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A Season in Town: Plantation Women and the Urban South, 1790-1877

Marise Bachand, *University of Western Ontario*

Supervisor: Margaret M.R. Kellow, *The University of Western Ontario*

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree
in History

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**A SEASON IN TOWN:
PLANTATION WOMEN AND THE URBAN SOUTH, 1790-1877**

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**The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
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London, Ontario, Canada**

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THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies

CERTIFICATE OF EXAMINATION

Supervisor

Examiners

Dr. Margaret M.R. Kellow

Dr. Charlene Boyer Lewis

Dr. Monda Halpern

Dr. Robert MacDougall

Dr. Samuel Clark

The dissertation by

Marise Bachand

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Abstract

What did the city mean for plantation women in the slaveholding South? This dissertation documents how a privileged group of women experienced and represented urban space in a society primarily defined by its rurality. From the very beginning of colonization and until the end of slavery, cities like Charleston and New Orleans occupied a key place in the lives of these women. Bridging the artificial gap between country and city present in the historiography, this study revises the plantation mythology, which contends that plantation mistresses rarely went to town, and when there, they seldom ventured beyond the domestic space. After examining the residential pattern of elite planting families, characterized by seasonal migrations and absenteeism, it explores the interplay between gender, space, and power in the city. Town houses, yards, theaters, ballrooms, libraries, coffee houses, parks, and streets were sites of intense gendered politics in the Old South. Whether they were born on a rice or a cotton plantation, whether they were Americans or Creoles, whether they were young belles, middle aged matrons or older widows, plantation women overwhelmingly took pleasure in a season in town. Even though a number of them were somewhat ambivalent about the moral and sexual dangers of the city, they still prized the proximity of social networks and the urban amenities. In all cases, however, their enjoyment of the city was based on the exploitation of the enslaved, either in the cotton fields or the urban household. Privileged by their class and race, these women were nonetheless subordinated by their gender. The story of the encounter of plantation women with the urban South told in this dissertation is therefore a story of accommodation and resistance to southern patriarchy.

Keywords: Women, City, South, Plantation, Charleston, New Orleans, Gendered Spaces, Absenteeism, Town houses, Migrations, Domestic slaves.

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I dedicated this dissertation to my daughter Simone, born at the beginning of this project, and for whom I now write the history of women.

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Prologue

“All the Pleasures the Town Affords”

With the death of Harriot Pinckney Horry in 1830, the Old South lost one of its most accomplished women. For the last forty-five years of her life, Harriot had successfully managed the rice plantation of her deceased husband Daniel, and she bequeathed to her daughter a considerable fortune, consisting of hundreds of acres of prime land in the South Carolina Lowcountry, dozens of head of cattle, and nearly two hundred slaves. Her legacy also included two residences: a plantation house in Saint James Santee and Prince George Winyah County, known as *The Hampton*¹; and an elegant dwelling on Tradd Street in Charleston. While the plantation was her principal residence during her married life, the widow Harriot chose to inhabit the southern metropolis for the greatest part of the year.² As a girl, she had loved the country.³ But as she aged, the life of a plantation mistress weighed heavily on her shoulders, and a niece recommended that she “certainly ought now to enjoy some respite, some cessation from constant exertion.”⁴ In Charleston, Mrs. Horry’s fêtes were grand events.⁵ The dowager entertained large gatherings in her townhouse as the posthumous inventory of her goods, which included plenty of chairs, nearly two thousand bottles of wine, and the finest china and silverware, testified.⁶ She also enjoyed being surrounded by friends and family members who came to Tradd Street for a morning call or an evening tea.⁷ A close acquaintance of Harriot, who had known her for decades, never

¹ In this study, the names planters gave to their plantations (and sometimes to their town houses) are italicized to highlight the fact that they were mental constructs, in addition of being places of residence and economic production.

² While her husband was alive, the couple divided their time between the plantation and a house at the corner of Broad and Legare Street. Elise Pinckney, ed. *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney, 1739-1762*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972, xxiii; Harriot Horry Ravenel, *Eliza Pinckney*, New York: Charles Scribner’s sons, 1896, 244. According to family correspondence, Harriot Horry appears to be in town most months of the year starting in the mid-1790s. See Rutledge Family Papers, Ralph Izard Papers, Manigault Family Papers, all three collections at the South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

³ Harriot Pinckney to Dolly, 20 July 1763, Harriot Pinckney Letterbook, 1763-1767, Pinckney-Lowdes Paper, Harriot Pinckney Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

⁴ Sarah E. Huger to Harriot Horry, 5 March 1816, Harriot Horry Rutledge Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

⁵ Henry Izard to Margaret Izard Manigault, 28 March 1799, Ralph Izard Papers, South Caroliniana Library Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

⁶ *Charleston Inventories*, Book G, Judge of Probate, District of Charleston.

⁷ Margaret Izard Manigault to Gabriel Manigault, 30 November 1792, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina; Anne Middleton Izard to Alice Delancey Izard, 27 March 1826, Ralph Izard Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

even had “an opportunity of seeing Mrs Horry in her rural character.”⁸ Harriot and her daughter, her namesake, were “City Dames” as a relative affectionately dubbed them.⁹

Harriot’s mother undeniably shaped her enthusiasm for the city. In a letter dated May 2, 1740, the young Eliza Lucas described to her London friend, Mrs. Boddicott, her everyday existence in South Carolina. Daughter of a West Indies planter who migrated a few years earlier to the continent, Eliza resided in the Lowcountry where she could oversee the three plantations of her absent father and pursue her agricultural experiments with indigo. Although she genuinely cherished her bucolic and solitary life, she granted a special place to her stays of “3 weeks or a month at a time” in Charleston. After the long weeks quietly spent on the plantation, she was finally able to “enjoy all the pleasures Charles Town affords.”¹⁰ Eliza portrayed the main town of the colony “as a polite, agreeable place” where “people live very Gentile and very much in the English taste.” There, she stayed with her friends Mrs. Pinckney and Mrs. Cleland with whom she partook of “some of the amusement suitable to her time of life.”¹¹ In Eliza’s words, heading to the city was tantamount to gaiety, while going back to the country meant returning to gravity.¹² For this hardworking and unusually mature young woman of eighteen years of age, these urban enjoyments were guilty pleasures that brought a certain frivolity to her otherwise regimented routine.¹³ When she married Charles Pinckney in 1744, Eliza maintained a special relation to the city. Her husband supervised the design and building of a townhouse for his young wife on East Bay Street, the most prestigious address of the colony, where they lived seasonally for almost a decade before sailing to England.¹⁴ Eliza reluctantly returned to Carolina in 1758, and the town appeared in this “remote Corner of the Globe” as the place that could better provide an ersatz of the refinement she prized in the mother country.¹⁵

⁸ Margaret Izard Manigault to Mary Pinckney, 7 May 1809, Ralph Izard Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

⁹ Thomas Pinckney to Harriot Horry Rutledge, 21 March 1827, Harriot Horry Rutledge Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

¹⁰ Eliza Lucas Pinckney to Mrs Boddicott, 2 May 1740, *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney*, op.cit., 7-8.

¹¹ Eliza Lucas Pinckney to Mary Bartlett, c. April-May 1742, *ibid.*, 38.

¹² Eliza Lucas Pinckney to Elizabeth Lamb Pinckney, c. July-September 1741, *ibid.*, p.19.

¹³ Eliza Lucas Pinckney to Colonel Lucas, c. 1 June 1742, *ibid.*, 50-51. C.f. Anne Firor Scott, “Self-Portraits: Three Women,” in Richard Bushman et al., eds, *Uprooted Americans: Essays to Honor Oscar Handlin*, Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1979, 64-65.

¹⁴ Elise Pinckney, ed. *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney*, op.cit., xxi; Frances Leigh Williams, *A Founding Family: The Pinckneys of South Carolina*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978, 12-13.

¹⁵ Eliza Lucas Pinckney to George Keate, February 1762, *Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney*, op.cit., 180-181.

During her entire existence, however, Eliza Lucas Pinckney nourished a certain suspicion toward the city and its pleasures. Given the choice by her parents to live either in town or in the country, the young Eliza deemed the latter “more prudent as well as more agreeable” for her mother and herself.¹⁶ Eliza distrusted on philosophical grounds “those diversions [*sic*] commonly called innocent” that came with the urban social life:

The danger arises from the too frequent indulging ourselves in them which tends to effeminate the mind as it takes it of of [*sic*] pleasures of a superior and more exalted Nature as well as waists [*sic*] our time; and may at length give it a disrelish for them. For where these airy [*sic*] pleasures have taken intire [*sic*] possession of the mind the rational faculties are more and more unactive and, without doubt, for want of use will degenerate into downright dullness so that ‘tis not playing a game at Cards or going to a ball now and then to relax the mind – but the immoderate love of them is sinful.¹⁷

Her reservations toward the city did not change when Eliza became a mother. In 1761, while her son Charles was being schooled in England, she warned him: “you will be in a City surrounded with temptations with every youthful passion about you. It will therefore require your utmost vigilance to watch over your passions.”¹⁸ The matriarch almost certainly gave similar advice to Harriot, her only daughter. At the tender age of 17, the future Mrs. Horry declared: “I love society and like to partake of some of some [*sic*] of its pleasures and amusements of the season extremely well.” But, she added, “I am very serious when I say I would not live in a constant round of them upon any account.”¹⁹ From mother to daughter, the city and the pleasures it afforded were to be enjoyed with circumspection.

What did the city mean for plantation women in the slaveholding South? The purpose of this study is to provide answers to this question. In the following pages are woven the particular stories of about seventy-five plantation women into a larger story that comprises their collective history and experience of the urban South. Wives, mothers, daughters, or sisters of planters who counted their slaves by the dozen, these women came mainly from states where large plantations prevailed, such as South Carolina, Georgia, Louisiana or Mississippi, but a few came from frontier state, such as Texas, Kentucky, or

¹⁶ Eliza Lucas Pinckney to Mrs Boddicott, 2 May [1740], *ibid.*, 7. Advertisements of Colonel Lucas in the *South Carolina Gazette* mention two properties in town: one “next door to Mr. Harvey near White Point,” and one “near Conselliere’s at upper end of Tradd Street.” *South Carolina Gazette*, Charleston, South Carolina, August 25-September 1, 1739, December 29-January 5, 1740. Paula A. Treckel, “Eliza Lucas Pinckney: “Dutiful, Affectionate, and Obedient Daughter,”” Winfred B. Moore, Jr., Joseph F. Tripp, and Lyon G. Tyler, Jr., eds, *Developing Dixie: Modernization in a Traditional Society*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1985, 219-234.

¹⁷ Eliza Lucas Pinckney to Mrs. H., [June or July 1742], *Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney*, op.cit., 48-49.

¹⁸ Eliza Lucas Pinckney to Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, 7 February 1761, *ibid.*, 159.

¹⁹ Harriot Pinckney Horry to [unknown], April 1766, Letterbook, Harriot Horry Ravenel Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

Arkansas. Their experience varied significantly from one locale to another. Still, the broad geographic scope of this study reveals that beyond significant differences, there were strong continuities in the lives of plantation women, in large part because slavery as a system of economic exploitation and racial domination gave the South a distinctive form of patriarchy. From the colonial period to the end of the Civil War, women of the master class experienced the city: for a few weeks or for a few years, for a season or for a lifetime. They yearned for stays in urban centers including Charleston, New Orleans, Savannah, Mobile, or Natchez. Instead of the isolation and industry inherent in plantation life, urban settings were synonymous with refinement, shopping, promenades, social gatherings, and proximity to kin. Like Eliza Lucas Pinckney and Harriot Pinckney Horry, many plantation women were somewhat ambivalent about the moral, physical, and sexual dangers of these urban centers. In comparison with the country, however, the city appeared to these women as an emancipatory space. Whether they were born on a rice or a cotton plantation, whether they were speaking English or French, whether they were young belles, middle aged matrons or older widows, planter women overwhelmingly took pleasure in a season in town. After presenting how this study contributes to the historiography of the slaveholding South, this prologue lays the theoretical foundations for this exploration of the interplay between gender, space, and power in a slaveholding society. It uncovers two spatial realities that shaped the lives of plantation women: containment and isolation. It ends with a presentation of the methodology and themes covered by this study.

The slaveholding South has been often defined as a rural region that was, once upon a time, controlled by a powerful elite of slaveholders. Historians have thus mostly portrayed the white masters in the rustic surroundings of the Big House overlooking the slaves' quarters and the plantation.²⁰ Until the late twentieth century, historians tended to view urban life as being incompatible with a slave society.²¹ As a result, the inclusion of towns and

²⁰ On the antebellum creation of the myth of the southern plantation, see "the South and the Myth of the Garden," chapter XIII of Henry Nash Smith. *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950.

²¹ The classic on the question is Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820-1860*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1964. Even historians as different as conservative Ulrich B. Phillips and liberal C. Vann Woodward shared the conviction that the soul of the South rested in its rurality. See Phillips, *Life and Labor in*

cities into the meta-narrative of the region only took place with the watershed 1977 publication of *The City in Southern History*. The authors of this anthology demonstrated that in spite of the modest demographic weight of towns and cities (10% of the region's population compared to 36% in the North-East in 1860), the South historically encompassed a significant urban component.²² David Goldfield argues that, "the daily life of southern history may have occurred mostly on the farms and plantations, but the key stages for momentous change were the towns and cities that mobilized people and ideas."²³ The urban South has since provided historians with an inspiring canvas to explore the heterogeneity of a region that, relatively speaking, was in the nineteenth century, "a land of cities and towns, railroads and steamboats, white democracy and equality."²⁴

Yet, the urban life of elite planters is not well understood.²⁵ Charleston and its resident planters, sometimes described as part-time urbanites, often appear in the regional landscape as exceptional. Other cities such as Richmond, Mobile, or New Orleans, have been presented as the preserve of middle-class merchants.²⁶ Still, historians of the master class have acknowledged that across the South towns and cities were the focus of the social, political, legal, intellectual, and religious lives of planters, given that "the plantation might be

the Old South, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, Institute for Southern Studies, 2007 (1929). Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993 (1960).

²² Blaine A. Brownell and David R. Goldfield, *The City in Southern History* (1977), Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1977.

²³ David Goldfield, *Region, Race, and Cities: Interpreting the Urban South*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997, 13.

²⁴ Edward L. Ayers contrasts the slaveholding South with Brazil, the other great slave society of the hemisphere in "What we Talk about when we talk about the South," *All Over the Map: Rethinking American Regions*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996, 73.

²⁵ No comprehensive monograph on this social group has been published since the comparative study of Frederic Cople Jaher, *The Urban Establishment: Upper Strata in Boston, New York, Charleston, Chicago, and Los Angeles*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982, 317-451. Jaher describes the Lowcountry planters as a rural-urban squirearchy. The virtual vacuum surrounding the urban life of planters is somewhat surprising considering that southern planters have been inexhaustible subjects of investigation for historians in the last thirty years. Historians have documented, among other things, the daily rituals of elite Southerners (Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), their values (Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor & Slavery*, Princeton: Princeton, 1996; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1880s*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), religious beliefs (Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt*, New York: A.A. Knopf, 1997), kinship relations (Jane Turner Censer, *North Carolina Planters and their Children, 1800-1860*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984; Lorri Glover, *All Our Relations: Blood Ties and Emotional Bonds among the Early South Carolina Gentry*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), or ideologies (Jeffrey Robert Young, *Domesticating Slavery: The Master Class in Georgia and South Carolina, 1670-1837*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

²⁶ Brownell and Goldfield, *The City in Southern History*, op.cit., 9.

attractive for quiet repose, but city streets held the keys to the kingdom of wealth and power.”²⁷

The slaveholding South counted a number of important towns and cities that were central to the life of elite planters.²⁸ Seaports and river towns such as Baltimore, Richmond, Norfolk, Charleston, Savannah, Mobile, New Orleans, and Natchez acted both as commercial emporiums and cosmopolitan centres.²⁹ Although they differed significantly by their size, their racial makeup, and their economic activity, these towns and cities were all connected to the plantation economy.³⁰ Because they were agriculturalists before anything else, planters perceived the city not as an economic centre, but first and foremost as a cultural and a recreational centre.³¹ Cities as different as the industrial Richmond and the mercantile Mobile both catered to the needs of plantation owners with their shops, hotels, and cultural offerings (or at least they aspired to meet these needs).³² Their commerce therefore, often centered on the seasonal arrival of these wealthy clients. Cities such as Charleston and New Orleans were busy for about six months of the year, their business season beginning with the arrival of the harvest in the middle of the fall and ending when the heat (and the epidemics) returned at the end of the spring.³³

Historians of the urban South have largely overlooked the agency of elite women. They often reduce the female characters in their accounts to the function of society’s gatekeepers.³⁴ To a certain extent, the southern urban landscape of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is imagined as a masculine public space, inhabited by merchants,

²⁷ Goldfield, *ibid.*, 10. See also on the importance of small towns and villages, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988, 5-6; James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders*. New York: Vintage Books, 1982, 92.

²⁸ Richard C. Wade coined the term “urban perimeter” in *Slavery in the Cities*, *op.cit.*

²⁹ These cities were most closely associated with the plantation economy, notably the trade of cotton, rice, and sugar cane, while other cities such as Baltimore, Louisville, St. Louis, and Washington, D.C., although very important to the region, functioned differently as border state cities. Claudia Dale Goldin, *Urban Slavery in the American South, 1820-1860: A Quantitative History*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976, 13.

³⁰ Claudia Dale Goldin characterizes the urban South as “a service center for a somewhat traditional agricultural economy.” Goldin, *op.cit.*, 13.

³¹ Jaher, *op.cit.*, 361. In his classic essay, Lewis Mumford suggests that a city is primarily defined by art, culture, and political purpose. *City in History: Its origins, Its Transformation, Its Prospects*, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1961. According to Louis Wirth’s classic essay, size alone does not qualify a place as urban, “Urbanism as a Way of Life,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 44 (1938), 1-24.

³² Harriet E. Amos, *Cotton City: Urban Development in Antebellum Mobile*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001 (1985), 44-46.

³³ Jo Ann Carrigan, *The Saffron Scourge: A History of Yellow Fever in Louisiana, 1796-1905*, Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1994, 241. See also Leila Sellers, *Charleston Business on the Eve of the American Revolution*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1934.

³⁴ See in particular the review of Elizabeth H. Turner, “New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910. By Don H. Doyle,” *The Journal of Southern History*, vol.57, November 1991, 745.

politicians, mechanics, seamen, and slaves. Here the only women that one encountered were female slaves, tradeswomen, and prostitutes; women who did not, because of race, condition, and class considerations, conform to the gendered ideology of separate spheres. Conventional southern historiography assumes that plantation women rarely went to town, and when there, they seldom ventured beyond the private space of homes. As early as Ulrich B. Phillips's 1918 *American Negro Slavery*, the assumption has been that while white men regularly went to town, women stayed behind on the plantation to perform their domestic work.³⁵ These assumptions became deeply ingrained in the historiographical tradition of the region.

Accordingly, historians of southern white women have mostly considered the life experience of the planters' wives and daughters in the rural context; the plantation mistress has therefore dominated the historiography.³⁶ Even so, several historians have written on the women of specific southern cities, documenting their work, legal status, and associative life.³⁷ These works have demonstrated, as Elizabeth Enstam York argues, that even "camouflaged within families, hidden behind prescriptions of propriety, and ignored by the definitions of history, women nevertheless were full participants in the creation of urban living."³⁸ Much like historians of slavery in the urban South, scholars of southern women have represented the city as an emancipatory place for women of all races, classes, and conditions.³⁹ For instance, in her study of single women in the antebellum South, Christine Jacobson Carter maintains that "women without husbands found plenty to do and to enjoy in Charleston and Savannah," these cities being "nearly ideal places to be a single, white, southern female of

³⁵ Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor As Determined by the Plantation Regime*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969 (1918), 323-324.

³⁶ Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Women's World in the Old South*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1982; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988; Marli F. Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-1880*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998; Kirsten E. Wood, *Masterful Women: Slaveholding Widows from the American Revolution through the Civil War*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

³⁷ Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1984; Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, *Ladies, Women, & Wenches: Choice & Constraint in Antebellum Charleston & Boston*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990; Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990; Lois Virginia Meacham Gould, "In Full Enjoyment of their Liberty: The Free Women of Color of the Gulf Ports of New Orleans, Mobile, and Pensacola, 1769-1860," Ph.D. Dissertation, Emory University, 1991; Cynthia Megan Kennedy, *Braided Relations, Entwined Lives: The Women of Charleston's Urban Slave Society*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005.

³⁸ Elizabeth Enstam York, *Women and the Creation of Urban Life: Dallas, Texas, 1843-1920*, College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1998, xv.

³⁹ Although according to Cynthia Kennedy, a city like Charleston was mostly a place for elite ladies. Cynthia Kennedy, *Braided Relations, Entwined Lives*, op.cit., 208.

some means.”⁴⁰ Of these studies, set *either* in the city or in the country, two stereotypes of elite white womanhood have emerged: in the country, the industrious and isolated plantation mistress and, in the city, the leisured and socialite lady. City and country essentially appear in the historiography as two distinct places inhabited by two distinct groups of women. As a result, some historians erase entire chapters of a woman’s life, such as one who gives a static portrayal of Harriot Pinckney Horry as a female planter that “stayed on at Hampton, cultivating rice beside the Santee River, until her death in 1830.”⁴¹

As Steven M. Stowe argues, however, women of the planter class experienced (and imagined) city and country not as two separate places, but as parts of a city-and-country theme spliced together by seasonal migrations.⁴² Stowe also suggests that in the late antebellum period, there might have been a gendered experience of country-and-city for elite men and women of the South Carolina Lowcountry:

If such men and women had been granted their respective wishes, it seems they would have passed each other on the Charleston road, women streaming into the city in search of company and conversation, men fleeing to the country in search of respite from the consequences of their own desire for power and position.⁴³

Historians have in recent years documented the mobility of elite slaveholders, whether they were on the move toward the Southwest, the Virginia Springs, Philadelphia, or Europe in pursuit of prosperity and/or refinement. Reflecting on the peripatetic lifestyle of the agricultural elite, Charlene Boyer Lewis observes, “the plantation neither defined the entire experience of planter men and women nor comprised the only significant place in their world. The southern elite was highly mobile, traveling from place to place according to season and inclination.”⁴⁴ Like Stowe, many scholars now believe that men and women experienced these migrations differently.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Christine Jacobson Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness: Unmarried Women in the Urban South, 1800-1865*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006, 4-5.

⁴¹ Cara Anzilotti, “Autonomy and the Female Planter,” *Journal of Southern History*, 1997, 63 (2), 246; For a similar focus on the rural life of Horry, see Constance B. Schulz, “Eliza Lucas Pinckney and Harriott Pinckney Horry: A South Carolina Revolutionary-Era Mother and Daughter,” Marjorie Julian Spruill, Valinda W. Littlefield, and Joan Marie Johnson, eds, *South Carolina Women: Their Lives and Times*, vol.1, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009, 79-108.

⁴² Steven M. Stowe, “City, Country, and the Feminine Voice,” Michael O’Brien and David Moltke-Hansen, eds, *Intellectual Life in Antebellum Charleston*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986, 295-324.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 322.

⁴⁴ Charlene M. Boyer Lewis, *Ladies and Gentlemen on Display: Planter Society at the Virginia Springs, 1790-1860*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2001, 4.

⁴⁵ Joan E. Cashin, *A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991; Daniel Kilbride, *An American Aristocracy: Southern Planters in Antebellum Philadelphia*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006. The mobility of this agricultural elite was striking in comparison with Northern and

This study builds on the work of these cultural historians to deepen the understanding of what it meant to be an elite white woman in the slaveholding South. It seeks to span space, to bridge the artificial gap between country and city. It understands country and city as part of a continuum.⁴⁶ During the different seasons of their lives, women of the planter-class moved along this country-and-city continuum. Whether she was a belle, a matron, or a widow, the position of a plantation woman fluctuated, reflecting different factors, including social conventions, material conditions, or (most importantly) submission to patriarchy. Focusing on the motion between country and city allows for a textured and nuanced portrayal of plantation women's lives that goes beyond the stereotypes of white southern womanhood. As the individual stories told in this study illustrate, the industrious plantation mistress and the leisured urban lady were often the very same woman. Because the great majority of elite planters, both men and women, led a life that was at times set in the country, at other times set in town, this study proposes to reconcile the history of the urban South with the history of the rural South. In documenting how plantation women constructed a place for themselves in Charleston and New Orleans, this dissertation will participate in the project, initiated thirty years ago by the first urban historians, of deconstructing the mythology of a region misunderstood by many as exclusively rural.

This study is primarily about women, although it does not and cannot exclude men from the story. If at times women and men inhabited "separate spheres," their lives were very much intertwined.⁴⁷ Still, plantation women's experiences of the urban South were in significant ways distinct from those of the men of their class, and this study focuses on those differences. A central tenet of this study is that gender is a fundamental category of analysis for understanding plantation women's lives.⁴⁸ It is an axiom to say that plantation women

European standards. James David Miller, *South by Southwest: Planter Emigration and Identity on the Slave South Frontier*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002, 7.

⁴⁶ Steven M. Stowe refers to a "city-and-country theme." I prefer the term "continuum," which is defined in *Webster's* as "a continuous whole, quantity, or series; thing whose parts cannot be separated or separately discerned."

⁴⁷ Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *Journal of American History*, vol.75, June 1988, 9-39.

