



Confederate Daughters: Coming of Age during the Civil War

Victoria E. Ott

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Confederate Daughters: Coming of Age during the Civil War explores gender, age, and Confederate identity by examining the lives of teenage daughters of Southern slaveholding, secessionist families. These young women clung tenaciously to the gender ideals that upheld marriage and motherhood as the fulfillment of female duty and to the racial order of the slaveholding South, an institution that defined their status and afforded them material privileges. Author Victoria E. Ott discusses how the loyalty of young Southern women to the fledgling nation, born out of a conservative movement to preserve the status quo, brought them into new areas of work, new types of civic activism, and new rituals of courtship during the Civil War.

Social norms for daughters of the elite, their preparation for their roles as Southern women, and their material and emotional connections to the slaveholding class changed drastically during the Civil War. When differences between the North and South proved irreconcilable, Southern daughters demonstrated extraordinary agency in seeking to protect their futures as wives, mothers, and slaveholders.

From a position of young womanhood and privilege, they threw their support behind the movement to create a Confederate identity, which was in turn shaped by their participation in the secession movement and the war effort. Their political engagement is evident from their knowledge of military battles, and was expressed through their clothing, social activities, relationships with peers, and interactions with Union soldiers.

Confederate Daughters also reveals how these young women, in an effort to sustain their families throughout the war, adjusted to new domestic duties, confronting the loss of slaves and other financial hardships by seeking paid work outside their homes.

Drawing on their personal and published recollections of the war, slavery, and the Old South, Ott argues that young women created a unique female identity different from that of older Southern women, the Confederate bellehood. This transformative female identity was an important aspect of the Lost Cause mythology—the version of the conflict that focused on Southern nationalism—and bridged the cultural gap between the antebellum and postbellum periods.

Augmented by eighteen illustrations, this book offers a generational understanding of the transitional nature of wartime and its effects on women's self-perceptions. *Confederate Daughters* identifies the experiences of these teenage daughters as making a significant contribution to the new woman in the New South.

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