.<sup>95</sup> She and Murray ran the school for forty years, after which Towne transferred to the Hampton Institute that was known as the Penn Normal, Industrial, and Agricultural School. Towne’s efforts outside of the school focused on her passion for equality as she

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<sup>91</sup> W. H. Furness, “An Address Delivered before a Meeting of the Members and Friends of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society During the Annual Fair, December 19, 1849,” *Internet Archive*, accessed March 7, 2017, <http://www.archive.org/stream/addressdelivered00furn#page/8/mode/2up>.

<sup>92</sup> Dougherty, *The Port Royal Experiment*, 18.

<sup>93</sup> Elizabeth Jacoway, *Yankee Missionaries in the South: The Penn School Experiment* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana St. University Press, 1980), 30.

<sup>94</sup> Towne, *The Letters and Diary of Laura Towne*.

<sup>95</sup> Breitborde, “Discourse, Education and Women’s Public Culture in the Port Royal Experiment,” 438.

served as a third party between the government and freedmen in support for black land rights.<sup>96</sup> Towne devoted most of her life to philanthropic efforts until she passed away in 1901.<sup>97</sup> Charlotte Forten once described Towne as a “housekeeper, physician, everything, here. The most indispensable person on the place, and the people are devoted to her.”<sup>98</sup>

Ellen Murray was born in 1834 in St. John, New Brunswick, Canada. Upon the passing of her father, Murray received enough money to attend school, where she became fluent in English, German, and French. She became a teacher after she moved to Rhode Island, and in 1862 traveled to St. Helena Island to begin teaching the newly freed African American adults and children. Murray excelled in instructing her students, especially the female students, and had more educational training, unlike Towne.<sup>99</sup> Several rose to the top of her classes and were able to move on to begin careers once they moved off of the island. Some were so attached to Murray and learning in general that they showed considerable emotion when they graduated. Murray began teaching her students physiology in 1865 and assigned *Physiology Made Easy*, a book that outlined the importance of a clean environment.<sup>100</sup> Murray and Towne not only taught, but attended to the sick, distributed clothing and other goods, and visited families. Murray sought to construct a regular school, which was housed in the local Baptist Church, or the Brick Church as it was called. Murray taught advanced classes and served as the school’s principal until she passed away in 1908.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Breitborde, “Discourse, Education and Women’s Public Culture in the Port Royal Experiment,” 432.

<sup>97</sup> “Only a Teacher: Schoolhouse Pioneers,” *Laura Towne (1825-1901)*, accessed November 27, 2016, <http://www.pbs.org/onlyateacher/lauratowne.html>.

<sup>98</sup> Dougherty, *The Port Royal Experiment*, 74.

<sup>99</sup> Breitborde, “Discourse, Education and Women’s Public Culture in the Port Royal Experiment,” 437.

<sup>100</sup> Ellen Murray, “Letter from Ellen Murray February 16, 1865,” *The Pennsylvania Freedmen’s Bulletin* (St. Helensville, Port Royal), February 21, 2017.

<sup>101</sup> Spruill, et al, *South Carolina Women: Their Lives and Times* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2010), 19, 26.

Charlotte Forten was born a free African American in Philadelphia in 1837. Her family members were business and politically-minded people who became involved in the abolition movement. Forten followed in the same direction and attended the Normal School in Salem, Massachusetts, where she became the first African American teacher ever hired to the Salem school districts. In 1862 Forten taught on the island of St. Helena with Laura Towne. Forten was only able to stay on the island for two years due to health reasons, but during that time she published articles for the *Atlantic Monthly* and recorded her experiences in diaries. The *Atlantic Monthly* was one of the most influential magazines circulated during the 1850s and 1860s, read by men and women across eastern America.<sup>102</sup> Forten published accounts of her efforts during the experiment within those pages, and by publishing for a broad audience, reiterated the fact that women could achieve whatever they set their minds to in the public sphere. Similar to Alcott and Edmonds, Forten challenged norms of civility by describing her thoughts, emotions, and actions for everyone, especially men, to analyze.