⁴⁸ "Slavery magnified gender as a social category," observes Cynthia Megan Kennedy, *Braided Relations, Entwined Lives: The Women of Charleston's Urban Slave Society*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005, 7.

were privileged. Across the South, they understood the world from certain class, racial, and ethnic positions, and these distinctive perspectives must be acknowledged and recognized. Scholarship is now more than ever aware of how gender identities are themselves imbricated in race, class, or ethnic identities; gender is not a stable or homogeneous category.⁴⁹ However, a recent historiography of the planter class has tended to place gender differences as peripheral to the lives of plantation women. Minimizing the ascendancy of patriarchy over elite women's lives, some historians have found other categories of analysis such as race, class, or refinement more compelling. For instance, in her portrayal of Eliza Lucas Pinckney, one author contends that since her gender rarely handicapped the female planter from her economic and intellectual pursuits, "it is unwise to place gender at the center of an analysis of Eliza Pinckney – at any rate, it should not be placed alone at the center."⁵⁰ Another historian of the master class recently concluded: "Slaves in the antebellum South were oppressed; the wives and daughters of those who owned them were not."⁵¹

In contrast, one argument of this study is that within their class, caste, and race, gender was a defining element of women's mind and behavior. Gender was not peripheral to these women's lives.⁵² From early childhood, a woman learned the subordination of the female to the male. She understood that one was more desirable, more powerful than the other. Otherwise, why would Eliza Lucas have worried that overindulging in urban pleasures would "effeminate the mind"? The young woman had already internalized in her language the inferiority of her sex. As the biographer of a contemporary of Eliza observed, patriarchy is "an invisible force that impinges on the mental and physical world of all women."⁵³ In a classic essay, Adrienne Rich defined patriarchy as:

A familial-social, ideological, political system in which men – by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the

⁴⁹ This reflection is especially well articulated in feminist postcolonial studies. For an overview, see Reina Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2004, 1-11.

⁵⁰ Darcy R. Fryer, "The Mind of Eliza Pinckney: An Eighteenth-Century Woman's Construction of Herself," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, vol.99, no.3, July 1998, 234-235.

⁵¹ William Kaufman Scarborough, *Masters of the Big House: Elite Slaveholders of the Mid-Nineteenth-Century South*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 91.

⁵² Joan E. Cashin argues that "gender should figure more prominently in our explanatory model. That part of a woman's identity remained constant throughout her life, while her social class could decline gradually over several decades or plummet suddenly in the wake of a father's bankruptcy or a husband's death." Cashin, *Our Common Affairs: Texts from Women in the Old South*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 10.

⁵³ Joanna Bowen Gillepsie, *The Life and Times of Martha Laurens Ramsay, 1759-1811*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001, 70.

female is everywhere subsumed under the male. It does not necessarily imply that no woman has power, or that all women in a given culture may not have certain powers.⁵⁴

To view southern women's actions only in terms of class, ethnicity, and/or race overlooks the gender specificity of their thinking and the extent to which so many women contravened or accommodated the patriarchal order of the Old South. By the same token, to imagine that plantation women were automatically in opposition to patriarchal power would be to oversimplify the nature of that power and to misapprehend the power of class, racial, or ethnic differentiations. The historian who searches only for evidence of pure oppositional voices (although a few of those voices were heard) or to understand female emancipation as the mimicking of male behavior clearly misunderstands the working of power relations.⁵⁵ In focusing on gender, this study is not seeking to paint the men as villains and the women as heroines or victims. Elite white women often expressed a desire for more autonomy within the patriarchal system, while at the same time they continued to perpetuate the enslavement of other women and men, functioning as instruments of patriarchal power. And yet, no matter how much power they held over the lives of others, elite white women remained subordinated to the men of their class. These women were "on the tight rope between racial privilege and gender oppression."⁵⁶

Michel Foucault noted that power is indivisible from resistance.⁵⁷ Most plantation women internalized the value system of a patriarchal society, yet even for them, oppression remained oppression. If enslaved men and women resisted slavery, why would white women not have resisted patriarchy?⁵⁸ White women, while they lacked power as a group in a

⁵⁴ Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1986 (1976), 57.

⁵⁵ Very few women of the planter class rejected the social order of the South. The Grimké sisters are certainly the most famous. See Gerda Lerner, *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina: Pioneers for Woman's Rights and Abolition*, Oxford University Press, 1998 (1971).

⁵⁶ Pauline Schloesser, *The Fair Sex: White Women and Racial Patriarchy in the Early American Republic*, New York: New York University Press, 2002, 189.

⁵⁷ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1980, 142.

⁵⁸ The purpose here is not to equate the subordination of slaves with the subordination of white women. According to Laura Edwards, this would "constitute a serious misrepresentation of southern society." Yet, the subordination of white women was undeniable and held tangible consequences. Laura Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction*, Chicago: University Press of Illinois, 1997, 6; Anya Jabour remarks, "Awareness of the important distinctions between African American slaves and the white women who called themselves their mistresses, then, should not obscure the equally important parallels between these two groups, who were oppressed similarly, although not equally. Given the similarities between the status of women and slaves in the Old South – indeed, given the similarities between all forms of oppression – it should come as no surprise that young women resisted the status quo in ways very similar to those practiced by black slaves – that is, by engaging in covert resistance rather than in overt rebellion." Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters: Young Women in the Old South*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007, 11.

patriarchal society, did have a measure of leverage in their own households and they could improve the quality of life within patriarchy. The country-and-city continuum played a pivotal role in this process. The story of the encounter of planter women with the urban South told in this dissertation is, therefore, a story of both accommodation and resistance to southern patriarchy.

To a great extent, this study is preoccupied by space; or, more precisely, by the constant interplay between plantation women and urban space. Space is defined here as a concrete environment: a parlor, a street, a church, a city, or a road leading to the plantation. It is not an abstract concept, and it is not synonymous with “sphere.”⁵⁹ While space as a category of analysis is central to disciplines such as geography, design, and architecture, it is underestimated and misconstrued by most historians. Consequently, we know more and more about what women did in particular cities of the Old South, but not much about their spatial behavior, their conception of the city, or their influence on the configuration of the cityscape.⁶⁰ The examination of space can be immensely evocative of the working of power relationships in the South. In her study of enslaved women’s resistance to slavery, Stephanie Camp shows “that the broad operation of politics in the Old South was profoundly invested in black and white uses of space. Space mattered: places, boundaries, and movement were central to how slavery was organized and to how it was resisted.”⁶¹ As well, *A Season in Town* argues that space mattered to southern patriarchy; buildings and communities were designed and used to reinforce the gendered place held by different members of society. While other scholars have revealed how race and class spatially operated in the slaveholding South, I emphasize gender.⁶² This study approaches old themes of southern history with a spatial consciousness. It highlights the gendered politics that regulated women’s movement within

⁵⁹ Definitions of “space” abound in the literature. “Space” is often described as a fluid framework and it is opposed to “place,” which describes the specific, the fix. Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994, 120.

⁶⁰ One notable exception, Lisa C. Tobert, *Constructing Townscapes: Space and Society in Antebellum Tennessee*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.

⁶¹ Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women & Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004, 6.

⁶² See for example John Michael Vlach. *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993; Maurie D. McInnis, *The Politics of Taste in Antebellum Charleston*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

the country-and-city continuum, and ultimately documents the working of power relationships in the slaveholding South at the very fundamental level of the everyday life. Yet, no matter how important space is to this study, it never becomes its subject since “space does not have independent agency.”⁶³

Feminist geographers and architects have demonstrated that gender relations are not only constructed in social and historical ways, but also along spatially specific lines.⁶⁴ A series of theoretical precepts developed by these scholars shapes this examination of plantation women’s relationship to urban space. First, since women’s daily lives are qualitatively different from those of men, women and men perceive and use their environments differently. Second, the built-environment is not a neutral background; roads, houses, and parlors are social constructions that reinforced the inequalities of gender, race, and class. And third, in Leslie Kanes Weisman’s words, “the appropriation of space is a political act” and “changing the allocation of space is inherently related to changing society.”⁶⁵ A focus on space - and, in particular, on women’s movement within the country-and-city continuum - allows for an original perspective on planter women. A historian of space, Dolores Hayden observes:

One of the consistent ways to limit the economic and political rights of groups has been to constrain social reproduction by limiting access to space. For women, the body, the home, and the street have all been arenas of conflict. Examining them as political territories – bounded spaces with some form of enforcement of the boundaries – helps us to analyze the spatial dimensions of “woman’s [experience].”⁶⁶

Patriarchy shaped the social reproduction of gender relations in the Old South, both in the country and in the city.⁶⁷ Men and women of the planter class moved, conceived and

⁶³ Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, 5.

⁶⁴ Jo Little, Linda Peake, and Pat Richardson, eds, *Women in Cities: Gender and the Urban Environment*, New York: New York University Press, 1988; Daphne Spain, *Gendered Spaces*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992; Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993; Mona Domosh and Joni Seager, *Putting Women in Place: Feminist Geographers make Sense of the World*, New York: Guilford Press, 2001.

⁶⁵ Leslie Kanes Weisman, *Discrimination by Design: A Feminist Critique of the Man-made Environment*, Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1992, 1.

⁶⁶ Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1995, 23.

⁶⁷ Henri Lefebvre coined the term “social reproduction.” The French philosopher is an influential figure of the spatial turn in cultural theory that presupposed that space contributes to the establishment of systems of power. According to Lefebvre, space is primarily a set of relations inscribed in history. It contributes to the establishment of systems of power – bourgeois, patriarchal, and/or racist. To explore the role played by space in *la durée*, Lefebvre conceptualizes a threefold analysis of its multiple expressions: lived, perceived, and

influenced space differently within the country-and-city continuum. Two fundamental realities shaped the spatial experience of plantation women: containment and isolation. The former was the product of patriarchy, while the latter was essentially an outcome of the agricultural landscape of the South. Both realities were entwined and acted together to subordinate white women to the men of their class.

In the slaveholding South, the bodies of elite white women were contained.⁶⁸ In the last twenty years, scholars have documented how, in almost every historical context, the restriction of women's mobility has indicated their subordination; for example, the foot binding of Chinese women, the harems of the Ottoman sultans, or the prohibition on female driving in Saudi Arabia.⁶⁹ This theory becomes especially compelling in the Old South. In contrast to enslaved men and women, there were no patrols, no passes, no curfews, nor city ordinances to regulate a white lady's movements in space.⁷⁰ In fact, when compared with the restrictions imposed on the enslaved, the containment of a white woman's body appears benign. Unrecorded in law, it belonged to the world of prescriptions, ideals, and traditions. If voices advocating women's containment were rare in the eighteenth century, they became more audible after the Revolution as new gendered roles were defined in the Early Republic.⁷¹ More than ever, elite white women were housebound. In this regional version of the cult of domesticity, a southern lady held less power over her household than her northern counterpart.⁷² The peculiar brand of patriarchy that developed in conjunction with slavery was forceful and demanded the complete obedience of white women. In the pamphlet *Slavery Ordained of God*, an Alabama pastor reminded women, "thy desire shall be to

conceived. Each of these expressions of space leads to different forms of appropriation by people who experienced it. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991 (1962).

⁶⁸ For a later period, see Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, New York: Basic Books, 1988.

⁶⁹ Daphne Spain, *Gendered Spaces*, op.cit.

⁷⁰ On the regulation of slaves' movements, see Stephanie Camp, op.cit., p.80-110.; Richard C. Wade, op.cit.

⁷¹ Cynthia Kierner, *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-1835*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998.

⁷² Marli F. Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-1880*, op.cit. See in particular chapter 3. "Unlike in the North, no bourgeois model of domesticity empowered southern ladies by emphasizing their dominance in the private sphere." Kennedy, *Braided Relations*, op.cit., 217.

thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.”⁷³ God bounded women to obey when it came to their mobility:

Will you say that you are free, - that you will go where you please, do as you please? Why, ye dear wives, your husbands may forbid. And listen you cannot leave New York, nor your palaces, any more than your shanties. No; you cannot leave your parlor, nor your bedchamber, nor you couch, if your husband commands you to stay there!⁷⁴

Published in the context of heightened tensions between the sections over slavery, and in response to abolitionism, this sermon of Pastor Frederick Augustus Ross summarized in forbidding terms the spatial reality of most women who aspired to ladyhood.⁷⁵ Undeniably, such an admonition was extreme and, in practice, very few husbands assigned their wives to their bedchambers. In fact, they did not need to, since early on women learned through the more subtle channels of ideals and customs what spatial behaviour was expected of them.

In the nineteenth century, southern white women were often portrayed as leisurely, almost immobile.⁷⁶ Such representations borrowed extensively from an oriental imagery that blended slavery, exoticism, luxury, and the subtropical climate of the South.⁷⁷ While visiting his sisters in Charleston in 1861, a merchant from Massachusetts noted the influence of orientalism on the city and, in particular, its ladies:

One gentleman, who is a sort of oracle in the city, has told me with complacency, more than once, that South Carolina society is “rapidly advancing towards Orientalism,” pointing out to me as evidence the increasing discountenance of any of useful employment among ladies, their growing fastidiousness, and the exclusiveness which proscribes literature that is not of native growth, and the tightening restrictions which fence about the mind and manners of South Carolina.⁷⁸

Also in Charleston, a British traveler heard eulogized in very similar terms, “a tendency toward ‘Orientalism’ on the part of the women, of which the characteristics were repose,

⁷³ Frederick Augustus Ross, *Slavery Ordained of God*, New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1970 (1857), 47.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.55-56.

⁷⁵ Kirsten Wood defines ladyhood as the combination of education, freedom from regular fieldwork, fashionable clothing and a comfortable surrounding. *Masterful Women*, op.cit., 10.

⁷⁶ The ideal, although pervasive, did not reflect the reality of most women. Lewis, op.cit., 77.

⁷⁷ Margaret M.R. Kellow observes that “as rationalism, sensibility, and especially, evangelical self-discipline gained ascendancy in European and American polite society, the “mysterious East,” and in particular the harem, became a convenient locus onto which unruly passions such as cruelty and sensuality could be displaced.” “The Oriental Imaginary: Constructions of Female Bondage in Women’s Antislavery Discourse,” Steven Mintz and John Stauffer, eds, *The Problem of Evil: Slavery, Race, and the Ambiguities of American Reform*, Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007, 187. On the “orientalization” of the South by external observers, see Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995, 37-39. See also Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage Book, 1979.

⁷⁸ “Life at Charleston in Quiet Times,” by the Son of a Pilgrim, [periodical or book unknown], 231, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

fastidiousness, and exclusiveness – one of the many admirable results of the fundamental institution.”⁷⁹ Southern men, too, were described through an oriental imagery. The cavalier became in the words of William Howard Russell a “denomadized arab.”⁸⁰ The migration of a planter with his white and black family from Virginia to Florida was done “in true Arab style.”⁸¹ It was only a leap of the imagination to envision the Big House as a gynoecia or a harem.⁸² Far from being the exclusive vocabulary of the foreign observer, this orientalist discourse was employed by southern writers, notably by George Fitzhugh, a famous apologist of the peculiar institution. In *Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society* (1854), Fitzhugh compared the southern woman to the Chinese woman with bound feet, one who thought like, “a slave, but is idle, honored and caressed.”⁸³

The oriental imagery was only one discursive vehicle among many to reinforce each gender’s place in space. Thomas R. Dew, a professor of political economy at the College of William and Mary in Virginia, rejected the oriental imagery to explain the containment of a woman’s body given that,

In the civilized countries of Europe, and in our own, woman has been liberated from that state of servitude and debasement to which either the condition of barbarism, or the laws of Mohammedanism had too long confined her. [...] She has been disenthralled from that jealousy which would quietly immure her within the walls of the Seraglio, and which, in attempting to preserve her chastity by constraint, prevents the development of mind, extinguishes the vigor and intensity of the affections, and really in the end, debauches the heart, whilst it guards the person.⁸⁴

According to Dew, woman was assigned by the “law of nature” to move within a narrow circle, since “a considerable portion of her life must be spent in the nursery and the sick room.”⁸⁵ Conversely, “the camp, the field, the woods and the sea seem to be the natural theatres for the display of man’s powers.” Since a woman is “naturally sedentary,” “the same

⁷⁹ “An Englishman in South Carolina,” December 1860, and July 1862,” *Continental Monthly*, 2 (1862), 689-94; 3 (1863), 110-17, Eugene L. Schwaab, ed., *Travels in the Old South: Selected from Periodicals of the Times*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1973, vol.2, 564.

⁸⁰ William Howard Russell, *My Diary North and South*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1863 (1861), 108.

⁸¹ Thomas Brown Memoir, quoted in Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, op.cit., 167. In his classic analysis of the plantation tradition in southern literature, the literary historian Francis Pendleton Gaines hinted “at a certain orientalism which operated from the moment when the belle, abdicating her throne of social dominion, yielded herself to the program of the plantation lord.” *The Southern Plantation*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1924, 180.

⁸² Basil Hall actually described the “oriental style” of the piazzas in Charleston. *Travels in North America in the years 1827 and 1828*, Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, & Carey, 1829, vol.2, 190.

⁸³ George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society*, New York: Burt Franklin, 1854, 213.

⁸⁴ Thomas R. Dew, “Dissertation on the Characteristic Differences Between the Sexes, and on the Position and Influence of Woman in Society,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, vol.1, 1835, 507.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 497.

amount of exercise is not necessary to the preservation of her health, as for the man.”⁸⁶ And when venturing outside, she needs a man:

He is the shield of woman, destined by nature to guard and protect her. Her inferior strength and sedentary habits confine her within the domestic circle; she is kept aloof from the bustle and storm of active life; she is not familiarized to the out of door dangers and hardships of a cold and shuffling world.⁸⁷

Dew’s observations on what he called “the constitutional differences between the sexes” reflected the opinion of the majority of his contemporaries. Nature (or God) decided on the subordination of a woman; the containment of her body was the direct result of her sedentary nature and of her physical inferiority. To Dew and his contemporaries, the ideal southern woman was - spatially speaking - reposed, immobile, submissive, and sedentary, in sum, she was contained.

These normative representations held tangible consequences in the practices of everyday life in the slaveholding South. Freedom of movement was a privilege, not a right, and as such it was denied to most slaves.⁸⁸ On the other hand, it was the undisputable privilege of white men to travel at will, choosing their mode of transportation according to their status, wealth, and destination. They walked, rode on horseback, took a carriage, cruised on boat or, in the late antebellum period, boarded a train.⁸⁹ White women did not enjoy the same freedom of movement. According to popular beliefs, ladies could not travel alone because they were threatened by the “dangers and hardships” of the outdoors.⁹⁰ To move beyond her circle, a woman needed a male escort. He insured her comfort, shielded her from theft or sexual outrage, and most importantly protected her reputation and respectability. Family letters reveal that although finding a suitable escort for a traveling woman was often a complicated business, southerners believed that it was mandatory.⁹¹

What was enclosed within a woman’s circle changed throughout time and place. Sometimes, it was narrowed to the Big House and the domestic compound. On occasion, it included the neighboring plantations or the nearby town. Rarely did it extend beyond ten

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 495.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 497.

⁸⁸ Camp, *op.cit.*, 25.

⁸⁹ Although restricted in their movements, enslaved men moved more often within the limits of the plantation and were more likely to travel than enslaved women. *Ibid.*, 28.

⁹⁰ Dew, *loc.cit.*, 497.

⁹¹ Alice Izard to Margaret Izard Manigault, 10 February 1805, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

miles. As a rule, the younger and the wealthier, the narrower the circle.⁹² Conversely, once she passed her sexual prime, a woman usually enjoyed a greater mobility, and she often played the chaperone for younger women. As for slaveholding widows, they enjoyed an exceptional freedom of movement that reflected their mastery (which trumped their gender).⁹³ “A woman’s mobility,” notes Joan Cashin, “was in every way dependent on the consent of a man – his permission to allow her to travel and his willingness to accompany her to her destination.”⁹⁴ Movement meant dependence for plantation women, and since their dependence was greater as long as they were considered fertile, their sex (the biological differences between men and women) was therefore a crucial aspect of their containment.⁹⁵ On this, Leslie Kanes Weisman remarks: “a woman’s sexuality is defined by her spatial location; that the “virtuous” woman is found in the nuclear family house, the “whore” in the house of ill-repute and in the embodiment of any woman who dares to walk the streets at night.”⁹⁶ Wherever they were, ladies were concerned with propriety, and this concern separated them – at least metaphorically – from other men and women. Traveling on a steamboat on the Mississippi River, a plantation woman recorded her trip: “We did not leave the landing until near dinner time. We did not get to Waterproof until after dark. We had sleet and rain nearly all day. At Waterproof three ladies got off. Mrs. Kent got off at her place and I was left alone.”⁹⁷ In fact, this plantation mistress was not left alone in the steamboat, since at least her husband and a few slaves were still on board. She was alone as a *lady*. Differences between women meant that there was no such thing as “women as a group having a consistent relationship to spatial frameworks.”⁹⁸

⁹² One historian argues that “occasionally, an unmarried woman could travel without a man, but doing so was generally unacceptable, especially when the woman (and the century) was young.” I have not observed that to change overtime. C.f. Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness*, op.cit.,72. See also Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress*, op.cit., 175-76.

⁹³ Kirstin Wood, op.cit., 98

⁹⁴ Joan Cashin, *A Family Venture*, op.cit., 15.

⁹⁵ On the importance of considering both “gender” and “sex”, Cynthia Kennedy writes: “Scholars have exposed the centrality of gender (meanings attached to sexual difference) to the processes by which white men of the master class forged and perpetuated their supremacy: they created and promulgated specific notions of “woman” and “man” to empower themselves. But sex as well as gender also proved essential to the acquisition and maintenance of power by white men of the master class. Just as important, many enslaved women and free women of color used sex as a survival mechanism.” Kennedy, *Braided Relations, Entwined Lives*, op.cit., 113.

⁹⁶ Leslie Kanes Weisman, op.cit., 2-3.

⁹⁷ 10 December 1849, Diary of Anna McCall Watson, Cross Keys Plantation Record, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁹⁸ Sara Mills, “Gender and Colonial Space,” *Gender, Place, and Culture*, vol.3, no.2, 1996, 131.

Besides containment, a second reality shaped the spatial experience of plantation women. More and more numerous as the plantation economy thrived under King Cotton, elite women living in the country expressed a spatial experience that can be easily summarized by the word “isolation.” The geography of the agricultural South was characterized by the remoteness of self-sufficient plantations and farms that were separated from each other by acres of fields, woods, or swamps.⁹⁹ Even in well-settled areas such as the South Carolina Lowcountry or the Mississippi Delta, the houses of neighboring planters were often located half a mile away from each other, a significant distance that precluded most spontaneous encounters. In 1835, the middle-aged plantation mistress Henrietta Tilghman faced the geographic reality of rural Maryland when she had to delay a much-anticipated visit to her cousins:

We had hoped to see you all on Friday next, but unexpected snow will render the roads impassable for a week or 2 & we must abandon the agreeable plan we had formed. I am however bent upon a jaunt as soon as all the roads will permit & you need not be surprised to see me at Myrtle Grove during your sojourn there - I am exceedingly anxious to make an old time sociable visit there such as I used to in my early youth... I have been so secluded this winter, I am determined to go forth & see the world a little. ... I am looking forward to carnival with you gals & intend to be as wild as any of you.¹⁰⁰

The extent of this isolation varied over time and regionally within the South, as several developments in transportation, including steamboats, railroads, and macadamized roads eased the movement of people from place to place, and of particular note here, from country to city. In Louisiana, a trip from St. Jacques Parish to New Orleans that had taken an entire day in the late eighteenth century only required a few hours by the late antebellum period. In the Black Belt, geographic space that appeared unbridgeable in the early 1820s, when the region remained mostly unsettled, was served by decent roads a generation later.¹⁰¹ But for many with no access to these thoroughfares, the South continued to be on the eve of the

⁹⁹ Catherine Clinton writes that “every woman was an island, isolated unto herself and locked into place by the stormy and unsettling seas of plantation slavery.” Clinton, *op.cit.*, 179.

¹⁰⁰ Henrietta Kerr Tilghman to Mary Ellen Wilson, 24 February 1835, quoted in Joan E. Cashin, *Our Common Affairs*, *op.cit.*, 100-101.

¹⁰¹ Joan Cashin, *A Family Venture*, *op.cit.*, 84.

Civil War an isolated world that could only be escaped through unpaved roads that were often impassable after a soaking rain.¹⁰²

Both planter men and women experienced rural isolation and, in very similar terms, expressed feelings of loneliness and boredom. Yet it did not bear the same meanings, and did not hold the same consequences, for each gender. In the agrarian ethos of the Early Republic, isolation was understood as manly independence.¹⁰³ In 1827, Alicia Hopton Middleton told her son, “try to accustom yourself to being alone – A man can not be comfortable unless he is independent of society for all his highest enjoyments.”¹⁰⁴ A planter embodied this ideal of masculinity; becoming a man meant, according to Stephanie McCurry, becoming the master of a small rural world. The degree of isolation of a plantation was relative to a man’s status. Historian Walter Johnson notes that “on the geography of those fields was imprinted the landscape of class and masculinity in the antebellum South – lesser men worked the sandy spits of infertile land between the river and joining creeks, greater men cultivated the more fertile land along the banks.”¹⁰⁵ A plantation on the banks of the Ashley River in South Carolina or the Mississippi River in Louisiana significantly eased the ability to make contacts with the outside world. In any case, when the isolation of the plantation was becoming too heavy, a white man could ride his horse to a nearby plantation or take the schooner to town. Freedom of movement was his privilege after all.

Women experienced rural isolation differently – in fact more acutely - than their male counterparts. In 1813, a widowed planter acknowledged that difference. Content with “the most restless desire to be quiet where I am,” he remarked, “my poor girls pass their time heavily – luckily they are pretty much occupied in preparing their little exhibition follies in the evening, which prevents their feeling the solitude of their position.”¹⁰⁶ Whereas the

¹⁰² Lisa C. Tolbert, *Constructing Townscapes*, op.cit., 61.

¹⁰³ Allan Kulikoff, *The Agrarian Origins of American Capitalism*, Richmond: University Press of Virginia, 1992; Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*, op.cit. James D. Miller observes: “Few young men, however ambitious their search for independence, looked to the North where a world of commercial opportunity and social fluidity was said to await the entrepreneurial and the individualistic venturer. Instead they went west to make money and create households in the certain ways of their mothers and fathers.” *South by Southwest*, op.cit., 78.

¹⁰⁴ Alicia Hopton Middleton, quoted in Michael O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, vol.1, 396.

¹⁰⁵ Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life inside the Antebellum Slave Market*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, 79.

¹⁰⁶ Henry Izard to Margaret Izard Manigault, 20 August 1813, Ralph Izard Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

ambition of a man was independence, a woman aspired to interdependence.¹⁰⁷ A plantation mistress in frontier Texas lamented her situation to a niece:

If it was not so expensive traveling, I would like so much for the girls to visit their relatives in Louisiana, and Mississippi. How happily your Ma' is situated with all her children so near to her. And poor me; some of mine are thousand of miles of [*sic*]. I cannot hear from them under a month, and I have only been able to make Louisa one visit, and that was more than a year ago. She came down last winter and staid only two weeks.¹⁰⁸

In addition to motherhood and housewifery, most elite white women aspired to an ideal of ornamental femininity that blended refinement, civility, and most importantly the cultivation of social networks. Society was a female ambition and it was instilled in girls from early childhood. Subordinated legally, economically, and politically, only in the social sphere could elite white women hope for equality with men. In his “Thoughts on the Constitutional Differences between the Sexes,” Thomas R. Dew acknowledged that reality: “The institution of chivalry, and the diffusion of the humane spirit of Christianity, have assigned her that station in society which makes her in the social circle the equal of man.”¹⁰⁹

Since an isolated plantation offered – relatively speaking – few social opportunities, it was from this perspective the least desirable place within the country-and-city continuum for women. A famous anecdote illustrates this reality. In her *Chronicles of Chicora Wood*, Elizabeth W. Allston Pringle related that, when her mother Adèle chose to marry her father, her aunt Louise opposed the match:

My dear Adèle, I have come to remonstrate with you on this extraordinary announcement you have made! You cannot think of accepting this young man. Mr. Allston lives winter and summer in the country. He will take you away from all your friends and family. That he is good-looking I grant you, and I am told he is a man of means; but it is simply madness for you with your beauty and your gifts to bury yourself on a rice-plantation. Perhaps I would not feel so shocked and surprised if you did not have at your feet one of the very best matches in the city. As it is, I feel I should be criminal if I let you make this fatal mistake without doing all I can to prevent it. If you accept Mr. Blank, you will have one of the most beautiful homes in the city.

¹⁰⁷ *Interdependence* is defined as the dependence on each other or one another; mutual dependence. It is understood as a dynamic of being mutually responsible to and sharing a common set of principles with others. This concept differs from “dependence” in that an interdependent relationship implies that all participants are emotionally, economically and/or morally inter-dependent, and one is not more devoted than the others. It also differs from independence, which advocates freedom as a sort of ultimate good. Interdependence recognizes the value in each position and weaves them together. For a feminist (and somewhat essentialist) perspective on the concept, see Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.

¹⁰⁸ Sarah B. to Anna McCall Watson, 16 September 1860, Cross Keys Plantation Records, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas R. Dew, loc.cit., 507.

You will have ample means at your command and you will be the centre of a brilliant social circle. My dear sister, my love for you is too great for me to be silent. I must warn you. I must ask you why you are going to do this dreadful thing?¹¹⁰

According to the wisdom of aunt Louise, plantation life meant for an elite white woman a burial, a social death.¹¹¹

More often than not, women stayed behind on the plantation while men went away for business and/or pleasure. As mothers and household managers, women were housebound. Because they often lived several days of travel away from their family and friends, plantation women felt lonely and isolated. Separated from her husband who practiced medicine in New Orleans, Aurora Morgan of Louisiana complained in 1831,

Papa is gone to town dull times here now sometimes I am in my room by my lonely self with a friend to communicate my pain trouble and sorrow to hard may it be I am oblige to suffer until we meet again. I go about and appear to be gay but what I feel no one on earth feels it.¹¹²

In August 1855, the twenty-five-year-old Mary Owen Sims recorded in her diary: “This evening Sister and family left for home. How lonely and desolate I feel tonight.”¹¹³ Such references to rural isolation are omnipresent in southern women’s writing. Yet, although they expressed the desire to go to a nearby town to visit friends or to run errands, they often had to cancel because they were too busy with domestic works or because they could not find a male relative to escort them.¹¹⁴ Unlike men, isolation came for most women with a series of restrictions imposed on their mobility that sometimes even forbade a visit to a neighboring plantation. Scholars who work on rural women have identified the isolation of rural living as one of the main sources of female oppression, in part because in the country, women’s daily experience is of being distanced from their social networks.¹¹⁵ Isolation meant for most plantation women an intensification of their dependence upon men, and in some cases, the

¹¹⁰ Elizabeth W. Allston Pringle, *Chronicles of Chicora Wood*, Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1940, 58.

¹¹¹ Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Studies*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982. For a use of the phrase in women’s history, see Anya Jabour, *Scarlett’s Sisters: Young Women in the Old South*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

¹¹² Aurora Falconer to William R. Falconer, 8 February 1831, Morgan-Falconer Family Papers, 1827-1905, New Orleans, The New Orleans Historical Collection.

¹¹³ Private Journal of Mary Owen Sims, quoted in Cashin, *Our Common Affairs*, op.cit., 74.

¹¹⁴ Diary of Eliza Ann Marsh Robertson quoted in Cashin, *ibid.*, 147-148.

¹¹⁵ See for different times and spaces: Joan E. Cashin, *A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991; Deborah Fink, *Agrarian Women: Wives & Mothers in Rural Nebraska, 1880-1940*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992; Véronique Soriano & Christine Wagner, *La femme et l’espace rural*, Paris: Plan construction, 1981.

appearance of the crudest and cruelest aspects of patriarchy, notably domestic violence and sexual abuse.¹¹⁶

Fortunately, there was an alternative to country life as the famous diarist Mary Chesnut reminds us. In an entry of her Civil War diary, she expressed unhappiness with a prolonged stay at Mulberry Plantation in South Carolina, and she noted: “I am always ill. The name of my disease is a longing to get away from here and to go to Richmond.”¹¹⁷ When rural isolation became too heavy, southern women looked to the city as an escape from their loneliness, their boredom, and their toil. In the South, as is true elsewhere in the world, towns and cities emerged out of the human need to get together to share services within a radius where one could easily move around to meet and communicate.¹¹⁸ The city was the most common and the most accessible of a series of sites that planters frequented to offset the solitude and monotony of plantation life. In women’s writing, trips to the towns and cities of the South are often described by words such as “excitement,” “festivities,” and “carnivals,” or, as with Eliza Lucas Pinckney and Harriot Pinckney Horry, “amusements” and “pleasures.” Plantation women enjoyed the urban South because it broke the isolation that came with rural living. In addition, they experienced a spatial mobility unheard of in the country, where their confinement to the domestic compound was greater. In towns and cities, a woman’s circle often included an entire neighbourhood where she could move with relative freedom. There, she met friends and family members. She engaged in social, religious, and cultural activities. When in financial need, she found work opportunities. In sum, the urban South often meant a measure of emancipation for most plantation women.

Of all the cities included in the urban perimeter of the Old South, Charleston and New Orleans receive the lion’s share of attention in this study. This emphasis essentially derives from the significance of these two urban centers to the social and cultural life of elite southern planters. According to their respective biographers, each one was exceptional

¹¹⁶ Cashin, *A Family Venture*, op.cit., 120.

¹¹⁷ 10 June 1861, C. Van Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981, 71.

¹¹⁸ Lewis Mumford, *The City in History*, op.cit.

within the regional landscape.¹¹⁹ Colonized by rival empires, integrated diachronically into the American Republic, ruled by distinct legal traditions, adorned by unique visual cultures, and peopled by men and women who belonged to competing churches and spoke different languages, Charleston and New Orleans were undeniably unique places.¹²⁰ Each city claimed the title of “Southern Metropolis.” Charleston was a declining city by the 1830s, at the very moment when New Orleans was in the ascendant.¹²¹ The first edition of the *DeBow’s Review* in 1846 contrasted the development of these two cities:

When the Crescent City consisted of a few huts on the low lands of the Mississippi, her sister of the Palmetto State was reveling in the riches of foreign commerce, and in all affluence and prosperity. But now the vision is changed. The noble city on the banks of the Cooper and Ashley looks back to the past with lingering regret, while the immense valley has thrown down upon New Orleans wealth beyond comparison, and built up a city which will be indeed to the great Father of Rivers, “as London to the Thames, and Paris to the Seine.”

And yet, no matter how different, they were no enemies, according to *DeBow’s*:

There can be no jealousies between these cities. New Orleans would see Charleston recover all that she has lost, would greet her as a sister in her advance, and hail her progress with gratulation. The cities of the Southern Atlantic cannot be rivals to those of the Gulf; their sympathies, institutions and destinies are similar. They are allies in every time of danger or of peril.¹²²

Indeed, from the perspective of the planter class, the metropolis of the Old Seaboard and the metropolis of the New Southwest were very much counterparts. Both cities were at the nexus of regions that favored slavery and large agricultural endeavors. Both counted a

¹¹⁹ Georgina Hickey remarks, “The classic form of urban history, the urban biography, certainly cultivates the widely held notion that cities have individual personalities from the beginning.” *Hope and Danger in the New South City: Working-Class Women and Urban Development in Atlanta, 1890-1940*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003, 219.

¹²⁰ Among the best monographs on each city see Maurie D. McInnis, *The Politics of Taste in Antebellum Charleston*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005; Walter Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston! The History of a Southern City*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989; George C. Rogers, Jr. *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1980 (1969); Thomas N. Ingersoll *Mammon and Manon in Early New Orleans: The First Slave Society in the Deep South, 1718-1819*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999; Shannon Lee Dawdy, *Building the Devil’s Empire: French Colonial New Orleans*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.

¹²¹ Charleston total population for 1830 was 30,289 (White : 12,828; Free Black : 2,107 Slave :15,354); New Orleans total : 29,737 (White : 12,299, Free Black : 8,041; Slave : 9,397). Source: Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the City*, op.cit., 326.

¹²² Art. V. –New Orleans and Charleston, *De Bow Review*, I, 1846, 44. Economic historian Peter A. Coclanis argues that DeBow and his contemporaries exaggerated the decline of Charleston: “the economy of the low country was not moribund in the antebellum period... For the low country’s antebellum economic decline was relative rather than absolute – at least until the eve of the Civil War. A brief look at certain data of population, output, trade, and wealth in the low country will bear out this point. After growing rapidly in the colonial period, the population of the South Carolina low country increased at a much slower rate in the period from the American Revolution through the Civil War.” Peter A. Coclanis, *The Shadow of a Dream: Economic Life and Death in the South Carolina Low Country, 1670-1920*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, 112.

significant number of free blacks and the great majority of their enslaved population consisted of women working as domestic servants. Like New Orleans, Charleston was an important seaport that welcomed many immigrants, and where prostitution flourished. Whereas the reputation of New Orleans as permissive and wild is firmly established, the sensuous past of Charleston remains unfamiliar. South Carolina was no Massachusetts, notes Cynthia Kennedy. The “state’s attitude toward the regulation of moral behavior was one of *laissez-faire*.”¹²³ Charleston’s critics labeled it as an immoral, hedonistic, self-indulgent place, extravagant where too many inhabitants were Sabbath-breakers.¹²⁴ And as long as there was a thriving plantation economy, these liberal cities welcomed a sizeable floating population of planters who dwelled year-round or seasonally.¹²⁵ Established in the eighteenth century, a merchant-planter oligarchy ruled the political, social and cultural life of each place. In Charleston, approximately one hundred families constituted the squirearchy that counted French Huguenots and British Anglicans among their ancestors. In New Orleans, Creole families that originated from France, Canada, Spain, Santo Domingo, and Germany comprised a comparable elite.¹²⁶ By the antebellum period, the old oligarchy was contested and declining in both cities (although for different reasons).¹²⁷ And in both places, aspirants to the planter class – be they *Parvenus/arrivistes* from the Backcountry in South Carolina or *Les Américains* in Louisiana - adopted in majority the traditions and values of the urban establishment.¹²⁸

¹²³ Cynthia Kennedy, *Braided Relations, Entwined Lives*, op.cit., 187-188.

¹²⁴ Joanna Bowen Gillespie, *The Life and Times of Martha Laurens Ramsay, 1759-1811*, op.cit., xv; Jaher, op.cit., 397.

¹²⁵ The term “floating population” is from Joan Carrigan, *The Yellow Scourge*, op.cit.

¹²⁶ Philip Cople Jaher, *The Urban Establishment*, op.cit., 318; Shannon Lee Dawdy, *Building the Devil’s Empire*, op.cit. 145.

¹²⁷ “This decline of the patriciate occurred in a context familiar to the experience of other American cities. Even though Charleston had, relative to northern towns, a more aristocratic style and a homogeneous and native-born population, by the 1850s populist machines, factions, and ethnicity played an increasingly important political role.” Jaher, op.cit., 362.

¹²⁸ “Distinguishing between upper class and aristocracy or patriciate is more difficult but just as essential. Both categories denote a group which holds, or at least has held, the highest and most widely recognized authority in the community. Unlike elites, who are frequently specialized and whose members may find fulfillment through a variety of unrelated/affiliations, upper classes and aristocracies are organized to shape all facets of their member’s lives and thus make exclusive claims for loyalty. What differentiates these two social orders is not hegemony but mobility. Upper-class status can be achieved by personal efforts but patricians are not self-made,” Jaher remarks in his comparative study of urban establishments. “The transition from elite to patriciate thus involved a reordering of priorities from individuals to group, from innovation to tradition, and from mobility to inheritance.” Jaher, op.cit., 2-3, 9.

Despite important differences, the similarities between Charleston and New Orleans from the perspective of plantation women are important enough to allow a comparison.¹²⁹

One plantation woman noted in 1839:

I am surprised that I never heard anyone say that Charleston and the environs are not exceedingly like New Orleans. Had I been suddenly set down in the place I should have declared it was N.O. The colour of the houses and ground, the stagnant water, the shrubbery and flowers, the quantity of West Indian fruit, and the complexion and dress of the women and the mulatto race make the resemblance complete.¹³⁰

A comparative approach presents several methodological advantages. A broad perspective allows for the derivation of regional patterns and not only local ones. As well, particularities are not necessarily lost; they are actually in evidence as a result of the comparison. The portrait of the South during the period studied becomes more dynamic. While this dissertation focuses on Charleston and New Orleans, it considers other towns and cities throughout. Plantation women experienced country-and-city as a continuum that often included several urban sites. For the great majority, between the remotest plantation and the most populous city, were smaller towns. While they offered a distinctive lifestyle, as Lisa Tolbert observes, “these county seats adopted spatial and social patterns common to much larger cities of the era.”¹³¹ The diary of Anna McCall Watson from Louisiana for the year 1849 reveals that reality. Once or twice a month, she went down in a carriage to the nearby town, Rodney, where she usually did some shopping, made a few social calls, took dinner at her aunt’s or went to church. In December, during race week, she traveled on a steamboat to Natchez, located half a day away. There she spent five days in a constant whirl of shopping, visits, and religious services, whilst her husband continued his journey to New Orleans. Although Rodney and Natchez constituted common urban sites in Watson’s antebellum diary, the Crescent city comes into view as a foreign and dangerous place, where the men of her family went for business and returned with news of cholera epidemics.¹³² In her postbellum diary, however, when she has become the manager of *Cross Keys* plantation, New Orleans now appeared more familiar. For instance, she traveled there in January 1871 and

¹²⁹ In her study of prostitution in New Orleans, Alecia P. Long insists that «New Orleans, although distinctive, was very much a part of the South and must be considered in that context in order to appreciate its function within and its importance to the region». Long, op.cit., 5; See also Nancy Hewitt, *Southern Discomfort: Women’s Activism in Tampa, Florida, 1880s-1920s*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001.

¹³⁰ Carol Bleser, ed., *Tokens of Affection: The Letters of a Planter’s Daughter in the Old South*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996, 252.

¹³¹ Lisa C. Tolbert, *Constructing Townscapes*, op.cit., 70.

¹³² Diary of Anna McCall Watson, 1849 (typescript and original), Cross Keys Plantation Records, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

returned home with a washerwoman.¹³³ Overall, the urban experience of plantation women such as Anna McCall Watson tended to confirm broader patterns observed in Charleston and New Orleans. Extending the analysis to include the experience of women from smaller centers shows that although plantation women's relation to the urban South might have differed slightly from place to place, in this agricultural and slave society, the same underlying patterns existed everywhere.

This dissertation locates at the heart of the narrative the agency of plantation women as expressed in their own writings. Hence, women themselves, and not the cities, are the subjects of this research. To document how plantation women lived, perceived, conceived, and influenced the urban landscape, published and unpublished writings (including diaries, letters, and memoirs) constitute the main primary sources of this dissertation. Other sources complement my research, notably estate inventories, wills, city records, didactic writings, domestic fiction, newspapers, slave narratives, maps, prints, censuses, city directories, travelers accounts, political pamphlets and religious sermons. I have made extensive use of quotations as I endeavored to portray these women's joys and struggles in their words rather than my own. Still, these sources are not neutral evidence, but mediated representations that need to be analyzed.

This study spans almost a century and a half, from the establishment of a planter class in the early eighteenth century until its collapse at the end of Reconstruction. The patterns exposed here developed and changed slowly, in great part because the turning points of the history of space do not faithfully correspond to the history of political events.¹³⁴ Therefore, the overall structure of this dissertation is ordered topically rather than chronologically. This decision also rests on the conviction that women's history should not highlight transformation when the main story is about continuity.¹³⁵ This being said, this study describes historical change all along. Entitled "Town & Country," chapter 1 is about

¹³³ Journal of Mrs. Anna McCall Watson, 1868-1876, Cross Keys Plantation Records, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹³⁴ Henri Lefebvre writes: "The history of space does not have to choose between "processes" and "structures," change and invariability, events and institutions. Its periodizations, moreover, will differ from generally accepted ones. Naturally, the history of space should not be distanced in any way from the history of time... The departure point for this history of space is not to be found in geographical descriptions of natural space, but rather in the study of natural rhythms, and of the modification of those rhythms and their inscription in space by means of human actions, especially work-related actions. It begins, then, with the spatio-temporal rhythms of nature as transformed by a social practice." Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, op.cit., 117.

¹³⁵ Judith M. Bennett, "Theoretical Issues: Confronting Continuity," *Journal of Women History*, autumn 1997, 73-94.

movement. It explores the origins, the motivations, and the mechanics that governed the seasonal migrations of the planter class, and it stresses their social and cultural significance for the men and women of the southern elite. Since plantation women experienced the city primarily from their town house, chapter 2 examines the gendered politics of urban domestic space. Chapter 3 documents the work lives of plantation women as urban housekeeper and their spatial relations with their enslaved servants. Chapter 4 explores the coming of age of plantation girls and their experience of a social season in the city chaperoned by their mothers, while chapter 5 follows plantation women in their urban wanderings, as they exercised, shopped, or socialized. This chapter also uncovers the gendered geography of Charleston and New Orleans, a geography that reflected the containment of elite white women in the slaveholding South. The epilogue of the dissertation describes how in the memory of the Old South, the urban experiences of plantation women were offered “on the Altar of the Country.”

To conclude this prologue, let us say a few words about the title of this dissertation: “A Season in Town.” When plantation women described their peripatetic life, they employed a vocabulary that understood movement along the country-and-city continuum as a seasonal affair. They “wintered” in New Orleans or they “summered” at the plantation. The title of this dissertation, as with the collective narrative of their relationship to the urban South told in the following chapters, aspires to tell the history of these women in their own terms. For Eliza Lucas Pinckney and Harriot Pinckney Horry, a season in town meant a fuller life, a life expanding the bounded ambitions of a southern lady. Very few held economic or political ambitions. A number of plantation women, however, manipulated the cultural codes of southern patriarchy to alleviate their subordination and to fulfill their personal aspirations. But when they were prevented from being where they wanted when they wanted along the country-and-city continuum, these women manifested their disenchantment with southern patriarchy, generally through subtle and ambiguous forms of resistance.

Chapter 1

Town & Country: Elite Southerners and Seasonal Migrations

In November 1807, Alice Izard gave an enthusiastic account to her daughter Margaret of the British play she attended the evening before. Entitled *Town, & Country*, the theatrical production clearly pleased Izard: “We were all amused by it. It is full of excellent sentiments, abounds in London wit, that is allusions to the manners of the West End, & to expressions of change, & c. but does not appear to be adapted to the meridian we live under. However, there are a great many observations which suit all countries, & all climate. I think the play wants connexion [*sic*], & motion.” Indeed, if the play entertained Alice Izard so much, it was in great part because it echoed her very own reality.¹ “Connexion, & motion” could have been her motto. Izard’s entire life appears as a series of migrations primarily dictated by her desire to be near her family and friends. Continuing her appraisal of the play *Town and Country*, she remarked: “I was amused & that was all, for my heart is divided. It sometimes is in Philadelphia, sometimes in Charleston, & always interested for, & anxious about my children.”² During her life, Alice Izard lived in several places. Born in a prominent New York family, she had moved with her husband Ralph to England, France, Pennsylvania, and South Carolina.

When she became a widow in 1804, the choice of a permanent residence away from *The Elms* (the Lowcountry plantation that was bequeathed to her son Henry) proved complicated for Alice Izard. As long as her husband was alive, she had followed his inclination, and for three decades she had assumed on and off the role of a plantation mistress, showing concern for the house, the gardens, and the slaves working on the plantation.³ While she spent the first year of mourning at *The Elms*, raising her younger daughters, she soon felt a desire to return to the cradle of her youth. She settled in New York

¹ A comedy in five acts by English playwright Thomas Morton, *Town and Country* was first acted in the United States in New York on November 2, 1807, and by the end of December, it was also acted in Charleston. The play was presented several times in Richmond, Virginia. Martin Staples Schockley, *The Richmond Stage, 1784-1812*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977, 283.

² Alice Delancey Izard to Margaret Izard Manigault, 11 November 1807, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

³ In 1790, according to the census, Ralph Izard was the second largest planter in the state of South Carolina: 10 slaves in Charleston, 594 slaves distributed in eight plantations, the most important being a home plantation, *The Elms* with 1,400 acres. La Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, *Travels through the United States of North America*, quoted in Leila Sellers, *Charleston Business on the Eve of the American Revolution*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1934, 26.

for a few years. But when her eldest daughter and her son-in-law left Charleston to establish their family near Philadelphia, she joined them.⁴

As an older woman in her sixties, Izard was tired of her existence as an elite slaveholding woman: “The migrating life is a very fatiguing one, & on account of servants, particularly distressing to Carolinians that class of people grow every day more insolent in this state. I experience many inconveniencies; but am not so badly off as some others.”⁵ She chose Philadelphia over Charleston to live out her last days. In Philadelphia, she became a celebrated *salonnière*, where the rich, the cultivated, and the talented gathered around Izard.⁶ But while she was a city woman, Izard still liked “to indulge [her] rural propensities” by residing in the country at least a few months each year.⁷ The southern plantation, however, was not one of her favored places. According to Izard, it was unhealthy for most of the year, the climate was often unbearable, and it was a lonely place where society was either too rare or too parochial. Since she had the status, wealth, freedom, and power to do so, she repeatedly chose to live away from the plantation.

And yet, if asked to determine her primary residence during her adult life, she probably would have answered *The Elms*, the cherished home of the Izards’ forefathers, a stone mansion located 16 miles from Charleston.⁸ For Izard and her thirteen children, “home” was undeniably the Lowcountry, where a slave population cultivated the rice that sustained their comfortable existence. *The Elms* symbolized in bricks and mortar their aristocratic status.⁹ But home in the Lowcountry was also a town house located on East Bay Street in Charleston where Izard spent almost half of each year during the last decade of her

⁴ On the life of Izard in Philadelphia, see chapter 1 of Daniel Kilbride, *An American Aristocracy: Southern Planters in Antebellum Philadelphia*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006.

⁵ Alice Delancey Izard to Margaret Izard Manigault, 31 march 1811, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina. A few years before, she was writing, “I am quite tired of changing houses. It is an expensive as well as fatiguing business.” Alice Delancey Izard to Henry Izard, 23 November 1806, Ralph Izard Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

⁶ Lang Syne, “Salon of Mrs. Ralph Izard,” unidentified newspaper clipping, [no date], Ralph Izard Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

⁷ Alice Delancey Izard to Margaret Izard Manigault, 10 October 1805 [mistakenly dated 10 February 1805], Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

⁸ When the house at *The Elms* burned, she wrote about the ruins: “our once favorite habitation.” Alice Delancey Izard to Henry Izard, 23 January 1807, Ralph Izard Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

⁹ George Izard to Henry Izard, 27 May 1807, Ralph Izard Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

married life.¹⁰ When her husband Ralph passed away, Alice inherited as part of her dowry the Izards' urban dwelling, renowned as one of the most magnificent residences on the Harbor.¹¹ Long after she ceased to live in South Carolina, she proudly referred to the house in Charleston as "my house."¹² As a wife and mother attached to a dynasty of Southern planters, her entire life had been a succession of migrations between town and country.