Her submissions for the *Atlantic Monthly* described her experiences as a teacher on St. Helena Island. Upon agreeing to travel south, she boarded a steamer called the *United States* to Hilton Head, which was a desolate place according to Forten, and then to Beaufort where she waited for a boat to take her to St. Helena. Along her journey she described the environment as sandy with the coasts bordered by trees. She passed an old building that was once a library that had become a shelter for the free African Americans, as well as a slave auction site no longer operable. She commented on seeing northern innovations coming to the islands as a wharf had been constructed similar to the ones

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<sup>102</sup> Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1741-1930, Vol. 2* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1958-1968): 32-33.

Forten was used to seeing. Forten, Towne, and other teachers faced some opposition from some of the white adults who lived on St. Helena, though by Forten's account she did not let the sneers hinder her ambitions.<sup>103</sup> She did revel in listening to the boatmen singing joyously:

“Jesus make de blind to see,  
Jesus make de cripple to walk,  
Jesus make de deaf to hear.  
Walk in, kind Jesus!  
No man can hender me.”

The boatmen's enthusiasm for radical northern values shone through when they continued by singing about John Brown, the abolitionist who tried unsuccessfully to inspire a slave insurrection. Forten continued to discuss nature when comparing the rebels, or Confederates, writing that “The palmettos disappointed me; stiff and ungraceful, they have a bristling, defiant look, suggestive of Rebels starting up and defying everybody.”<sup>104</sup> Forten was referring to the war and believed that the rebels would not consent to have compassion against slavery or refuse to conform to the actions of other rebels.

The conditions of the freed people on St. Helena were pitiful. Forten observed that the natives' living quarters consisted of shacks, each with two tiny rooms with glassless windows and an open door as that was the only other way of lighting the space. The shacks were extremely crowded as multiple families inhabited them.<sup>105</sup> Forten, Towne, and the other teachers were welcomed to stay in the slave cabins at the Oaklands

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<sup>103</sup> Charlotte Forten, “Life on the Sea Islands”, Part I, *Atlantic Monthly XIII*, Lowcountry Africana: African American Geanology in SC, Ga, and FL, 1864, 587-590, <http://www.lowcountryafricana.com/life-on-the-sea-islands-part-i-by-charlotte-forten-atlantic-monthly-xiii-may-1864-pp-587-596/>.

<sup>104</sup> Mary S. Peake, Charlotte Forten, *The American Negro: His Story and Literature* (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1969), 69.

<sup>105</sup> Forten, “Life on the Sea Islands.”

Plantation. The slave cabins consisted of one-story buildings with low-hanging roofs and five small rooms. Eight or nine families lived inside at any given time.<sup>106</sup> Oaklands used to belong to a rebel physician named Dr. Sams, about whom Forten gives no further information. Charitable neighbors brought used furniture to accommodate the new teachers. Forten and the others decided to live without the luxuries they coveted up north. While Forten neglects to record a reason for this, perhaps she wanted to feel closer to the locals to have a better appreciation for their circumstances. Oaklands employed a cook for the teachers and an African American named Cupid who provided their basic amenities.<sup>107</sup>

Forten, who had several years of experience in New England schools, taught at a brick Baptist Church in September of 1862. One quote in particular captures the willingness of not only Forten to teach, but of the African American children to learn: “The first day of school was rather trying. Most of my children are very small, and consequently restless. But after some days of positive, though no severe, treatment, order was brought out of chaos. I never before saw children so eager to learn.”<sup>108</sup> The older children worked in the fields in the morning during the summer and then came to school in the afternoon, while the adults attended whenever time permitted. The adults were most interested in learning how to read, but they also learned the history of prominent figures in American history. Everyone who attended school performed exceptionally well and Forten boldly asserted that if the students had never been enslaved, the black race would be superior to any other race on earth.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Peake, Charlotte Forten, 73.

<sup>107</sup> Forten, “Life on the Sea Islands.”

<sup>108</sup> “Only a Teacher: Schoolhouse Pioneers.”

<sup>109</sup> Peake, Charlotte Forten, 71.

After the Civil War, Forten lived in Washington, D.C. where she married Francis Grimke, who was a minister and a nephew of the Grimke sisters, who were starch abolitionists and women's rights advocates. Forten passed away in 1914.

One of the most successful schools created on St. Helena Island was the Penn School. It was opened by Laura Towne and Ellen Murray in 1862, and grew from a one-room space in the living room of The Oaks Plantation to a large establishment. The two

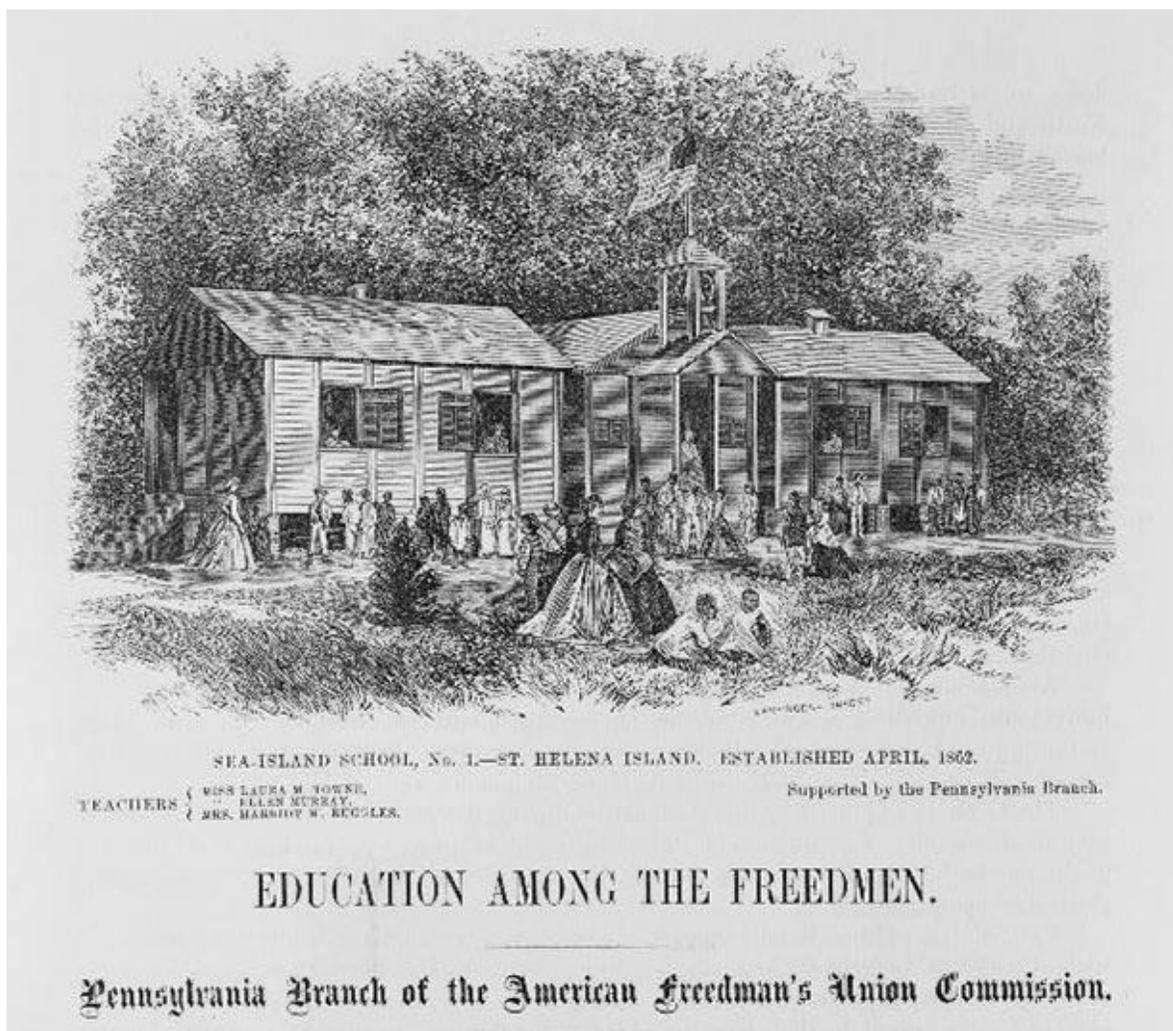


Figure 1. Penn School. Courtesy of the Library of Congress

successfully operated it for forty years. The school itself was open for more than one hundred years. Towne and Murray, along with many other teachers and missionaries

from aid societies, taught African Americans what were considered the standards for white, civil women: the New England view of morality. However, the teachers also adhered to their own curriculum not defined by civility as the answer to what African Americans should be taught when they were assimilated into white society. Practical education took place in which the students were taught arithmetic, history, penmanship, and reading, as well as homemaking for the females and Sunday School for all. There was an emphasis on giving the children and adults the physical tools and knowledge to take care of themselves by learning farming techniques; however, the Penn School had to grow for those goals to be achieved. In the early days of the school, there was only one farm, one horse, only a few tools, and one shelter. On their own land, African Americans lived on barely enough corn to survive and lived in poor houses and were not familiar with using utensils. This was rectified by separating students into farmers' conferences where they practiced what they were taught. Individual farms grew as half of each day was devoted to ways to improve their own communities. Thus the school's resources grew immensely which provided the students with all they needed.<sup>110</sup> Potatoes, corn, pumpkins, sugarcane, pecans, peanuts, rice, and bananas was harvested; baskets, quilts, rag rugs, and corn-shuck mats was produced, and needlework was taught to the females, who also learned how to cook and sew. Many former students became teachers, clerks, and store employees and ultimately created better living conditions for themselves.<sup>111</sup>