The migration pattern of Alice Izard's life does not conform to standard representations of elite southerners who, if we are to believe the plantation mythology, spent the year in the country, caring for their white and black families. However, Alice Izard was certainly not exceptional within the southern master class.¹³ The residential pattern of elite planters was - spatially speaking - a peripatetic life that often led away from the plantation. From the establishment of a slaveholding elite in the 1730s until its collapse after the Civil War in the 1870s, a significant number of planters migrated seasonally between town and country. Seasonal migrations can be understood as the resettlement of a household from one residence to another for a period of at least three weeks, but generally for several months. A household usually consisted of a planter, his wife, their children, possibly several relatives, perhaps a governess or tutor, and often some of the slaves attached to the domestic service. Seasonal migrations were the uttermost expression of the movement of the southern elite between country and city that existed in other forms. Planters regularly went by themselves to the city for business or politics. At times, they also brought along their wives who went shopping, attended religious or cultural events, and visited relations. Even the smaller planters engaged in these trips that differed from seasonal migrations by their shorter length, the limited human and financial resources they involved, and the narrower experience they provided of the city and its people.

¹⁰ For a portrait of the Izards that omits their life in Charleston, see Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004, vol.1, 91-92.

¹¹ The house "was described as "Three stories & piazzas above the basement & circular projections. There is more than a usual quantity of carved & ornamental work, tasteful, however, & modest." The writers also mentioned that the house was principally built by slaves owned by the Izards, but designed by an "Eng. Carp[ente]r." That English carpenter was likely James Hoban, architect of the White House." Maurie D. McInnis, *The Politics of Taste in Antebellum Charleston*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005, 182.

¹² Alice Delancey Izard to Henry Izard, 15 October 1806, Ralph Izard Papers, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

¹³ Izard came from the ranks of an elite that Anne Firor Scott describes as "the most visible southerners, the minority which the rest saw and heard." She notes, "from their ranks came the proslavery philosophers, the mythmakers, the leaders of opinion" Anne Firor Scott, "Women's Perspective on the Patriarchy in the 1850s," *Journal of American History*, vol.61, no.1, 1974, 54.

Although southern planters have constituted a common subject of investigation for historians in the last thirty years, the seasonal migrations of elite slaveholders are still not well understood. “Many historians have mentioned these lengthy absences from plantations,” Charlene Boyer Lewis remarks, “but few have examined them in any depth.”¹⁴ On the one hand, their geographic mobility has attracted a fair amount of interest in the last decade; there have been studies of slaveholders traveling to places such as the Virginia Springs, Philadelphia, Newport, and overseas, for what was called the ‘European Grand Tour.’¹⁵ These studies have highlighted the cosmopolitan nature of the southern elite, its northern networks, and the importance of gentility in its self-definition as a group. On the other hand, the most prevalent sojourns of wealthy southerners in the urban centers of the region, whether large cities or small towns, have not been thoroughly examined. Historians have portrayed planters as rural, but a few have presented them as urban.¹⁶ Even when acknowledged, the seasonal migrations of the elite between country and city have typically been attributed to environmental factors, such as epidemics of malaria and yellow fever that struck the South in the summer months.¹⁷

But why did elite southerners migrate between country and city? What was the meaning of these seasonal migrations for planting men and women? This chapter explores these questions. Town and country were not interchangeable places. They were landscapes experienced differently by men and women of the slaveholding class. Scholars of the Old South have too often dismissed the urban experience of the elite from the meta-narrative of

¹⁴ Charlene Boyer Lewis, *Ladies and Gentlemen on Display: Planter Society at the Virginia Springs, 1790-1860*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2002, 216.

¹⁵ Daniel Kilbride, *An American Aristocracy: Southern Planters in Antebellum Philadelphia*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006. *Idem*, “Travel, Ritual, and National Identity: Planters on the European Tour, 1820-1860,” *Journal of Southern History*, 2003, 69 (3), 549-584; Margaret Gail Gillespie, *Havens for the Fashionable and the Sickly: Society, Sickness, and Space in the Nineteenth Century Southern Spring Resorts*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 1998. These studies build on earlier works on elite migrations, in particular Lawrence Fay Brewster, *Summer Migrations and Resorts of South Carolina Low-Country Planters*, New York: AMS Press, 1947; and Carl Bridenbaugh, “Charlestonians at Newport, 1767-1775,” *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, XLI, April 1940, 43-47.

¹⁶ On planters as urbanites, Michael P. Johnson states: “although their plantations were strewn throughout the low country, the social and cultural capital was Charleston. Many of the most prominent planters considered their plantations nice places to visit, but they lived where they wanted, in Charleston.” Michael P. Johnson, “Planters and Patriarchy: Charleston, 1800-1860,” *Journal of Southern History*, 46, 1980, 47.

¹⁷ While historians are generally suspicious of environmental determinism, they seem to rely heavily on climate and diseases to understand these seasonal migrations. For different perspectives on these themes, see H. Roy Merrens and George D. Terry, “Dying in Paradise: Malaria, Mortality, and the Perceptual Environment in Colonial South Carolina,” *Journal of Southern History*, vol.50, no.4 (November 1984), 533-550; A. Cash Koeniger, “Climate and Southern Distinctiveness,” *Journal of Southern History*, vol.54, no.1 (February 1988), 21-44; and Louis Ferleger and Richard H. Steckel. “Faulker’s South: Is There Truth in Fiction?,” *Journal of Mississippi History*, 1998, 60 (2), 105-121.

the region and underestimated the importance of these seasonal migrations. This historiographical silence can be explained, in part, because they entailed an absenteeism that contradicts the mythology of the self-sufficient plantation inhabited year-round by a paternalistic planter and his family. The time spent in the city appealed to slaveholders, especially women, who paradoxically had the best opportunity to perceive themselves as members of a privileged class – as gentlemen and ladies - when they were away from their plantations. This chapter first explains that seasonal migrations represented a peripatetic lifestyle that southerners shared with elites throughout the Atlantic world. Next, it explores the much-criticized absenteeism of the wealthiest planters who deserted their plantations for the greatest part of the year. Third, it examines the health rhetoric that surrounded the seasonal migrations, especially in the summer. Finally, it documents the gender implications of these migrations within the planting family.

Wealthy southerners, as with their northern counterparts, divided their life between town and country in conscious emulation of European upper classes.¹⁸ In his *View of South Carolina* (1802), John Drayton remarked, “the modes of living of the elite are similar to those of the same rank in European nations.”¹⁹ Six decades later, a traveler was told by a planter, “you’ll find us a good deal more British than you think possible here in America. England and South Carolina are mother and daughter, you know.”²⁰ During the colonial period, Charlestonians in particular displayed a remarkable enthusiasm for transposing English genteel society - its institutions and lifestyle - onto South Carolina. In eighteenth century vocabulary, Big Houses on the plantations were “elegant and expensive country seats” where neither slavery nor economic enterprise disturbed the scene. According to Drayton,

At an early period, gentlemen of fortune were invited to form these happy retreats from the noise and bustle; the banks of the Ashley, as being near the metropolis of the state, was first the object of their attention. And here elegant buildings arose, which

¹⁸ Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt: Urban Life in America, 1743-1776*, New York: Knopf, 1955, 141-145, 336-341.

¹⁹ John Drayton, *A View of South-Carolina, As Respect to her Natural and Civil Concerns*, Charleston: W.P. Young, 1802 (reprinted in 1972), 221.

²⁰ “An Englishman in South Carolina,” December 1860, and July 1862, *Continental Monthly*, 2 (1862), 689-94; 3 (1863): 110-17, Eugene L. Schwaab, ed. *Travels in the Old South: Selected from Periodicals of the Times*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1973, vol.2, 561.

overlooked grounds, where art and nature were happily combined. Gardeners were imported from Europe; and soon the stately laurel, and the soft spreading elm, shot up their heads in avenues and walks: while they were occasionally clasped by the yellow jasmine, or crimson woodbine. Soon the verdant lawn spread forth its carpet, contrasted with hedges, gravel walks, terraces, and wildernesses.²¹

The merchants who aspired to become planters went so far as to imitate the seasonal migrations of the British landed gentry.²² Henry Laurens was one of these colonial gentlemen. Laurens first made his fortune as a merchant and, after marrying into one of the most prosperous slaveholding families of the region, he purchased several plantations in the Lowcountry to fulfill his political ambitions. When his two business partners established themselves as country gentlemen in their native England, Laurens emulated them.²³ He had a house built away from the city in Ansonborough. Called *Ratray Green*, his new residence was surrounded by a walled garden and was, in Lauren's imagination, the equivalent of his former partners' country estates.²⁴ A decade later, as the city grew and Ansonborough developed into a suburb of Charleston, *Ratray Green* became Laurens's urban and primary residence while he built a country residence at *Mepkin*, his home plantation.²⁵ Laurens understood, like most of his contemporaries, that the status of a planter - even in the city - was on the royal ladder to the zenith of southern society. It was for this reason that he advised a contemporary that to get "the esteem of the People whose respect they must endeavor to attract;" becoming a planter was the path to admission into the best social circles.²⁶

In Spanish Louisiana as well, investing in plantations and slaves added to the social prestige of a merchant, a military officer, or a government official.²⁷ "The greatest praise that can be made of a boy is to call him a good planter, that is, a man intelligent in the toils of the

²¹ Drayton, op.cit, 112.

²² The great landlords of the English gentry spent six months on their rural estate, one month at a fashionable spa, one month of travel, and four months in London for the social season. Tamara Plakins Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen: The Meaning of Country Life among the Boston Elite, 1785-1860*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989, 33.

²³ George C. Rogers, Jr., ed, *The Papers of Henry Laurens*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1976, vol.4, xvii,

²⁴ Henry Laurens to John Knigh & John Blackburne Jr., 21 December 1764, *ibid.*, 545.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, vol.6, Appendix B, 610.

²⁶ Henry Laurens to Richard Oswald, 7 July 1764, quoted in Sellers, op.cit., 86.

²⁷ Gilbert C. Din, ed. *Louisiana in 1776: A Memoria of Francisco Bouligny*, New Orleans: Jack D. L. Holmes, Louisiana Collection Series of Books and Documents on Colonial Louisiana, 1977, 56. Original in Spanish in Bouligny-Baldwin Papers, The New Orleans Historical Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

field,” Francisco Boulogny indicated in his *Memoria*.²⁸ The planters constituted the premier class of citizens:

The population of Louisiana can be divided into three classes of people: planters, merchants, and day-workers. The first are the most numerous, only occupied in the development of their farms. They do not think of anything else but harvesting as much as possible from their fields in order to have a great number of slaves, because with them they have all they need and they can satisfy their dominant passion, which is to beautify their lands. The second class is occupied only in buying and selling, and they make some trips to distant places. They toil eagerly to gain some money in order to become planters.²⁹

As an officer of the infantry in the service of Spain, Boulogny acquired a sizable fortune by his marriage to an heiress of French descent and native of New Orleans, as well as by the exploitation of a plantation, “la mieux installée qu’il y a dans tout le paiz [sic] et qui est à la veille de me donner de gros revenus [sic].”³⁰ A military career was not enough to ensure Boulogny and his family a high standing under the Spanish, French, and then American control of New Orleans. Plantations were the great investment of the day, both financially and socially.³¹ Although they drew wealth and prestige from the country, these Louisiana planters spent several months each year in New Orleans where slaveowners were required by the colonial authorities to establish town houses.³²

In the Early Republic, while king cotton reigned over the South, the prestige associated with the owning of slaves and lands increased. As with the merchants who needed the country to gain social prominence, planters needed the city. Being a full-time agriculturalist lowered social status believed the Grimkés, who shared their life between Charleston and a Carolina plantation.³³ The descendants of men like Laurens and Boulogny essentially devoted the greatest part of their time to planting activities, yet they kept strong links with the city, whether through urban properties or social networks. The sons and

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

³⁰ “with the best location in the country, which is about to give me great profits.” François Boulogny to Monsieur [Milleville], 24 October 1789, Dauberville-Boulogny Family Papers, The New Orleans Historical Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

³¹ Jeffrey Robert Young, *Domesticating Slavery: The Master Class in Georgia and South Carolina, 1670-1837*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999, 39-42.

³² Both the French and the Spanish colonial authorities had compulsive urban residency policies. Thomas N. Ingersoll, *Mammon and Manon in Early New Orleans: the First Slave Society in the Deep South, 1718-1819*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999, 30; J.H. Elliot, *Empire of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America, 1492-1830*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006, 40.

³³ It also “dulled the spirit” and “dimmed the intellect.” J.F. Grimké, 6 March 1818 and T.S. Grimké to H. Grimké, February 1818, quoted in Jaher, *op.cit.*, 397.

daughters of those well-established colonial gentlemen were the ones most likely to migrate to the city several months each year and they provided a model of elite behavior. If social prominence was partly assessed in number of slaves and acres, it was also assessed in terms of social pedigree and refinement. Status in any given community came for the socially ambitious planter with a Big House on the plantation, some public office, and eventually, an establishment in town. Migration between two or more residences was, across the South, a defining characteristic of the elite.³⁴

In many respects, elite slaveholders were not exceptional in their seasonal migrations. During both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, landed elites (and eventually industrial bourgeoisies) throughout the Atlantic world traveled seasonally between country and city. Southerners who settled outside their region often upheld a migrating lifestyle that they recognized as being innate to the upper classes. The de Pontalbas were large landholders in Louisiana and shortly after their wedding in 1811, they left for France where they divided their time between *Mont L'Évêque*, a rural property in Picardie and an apartment in Paris.³⁵ Born into a family of French aristocrats, Nathalie Delage Sumter, wife of a cotton planter, knew for example that in France the autumn was “not the season to go in the country.”³⁶ In 1810, she moved to Brazil where her husband was named US ambassador to the court of Portugal in Rio de Janeiro, and there she migrated with her family between two residences:

we have at last a house 6 miles from town in a place as healthy as any in the world. It is on the bank of a beautiful salt water Lake open to the sea & surrounded by mountains we are exactly under the cliff of one called Botafoga the highest about here, the beauties I cannot today describe because I have not time...we will be obliged to have however another house in town but there is no helping it,... it was impossible to live in summer in town.³⁷

Three decades later, Eliza Middleton married a northerner and moved to Philadelphia. When her husband acquired *Alverthorpe*, a country estate, she was pleased to resume the regular cycle of migrations between town and country that she had experienced in South Carolina.³⁸

³⁴ Even in Virginia, which often appears as an exception, planters established urban residences in places such as Williamsburg and Richmond. See Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*, Chapel Hill: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture; University of North Carolina Press, 1999.

³⁵ Christina Vella, *Intimate Enemies: The Two Worlds of the Baroness de Pontalba*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997, 112-134.

³⁶ Nathalie Delage Sumter to Mary Anderson, 31 October 1823, Mary Virginia Saunders White, ed., *Fifteen Letters of Nathalie Sumter*, Columbia: R.L Bryan Company, 1942, 97.

³⁷ Nathalie Delage Sumter to Mary Hooper, 30 September 1810, *ibid.*, 72.

³⁸ Eliza Cope Harrison, ed., *Best Companions: Letters of Eliza Middleton Fisher and Her Mother, Mary Hering Middleton, from Charleston, Philadelphia, and Newport, 1839-1846*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001.

No matter how corrupt and decadent the Old World was portrayed in the new republic, European elites continued to fascinate Americans, both North and South, increasingly over the course of the nineteenth century.³⁹ If the desire to emulate the British gentry (or the French Aristocracy for the Creoles) was not as conscious as it had been in the late colonial period, being welcomed into the best circles abroad remained the ambition of elite slaveholders on the eve of the Civil War.⁴⁰ If there was such a thing as an Atlantic elite in the nineteenth century, then seasonal migrations were an integral part of their culture. Country and city were two sides of the same coin. In her appraisal of the play *Town & Country*, Alice Izard remarked that, beyond her reserves on the play, “there are a great many observations which suit all countries, & all climate.” Clearly, these observations were not only relevant to the revolutionary elite of which she was a prominent member; they also resonated with antebellum audiences as far away as New Orleans, where the play was still performed at the American Theater in 1849.⁴¹

Seasonal migrations followed a certain rhythm, although the peripatetic history of planting families were everything but perfectly cyclical. From year to year, the pattern of migration changed within a family: illnesses, mourning, pregnancies, wars, and especially reversals of fortune prevented the entire household from migrating for one or several seasons.⁴² One bad crop, for example, was enough to jeopardize the annual trip of the Middletons to Newport.⁴³ The regular pattern of migrations, which varied from place to place, was frequently disrupted by life contingencies, yet was broadly understood as the model by which to abide. In two particular instances during the year, planting families were most likely to migrate between town and country. The first was in the winter, from January through April, in order to engage in the social season. The cold months saw planters’ families congregating in the city to pursue the dual quest of “business and pleasure,” the former

³⁹ According to O’Brien, southerners were divided “between their identity as postcolonials who wished the Atlantic to be wide, and their identity as migrant Europeans, who wished for a comity with the old places, the old stones... But the power of Europe, political and cultural, represented not only what Southerners had been but what they wished to emulate, even to transcend, so their minds (and their bodies) went more often to Paris than to Rio de Janeiro.” Michael O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, vol.1, 210-211.

⁴⁰ On Southerners traveling to Europe, see O’Brien, op.cit., 90-161; C.f. James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982, 137.

⁴¹ *Times Picayune*, New Orleans, 9 January 1849.

⁴² For an example of bad health preventing a winter season in Charleston, see M.C. Townsend to Phoebe Townsend, 8 March 1856, Townsend Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

⁴³ Harrison, op.cit., 129.

including the very serious business of marriage.⁴⁴ Sometimes for a few weeks (but often for a few months), the entire family gathered to participate in a round of dinner parties, concerts, theatre plays, dancing assemblies, horse races, and parlor visits. The social season began in Charleston and New Orleans in the colonial South and it was replicated all over the slave states in the antebellum period, from Richmond, Virginia to Natchez, Mississippi. The winter social season in the city, with its balls and its concerts, was not unique to the South – it also happened in London, Paris, and Palermo, but also in New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and Montreal. The second instance, during the summer months, presented significant local variations in the patterning of these seasonal migrations. Charleston and Savannah were flocked, at the very same season that Mobile, New Orleans and Natchez were fled. Everywhere, however, these movements of elite southerners were justified by the dual quest of “health and pleasure,” or “health and society.” The summer season was also a privileged period of socialization everywhere across the Atlantic World; the English gentry traveled to places such as Bath or Brighton, the New England elite went to Newport and Saratoga, and the Montreal bourgeoisie of the Golden Square Mile migrated to Cacoona in the Bas-St-Laurent. Interestingly, in England, in Lower Canada, and in the American South, the summer migrations were often justified by the need to escape the unpleasant heat and humidity.⁴⁵

The Lowcountry rice barons, the Creole sugar planters, and the Natchez district cotton nabobs practiced the most ritualized forms of seasonal migrations. Yet, these migrations were not the prerogative of the wealthiest, nor exclusive to the largest cities. In every town located nearby a plantation region, one could find the urban seats of some of the most affluent local planters. They established their urban seats in smaller and medium-sized towns, such as Georgetown, Beaufort, Columbia (South Carolina), Savannah and Augusta (Georgia), Montgomery, Mobile (Alabama), Jackson, Vicksburg (Mississippi), Louisville

⁴⁴ John Drayton, *A View of South-Carolina, As Respect to her Natural and Civil Concerns*, Charleston: W.P. Young, 1802 (reprinted in 1972), 112; Margaret Hayne Harrison, *A Charleston Album*, Rindge: Richard R. Smith., 1953, 36.

⁴⁵ They also came from the West Indies to Rhode Island. Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in the Wilderness: the First Century of Urban Life in America 1625-1742*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955, 442. Enrico Dal Lago, *Agrarian Elites: American Slaveowners and Southern Italian Landowners, 1815-1861*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005; Frederic Cople Jaher, *The Urban Establishment: Upper Strata in Boston, New York, Charleston, Chicago, and Los Angeles*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982; Venetia Murray, *An Elegant Madness: High Society in Regency England*, New York: Viking, 1998; Françoise Noël, *Family Life and Sociability in Upper and Lower Canada, 1790-1870: A View from Diaries and Family Correspondence*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003; Thornton, op.cit.; Edward Pessen, *Richs, Class, and Power before the Civil War*, 1973; Betty Farrell, *Elite Families: Class and Power in 19th century Boston*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.

(Kentucky), Memphis (Tennessee), New Iberia or Natinotches (Louisiana).⁴⁶ In fact, they were found everywhere in plantation country.

At the scale of the South, the peripatetic South Carolinians were prototypical. The fortunes of the Lowcountry planters were considerable during the entire period, often originating in the eighteenth century. On the eve of the American Revolution, the Lowcountry “was by many standards of measurement the wealthiest area in British North America, if not the entire world.”⁴⁷ Although the rice planters experienced a relative economic decline at the national scale in the following decades, Charleston remained a favorite place of seasonal residence for fifteen percent of the wealthiest planters of the region in the 1850s, that is the owners of at least two hundred and fifty slaves.⁴⁸ This select group constituted only a fraction of the planting families that resided seasonally in Charleston during the antebellum period.⁴⁹ By comparison, there were more merchants, but fewer lawyers, factors, doctors or judges. Each planter listed in the census usually represented a large household of women, children, and enslaved domestic servants. The urban household of John Julius Pringle was composed of his wife Mary, his mother-in-law, seven children, and fourteen slaves. In addition, the town house of these most established planters often acted as the urban seat of a broad network of rural relatives and friends who came to the city for sojourns extending anywhere between a few days and several months. Municipal authorities acknowledged the seasonal behaviour of the planter class; to be considered a resident of Charleston (and therefore be required to pay taxes), one only needed to stay in the city for four months a year, at a friend’s house.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ On small towns as microcosms of large cities, see Orville Vernon Burton, *In My Father’s House are Many Mansions: Family and Community in Edgefield, South Carolina*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985, 28.

⁴⁷ Peter A. Coclanis, *The Shadow of a Dream: Economic Life and Death in the South Carolina Low Country, 1670-1920*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, 121.

⁴⁸ William Kaufman Scarborough, *Masters of the Big House: Elite Slaveholders of the Mid-Nineteenth-Century South*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 6.

⁴⁹ The 1848 census numbered one hundred and twenty-six planters (101 men and 25 women), for a population of 3,547 male whites (between 20 and 90 years of age). Dawson and DeSaussure, *Census of the City of Charleston, 1838*, quoted in Cynthia Megan Kennedy, *Braided Relations, Entwined Lives: The Women of Charleston’s Urban Slave Society*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005, 128-129. In 1860, almost a quarter of the owners of at least 100 slaves in Carolina lived in Charleston at least part-time. Jaher, *op.cit.*, 359. See also Chalmers Gaston Davidson, *The Last Foray: The South Carolina Planters of 1860: A Sociological Study*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1971, 170-267.

⁵⁰ Kennedy, *op.cit.*, 266.

One hundred miles south of Charleston on the Old Seaboard, Savannah hosted a very similar proportion of peripatetic planters.⁵¹ Town and cities of the Southwest also attracted seasonal migrants. In 1822, the city directory of New Orleans listed approximately sixty planters, mostly Creoles.⁵² With the demographic explosion of the Crescent City in the antebellum period, planters lost some of their demographic weight, but they still held a considerable social and cultural influence on both the French and the American sectors of the city. Natchez, although smaller and more homogeneous, was nonetheless an important urban centre for the planter class, being the main place of residence of nearly one fifth of the wealthiest slaveholders of the entire region on the eve of the Civil War.⁵³ These data, however, underestimate the presence of the planting class in towns and cities of the Old South. Throughout the region, censuses and directories rarely noted the dual occupations of a rather large contingent of men who practiced a profession or engaged in commerce on top of operating a plantation.⁵⁴ The Anglican bishop Leonidas Polk, a resident of the Crescent City in the late 1850s, was also the owner of a large plantation in Mississippi.⁵⁵ Henry R.W. Hill, listed as a factor in the New Orleans city directory, was also the owner of four cotton plantations in Issaquena County, Mississippi and a sugar plantation in Jefferson Parish, Louisiana.⁵⁶ Next to these men, a number of planting women were only listed as “widows.” Finally, planting families who resided in hotels and boarding houses for several months each winter do not appear in these records.

Men and women of the planter class perceived the regular cycle of migrations between town and country as part of the great order of things. Each place provided its own distinct advantages. In the planting class’ worldview, the country symbolized retirement and solitude, while town represented society and company. Contrasting the town and country way of life was far from being the invention of southerners; this dichotomy reached back to the classical

⁵¹ Savannah counted 50 planters (for a population of 2,060 white male population over the age of 21). Claudia Dale Goldin, *Urban Slavery in the American South, 1820-1860: A Quantitative History*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976, 14.

⁵² James Adams Paxton, *The New-Orleans City Directory and Register*, 1822.

⁵³ Scarborough, op.cit., 6.

⁵⁴ In those cases, it is the urban profession that was listed. As well, some planters are listed as “widows” or as “gentleman.”

⁵⁵ Joseph H. Parks, *General Leonidas Polk, C.S.A.: The Fighting Bishop*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1962.

⁵⁶ Scarborough, op.cit., 134-135, 231.

period.⁵⁷ For most southerners, however, these were not polarities, but part of a continuum in their mental geography.⁵⁸ During a trip to the “Old Continent,” Mary Stead Pinckney of Charleston observed: “In Paris one has town & country – society or no society – one lives retired without being alone – one rides about the streets, visits the shops, & one seems to be in company – one goes to Charles’s, & find civil people – one talks to them – they talk to you...One goes to the spectacle – walks in the Tuileries or retires to the jardins Monseau.”⁵⁹ Being able to simultaneously have both town and country pleased Pinckney who, like many women of the planting class, took the most out of a peripatetic lifestyle. The daughter of a Georgian planter, Mary Telfair, noted in her diary in October 1814:

We commence our journeys to Savannah after an absence of nearly four months. I always return to town with pleasure and never leave it with regret, for even the most solitary abode where *Hygenia* dispenses her blessings, is preferable to remaining in a place where the mind remains dormant from excessive heat, and the body liable to be affected by sickness.⁶⁰

Although she loved Savannah, Telfair could not nourish her rural inclinations at the plantation:

“I am fond of the Country where
 “Boon Nature scatters, free and wild
 Each plant or flower, the mountain child”
 and should take great delight in cultivating a little spot.
 What can be more pleasing than to watch the progress of a favorite plant.”⁶¹

Women who enjoyed the city during the winter were eager to return to the country when spring returned. “The city is getting warm & dusty which makes us think of the country,” Anna E. Mercer wrote from New Orleans.⁶² The Clantons of Georgia, one of the wealthiest planting families of the state, shared their life between three residences: a town house in Augusta, a plantation house named *Rochester*, and a summer home that Gertrude, their

⁵⁷ Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1973, 1. See also Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992, 353-354.

⁵⁸ Michael O’Brien remarks, “For, with the great exception of New Orleans and the partial one of Charleston, no city was large enough or sufficiently insulated from the life of its countryside to generate the sharp differentiations of city and country found in European discourse, ancient and modern. The Southern city was full of country people, the country full of city people, and the contrast was a differentiation within the experience of a migratory individual, less often between two opposed groups of people who never met.” O’Brien, *op.cit.*, 359. Before the antebellum period, this distinction did not exist in New Orleans. Ingersoll, *op.cit.*, 27.

⁵⁹ Mary Pinckney to Margaret Izard Manigault, 19 February 1797, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

⁶⁰ Mary Telfair to Mary Few, 19 October 1814, quoted in Joan E. Cashin, *Our Common Affairs: Texts from Women in the Old South*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996, 211-212.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Anna E. Mercer to Benjamin Farar, 14 March 1824, Farar Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

daughter, had named *Woodland*. Gertrude was eighteen in June 1852 when she noted in her diary:

Again I am in the country and ho how cool – how very pleasant it is. I am surprised at my reluctance in wishing to come up. Probably after a while I will again become wearied, find my life here too monotonous and wish for the varied life of a city and as it is I am unwilling to remain here all summer. I wish to travel some where. Perhaps we may spend a month at Madison Springs.⁶³

Like Gertrude Clanton Thomas, many women of the planting class enjoyed the country, as long as there was an eventual return to the city. City like country shaped their sense of self.

Seeking society was undeniably the primary motivation of the southern elite to migrate seasonally to small towns, big cities, and summer resorts. There was a social life in the country consisting of neighborhood visits, dinners, hunting and fishing parties, picnics, and occasional dances, but it moved at a slower pace. One plantation mistress of Edisto Island in South Carolina, M.C. Townsend, described this disadvantage: “On these plantations, we live in such a masterly state of inactivity.”⁶⁴ Even in the closely settled areas, the cold season was often a lonesome experience for those who stayed on their plantations instead of migrating to the city. In March 1833, Rebecca Rutledge told her husband Frederick, who was in the Navy, how solitary was her rural life in the Lowcountry:

Mama, myself and my little Harriot are now here alone really and truly the only persons on the river, except your dear Friend Mrs. Smith who is detained very much against her will by sickness – Pinckney, Margaret, and Uncle Cotesworth are all away, your mother’s family are gone and seem to have no intention of coming up even the Shouldbreads and Lucases are gone.⁶⁵

The hot season was also a lonely experience in the more secluded retreats, such as at Pawley’s Island, where the Allstons often summered. “We have a very quiet time here,” remarked Adele Allston in 1850, maybe “too quiet” for her niece who was then visiting her aunt: “It is natural for young people to wish more society and more activity than we can have here – for the habits of our people are not social indeed.”⁶⁶ Unless one had family established

⁶³ 13 June 1852, Virginia Ingraham Burr, ed., *The Secret Eye: The Journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 1848-1889*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990, 107.

⁶⁴ M.C. Townsend to Dame Townsend, 30 January 1858, Townsend Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

⁶⁵ Rebecca Motte Rutledge to Frederick Rutledge, 9 March 1833, Rutledge Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

⁶⁶ Adèle Petigru Allston to Ben Allston, 25 June 1850, Adèle Petigru Allston Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

nearby, the intense periods of sociability were notable around Christmas and generally corresponded to moments when visitors came for extended sojourns.⁶⁷

Both men and women experienced loneliness on their plantations, yet it did not bear the same meanings, and did not hold the same consequences for each gender. “We have done wrong to allow our sons to be alone on plantations – They must at time be very unhappy – besides the danger of getting into bad habits,” William Minor noted in his diary.⁶⁸ Next to riding their horses, fishing and hunting, young men alone in the country tended to drink too much and multiply sexual intercourses with female slaves. “It will not do – They must marry or give up staying alone on plantations. The want of society is *terrible*,” concluded the Mississippian.⁶⁹ The women that these lonely sons married also acutely felt the “want of society,” especially when their husbands were gone all day. But unlike the men of their family, they could not ride their horses or carriages in search of society; doing so endangered their reputation. Sabina Rutherford was shocked when her sister Mary decided to leave her plantation *Oak Lodge* to travel by herself: “Our sister is going to Washington alone (this surprises me much) – A lady would require very respectable protection to appear in such a throng – and what could have been her object in going? Pray tell me, has she left all those servants idle, at the Lodge, just as planting is coming on?”⁷⁰ Not only Mary endangered her reputation, she also neglected her duty as a plantation mistress. For women, isolation came hand in hand with containment in the plantation South.

The relative isolation of the country also meant that elite slaveholders did not always find their neighbors – often planters of lesser means - refined enough to associate with. According to Adèle Allston, “there are few if any, with whom one would desire to be social. It is improbable that an educated and cultivated woman can take pleasure in associating intimately with ignorant and clownish people. I feel this is the case of poor Mrs. Nesbit and

⁶⁷ The presence of one person could change significantly the sociability in the country, as observed Rebecca M. Rutledge in April 1835: “Santee has received such an impulse by Uncle Cotesworth’s residence here, and young Cotesworths popularity, that visiting has become quite the fashion – We stumble upon a large party this morning at Mr. Mazyk’s and have found Mr and Mrs Lucas very amusing neighbors – his ingenuity and ingenuousness render him quite a treasure to converse with. I am going to spend the whole of tomorrow at Hampton, the prospect gives me exquisite pleasure. I only wishing that Lucas may have been occupied as I have been, for then there will be no lack of laughter, the Santee society presents an ample field for her genius.” Rebecca M. Rutledge to Edward C. Rutledge, 9 April 1835, Pinckney-Lowdes Papers, Pinckney Family Papers in Harriot Horry Ravenel Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

⁶⁸ William J. Minor Diary, 5 February 1863, quoted in J. Carlyle Sitterson, “The William J. Minor Plantations: A Study In Ante-Bellum Absentee Ownership,” *The Journal of Southern History*, vol.9, no.1, February 1943, 62.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Sabina Rutherford to Ann Vanderhorst, 7 March 1845, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

her sister, who tho [*sic*] worthy people, are very tiresome when it comes to visiting them often or taking tea with each other.”⁷¹ Although not as disparaging as Allston, Rebecca Rutledge also believed that some of the neighbors of *Eldorado* plantation did not fit within her social circle: “as for the other nobodys, I do not know where they are gone or not, nor does it at all signify; they are very pleasant neighbours keeping quietly to their own domain, they are never you know heard of or thought of by us.”⁷² These elite women often perceived loneliness and solitude as preferable to associating with lesser folk. The antidote to the spatial reality of the country was therefore either to invite people to the plantation, or to go to the nearby town or city. To many plantation women, the urban South appeared a more complete environment for the lives they would prefer to lead.

The rural isolation that came with the life of a southern planter did not suit everyone, especially not those who had risen in the most brilliant social circles of the Atlantic world. With the ready support of their wives, a number of planters chose to live away from the plantation for the greatest part of the year. The son-in-law of Alice Izard exemplifies this. For Gabriel Manigault, enjoying the fortune that came with an agrarian empire was one thing, but having to manage and supervise it was another. His grandfather and namesake, considered at his death the third wealthiest man in the thirteen colonies, had become a respected gentleman by acquiring several plantations in South Carolina. He schooled his grandson in England and encouraged his interest in amateur architecture. The young Manigault was the embodiment of the elite planter: refined, wealthy, cosmopolitan, and profoundly urban. In a letter addressed to Gabriel’s wife, Margaret, her friend Eliza Bird wondered in August 1800: “Mr. Manigault is he much of a Farmer or does he love the pleasures of Charleston better?”⁷³ Clearly, Bird was not well acquainted with her friend’s husband, because it was public knowledge that Gabriel was not much of a farmer. In fact, he

⁷¹ Adèle Petigru Allston to Ben Allston, 25 June 1850, Adèle Petigru Allston Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

⁷² Rebecca Motte Rutledge to Frederick Rutledge, 9 March 1833, Rutledge Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

⁷³ Eliza Bird to Margaret Izard Manigault, 24 August 1800, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

was somewhat of a dandy.⁷⁴ Manigault made only infrequent visits to his nearby plantations *The Oaks* (which Margaret had named) and *Silkhope*. These visits were, according to his wife, “desperate resolution[s].”⁷⁵ While the majority of the Lowcountry planters habitually resided for at least a few months each spring on their plantations, Gabriel and Margaret Manigault had become by choice urbanites year-round.⁷⁶ Acknowledging this reality, Alice Izard wrote in 1805 to her daughter: “neither of you are attached to a country life as I am.”⁷⁷ Joseph, Gabriel’s brother, was also well-aware of this urban inclination: “All your removals with your large family, must make you enjoy the more, a stationary residence in town, which I believe you have generally preferred to the country.”⁷⁸ Gabriel Manigault was a wealthy man. His city tax return for 1804 demonstrates that he owned several urban houses and lots in Charleston, twenty-five slaves in the city, five plantations in the Lowcountry, and 416 slaves working on those plantations.⁷⁹ But the great price fluctuations of rice and the distaste for the management of an agrarian empire led Manigault to sell most of his South Carolina properties in 1805 when he moved his family to *Clifton*, an estate on the Delaware River near Philadelphia. His wife Margaret had strongly encouraged the move.⁸⁰ He died unexpectedly four years later. Before long, some of Manigault’s offspring returned to South Carolina, resuming a life divided between Charleston and a plantation in the Lowcountry.

Gabriel Manigault was, in many ways, archetypal of the wealthiest slaveholders in the Early Republic. Some elite planters never visited their plantations. Alternatively, some went for a few days now and then. Others resided with their families on their plantations a few months each year, especially in the spring to oversee the planting season. But more than half the year they were away from their plantation in the city, in a suburban estate, in a summer resort, at the springs, or in the North. Describing the elite of Richmond in 1851, a local historian noted:

⁷⁴ Beatrice St. Julien Ravenel, *Architects of Charleston*, Charleston: Carolina Art Association, 1945, 53.

⁷⁵ Alice Delancey Izard to Margaret Izard Manigault, 4 February 1802, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

⁷⁶ Henry Izard to Margaret Izard Manigault, 28 March 1799, Ralph Izard Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina; Joseph Manigault to Gabriel Manigault, 21 December 1806, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

⁷⁷ Alice Delancey Izard to Margaret Izard Manigault, 20 September 1805, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

⁷⁸ Joseph Manigault to Gabriel Manigault, 17 December 1805, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

⁷⁹ City Tax Return for 1804, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

⁸⁰ Wilma Wates, “Precursor to the Victorian Age: The Concept of Marriage and Family as Revealed in the Correspondence of the Izard Family of South Carolina,” Carol Bleser, ed., *In Joy and Sorrow: Women, Family, and Marriage in the Victorian South, 1830-1900*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, 8.

The higher circle consisted of the families of the neighboring planters, who left their estates to the managements of overseers, and spent the larger part of the year in Richmond, because of its social advantages. They were men of leisure who spent life in enjoyment; they were not money makers, nor did they feel the cares and anxieties of men of trade; their leisure and their natural disposition led them to cultivate those occupations and amusements which rather refine the manners and add to our happiness, than those which increase the wealth and prosperity of a community.⁸¹

As said an absentee planter, “if pecuniary circumstances did not oblige me to live there I think I would rather live everywhere than Carolina.”⁸²

Planters who did not reside on their plantations were dubbed “absentees” by their contemporaries. In the 1830s, Fanny Kemble married into one of the wealthiest Philadelphia families who derived their riches in great part from the absentee ownership of a lucrative property where hundreds of slaves grew Sea Island cotton.⁸³ Kemble asserted that in the city, planters were favorably exposed to “highly cultivated modern society.”⁸⁴ She presented these migrating planters as a superior caste within the slaveholding class. While the majority of southern slaveholders “are a remnant of barbarism and feudalism” whose “animal passions predominate,” Kemble believed that “the inhabitants of Baltimore, Richmond, Charleston, Savannah, and New Orleans, whose estates lie, like the suburban retreats of our city magnates, in the near neighborhood of their respective cities, are not now the people I refer to. They are softened and enlightened by many influences – the action of city life itself.”⁸⁵ These “enlightened masters,” who distanced themselves from slavery, unfortunately constituted “the most inconsiderable portion of the slaveholding population of the South.”⁸⁶ She could have added that they were also the most prone to absenteeism. Her husband’s country neighbors on the Georgia Coast did not reside in Philadelphia as he did, but they

⁸¹ John P. Little, *Richmond, the Capital of Virginia: Its History*, 1851, quoted in Patricia C. Click, *The Spirit of the Times: Amusements in Nineteenth-Century Baltimore, Norfolk, and Richmond*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989, 15-6.

⁸² A. E. Morris to Elias Vanderhorst, 30 June 1829, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston, South Carolina.

⁸³ She recorded her experience as the wife of an absentee planter in her *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839*, John Anthony Scott, ed., New York: Knopf, 1961 (1863). The grandfather of Kemble’s husband, the Major Pierce Butler, was one of the wealthiest rice planters of the Georgia Lowcountry. In the last decade of the eighteenth century, he bought a town house in Philadelphia, in addition to a rural property known as *Butler Place*. See Malcolm Bell, *Major Butler’s Legacy: Five Generations of a Slaveholding Family*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987, 42-81.

⁸⁴ Fanny Kemble, “Letter addressed to the Editor of the London TIMES,” 1863, in Kemble, op.cit., 349.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 350.

⁸⁶ Needless to say, these absentees constituted a minority within the minority. According to James Oakes, “Only a small faction of slaveholders, less than one and a half percent, ever owned fifty slaves or more. Their relatively small number alone suggests the difficulty of achieving such heights of wealth.” Oakes, op.cit., 65.

could still be considered absentee planters. They stayed in Savannah or Charleston from May to December and if they came back to the plantation around Christmas, they often returned to the city in February for the social season.⁸⁷ Absenteeism, therefore, was the habitual pattern of absence of a planter from his plantation. A planter who spent half of the year on his rural estate was not considered an absentee according to this definition, but slaveholders who hardly spent three or four months a year on their plantations were definitely practicing a mild form of absenteeism.⁸⁸

According to one demographic study, the great majority of large slaveholders in the decade preceding the Civil War were in fact absentee planters.⁸⁹ The most established families, often those who had owned the land for generations, were the most likely to practice absenteeism. In comparison with the “aggressive, expansive and upwardly mobile culture of the to-be slaveholders,” these elite slaveholders, whether they were planting sugar, cotton or rice, be they Creoles or Americans, were as a group more conservative, hierarchical, stable, and paternalistic.⁹⁰ Several factors promoted absenteeism in slave societies across the American hemisphere, Nathalie Dessens observes, but everywhere, “the wealthier the planters, the more likely they were to be absent.”⁹¹ First, “absenteeism enabled planters to reconcile the ideal of nobility with the commercial constraint of business.”⁹² After all, planters were in their imagination aristocratic cavaliers, not ruthless capitalists. Evolving in metropolitan circles where their crops were sold, while maintaining efficient overseers in the country favored their overall prosperity. Third, it also allowed planters to diversify their economic activities. Southern planters notably invested massively in urban real estates. Few southern absentees went back to Europe (although some did), but most lived in the urban centers of the region, as did planters in Spanish slave societies such as Santo Domingo and

⁸⁷ Kemble, *op.cit.*, xxvix.

⁸⁸ In his study of plantation paintings before the Civil War, John Michael Vlach interprets the absence of black figures in those paintings as “a powerful tactic that artists used to suggest a planter’s undisputed command over his estate. If there were no blacks to be seen in a plantation landscape, then white people, by default, would have to be recognized as the primary occupants.” I would suggest that such a statement was especially important for absentee planters. John Michael Vlach, *The Planter’s Prospect: Privilege and Slavery in Plantation Paintings*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002, 2.

⁸⁹ Scarborough, *op.cit.* See especially chapter 4 “Agrarian Empires.”

⁹⁰ On the Creoles, see Oakes, *op.cit.*, 44-45.

⁹¹ According to Dessens, this “explains why absenteeism was more common in the greater than in the Lesser Antilles and in Jamaica than in Barbadoes.” Nathalie Dessens, *Myths of the Plantation Society: Slavery in the American South and the West Indies*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003, 44.

⁹² *Ibid.*

Cuba.⁹³ Across the South, absentee planters clustered around cities like Charleston, Savannah, Natchez, Augusta, New Orleans, and Richmond.⁹⁴ Absenteeism in the United States was by no means equivalent to the phenomenon observed in the Caribbean or the West Indies, yet historians have clearly underestimated the phenomenon.⁹⁵ American absenteeism would not have bred “the callous indifference of West Indian absenteeism,” Ira Berlin tells us. Instead, it would have been a “paternalism-at-a-distance.”⁹⁶

This idea that paternalism could be exerted at a distance did not convince critics of chattel slavery. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur questioned the benevolence of those absentee masters in his *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782):

The inhabitants [of Charleston] are the gayest in America; it is called the centre of our beau monde, and is always filled with the richest planters of the province. ... While all is joy, festivity, and happiness in Charles-Town, would you imagine that scenes of misery overspread in the country? Their ears by habit are become deaf, their hearts are hardened; they neither see, hear, nor feel for the woes of their poor slaves, from whose painful labours all their wealth proceeds. Here the horrors of slavery, the hardship of incessant toils, are unseen; and no one thinks with compassion of those showers of sweat and of tears which from the bodies of Africans, daily drop, and moisten the ground they till. The cracks of the whip urging these miserable beings to excessive labour, are far too distant from the gay Capital to be heard. The chosen race eat, drink, and live happy, while the unfortunate one grubs up the ground, raises indigo, or husks the rice; exposed to a sun full as scorching as their native one; without the support of good food, without the cordials of any cheering liquor.⁹⁷

⁹³ Dessens, op.cit., 51.

⁹⁴ According to the New Orleans *Crescent*, the absentee planters of Concordia Parish, Louisiana, ruled “over estates as broad as some German principalities, and yielding far greater revenues. But very few of these lords of the soil reside on their estates but have their residence across the river in Natchez or elsewhere,” quoted in Randolph Delehanty and Van Jones Martin, *Classic Natchez*, Savannah & New Orleans: Martin-St. Martin, foreword by Wendell Garrett, 1996, xi.

⁹⁵ Besides Scarborough, very few historians have written on absentee planters. See Carlyle J. Sitterson, “Lewis Thompson, a Carolinian, and His Louisiana Plantation, 1848-1888: A Study in Absentee Ownership,” Fletcher M. Green, ed., *Essays in Southern History*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1949, 16-22. Idem, “The William J. Minor Plantations: A Study in Ante-Bellum Absentee Ownership,” *Journal of Southern History*, February 1943, 9, 59-74. According to Michael J. Wayne, “Even in the Natchez district, where absentee rates were higher than normal, there was recurring personal contact between masters and slaves. Blacks used this contact to imprint their humanity on their owners. And for reasons that were presumably a mixture of conscience and expediency, the gentry responded by conceding their chattels a voice in the shaping of the rules and regulations governing the plantation.” Then again, he notes, “the most successful slaveowners in the Natchez district, the richest and most “patrician” – Stephen Duncan and William Newton Mercer, Jacob Surget and Levin R. Marshall – invested heavily in the North, lived a portion of the year in New York or New England, and profited from the marketplace arrangement of free labor just as they did from the paternalism of the plantation.” Michael J. Wayne, *The Reshaping of Plantation Society: The Natchez District, 1860-1880*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983, 24, 27. See also Eugene D. Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1969, 96.

⁹⁶ Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in America*, Cambridge: Belknap, 1998, 152.

⁹⁷ Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer; and, Sketches of Eighteenth-century America*, New York: Penguin Books, 1981 (1782), 166, 168.

In Crèvecoeur's depiction, the city is white and gay; the country is black and gloomy.⁹⁸ Already audible at the end of the eighteenth century, critics grew louder as slavery became a central issue in the national arena.⁹⁹ During his trip in the Southwest, Frederick Law Olmsted asked a poor white fellow:

“Do the planters not live themselves on their plantations?”

“Why, a good many of them had two or three plantations, but they don't often live on any of them.”

“Must have ice for their wine,” said Mr. S., “or they'd die; and so they have to live in Natchez, or New Orleans”¹⁰⁰

According to the abolitionist literature, absenteeism was a “widespread evil” in the slaveholding South. The antislavery advocate Angelina Grimké Weld witnessed that reality first hand. Born and raised in Charleston, Angelina was the daughter of Judge Grimké, an absentee planter. Only sporadically did she and her siblings visit her father's plantation, and while there, she barely came into contact with the enslaved:

Throughout all the eastern and middle portions of the state, the planters very rarely reside permanently at their plantations. They have almost invariably town residences and spend less than half the years on their estates. Even while spending a few months on them, politics, field sports, races, speculations, journeys, visits, company, literary pursuits, & c. absorb so much of their time, that they must, to a considerable extent, take the condition of their slaves on trust, from the report of their overseers.¹⁰¹

Weld remembered that on the family estate men and women were treated like beasts rather than as human beings. The practice of absenteeism was perceived as inherently evil because it conflicted with the ideal of benevolent mastery promoted by the apologists of the peculiar institution. An absentee planter could not nurture the personal relationships with his human chattel that led to benevolence and instead encouraged the indifference that triggered cruelty. The very institution that was supposed to civilize the African, now under the neglectful auspices of an absentee planter, dehumanized the African.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Crèvecoeur realized in Charleston that, “slavery undermines the attempt to create an agrarian utopia in America.” John D. Cox, *Traveling South: Travel Narratives and the Construction of American Identity*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005, 36.

⁹⁹ In 1807, John C. Calhoun, an upcountry man, said that the fever was “a curse for [Charlestonians] intemperance and debaucheries.” George C. Rogers, Jr., *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1980, 168.

¹⁰⁰ Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey in the Back country in the Winter of 1853-4*, New York: Putman, 1860, 27-28.

¹⁰¹ “Testimony of Angelina Grimké Weld,” in Theodore Dwight Weld, *American Slavery As It Is*, New York, 1839. Reprint; New York: Arno Press, 1968, 36.

¹⁰² On the benevolence of slaveholders, see Jeffrey Robert Young, *Domesticating Slavery: The Master Class in Georgia and South Carolina, 1670-1837*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999.

Voices denouncing absenteeism also came from the South and spoke in similar terms. Absentee planters did not fit well within the regional paradigm. The scientist Robert Mills articulated the problems prompted by these neglectful masters:

Few of our planters now, comparatively, remain on their plantations longer than half the year; and how many are absent almost the whole year (for during the short period they remain there, they feel not at home.) Will not this habit, the result of necessity and education, increase upon them every year? Is not this compulsory personal inattention to our prosperity, destructive to our interests? What is the result? Having to trust the management of our plantations to hirelings, or to slaves, we necessarily lose considerably from the want of our own personal attention?¹⁰³

According to most contemporary critics, a good planter had to be on his plantation. These negligent masters posed serious threats to the security of the master class; marooning occurred more frequently where absenteeism predominated. Moreover, planting was not only an economic enterprise; it was also a social and moral enterprise. In the agricultural addresses that proliferated the antebellum period, the soil became instilled with spiritual meaning.¹⁰⁴ The agrarian myth formulated by the reform movement played an important role in creating a symbolic consensus and social solidarity: “be they wealthy planters or dirt farmers, southerners were, the myth contended, agrarians all.”¹⁰⁵ The country bred a “manly spirit,” affirmed the planter and politician James Henry Hammond. Agriculture, he claimed, was “the very Foster-Dame of Freedom.” It “cherishes and promotes a generous hospitality, a high and perfect courtesy, a lofty spirit of independence, an uncalculating love of country, and all the nobler virtues and heroic traits of man.”¹⁰⁶ “In the cities and factories,” Hammond contended, “the vices of our nature are more fully displayed, while the purest morals are fostered by rural life.”¹⁰⁷ The ideal southern man was a patriarch, a slaveholder, and an agriculturalist.

Hammond shared these ideas with his close friend, the writer and planter William Gilmore Simms, who stressed the emasculating effect of cities on southern men. Cities bred an inferior gentleman, Simms believed, unable to relate to people of his own race, whether they were the urban working community, the “forest-bred inhabitant, or the rugged

¹⁰³ Robert Mills, *Statistics of South Carolina, including a View of its Natural, Civil, and Military History, General and Particular*, Charleston: Hurlbut and Lloyd, 1826 (The Reprint Company, Spartanburg, 1972), 322.