The Hampton Institute in Virginia, an establishment that provided education for freedmen, played a large role in supervising the Penn School. Towne recruited Hollis Burke Frissell, the principal of the Hampton Institute, to improve the numerous other

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<sup>110</sup> Jacoway, *Yankee Missionaries in the South*, 27-51.

<sup>111</sup> Jacoway, *Yankee Missionaries in the South*, 70, 52, 31.

public schools being created throughout the South Carolina Sea Islands as well as the agricultural practices of the Penn School. Frissell recruited Quakers, academics, and family relations as board members to help govern the operation. The school adopted the name Penn Normal, Industrial, and Agricultural School after other teachers were brought in to teach new subjects. Rossa Belle Cooley and Miss Frances Cara Butler, both previously employed at the Hampton Institute, along with Grace House, were recruited to teach Latin prose, geography, physics, government, and algebra, all of which received excellent responses from the students, according to Cooley. While education was a major focus at the Penn School, attention was also given to medicine and the well-being of the students. Cooley was concerned with the health of the native islanders, so she hired Dr. York Bailey, who graduated from the Penn School and then attended Howard University to study medicine, to attend to physical needs of his patients. Cooley also served as the Secretary of the South Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs and the Beaufort's Clover Club, which was a literary society. Like Towne and Murray, Cooley and House retired after teaching on the island for forty years.

By 1929, the Penn School boasted twelve grades and made students attend classes year-round. It became a place much like our high schools are today in offering counseling, mediation for conflict resolution, and advice for the future. Forty years later, Penn's leadership changed hands again when the administration hired John W. Gadson, a former high school science teacher, who selected new board members who helped make lasting impressions on the students.<sup>112</sup> The Penn School operated as a school until after

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<sup>112</sup> Jacoway, *Yankee Missionaries in the South*, 76, 91, 237, 262.