¹⁰⁴ Drew Gilpin Faust, “The Rhetoric and Ritual of Agriculture in Antebellum South Carolina,” *The Journal of Southern History*, vol.45, no.4, November 1979, 544.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 551.

¹⁰⁶ Hammond, quoted in Burton, *op.cit.*, 37, 347.

¹⁰⁷ Faust, *loc.cit.*, 37.

mountaineer.”¹⁰⁸ The city and its society “rendered [the planter] feeble and effeminate.”¹⁰⁹ It threatened southern masculinity:

The danger is always that, in the perfection of our tastes, we lose some of our necessary energies. The secret is to refine our manners without forfeiting our strength.... The man of manners and refinements, is apt to make them special objects of pride; and in doing so, emasculates his mental energies. He perpetually contrasts his quiet, graceful manner, with the rude hurry of the working man; and in proportion as the rough energy of the other offends his tastes, will he turn away equally disgusted with, or unobservant of, the vigor and power which are coupled with the roughness which offends him. In rejecting what is evil, or inferior, in the manners, he makes the mistake of rejecting also the virtues of that manhood which is the secret of safety in all communities.¹¹⁰

Because the city emasculated elite slaveholders, they should not be idle in the city, but rather industrious in the country.¹¹¹ The city corrupted men, undermined southern patriarchy, and endangered the gendered and racial order.¹¹² Absentee planters – and to a lesser extent seasonal migrants – went against the agrarian and benevolent ethos that was then formulated in defense of the slaveholding South; they weakened southern patriarchy. One did not have to share the political agenda of William Gilmore Simms or James Henry Hammond to observe the differing influence that town and country had on the planter’s character. A traveler remarked, “In the city he lives like a modern and a gentleman, among his peers; in the country, he lives like a gentleman, too, but after the manner of a patriarch of old.”¹¹³ Absenteeism was therefore a threat to racial, class, and gender relations in the South.

¹⁰⁸ William Gilmore Simms, *Father Abbot, or, the Home Tourist*, Charleston, 1849, 48, 183. See also idem, “Summer Travel in the South,” *Southern Quarterly Review*, 2 September 1850, 24-65.

¹⁰⁹ Simms, op.cit., 146.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 183. Simms started writing about similar themes earlier. See John McCardell, “Poetry and the Practical: William Gilmore Simms,” Michael O’Brien and David Moltke-Hansen, eds, *Intellectual Life in Antebellum Charleston*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986, 201.

¹¹¹ This ideology extensively borrows from the agrarian ethos of the Early Republic. “Will you tell me how to prevent luxury from producing effeminacy intoxicating extravagance vice and folly,” asked John Adam to Thomas Jefferson in 1819. Lester J. Cappen, ed., *The Adams-Jefferson Letters: the Complete Correspondence*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1952, vol.2, 551. According to the cyclical theory of history, widespread at the time, the sign of the decline of a society included idleness, luxury, and extravagance, versus simplicity, frugality, and industry. Stow Persons, “The Cyclical Theory of History in 18th C. America,” *American Quarterly*, 6, Summer 1954, 5.

¹¹² “William Gilmore Simms noted the contrast between the coarse masculine Southwest, where there were no restraints on human passion, and the genteel, feminine seaboard, a theme that appeared in his personal life and fiction,” Joan E. Cashin, *A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, 160.

¹¹³ G.M., “South Carolina,” *New England Magazine*, October 1831, vol. I, Issue 4, 247.

The city and its fashionable life also threatened southern women, as it tended to “effeminate the mind.”¹¹⁴ Eliza Lucas and her contemporaries of the colonial period already believed that urban society made women wasteful, unstable and irrational. As the ideal of domesticity became all-pervasive in the antebellum period, at the very same moment that absenteeism became much-criticized, regional domestic advisers repeatedly told women that their place was not in the city, playing the belles at the ball, but in the country, as the mothers of black and white families.¹¹⁵ Domestic novelists were undeniably the foremost promoters of an idealized vision of country life – a plantation mystique – and they encouraged elite southern women to accept their lot without question.¹¹⁶ These authors were widely influenced by the Anglo-Irish novelist Maria Edgeworth who glorified the quiet and simple joys of rural life and presented the country estate as the idealized domestic sphere. By contrast, London appeared in her *Tales of Fashionable Life* as a shallow place where women were uncontrollable “financial and verbal spendthrift[s]” who destructed “the fortune and reputation of the family.”¹¹⁷ Edgeworth and her southern emulators claimed that the happiness of a woman rested on a good husband, plenty of children, and dutiful servants.¹¹⁸ Set in Ireland, Edgeworth’s novel *The Absentee* (1812) condemned the negligence of the absentee landed aristocracy who exploited instead of nurturing the land and its people. Landlords who chose the country over the city served the greater good of their tenants and of their country; it was both a benevolent and a patriotic gesture. The novelist compared the Irish absentees to the West Indian planters; criticizing their negligence, and not slavery itself.¹¹⁹ Women were called by Edgeworth to marry responsible men who inhabited year-round the country, and thus to enliven their solitude. Without stepping outside the domestic sphere, women could therefore undermine absenteeism and express their nationalism.

¹¹⁴ Eliza Lucas Pinckney to Mrs. H., [June or July 1742], *Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney 1739-1762*, op.cit., 48-49.

¹¹⁵ Virginia Cary, *Letters to a Young Lady on the Death of her Mother*, Richmond: Ariel Works, 1830, 141. Maria J. McIntosh, *Woman in America: Her Work and Her Reward*, New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1850, 89.

¹¹⁶ Steven M. Stowe, “City, Country, and the Feminine Voice,” Michael O’Brien and David Moltke-Hansen, op.cit., 307.

¹¹⁷ Heidi Thomson, “Introduction,” Maria Edgeworth, *The Absentee*, London: Penguin Books, 2000 (1812), xviii.

¹¹⁸ See Elizabeth Moss, *Domestic Novelists in the Old South: Defenders of Southern Culture*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992.

¹¹⁹ Thomson, op.cit., xxxvi.

Edgeworth's message stridently resonated within the Old South, where she was one of the most-read novelists.¹²⁰

Southern absentees were no better than other infamous absentee landlords abroad, William Gilmore Simms contended: "What Irish nobleman or landowner, living in Italy, will admit any attraction in Ireland, except his rents?"¹²¹ The critics of absenteeism became particularly vocal in the decades preceding the Civil War due to the combination of the agricultural depression of the late thirties and early forties, the sectional crisis over nullification of what were perceived to be oppressive tariffs, and the emigration west of the most enterprising citizens. In South Carolina in particular, the agricultural decline of the state was often blamed on those absentee planters, especially those who spent part of the year in the North or abroad. As the conflict heightened between the sections, the absentees came to be depicted not only as negligent masters, but also as traitors to their region. In a series of letters published in the Charleston's *Mercury* in 1848, William Gilmore Simms painted those absentees as "Yankee Humbugs," "poor nincompoops" and "Men who plodded annually to that vulgarest of all social places, Saratoga."¹²² According to Simms, "this absenteeism – this wandering off into distant and ungrateful States – wasting profligately, in foreign expenditure, the substance drawn ruthlessly from the bowels of our own – is a crime no less than a folly!" and a "self-disparaging weakness."¹²³ Ironically, Simms was himself an absentee; he spent his summers in the North and when in the South, he was more likely to be found at *The Wigwam*, his Charleston town house (a name that reflected his desire to imprint a masculine symbol unto the emasculating city), than at *Woodland*, the family plantation.¹²⁴

As one of the most prolific writers of the antebellum South, Simms' opinion was not marginal. In his *Sociology for the South* (1854), George Fitzhugh also saw the rich absentees of Virginia as a major impediment to the economic prosperity of the region:

¹²⁰ The Charleston Library Society owned a copy of *The Absentee* published in New York in 1812. From January 1813 until 1817, it was borrowed 62 times by the members of the library. Edgeworth was one of the most popular novelists of the CLS throughout the period. Circulation Records, 1813-1817, Charleston Library Society, Charleston, South Carolina. Thanks to Isabelle Lehuu for sharing this information.

¹²¹ Simms, op.cit., 12; For similar criticism of absenteeism in Southern Italy, see Dal Lago, op.cit., 104.

¹²² William Gilmore Simms, *Father Abbot, or, the Home Tourist*, Charleston, 1849, 7, 58. *The Mercury* was edited by Robert Barnwell Rhett and Henry Laurens Pinckney, two prominent fire-eaters politicians, and descendants of prominent planting families. Jaher, op.cit., 341-342.

¹²³ Simms, op.cit., 111, 203.

¹²⁴ On Simms, see Mary Ann Wimsatt, *The Major Fiction of William Gilmore Simms: Cultural Traditions and Literary Form*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989; John Caldwell Guilds, *Simms: A Literary Life*, Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1992.

The pleasures of society are seldom indulged in, or if indulged in, at much expense of time and inconvenience, in merely farming countries, where people live at considerable distance from each other. There is no occasion for towns or cities, and not enough of the rich to support places of recreation and amusement. The rich are, therefore, all absentees. Some go off for pleasure, some to religious conventions and associations, some for education, and those who remain at home, do so not to spend money and improve the country, but to save it, in order that they too may hereafter visit other regions. The latter class are no less absentees, in effect, than the former classes. The consumption abroad, of the crops made at home would, in two centuries, blast the prosperity of any country, by robbing it of the manures which nature intended for it.¹²⁵

Among the solutions put forward by Fitzhugh, he recommended the development of towns and cities, thus making the South more attractive to the “rich absentees.”¹²⁶ By promoting urbanization, but also education, industrialization, and economic diversification, Fitzhugh’s vision opposed the agrarian ethos defended by Simms and Hammond, yet it reflected the agenda of “softened and enlightened masters.”¹²⁷

Absentees remained a conundrum for the apologists of the peculiar institution, not only for their reluctance fully to embrace the agrarian ethos and abandon their seasonal migrations, but also for their differing political affiliation. Class, more than race, defined them.¹²⁸ As a majority, they voted like urban southerners, who preferred the Whigs to the Democrats.¹²⁹ Adverse to democracy, they presented themselves as opponents to Andrew Jackson and his populist politics.¹³⁰ Because of their economic, social and cultural connections with the North, these elite planters were among the South’s most vocal Unionists, literally and politically less tied to southern values.¹³¹ And yet, when the Thirteen States seceded, most sent their sons to the battlefield under the Confederate flag and encouraged their wives and daughters to participate in the war effort. Without slavery, these

¹²⁵ George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society*. New York: Burt Franklin, 1854, 154.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.158.

¹²⁷ Fanny Kemble, “Letter addressed to the Editor of the London TIMES,” 1863, Scott, *op.cit.*, 349. This project, however, was doomed argued Eugene Genovese. *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South*, New York: Vintage Book, 1967, 171-174.

¹²⁸ Daniel Kilbride suggests that these planters belonged to an American leisure class during the first half of the nineteenth century, devoted to “an ever-more anachronistic aristocratic culture” and which “bound[ed] gentlepeople in the South and Philadelphia.” Kilbride, *op.cit.*, 3.

¹²⁹ Tolbert notes in her study of Middle Tennessee that local Democrats did “not expect to gain much in towns and villages where aristocracy and selfishness reign predominant.” Lisa C. Tolbert, *Constructing Townscapes: Space and Society in Antebellum Tennessee*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999, 79-80.

¹³⁰ On the politics of urban Southerners, see Frank Towers, *The Urban South and the Coming of the Civil War*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004; on the politics of absentee planters, see William Kaufman Scarborough, *op.cit.*, 238-274.

¹³¹ Charleston and especially “its mercantile interest” were “the most union loving and conservative portion of the State.” Jaher, *op.cit.*, 370; Sitterson, *loc.cit.*, 1943, 61.

absentee southerners could not sustain their refined life, starting with their seasonal migrations. Although removed most of the time from the daily reality of the plantation, absentee men and women were deeply imbricate within the economy of slavery.

The antebellum period must be understood as a period of growing class tensions in the South, especially in towns and cities.¹³² Confronted with an era of extended crisis and the emergence of an antiplanter rhetoric, elite men and women needed to justify and/or recalibrate their absences from the plantation, and most importantly, from the region. Some elite slaveholders did not wait until the attack on Fort Sumter in 1861 to express their patriotism for the southern cause.¹³³ Like the friend of Rebecca Motte Rutledge who's "patriotism [did] not let her travel North of the Potomac," some absentee southerners had already started to transform their seasonal migrations in the early 1830s.¹³⁴ Visiting South Carolina at the apex of the nullification crisis, a traveler noted, "If the planter's patriotism be so rigid that he will pass his summers in Charleston, it is at a grievous sacrifice of comfort and liberty. It is unsafe for him to be abroad when the sun shines or the dew falls; his house is, therefore, not only his castle, but his prison."¹³⁵ Simultaneously a castle and a prison, the urban residence of the elite slaveholder acted on the visual culture of the city as a political statement of its loyalty to the South. Charleston's climate was unsafe during the summer, the traveler was told. Staying represented a great personal sacrifice, perhaps even the sacrifice of one's life. The planter and Episcopalian bishop Leonidas Polk moved to New Orleans with his family in the mid-1850s. While the elite fled the city to escape the yellow scourge, Polk refused to leave, professing solidarity with the poorer city-dwellers, "It is now my home and we shall not leave it." He was a man of God, after all.¹³⁶

¹³² Jonathan Daniel Wells, *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class, 1800-1861*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004, 192.

¹³³ Except most conspicuously a few Natchez nabobs. Scarborough, *op.cit.*, 337.

¹³⁴ Rebecca Motte Rutledge to Edward Rutledge, 14 June 1833, Rutledge Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina. The Virginia Springs as a summering destination gained popularity as the sectional crisis heightened. See Boyer Lewis, *op.cit.* It was also the case of Beerseba Springs in Tennessee and Biloxi on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Scarborough, *op.cit.*, 36.

¹³⁵ G.M. "South-Carolina," *New England Magazine* 1, September-October 1831, Schwaab, *op.cit.*, 240.

¹³⁶ Parks, *op.cit.*, 114.

The seasonal migrations of the planting elite have traditionally been understood as first and foremost a movement dictated by the sickly landscapes of the South: migrating to escape diseases or dying.¹³⁷ In his book *Statistics of South Carolina* (1826), the architect and engineer Robert Mills mapped the state's landscape according to the dialectic of healthiness/sickness.¹³⁸ The climate and its consequences on the seasonal migrations of the most prominent South Carolinians - the Lowcountry planters - occupy a key place in his work. While the Sea Islands were "generally healthy" Mills wrote, the tidal swamp was "decidedly unhealthy," whilst the rice swamps were "very sickly." To escape the ravages of the country fever (malaria), the wealthy planters only inhabited these sections in the winter and the spring, abandoning their plantations the rest of the year for a residence in Charleston or the side lands.¹³⁹ Then again, the sand hill region and the mountains of the backcountry were preferable for a "perfect health" and elite slaveholders often retreated there in the autumn.¹⁴⁰ Mills did not limit himself to a mere description of the migratory habits of the elite; he also pleaded against the desertion of the Lowcountry for most of the year by its best residents. His writing on the subject – an almost poetic supplication - broke with the largely scientific tone of the *Statistics*:

During the most enchanting season of the year, how desolate appears our low country! The rich glow of colors from a thousand flowers, bloom in vain to catch the admiring eye of intelligent man. The fragrance of the garden and the grove spreads abroad its sweets, untasted by the sense that is capable of appreciating them! Shall we continue this state of things? Witness our citizens gradually deserting us for more salubrious climates, and not attempt to remedy the evil? Shall we willingly consent to yield this fine portion of our state to be inhabited only by our slaves?¹⁴¹

According to Mills, the dangerous climate of the Lowcountry jeopardized the attachment to this land. As the State engineer in charge of internal improvements, he proposed to drain the swamps of the Lowcountry, thus reclaiming them from the insalubrity, the miasma, and the

¹³⁷ According to a plantation mistress, "The summer climate is treacherous and deadly, and no white man can with impunity expose himself to it." Meta Morris Grimbald, "Our Country Neighbours," Sketches, 1857, Margaret Ann Morris Grimbald Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

¹³⁸ Mills surveyed among other things the geography, agriculture, judiciary, and political institutions of the Palmetto State.

¹³⁹ "Although the clinical symptoms of malaria do not usually inspire dread, its epidemiological symptoms, largely because of their tendency to persist, may be of the gravest consequence. ... Attacks of malaria tend to recur and infection may take place repeatedly. The disease is peculiarly fatal to children. In expectant mothers, it often causes abortion, miscarriage, or premature labor. Common by-products of malaria are anemia, weakness, loss of energy, sexual impotence, susceptibility to other infections, and chronic invalidism." St. Julien Ravenel Childs, *Malaria and Colonization in the Carolina Low Country, 1526-1696*, Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1940, 11.

¹⁴⁰ Mills, op.cit., 131-133.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 321.

fever. Yet Mills failed to convince his contemporaries to undertake his ambitious sanitization program, and until the end of slavery, wealthy planters of South Carolina and other states of the Deep South continued their seasonal migrations. But if he had been successful in transforming the Lowcountry landscape from sickly to healthy, would elite planters have spent more time on their plantations? Would they have stopped migrating for several months each year to southern cities and other destinations? Or, to ask the question another way, to what extent do environmental factors explain the seasonal migrations of the Southern elite?

The uniqueness of the Lowcountry elite in practicing these seasonal migrations should not be overstated, but rather understood as a variant of a movement between country and city that existed everywhere across the South. The humid subtropical climate of the South obviously influenced the seasonal migrations of the planters. The meridian at which they lived was known for its oppressive heat and its effect on health. From one generation to another, planters were constantly reminding themselves of the changing state of the landscape from healthy to sickly. The fear of dying of epidemic scourges such as yellow fever, smallpox, and scarlet fever were recurrent justifications for migration between country and city. The Motte family, who owned the plantation *Eldorado* on the Santee River, knew those deadly threats first hand. In October 1832, Rebecca Motte Rutledge was surprised by the death of her uncle, a victim of his own imprudence in visiting his plantation at the height of the sickly season: “He slept three successive nights in the swamps – got wet daily, and was up early and out late, in spite of the prayers and remonstrances [*sic*] of all his countryfriends and neighbors.”¹⁴² As a result, the following spring, she made sure that she and her infant escaped the deadly climate of the plantation, but was saddened that her brother Pinckney did not take similar precautions: “we have all been in town the required time and are all as yet quite safe from country fever. I fear for Pinckney, he has returned there in spite of our entreaties and of the bitter experience of our family. The country was quite healthy and very pleasant as long as we remained there, but very soon after we came down it became sickly.”¹⁴³ Planting men and women who took refuge in town believed that there was “a magic circle at Charleston, which the malaria seldom invade[d], though he presses closely

¹⁴² Rebecca Motte Rutledge to Frederick Rutledge, 5 October 1832, Rutledge Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia.

¹⁴³ Rebecca Motte Rutledge to Frederick Rutledge, 3 June 1833, Rutledge Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia.

upon it.”¹⁴⁴ The first frost of the year, either in October or November, marked the end of the sickly season.

Then again, Charleston during the sickly season was far from healthy. Both the yellow and the typhoid fevers were common during the warmest months of the year but since the victims of these urban diseases were mostly numbered among immigrants, planters felt safe as long as they arrived early in the season to “acclimate” themselves. Lowcountry planters thus considered Charleston unsafe, even deadly, for those who would venture into the city in the middle of the sickly season.¹⁴⁵ In the era of the Early Republic, the practice of seasonal migration was so well established that the Charleston Library Society, a social library, was offering seasonal membership to the planters that came to reside in the city during the summer.¹⁴⁶ During the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, perceptions of what constituted a sickly landscape changed and the patterns of seasonal migrations between country and city altered accordingly. Traveling in South Carolina in 1765, Pelatiah Webster noticed, “many people move to considerable distances up into the country to spend the summer and avoid the intense heats and confined air of the town.”¹⁴⁷ However, at the very moment Charlestonians left for the country, planters of the Lowcountry flocked to the town.¹⁴⁸ In the colonial period, the sickly season lasted about three months and corresponded with the autumn, that is from August to October. By the nineteenth century, the sickly season went on for a full six months and stretched from June to November.¹⁴⁹ Did the Lowcountry have become sicklier? Were the planting families more cautious? Or did sickly landscapes become convenient excuses to justify long absences from their plantation in the face of mounting critics?

¹⁴⁴ G.M., “South Carolina, No.II,” *New England Magazine*, no.1, 1831, 340.

¹⁴⁵ John Drayton, *A View of South-Carolina, As Respects her Natural and Civil Concerns*, Charleston: W.P. Young, 1802 (The Reprint Company, 1972), 27-28; William F. Colcock to Emmeline Colcock, 2 November 1858, Colcock Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁴⁶ Isabelle Lehuu, “National Narratives and Cosmopolitan History: The Southern Book Culture in the Early Republic,” SHEAR 27th annual meeting, Montreal, 2006, unpublished conference paper.

¹⁴⁷ T.P. Harrison, ed. *Journal of a Voyage to Charleston in South Carolina by Pelatiah Webster in 1765*, Southern History Association Publications, II, April 1898, 131. For example, in July 1760, Eliza Lucas Pinckney was at her country estate Belmont. Elise Pinckney, ed., *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney, 1739-1762*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972, 152-154.

¹⁴⁸ John Drayton, *A View of South-Carolina, As Respects her Natural and Civil Concerns*, Charleston: W.P. Young, 1802 (The Reprint Company, 1972), 24; Eliza Wilkinson, *Letters of Eliza Wilkinson, during the Invasion and Possession of Charlestown, S.C. By the British in the Revolutionary War. Arranged from the Original Manuscripts, by Caroline Gilman*, New York: Samuel Colman, 1839 (reprint Arno Press, 1969), 104.

¹⁴⁹ Brewster, op.cit., 3-11.

The rice fields of the Lowcountry were not the only agricultural landscapes that planters feared. In Georgia, a number of Sea Island cotton planters also took refuge in Savannah during those months, at the very moment others fled the confining air of the town.¹⁵⁰ The fear of diseases on plantations was not exclusively an eastern phenomenon. Unhealthy landscapes were found throughout the South. Sickness was a recurrent problem in frontier Louisiana. In addition to malaria and yellow fever, they also had to deal with ague, typhus, dysentery, and cholera. In the 1830s, Rachel Swayze O'Connor, who almost never left her plantation in West Feliciana Parish, lived in a constant fear of diseases. Her best remedy against cholera was to forbid her slaves to go near the town "or any other place."¹⁵¹ An exceptionally benevolent slaveholder, O'Connor would never think of fleeing her unhealthy plantation and abandoning her slaves.

In New Orleans, seasonal migrations antedated the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. Under the French and Spanish regimes, planters of the parishes surrounding New Orleans often inhabited the city for several months each year, like their South Carolinians counterparts. Although they generally spent the summer on their plantations, they still regularly sojourned in the Crescent City during the warmest months of the year. As New Orleans boomed in the antebellum period with its population doubling almost every decade, the flow of immigrants led to an escalation of yellow fever epidemics. Creoles who once believed that they were immune to the "saffron scourge" began to fear the summer in their beloved city, now often referred to as the "Necropolis of the South."¹⁵² The upscale rental market reflected these changes; leases for apartments and town houses were usually for eight months.¹⁵³ Family plantations along the Mississippi river became health refuges. Céline Roman, born and raised in the French Quarter, dreaded the summer months in the city. In a letter to her son Henri, she dramatically announced that although willing to risk her life in facing the yellow scourge in the city, she would rather spend "la saison des maladies" at Beau Séjour, the family plantation in St. Jacques Parish, for the sake of her daughters' health.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Kemble, *op.cit.*, xxxix.

¹⁵¹ Rachel O'Connor quoted in Avery O. Craven, *Rachel of Old Louisiana*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1975, 45.

¹⁵² Jo Ann Carigan, *The Saffron Scourge: A History of Yellow Fever in Louisiana, 1796-1905*, Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1994, 29. See also chapter 3 in Ari Kelman, *A River and Its City: The Nature of Landscape in New Orleans*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, 87-103.

¹⁵³ Vella, *op.cit.*, 296.

¹⁵⁴ Céline Roman to Henri Roman, 14 march [1860], Roman Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Similarly, Louise St. Martin of St. Jean Baptist Parish urged her daughter Louisa to come down to the plantation with her children:

On nous dit que les maladies prennent un caractère très sérieux à la Nvlle Orléans, ne t'expose pas à y demeurer plus longtemps ma chère Enfant car tu n'y es pas acclimatée; tu me répondras à cela, vous avez aussi beaucoup de maladies chez vous? Cela est vrai, mais il me semble qu'elles ne sont pas aussi dangeureuses [*sic*]. Car nous avons le grand air et les bains froids qui nous fortifient beaucoup. Nous avons aussi une maison vide où nous puissions nous disperser dans le cas où nous aurions une épidémie, et puis réunis nous aurions bien plus de courage pour nous soigner, car l'union fait la force.¹⁵⁵

If St. Martin acknowledged that her Louisiana plantation was not entirely spared from diseases, she still believed that it provided the human and material conditions to withstand an epidemic. Few planters ventured to Mobile or Natchez where the heat was considered unbearable at the height of the summer and where epidemics of yellow fever became increasingly recurrent as the decades passed.

Envisioned at first as resorts by the planters, Charleston and Savannah lost popularity as summering destinations throughout the nineteenth century. Planting families were proportionately less and less numerous in spending the entire summer in these cities as time passed, privileging instead small villages, springs and other exclusive northern resorts. In spite of the refreshing breeze that came from the Ashley and the Cooper rivers, Charleston – as with Mobile, Natchez, or New Orleans - was a rather unpleasant place in the dog days. Locals were very critical of the “monstrously dull” summers in what was described as a “hot little dusty city.”¹⁵⁶ “Savannah’s being as dull as a “dry old stick” noted a young woman.¹⁵⁷ Planters thus turned to a wide range of retreats reputed for their healthiness. There were the coastal towns like Beaufort in South Carolina or Côte St. Louis in Mississippi. There were the beaches privileged by those who preferred to live in relative isolation. Others favoured the proximity to the plantations provided by the Pine Barrens located some distance from the rice swamps, where planters “marooned” in communities such as Summerville, Pinopolis,

¹⁵⁵ “We are told that diseases are taking a serious character in New Orleans. Do not expose yourself to remain there longer, my dear Child, because you are not acclimated; you will answer me “you also have many diseases at your place?” It is true indeed, but they do not appear to me as dangerous. Because we have the great air and the cold baths that fortify us a lot. We also have an empty house where we can disperse if we face an epidemic. We would also be together; we would be much more courageous to take care of each other, because unity makes strength.” Louise St. Martin to Louisa St. Martin, 10 Août 1858, St. Martin Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁵⁶ Elias Vanderhorst to Ann Vanderhorst, 29 August 1835, Mary Morris to Ann Vanderhorst, 9 May 1836, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

¹⁵⁷ Eliza Harriet Johnston to Elizabeth Mackay, 18 July [1828], quoted in Cashin, *Our Commons Affairs*, op.cit., 92.

and Plantersville.¹⁵⁸ A significant number migrated farther into the Upcountry or into North Carolina. The Haynes chose Pendleton because “the air was fresh and invigorating, the mountain streams furnished trout, the miles of pine forest had plenty of game.”¹⁵⁹ Most urban centers also witnessed the emergence of summer communities in their periphery. Charlestonians went to Sullivan’s Island, while Orleanians went to Carrollton on Lake Pontchartrain.¹⁶⁰ Augusta had Sand Hills on the banks of the Savannah River, while Mobile had Spring Hill.¹⁶¹ There, elite southerners built simple summer homes for their families. Appearing in the late eighteenth century, these summer communities founded by planters and other elite members of the slaveholding society mushroomed across the South and remained a recognizable feature of the landscape well after the end of slavery.

These summer communities, however, were not always the promised panacea, as one of the daughters of Alice Izard discovered. In the spring of 1813, the husband of Nancy Izard Deas decided to establish his family in the Pine Land, where “there are no moskitoes” and “they have excellent water.”¹⁶² The slaves built a rustic cottage to accommodate the family. Nancy confessed to her sister: “I still preserve a predilection for comfortable houses & good furniture, tho’ my curiosity is on the alert to see this curious Pine House. We take very few things, & shall have some benches & shelves arranged after we get there. If it only proves healthy I shall be satisfied.”¹⁶³ If during the first few days she enjoyed “a pleasant cool breeze,” the residence in the Pine Land soon became a nightmare for Nancy. Her children became sick with the country fever:

The children have been sick for a week & I am dispirited & uncomfortable, & disappointed. Allen & William have had a constant fever..., it has never been very violent, but still it has reduced them, & they can scarcely crawl about, & are almost all day on their beds. Charlotte also had a fever for two days, but she is apparently well

¹⁵⁸ Pineville as described by Mills: “The village of Pineville... contains twenty-two dwelling houses. It forms a retreat for heal in summer and autumn. It began to be settled in 1794, and lies about fifty-two miles to the north of Charleston. It is situate on a level piece of pine land, five miles of the S.W. of Santee river, and two miles from the swamp, which here extends three miles from the river. The white population of Pineville is 150; the number of blacks about 300.” Mills, *op.cit.*, 482-483.

¹⁵⁹ Margaret Hayne Harrison, *A Charleston Album*, Rindge, New Hampshire: Richard R. Smith Publisher, 1953, 106.

¹⁶⁰ Mary Cable, *Lost New Orleans*, New York: American Legacy Press, 1980, 28.

¹⁶¹ Virginia Ingraham Burr, ed. *The Secret Eye: The Journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 1848-1889*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990, 72-73; Elizabeth Barrett Gould, *From Fort to Port: An Architectural History of Mobile, Alabama, 1711-1918*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988, 50.

¹⁶² Alice Izard Deas [Nancy] to Margaret Izard Manigault [Peggy], 26 March 1813, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

¹⁶³ Alice Izard Deas to Margaret Izard Manigault, 4 June 1813, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

again. So far Edward has been perfectly well, but I dread his getting sick now, & have lost my confidence in this resented [the] Pine Land. Yet to the grown people it certainly has been of service, I felt astonishingly better & Becky has also got quite well. I still hope that this may only be a seasoning & that these poor children may yet enjoy health during the rest of the summer. If these poor little things had not got sick, I should have been very well pleased with my prospects for the summer, for to say the truth I have learnt not to be difficult.¹⁶⁴

Because the children did not indeed fare better, the entire family abandoned the Pine Land settlement to migrate to Sullivan's Island, a destination that had first been discarded by the Deas because of its location in Charleston harbour, at a time when the War of 1812 was raging against Great Britain.¹⁶⁵ The island proved healthy that summer for the Deas, but other elite slaveholders would lose their lives there.

Sullivan's Island was, during the summer, primarily inhabited by women, children, and elders, while men remained in town to attend their businesses and their social clubs. An annex of Charleston, the island was a feminized landscape at the margin of the city.¹⁶⁶ The elite community formed on the island socialized and enjoyed the fresh air. Youngsters bathed in the sea, and families walked "on the beach in search of shells."¹⁶⁷ Usually a pleasant experience, a summer on Sullivan's Island, however, was never totally safe. Located in the harbor, the island was often struck by hurricanes. For several summers in the 1850s, the Colcocks "removed to Sullivan's Island, in consequence of the Yellow Fever."¹⁶⁸ While the father remained in town to attend his professional obligations as a planter and as collector of the port of Charleston, mother, children, and enslaved servants went to the island. There, in September 1858, Emmeline Colcock gave birth to "a fine little girl."¹⁶⁹ Within weeks, the new mother and one of her daughters became sick "with broke bone fever." They recovered, but an enslaved servant succumbed to yellow fever. "Whoever supposed that this disease would have followed us here. We have had five cases & I hope we shall have no more," Emmeline wrote, discouraged. "I have never spent such a summer in my life. It has been a season of

¹⁶⁴ Alice Izard Deas to Margaret Izard Manigault, 18 June 1813, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

¹⁶⁵ Alice Izard Deas to Margaret Izard Manigault, 13 June 1813, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

¹⁶⁶ Mills, *op.cit.*, 425.

¹⁶⁷ William Ferguson Colcock Jr. to Emmeline Colcock, 25 september 1858, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁶⁸ "The autobiography of William Ferguson Colcock," Colcock Family Papers, 1785-1917, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁶⁹ Only a few days after having buried a son who had died of typhoid fever. William Ferguson Colcock to Emmeline Colcock, 3 September 1858, 22 August 1858, Colcock Family Papers, 1785-1917, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

sickness, sorrow and death. I hope we shall be able to move up to town by the first of November.”¹⁷⁰ Unfortunately, the mother of ten would never see Charleston again, for twelve days later, she died of the fever. The experiences of Emmeline Colcock, Nancy Deas, and their contemporaries serve as reminders that there was no such thing as a completely healthy landscape in the nineteenth century, whether it was urban or rural, North or South. In spite of all the precautions that elite southerners took, they often encountered diseases.

Southerners were not the only ones to experience the city as a sickly landscape. Urban epidemics were not exclusively a southern phenomenon; they were a fact of life that had to be dealt with for anyone visiting an American city.¹⁷¹ While in the North, southerners encountered influenza, cholera and yellow fever.¹⁷² Fears of sickly landscapes also prompted northern elites to undertake seasonal migrations. In October 1805, Alice Izard wrote, “the fever, since the frosts, has decreased so much at Phia that the inhabitants are returning to the City. I hope that N. York is equally happy.”¹⁷³ In Pennsylvania (the state in which she elected to spend her last days), Izard decided to “always [have] a House in town & take a smaller one in the Country to retire to in case of yellow fever.”¹⁷⁴ Upon hearing that his brother Gabriel had “been obliged to remove [his] family to a small house five miles from New York, on account of the danger of the yellow fever,” Joseph Manigault complained that “It is a melancholy as well as unaccountable circumstance, that our principal cities should be so frequently visited by this dreadful calamity.”¹⁷⁵ In the North, as in the South, these urban diseases were often blamed on the lower elements of society. “It was so sickly the last summer,” Ann Vanderhorst said of Charleston, “those lazy Irish will throng the city.”¹⁷⁶ In August 1832, Harriet Manigault Wilcox was explaining to her cousin Meta Morris Grimball

¹⁷⁰ Emmeline Colcock to Emmeline Colcock, 21 October 1858, Colcock Family Papers, 1785-1917, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁷¹ For instance, malaria in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries was known on both side of the Atlantic. England even had a few epidemics. St. Julien Ravenel Childs, *Malaria and Colonization in the Carolina Low Country, 1526-1696*, Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1940, 126-127.

¹⁷² Ann Vanderhorst to Elias Vanderhorst, 30 June 1829, Vanderhorst Family Correspondence, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina; Alice Delancey Izard to Henry Izard, 14 August 1807, Ralph Izard Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

¹⁷³ Alice Delancey Izard to Margaret Izard Manigault, 10 October 1805 [the letter is mistakenly dated 10 February 1805], Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Joseph Manigault to Gabriel Manigault, 2 October 1805, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

¹⁷⁶ Ann Vanderhorst to Lewis Vanderhorst, 17 march 1853, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

what she believed were the causes of the cholera epidemic in Philadelphia: “Yesterday there were but 24 new cases: I imagine there will be more to day [*sic*], as it has been observed that there are always more on Sundays, owing to the working class having more time to drink.”¹⁷⁷ Migrating north, therefore, was not a guarantee that one would completely escape the sickly landscapes of the South.

Elite planters also believed that a prolong exposure to the northern climate was harmful to the southern-born. “Mr. Bee is perfectly astonished at your venturing to pass a winter in Phia & still more so at your having taken a house in one of the cross streets, Nancy Deas told her sister Margaret Manigault, “he predicts that you are to be sick.”¹⁷⁸ Years later, Manigault’s granddaughter asserted:

her desire to leave Charleston... [It] is now considered the cause of the death of her three daughter [*sic*], Emma, Caroline, and Charlotte, the northern climate is very trying, during the winter months, and the colds taken in that dreary season gradually undermined the constitutions of these young ladies, and one after another they faded away, and came to their end.¹⁷⁹

The selfish desire of Margaret Manigault, who had encouraged her husband to become an absentee planter to indulge her taste for society, and who had chosen to spend her widowhood in Philadelphia, was now blamed for the death of her daughters.

No matter how real the threat of diseases in the rural South, moving away from the plantation remained the prerogative of the elite. It was those who could leave that would move to the city or to another summering destination. This was an expensive venture that only the wealthiest could afford. Being away from the plantation required someone in place to oversee the slaves and the harvest, so crucial for the planter’s profit. Migrating involved a second residence, whether rented or owned, to lodge the entire family. It also meant a long preparation and the disposable income to travel. Moving around was expensive and time-consuming, but the total number of planters who had the money and the leisure to do so steadily increased in the nineteenth century. In colonial Louisiana, for example, few planters could afford extensive sojourns to New Orleans as Francisco Boulogny indicated in the *Memoria* he presented in 1777 to the King of Spain:

¹⁷⁷ Harriet Manigault Wilcox to Meta Morris Grimball, 26 August 1832, typescripted letter, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

¹⁷⁸ Alice Izard Deas to Margaret Izard Manigault, 23 October 1812, Manigault Family Papers, South Carolina Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

¹⁷⁹ Meta Morris Grimball, “My Mothers Relatives,” Sketches, Grimball Family Papers, [c. 1855], typescript, 4, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

In the country they have all their comforts without spending much; in the city everything is expensive and, as generally not one of them has much money, all of them flee from the city. I say that they do not have money because such is the passion with which they wish to develop their fields that they barely sell the harvest, having made provisions for foodstuffs that they need for the year such as wine, oil, soaps, flour, and some clothes for the domestic use of the household, that they employ the rest in work implements or in Negroes, if they find an opportunity to buy them.¹⁸⁰

A generation later, as prosperity increased in Louisiana with the introduction of the sugar cane culture, Creole planters were more and more numerous to spend several months each year in the city, as did their Carolinians counterparts.

Amongst the destinations opened to elite slaveholders, a season in the city remained one of the most expensive options, second only to a trip up north.¹⁸¹ During the Pine Land experiment, Nancy Izard Deas longed to travel to Pennsylvania, but as she lamented, “I see no prospect of it now & economy strict & rigid economy is all I can discover.”¹⁸² Even for those who were well established in Charleston, the city was costly and a few months in a summering community represented a change of air, but also an opportunity to save money. In 1838, John Berkeley Grimball hired a beach house in Edingsville for the modest sum of \$130, while he rented out his own town house in Charleston for \$600.¹⁸³ Harriot Horry, who spent several months each year in Charleston, perceived in Statesburg, in the Carolina Up country, a very decent alternative to the city:

Here we were extremely well accommodated at Mrs. Browns; the Hotel is a large building itself and having several contiguous to it contains in the whole thirty seven bed-chambers besides public rooms; here families sometimes reside the summer months, and being healthy, and comfortably supplied with washing and every necessary (except liquors) at the rate of 35 pr an'm. for each person is an Eligible place while there is such a scarcity of houses in [Charleston].¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁰ Din, op.cit., 56.

¹⁸¹ Margaret Manigault about the settling of the upcountry: “If this Catawba proves healthy, which they have good reason to believe it will & if they should not find it too difficult of access – it will be a blessing for those who have their property in this country, & who cannot afford to live in Charleston.” Margaret Izard Manigault to Alice Delancey Izard, 16 March 1812, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

¹⁸² Alice Izard Deas to Margaret Izard Manigault, 5 March 1813, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

¹⁸³ John Berkeley Grimball Diary, VI, entries for May 1-23, 1838, quoted in Brewster, op. cit., 29.

¹⁸⁴ Harriot Horry Journal 1793-1794 (typescript), 30 April 1795, 66, Pinckney-Lowndes Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

A keen observer, Horry saw the potential of the town and twenty-five years later, Robert Mills noted the same about Statesburg: “there is not a more desirable place for residence, either for health or society, in any part of the state, than this village offers.”¹⁸⁵

Given the cost associated with a season in the city, the development of summer communities such as Plantersville, Statesburg or Sullivan’s Island appeared to be motivated by more than a desire to escape sickly landscapes, either rural or urban. These villages, settled for a season by up to two hundred planters’ families, offered advantages aside from their pleasant and healthy climate: affordability, proximity to plantations, and an exclusive society. In these villages there were no drunken sailors, no prostitutes, and no impertinent free blacks who dwelt in urban ports. In Pineville, for instance, the horse races were an exclusive affair: “The company in attendance is always of so select an order, composed of the gentry of the immediate neighborhood, that it resembles a large united family party, rather than the promiscuous throng [usually found] on a race ground in other places.”¹⁸⁶ As well, these summer communities represented an opportunity to enjoy the genteel society of the city at low expense. In his *Statistics*, Robert Mills captured this reality in his description of one of the resorts: “Dancing is the chief amusement here. There are generally from two to three balls in the week, during the season of residence in Pineville, given nearly in rotation, by the families, with little ceremony and expense; but with great decorum and propriety.”¹⁸⁷ In Pendleton too, “the social life was simple. Except for an occasional dance at Tom Cherry’s Inn, there were only informal gatherings on the piazzas, with tea and cakes for the ladies, and rum punch for the gentlemen.”¹⁸⁸ In cities like Charleston or New Orleans, receptions where only water and tea were served would have been the laughing stock of polite society, but in these rustic settings they were deemed as suitably refined. For a planter who aspired to gentility, building a villa in the backcountry was more affordable than buying an elegant dwelling in Charleston. For some, it was a stepping-stone toward refinement and upward social mobility, with the ultimate ambition being an urban establishment. For others, especially the ones who wanted to abide by the agrarian ethos, summer communities closer to nature appeared more acceptable destinations to seek “pleasure and health.” They did not endanger southern masculinity as cities did.

¹⁸⁵ Mills, op. cit., 743.

¹⁸⁶ John B. Irving, *The South Carolina Jockey Club*, 1857, quoted in Brewster, op.cit., 41.

¹⁸⁷ Mills, op. cit., 486.

¹⁸⁸ Harrison, op.cit., 107.

Although elite southerners often explained their migrations as necessary measures to escape sickly landscapes (the dilemma being posed in terms of migrating or dying), their legitimacy was repeatedly questioned throughout the entire period, by locals and foreigners alike. John Drayton, Governor of South Carolina and himself a regular migrant, acknowledged that even in the sickly Lowcountry, planters “by far the greater number still remain in the country on their plantations; many of them enjoying as perfect health, as can be found on any part of the globe.”¹⁸⁹ “Blessed are the poor,” asserted one Mobilian, “for they shall enjoy the comforts of home.”¹⁹⁰ Having experienced the subtropical climate of the Lowcountry his entire life, William Gilmore Simms was especially critical:

We are too well disposed to believe these traditions in regard to the dreadful sickliness of places among us, which should be fostered rather than deserted, since this belief furnished us with an excuse, which we desire, to get away. We find very poor people, who cannot leave the swamp neighborhoods, enjoying comparatively good health, - while their children flourish and fatten in spite of malaria.¹⁹¹

To Simms, the beliefs surrounding the sickly landscapes were nothing else but “excuses to get away.” Foreigners also questioned these beliefs. In 1861, the British traveler William Howard Russell met a captain who navigated year-round the inland waters of the Lowcountry and who “laughed at the fears of the whites as regards the climate.”¹⁹² Southerners vehemently rejected such calling into question of their motivations, starting with Mary Chesnut who reaffirmed the environmental beliefs of her class. After reading Russell’s letters, she remarked in her diary:

One thing he said – our people were so *fine looking*, it contradicted the idea that white men could not live in this country. What nonsense. The parts where white men grow so happily are not the parts where rice & cotton are made - & he forgets that the manly fellows he saw about the Mills house would be killed by one night between May & December where thousands of Negroes are working the fields. Not to speak of their fate if they braved not only night air & malaria but if they attempted *work* under our tropical sun. I wonder a man who knows India could make such a mistake.”¹⁹³

Russell was not the first one to be mistaken. He was the last of a series who “come here to make a book armed with three things, “pen, paper, & prejudices.””¹⁹⁴ Russell, Crevecoeur, Drayton, Simms, the captain, were all mistaken; the Lowcountry was deadly to (elite) white

¹⁸⁹ Drayton, *op.cit.*, 24.

¹⁹⁰ Jones W. Withers to Francis J. Levert, 18 June 1850, quoted in Harriet E. Amos, *Cotton City: Urban Development in Antebellum Mobile*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1985, 116.

¹⁹¹ Simms, *op.cit.*, 32.

¹⁹² William Howard Russell, *My Diary North and South*, New York: Harper and Brothers, 1863, 56.

¹⁹³ 21 June 1861, C.Vann Woodward, ed. *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981, 84.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

people. In spite of difficult epidemiological conditions, the population of the Lowcountry grew rapidly, more rapidly in fact than did the total population of British North America.¹⁹⁵ Because they wanted to hold on to a migrating lifestyle that contradicted the agrarian ethos of benevolent slavery, planting men and women took refuge, more or less consciously, behind an environmental rhetoric based on the necessity to escape diseases.

Starting with Mary Chesnut, plantation women were perhaps the most effective users of this health rhetoric. Much like *The Princess and the Pea* of the fairy tale by Hans Christian Andersen, elite white women used their physical sensitivity as a medium to establish their aristocratic identity. Their feebleness and delicacy, often at the limits of invalidism, mirrored the oriental imagery of southern womanhood pervasive in the Old South. It also reinforced the protective role of men. An examination of the discourses surrounding the seasonal migrations and the sickly landscapes of the South reveal how gendered they were. Most planters did not express fear for themselves, but only for the health of their white dependants: women and children. Their other dependants (enslaved men and women) were usually believed immune to malaria and yellow fever. Offering a season away from the plantation was another expression of the benevolent authority of the patriarch who duly protected his dependants. To ensure the recovery of a wife or a daughter, a planter was willing to invest large sums and enter into very long and tiring trips, such as Robert Allston who brought his daughter Della on a grand tour of Europe that lasted several months for her “health.”¹⁹⁶

Seasonal migrations constituted a favored opportunity for the patriarch to affirm his authority over his subalterns. A season away from the plantation – for pleasure and/or for health - was intended to “gratify” a plantation woman - that is, to please her, to oblige her, to indulge her. In sum, it was meant to reward her.¹⁹⁷ “Southern men of honor loved to give gifts,” Kenneth S. Greenberg observes, they “were the most common means of exchange for

¹⁹⁵ Coclanis, op.cit., 65.

¹⁹⁶ Pringle, op.cit.

¹⁹⁷ “Gratify” comes from the French *gratifier*, and the latin *gratificare, gratificari*. In its archaic use, “gratify” was synonymous of “to reward.” Social theorists have extensively written on social control through the dialectic punishment-reward, focusing mostly on punishment. On the efficiency of reward to exert domination, see Olivier Ihl, *Le mérite et la république: Essai sur la société des émules*, Paris: Gallimard, 2009.

honorable men of the master class.”¹⁹⁸ It reinforced the dependency relations between men and women, as it did between masters and slaves.¹⁹⁹ Planters who shunned the city on pragmatic and/or ideological grounds still felt that it was their duty to provide, on a regular basis, pleasure and society to their wives. A number of planters remained in the country, while magnanimously allowing their wives to engage in society, either in the city or at summer resorts. Were they more numerous as the absenteeism of elite slaveholders came under scrutiny? It is hard to tell, but not impossible. A British traveler remarked the preponderance of women at a South Carolina resort: “We passed the evening with some very agreeable company, who had come from the sea-coast for health and pleasure. These were chiefly ladies, there being about 50 persons of whom not more than 10 were gentlemen.”²⁰⁰

Other patriarchs invested in their own manly pursuits and were disinclined to gratify their wives. Bennet H. Barrow was such a man. Obsessed with horse racing and fox hunting, Barrow considered the twin-villages of St. Francisville and Bayou Sara pleasurable enough for his family. Each time he went to New Orleans between December and March to transact business and to see his best horses compete, wife and children remained at *Highland*, his cotton plantation in Florida Parish.²⁰¹ In April 1845, however, as his wife of the last fifteen years was on her deathbed after a difficult delivery, he was ready to make amends. In his diary, he promised that if his wife was to live, “will try and take care of my own the remainder of my life – shall quit Fox hunting – and study amusements with my wife & children, God speed an end to all my troubles, hope in short time to be able to start some Where will all the family for health pleasure & happiness.”²⁰² Five days later, he was the widowed father of six. Pleasures were supposed to be shared within the plantation household; they were the privilege of a leisured class.

These pleasurable seasons offered to women seemed unfair to young men. While their sisters were indulging in town or at a summer resort, they were called by their fathers to supervise an isolated plantation in the country or learn a profession in the city. The Grimas

¹⁹⁸ “The more a man gave, the most likely he was to achieve “the highest positions of status and power.” Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor & Slavery*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, 51.

¹⁹⁹ According to Greenberg, “The language of the gift was frequently the language of mastery.” *Ibid.*, 66.

²⁰⁰ J.S. Buckingham, *A Journey Through the Slave States of North America Slave States*, London: Trafalgar Square, 2006, 201.

²⁰¹ An official timer of the Louisiana Jockey Club, Barrow also raced his horses in St. Francisville, near his plantation. He abandoned racing at the turn of the 1840s, as his hobby placed a major stress on his finances. Edwina Adams Davis, ed. *Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes of Louisiana, 1836-1846 as reflected in the Diary of Bennet H. Barrow*, New York: Columbia University, 1943, 12, 57.

²⁰² 20 April 1845, *ibid.*, 352-354.

were one of the most prominent families of Louisiana. The patriarch Felix was a notary, a judge and a planter. In the 1850s, the Grimas spent their summers in Baie St. Louis in Mississippi, a popular resort among the wealthy located a few hours away from the Crescent city by steamboat.²⁰³ After the Civil War, the mother and daughters returned to Baie St. Louis, while the sons remained in town to run the notary office of their father. Paul, one of the sons, whined about the weather in the city: “Rien de nouveau sous le soleil brûlant de la ville: c’est toujours la même monotonie abrutissante, nous sommes forcés de tuer le temps de nous coucher de très bonne heure”.²⁰⁴ Another son, Edgar, complained of the work that fell upon him to afford to his female relatives a summer at the Baie: “quant au bureau, les recettes sont assez faibles, sauf la journée de Samedi, ou vingt trois protêts à cinq piastres nous ont donné de quoi payer vos journées de \$18 à \$20 à l’Hôtel.”²⁰⁵ Aware that there was no room for that kind of resentment toward the gendered order, he added, “Mais tâchons de ne pas laisser ces idées mesquines occuper ici une place qu’il leur conviendrait mieux d’avoir.”²⁰⁶ The young man knew that, in these uncertain times, when these masters had lost their slaves to emancipation, the Grimas needed to hold on to as many antebellum traditions as possible to preserve their standing within the regional elite.²⁰⁷ The seasonal migrations between town and country of his female relatives were some of them.