World War II, and then became a community center that still serves the island's citizens by preserving St. Helena's cultural heritage today.<sup>113</sup>

The act of educating within the public sphere was a method effective enough to prove that women could contribute positive outcomes to the public realm. The Civil War in the nineteenth century created avenues for teachers to take their place outside of the domestic sphere; a case in point was the opportunities in the South Carolina Sea Islands. Female teachers made a significant difference in the lives of the free African Americans. The successful schools that were created on many of the islands contribute to the storied history of the area today. The Penn Center in particular lets visitors know of the determination of women who defied what it meant to be civilized in the nineteenth century as online exhibits tell the tales of the South Carolina Sea Islands. The Port Royal Experiment was one of the most profound educational experiences in the history of the United States. Impressively, Towne, Murray, and Forten sustained their ambition and commitment to educate the freedmen of which men never achieved. The generations of African Americans who lived in the South Carolina Sea Islands have themselves and these women to thank as an entire culture was rejuvenated and was given promising futures. Eagerness coupled with ability negated any fear or doubt from which could have kept them performing domestic roles. Women accomplished this without any Federal funding or government regulation and did not rely on male support. Unselfish motivation carried these women's successes and motivated others to carry on their life's work.

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<sup>113</sup> Diane McMahon, "Penn Center: A South Carolina Historical Legacy, An American Cultural Treasure," *Penn Center 1862*, accessed November 23, 2016, <http://www.penncenter.com/welcome/>.

## Conclusion

Pivotal female actions performed during the Civil War culminated in redefining women's civility, and set the stage for the emergence of women's rights legislation in the Progressive Era. American middle-to-upper-class white and African American women used the strongest tools at their disposal, writing and teaching, to make their case. By performing these acts, they were able to get males to see that society would greatly benefit from women's work outside of the domestic sphere. In addition, the educational opportunities that northern women seized prior to the Civil War had advanced them further and helped them apply it to their ambitions.

Emily Dickinson, Louisa May Alcott, and S. Emma E. Edmonds, among others, wrote about controversial topics such as war, death, and suffering, which was not appropriate for civil women. Alcott took charge of wartime situations as a nurse in direct defiance of civility; however, the duties she performed in the public sphere served as an example of the ability of women to work on their own and complete tasks of universal importance. Edmonds stepped into the life of a male soldier and fought in the Civil War as she felt that she could not make contributions to society from home.

Similarly, Laura Towne, Ellen Murray, and Charlotte Forten took it upon themselves to successfully construct and run the Penn School on St. Helena Island off of the coast of South Carolina. Their actions prepared free African Americans to live among others in American society and influence their own future generations. None of these women believed that women should only perform domestic duties; they were destined for active and often successful lives in the public sphere. Towne, Murray, and Forten are excellent examples of women who were not held down by demands of a patriarchal

society; instead, they advocated for what they believed would solve the problems that arose during a tumultuous time in American history. Women who lived during World War I and World War II took the lessons of the women outlined here and applied them to their roles in society, as men came to rely on women in the public sphere to achieve national goals. Thus, the ramifications of these women's actions still echo through the halls of liberation today.

As a companion to this analysis, the online exhibition *Civil War Successes: Northern Women in the Civil War*, gives visitors a better understanding of these women's achievements through visual elements. Using the term *successes* is fitting, especially with the Port Royal Experiment, as pictures of the Penn School and twentieth-century graduating classes prove that the mission was still being upheld and producing educated adults. Showing where women such as Dickinson and Towne lived versus where they passed away, lets visitors grapple with the decisions these women made and how evident their motivation for changing the definition of civility was. Basic biographies complement examples of each women's prose, as well as a video visitors can watch on the Port Royal Experiment. There are links for additional information as well. The online exhibit is meant to inspire visitors to conduct their own studies on any element presented. Together, these chapters and the companion website attempt to illustrate the dynamic roles played by northern women in the Civil War Era.

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