Town and country were at the center of great gender negotiations within the planting family; it was used by both men and women to assert their authority within the household. In most slaveholding families, the patriarch controlled the rhythm and the destination of seasonal migrations. Alice Izard noted that her son Ralph “decided that his wife, & children shall spend the summer at Sullivan’s Island.”²⁰⁸ Sometimes, especially when a marriage was

²⁰³ Alfred Grima to Felix Grima, 30 juillet 1857, Grima Family Papers, 1856-1921, New Orleans Historical Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

²⁰⁴ “Nothing new under the burning sun of the city; it’s always the same tiresome monotony. We are force to kill the time by going to bed very early.” Paul Grima to Louise Grima, 24 août 1867, Grima Family Papers, 1856-1921, New Orleans Historical Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

²⁰⁵ “As for the office, the profits are rather modest, except for Saturday, where twenty protests at five dollars each have given us enough to pay your days at \$18 to \$20 at the hotel.”

²⁰⁶ “But we are better not let these petty ideas occupy here a place that they should not have.” Edgar Grima to Adélaïde M. Grima, 22 août 1867, Grima Family Papers, 1856-1921, New Orleans Historical Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

²⁰⁷ “Summering at resorts had become part of the upper class’s way of life – an extravagant expression of an opulent life-style that marked their position in society. If anything, such expression was needed more after the war before as the elite... sought to put their lives and fortunes in order and to recover their former positions.” Click, *op.cit.*, 95.

²⁰⁸ Alice Delancey Izard to Margaret Izard Manigault, 12 April 1815, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

companionate and harmonious, a planter's wife could influence her husband's decision. A daughter could express her preference to spend the summer at the Virginia Springs or the winter in New Orleans. But nobody questioned the right of the patriarch to make the final decision. Especially not Alice Izard, who remarked that one of her relations was summoned to "dispose of her property in Charleston & to prepare for settling in New York. She complied with the request although much against her inclinations, for she is attached to Charleston & was very comfortably settled in a new House."²⁰⁹ Although they submitted themselves with a remarkable resignation, some women expressed frustration and resentment. Summering on Sullivan's Island in 1817, Alicia Middleton told her son: "I have not been to town for a week... Your Papa is unwilling to let me go again before a frost. I do not feel at all afraid, and still hope I shall be able to prevail on him to let me visit our friends there occasionally, it is quite a trial to be only six miles from them and not be able to see them."²¹⁰ "Submission is the duty of women. & I feel a satisfaction in knowing that I did mine in returning sorely against my inclination to this climate," Nancy Deas wrote in 1813, "you say that bread & water in a healthy country are preferable to riches in one that is not so. What then must poverty be?"²¹¹ As protector and provider, men often justified their migrating agenda on health and economic grounds.

For the duration of her marriage, Adèle Allston was a model of deference to her husband, a great believer in the agrarian ethos. Spending their winters at *Chicora Woods*, their Lowcountry plantation, the Allstons frequently changed their summering destinations. Usually, they spent the summer at *Canaan* on the beach across from Pawley's Island. For a few years they summered closer to the plantation in a bungalow-like house called *The Meadows*, located in a pineland. After the pineland proved unhealthy, they returned to the sea, this time at *The Beach* on Pawley's Island. During the Civil War, while the coast was considered unsafe, the planter built *Log Castle* in Plantersville, a few miles away from Georgetown.²¹² Over the thirty-two years of married life, the Allstons also spent several summers in the North and at the Virginia Springs, although both seemed to prefer the

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Alicia Middleton to Nathaniel Middleton, 29 September 1817, quoted in Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Women's World in the Old South*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1982, 148.

²¹¹ Alice Izard Deas to Margaret Izard Manigault, [summer 1813], Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

²¹² Adèle Petigru Allston Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina; Elizabeth W. Allston Pringle, *Chronicles of Chicora Wood*, Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1940.

quietness of the country. For the first two decades of their marriage, the Allstons did not winter in Charleston. Adèle sometimes went for a few weeks to visit her large network of relatives.²¹³ If she unduly prolonged her urban sojourns, she was systematically reprimanded by her husband.²¹⁴ There were times, however, when even the most independent planter needed the urban social circles to fulfill his ambitions. When Robert Allston was elected governor, the highest office of his State in the 1850s, he finally bought a town house in Charleston to lodge his family several months each year. His wife was pleased. Usually complying with the decisions of her husband, there were times when even Adèle expressed disappointment at not being able to go where she really wanted to. In 1850, as she wanted to visit her son at school, she wrote, “your Papa tells me a trip to the North is out of the question this summer – I regret that it should be, but must submit to necessity.”²¹⁵

Some women tried to influence the migratory agenda of their husband, sometimes even before they were married. Gertrude Clanton encouraged her fiancé Jeff Thomas to finish his medical training instead of becoming a planter, so they could live in Augusta for the greatest part of the year. She reluctantly moved to the country once married, yet she never abandoned her urban aspirations. In her diary, she noted:

Occasionally when I am in town I think I would be extremely pleased to spend the winters in town, but then it appears extravagant for us to have town homes and plant in Burke besides. I am the more reconciled to a slower but more sure mode of progress when I hear of the failures which are constantly occurring. Mr John Carmichael has just failed for a large amount. So have the firm of Grey Brothers and within the last week Mr John Moore, and Louis Delaigle.²¹⁶

Aware of the financial costs of a winter in town and sensible to the precarious planting activities of her husband, Gertrude was willing to postpone her gratification. Nonetheless, she also knew that more lands and more slaves would distance her family from Augusta:

Mr Thomas is speaking of buying a plantation of Goode Bryant’s but I do hope he will not. If he has any money to invest I wish he would go into some business in town and spend the winters there. I do think I should enjoy town life so much – but that is a “chateau de Espagne” [*sic*] for the future.²¹⁷

²¹³ Pringle, *op.cit.*, 85.

²¹⁴ Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, *A Family of Women: The Carolina Petigru in Peace and War*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999, 116.

²¹⁵ Adèle Allston to Ben Allston, 25 June 1850, Adèle Petigru Allston Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

²¹⁶ *Belmont*, the plantation of the Thomases, was 6 miles outside of Augusta. 1 January 1857, Burr, *op.cit.*, 153.

²¹⁷ “castle in Spain.” *Ibid.*, 160.

The following winter, Mr. Thomas rewarded her patience, and finally hired “a very delightful residence” in town.²¹⁸ Many elite women such as Gertrude Clanton Thomas envisioned an urban profession as a more desirable manly pursuit than a plantation life. “Our children must exercise professions,” wrote Nancy Deas to her sister Margaret “& society a large flourishing city is a more proper place for that than the woods & wilds of Catawba.”²¹⁹

Too much pressure on the agenda of a patriarch could seriously strain a relation, and even injure reputations. As with any other gifts, a season away from the plantation was to be granted, not demanded or expected. Demanding was subverting the logic of the gift, it was rebelling.²²⁰ In the summer 1828, Maria Rutledge did not want to go so Sullivan’s Island, and wanted instead to stay in Charleston. “Is it possible that so slight a circumstance as a change of residence from Charleston to Sullivans Island my dear Marie could have so great an effect as to sour your temper?” her brother asked. “I can hardly credit it...I hope the island air will be of service to our dear grandmother & that you will recover from that sour fit.”²²¹ The air of the island, though, did not make the young woman more pliable; it was the first of a series of migrations that she would refuse to do in the following years. By expressing her own preferences, Maria was being unreasonable.

Twenty years later, Raven Vanderhorst Lewis wanted to sojourn on Sullivan’s Island, but her husband refused, “The Island is very cold and disagreeable at this season, the food there is not good and it is too near the city to be perfectly safe.” Instead, he called upon her father “to insist on Raven’s going to Aiken or some place on the line of railroad and remaining there until the fever has disappeared.”²²² The following summer, Raven again opposed her husband’s plans. “Poor child, she makes herself vey miserable about trifles,” her father wrote, “she must get rid of her foolish prejudices as she is now no longer a child – her disagreements with Mr. Lewis makes me more unhappy than I can well explain...[Mr. Lewis] is staying on the Island alone - this must look very strange to the talking world.”²²³ In fact, Raven was just starting to be difficult. In 1853, she decided that she wanted to go north, with

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 188.

²¹⁹ Alice Izard Deas to Margaret Izard Manigault, 11 June 1813, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

²²⁰ Greenberg, *op.cit.*, 64.

²²¹ Edouard C. Rutledge to Marie P. Rutledge, 13 august 1828, Rutledge Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

²²² John W. Lewis to Elias Vanderhorst, 26 October 1849, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

²²³ Elias Vanderhorst to Ann Vanderhorst, 11 July 1850, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

her mother and her children. Her demands were too great for her husband, who turned to his mother-in-law for help with reasoning his wife:

I am ready to deprive myself of the pleasure of going north and am willing to undertake the charge of two of the children, that Raven and little Raven may go on with you. The taking on of three babies, and two nurses, and Raven herself an invalid, for only six weeks, to a fashionable hotel at New Port would be a more ridiculous act...Moreover I should be miserable if I went with such a charge every moment I was away and I feel no disposition to loose and [*sic*] excellent wet nurse for my youngest child, and two good servants, Susannah & Martah would be worried out of their lives by the abolitionists, and perhaps forced to remain north, or prevented from returning to this state. Under these circumstances I have told Raven I cannot permit my servants or two youngest children to go north without me, and that I am not going. Raven then says she wont go with little Raven without the rest. I then offer to take her and the children to Sullivan's Island and afterward to Flat Rock. This offer she positively refuses; so I very much fear we are destined to pass the whole summer in Watterborough unless Raven will accept of either the one offer or the other.²²⁴

Either Raven accepted one of her husband's offers, or there would be no offer at all. Defying the migrating agenda of the head of the household was an important gesture of insubordination. The young patriarch tried to establish his authority over his wife with the help of her parents. Overtly rebellious, the young mother refused to be constrained.

The problem with Raven was that she felt entitled to spend her summers wherever she wanted to, as her mother had done for most of her life. When Ann Morris married Elias Vanderhorst in 1821, she was already used to a peripatetic life, divided between *The Bluff*, a Lowcountry plantation, a town house in Charleston, and *Morrisania*, a country estate near New York City. At first, the couple shared its time between two islands: a cotton plantation on Kiawah Island, where they wintered, and a beach house on Sullivan Island, where they summered. After the birth of a few children, however, Ann had started spending her summers up north with her female relatives. To her abandoned son-in-law, Ann's mother urged: "for the restoration of my poor child a change of scene, & traveling is often the only means of recovery in nervous cases. And with your watchful care, under the blessing of God, I fervently trust she will again be restored to her accustomed health."²²⁵ Year after year, Ann traveled north, sometimes with one or two children, but usually without her husband. Elias disliked traveling and rarely ventured beyond the Virginia Springs. Yet the couple maintained

²²⁴ John W. Lewis to Ann Vanderhorst, 17 July 1853, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

²²⁵ Ann Morris Vanderhorst to Elias Vanderhorst, [no date], Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

a regular correspondence that reveals glimpses of tenderness. “I am very glad indeed to hear that you felt better, God grant that you may soon be perfectly restored to health & when you return be as plump as a partridge... The yellow fever is sad to be in town therefore I do not suffer [our sons] to go to the Bathing house.”²²⁶ As his fortune grew, Elias purchased a second plantation, *Round-O*, much less isolated, which should have pleased his wife. By then, though, Ann only made rare appearances in the country. She preferred to winter in the city, in the imposing suburban villa her husband had acquired. To his sociable wife who had called upon poor health to decline a prolonged sojourn in the country, the planter advised, “if you will only stay at home & keep perfectly tranquil & avoid parties and excitements, your health will soon be restored.”²²⁷

Several months each year, for decades, the Vanderhorsts lived apart. “You are now too old to be a lone traveler,” wrote Elias to Ann in 1866, who was now in her mid-sixties and not quite ready to permanently settle in the South.²²⁸ Throughout her married life, Ann Vanderhorst had been able to uphold her very own migrating agenda for two reasons. First, she manipulated the cultural codes of her society, allowing herself a remarkable spatial freedom to migrate away from the plantation without directly confronting the authority of her husband. A woman who traveled for her health was not free, nor threatening; her body was contained by the sickness (real or imagined).²²⁹ Ann Vanderhorst understood that “her weakness was her strength.”²³⁰ Unlike her daughter who directly opposed Mr. Lewis, she avoided confronting the patriarchal authority of her husband. Second, and not the least, she controlled a separate income, derived from northern rental properties she had inherited,

²²⁶ Elias Vanderhorst to Ann Morris Vanderhorst, 29 August 1835, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

²²⁷ Elias Vanderhorst to Ann Morris Vanderhorst, 28 April [no year], Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

²²⁸ Elias Vanderhorst to Ann Vanderhorst, Charleston 25 January 1866, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

²²⁹ Some years, Ann Vanderhorst was clearly recuperating from a difficult delivery. Other years, her health problems appear more rhetorical. Historians have extensively commented on the obsessive preoccupation of elite southern women with health. Some have blamed repeated pregnancies, the climate, clothing, or lack of exercise (Firor Scott, *op.cit.*). Others have emphasized the depressing effect of isolation. (Clinton, *op.cit.*, 139-141). Charlene Boyer Lewis notes the gap between ideal and reality: “Southern white women and men may have idealized delicate ladies, but they apparently saw no place in an agricultural society for weak and enfeebled ones. Southern women, especially plantation mistresses, had enormous responsibilities to fulfill and labor to perform. They could not afford the sacrifice of productivity required to indulge in ill health, feigned or real. Nor did genteel southern women want to be perceived as fragile. They rarely dwelt upon their illnesses. Many women at the Springs barely mentioned their physical sufferings, focusing instead on their hopes for improvements.” Boyer Lewis, *op.cit.*, 77.

²³⁰ Fitzhugh, *op.cit.*, 214.

which financed in large part her seasonal migrations away from the plantation South. Her penny-pinching husband only had to give his approbation.

In some cases, plantation women consciously chose to spend part of the year separated from their husbands, as a way to control their fertility. Travels away from their husbands, Anne Firor Scott suggests, “were partly motivated by a desire to prolong the time between babies.”²³¹ In the summer 1838, Rebecca Motte Rutledge started traveling with female relatives, while her husband remained in Charleston. One year she went to the Virginia Springs with her mother and her daughter. The following year, she went to Saratoga and Washington. During the winter, while her husband remained at *The Hampton*, Rebecca frequently went to Charleston.²³² With only two children (while on average planting women had six children), her strategy to control her reproductive process clearly paid off. Fewer children meant fewer health problems, no premature aging, and a longer life span.

Numerous plantation women feared death in childbirth in the isolated countryside, and they therefore chose to be confined in the city.²³³ Already in the Spanish colonial period, Creole women came to deliver their babies in New Orleans, where they were attended by male obstetricians.²³⁴ The practice shocked Berquin-Duvallon, a sugar planter and a refugee from Saint-Domingue:

Il n'est pas de femmes.... Ou du moins, il en est bien peu qui ne croiraient ou ne font semblant de croire qu'elles feraient les couches du monde les plus fâcheuses, si elles n'allaient, un ou deux mois d'avance, résider en ville et se préparer à y déposer, à terme, le fruit de leur fécondité entre les mains d'un chirurgien plutôt qu'en celles d'une personne de leur sexe, à qui néanmoins cet emploi délicat dont l'exercice appartient autant à la décence personnelle qu'à la souplesse et à la légèreté des mains, est, à tous égards, plus convenable.²³⁵

Four decades later, Adèle Allston also went to the city to have her first baby, staying at her brother's house. Although the delivery was difficult and was followed by a prolonged illness,

²³¹ Anne Firor Scott, “Women’s Perspective on the Patriarchy in the 1850s,” loc.cit., 57.

²³² Rebecca M. Rutledge to Edward C. Rutledge, 20 June 1838 and 22 June 1839, Rutledge Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

²³³ On fear of death in childbirth, see V. Lynn Kennedy, *Born Southern: Childbirth, Motherhood, and Social Networks in the Old South*, Baltimore; Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010, 70-72

²³⁴ See Rudolph Matas, *History of Medicine in Louisiana*, Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 1962.

²³⁵ “There are no women... or at least, there are few who believe, or pretend to believe, that they would have an unfortunate confinement if they did not, one or two months ahead, go to reside in the city and prepare to deliver the fruit of their fecundity in the hands of a surgeon, instead of a person of their own sex, to whom nonetheless, this delicate duty that belongs to personal decency, as well as to the fluidity and lightness of the hands is more appropriate.” Berquin-Duvallon, quoted in Liliane Crété, *La vie quotidienne en Louisiane, 1815-1830*, Paris: Hachette, 1978, 272.

her husband decided that for the second one, she had to remain at *Chicora Wood*.²³⁶ Much more assertive, Mary Pringle always made sure to be in Charleston several weeks before the expected delivery.²³⁷

Planting couples and families were often separated along the rural-urban continuum, with some members living in town, others at the plantation. Usually, the separation was temporary and circumstantial. Sometimes, however, it clearly reflected a couple's estrangement. Using the excuse of ill-health, Caroline Carson (Adèle Allston's niece), lived most of the time in Charleston with her parents, while her alcoholic husband migrated between his plantation *Dean Hall* and a summer house on Sullivan's Island. Carson even traveled alone to New York, a gesture understood as blatant desertion.²³⁸ Legal separations and divorces (illegal in South Carolina) were few within the planter class. Women who deserted their husband submitted themselves to public humiliation, as the abandoned spouse could take out an advertisement in the local newspaper "to warn creditors that he would not pay any debts accrued by his disobedient wife."²³⁹

When Catherine Hammond discovered that her husband had taken a slave for mistress, she left the plantation *Silver Bluff* and took the children with her.²⁴⁰ For more than two years, she lived in Charleston at the town house of relatives. Her social network supported her as she contested the abusive behavior of her husband. She eventually consented to return to the plantation, at the express condition that Louisa, the slave mistress, would be sent away. The planter agreed, provided that Louisa was to become the personal maid of his sister-in-law in Charleston, that she should not "be put in the backyard among the Negroes," and that she would not leave *Silver Bluff* until the first frost (when it was believed that all dangers of sickness were over in the city).²⁴¹ Within two months of his wife's return, an epidemic of cholera served as Hammond's excuse to repatriate Louisa at the plantation. "I will risk no life there," Hammond put it, "these people shall remain mine everyone of them while there is breath in any body...A fly should not suffer *on my account* if I can help it."²⁴²

²³⁶ Pease and Pease, *op.cit.*, 25.

²³⁷ Richard N. Côté, *Mary's World: Love, War, and Family Ties in Nineteenth-century Charleston*, Mount Pleasant, S.C.: Corinthian Books, 73.

²³⁸ Pease and Pease, *op.cit.*, 75-77.

²³⁹ Young, *op.cit.*, 68.

²⁴⁰ Carol Bleser, *The Hammonds of Redcliffe*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1981, 10.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

Although both wife and mistress had returned, James Henry Hammond could not be totally contented. His reputation was now seriously damaged.²⁴³ For two years his estranged wife had been seen in the city, ladies and gentlemen had been talking. Wasn't he the man who contended that rural life fostered the purest morals? If that was not true, at least he was right when he asserted that the vices of one's nature were fully displayed in the city. The independent planter could not just bury himself in the country; he needed to reestablish his honor and reputation in the city. His friend William Gilmore Simms advised him:

For years, your friends – and you will, I take for granted, believe that I was not the silentest among them – have been compelled to deny, almost daily, a variety of scandals & slanders at your expense... These slanders represent you as a sot, utterly lost to society, & for this reason not fit to appear in the world; and this is assigned as a new reason why you are no longer willing to be seen. The next is like unto it. That you have brutally abused your wife, nay, beaten her, and that she neither lives with you, nor will appear in your society.²⁴⁴

To silence the scandals, Simms suggested to Hammond,

to show yourself in Charleston and Columbia with your family, on certain occasions, and for a time sufficiently long, to render the impression certain... Now, a week every season in Columbia and another week in Charleston, where your friends may gather around you, - where you may make new friends – and where your personal appearance alone will suffice to set at rest all slanders of your habits; where the presence of your family will silence all those in respect to your brutality.²⁴⁵

As Simms reminded his friend Hammond, “A man may carry his notions of independence too far, and certainly does so, when his indifference encourages such slanders as mortify the pride of his family, and the feeling of his friends.”²⁴⁶ In spite of what the agrarian ethos claimed, manly independence had its limits. Society was there to protect women from the harsher aspects of masculine tyranny, at least temporarily. The country was never totally separated from the city; they belonged to a continuum.

In the slaveholding South the change of season meant a change of landscape for the wealthiest plantation owners. With the same certitude that spring would come after winter,

²⁴³ It was not his first sexual misconduct. He had engaged in sexual relations with his four teenage nieces. *Ibid.*, 32-33.

²⁴⁴ William Gilmore Simms to James Henry Hammond, 23 August 1857, *ibid.*, 35-36.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

elite men and women knew that city would come after country. The exploration of the seasonal migrations of elite slaveholders between country and city exposes a dynamic elite, constantly on the move. This reality challenges the mythology of the Old South, in which cities seldom appear among the cotton fields and the magnolia trees. As this chapter reveals, however, city like country shaped elite slaveholders sense of self and sense of belonging to a community of Southern planters. Men, and particularly women, yearned for stays in urban centers such as Charleston, Savannah, or New Orleans. Instead of the isolation and boredom inherent to plantation life, urban settings were synonymous with social gatherings and proximity to kin. Cities provided the best context for cultivating the ideal of refinement to which the Southern elite aspired. In this primarily rural society, most elite men and women identified themselves first with the agricultural landscapes where their slaves cultivated rice, cotton, or sugar cane. And yet, they also recognized themselves in the urban landscape of the slaveholding South. Town and country were integral parts of their life experience. By definition a season in the city was ephemeral. After a few months of urban gatherings, it was time for the planting family to return to the plantation. Few planters, even the wealthiest, could sustain the expenses that the city and its refined sociability entailed year-round. In a region where fortunes were assessed in numbers of slaves and plantations, cash flow problems were recurrent themes of slaveholders' correspondence. Financial considerations therefore played a significant role in these migrations.²⁴⁷

Seasonal migrations and the absenteeism they entailed were inevitably tainted by the political climate of the antebellum period. Because families at the forefront of southern society engaged in them, seasonal migrations were criticized from all sides of the political spectrum, in both the North and the South. Although elite southerners often comprehended these migrations in fatalistic terms (migrating or dying) they cannot be reduced to a "natural" phenomenon. These migrations were triggered and shaped by complex social and historical forces. They were about physical comfort, leisure, sociability, refinement, rural isolation, and preservation of wealth. And undoubtedly, they were about real and imagined sickly landscapes. But for plantation men, they were mostly about social status. Leading a peripatetic life was a prerogative that differentiated them from both the poorer whites and

²⁴⁷ Thomas J. Savage, *The Charleston Interior*, Greensboro, Legacy Publications, 1995, 5; Carole E. Borchert, *The Inventory of Lucretia constance Radcliffe: the Material World of Elites in Federal Period Charleston, South Carolina*, M.A. Thesis, University of Delaware, 1996, 61.

the enslaved; the former did not have the financial resources to do so, and the latter, the freedom.

For plantation women, these migrations reinforced the privileged status of ornamental ladies on a pedestal. It gave them more opportunities to engage in society. It also provided elite women with a full range of strategies to circumvent patriarchal authority. They found ways of remaining in town when the patriarch wanted them in the country and vice-versa. Over the course of a woman's life, these strategies evolved in accordance with her power and her agency. One of most efficient and universally accepted strategies: real and/or pretended sickness. Health, or rather the fear of being deprived of health, was a recurrent justification to change the migrating agenda of the patriarch. Plantation women, while they lacked power as a group in the patriarchal family, did have a measure of leverage on their own household and the rural-urban continuum undeniably played a pivotal role in this process. Even as plantation women defended a system that positioned them at a lower rank than their male relatives, they still not completely abide by it. Elite women embraced an ornamental role that rejected gender equality, but that nonetheless acknowledged female agency. Town and country were very different places in the Old South and so was the everyday life in a town house as opposed to a country house. The next chapter examines the gendered politics in the urban domestic space of elite planters.

Chapter 2

A Town House, a Dower House: The Gendered Politics of Urban Domestic Space

“It does not suit Mr. Grimball to be absent from his business all the year, so we live on the plantation, for 6 months.”¹ It is in those words that, in a sketch written in 1856, Meta Morris Grimball explained the seasonal migrations between country and city of her household.² For half the year, she resided on a rice plantation in St. Charles Parish, in the South Carolina Lowcountry. For the other half of the year, she inhabited a town house in Charleston. Meta’s country neighbours also engaged in a peripatetic lifestyle. The Brisbanes conducted “their housekeeping in a very airy style, carriages, horses, servants, going to town, coming back, whenever it suited them.”³ The Fabers also spent their summers in the city and for that purpose they built “a very handsome house in Charleston, quite a conspicuous one with a great cupola on the top.”⁴ Meta and her husband both belonged to planting families whose aristocratic claims dated back to the early colonial period. Compared with their country neighbours, however, the Grimballs’ situation appeared modest.⁵ For most of the antebellum period, they inhabited seasonally a town house that was no castle, but according to Meta, it held its advantages:

We lived for many years in a small house very old fashioned which was closely joined to another the two forming a whole building but entirely separate dwellings...The parts of the porch was [*sic*] open to a lovely view of the harbour and a public walk forming such an inducement to continue in the house that we entirely out grew it before we gave it up.⁶

In the heterogeneous environment of Charleston, Meta readily shared a partition wall with the family of a watchmaker who owned and occupied the other half of the Grimballs’ town

¹ Meta Morris Grimball, “The Boys Housekeeping in Charleston,” Sketches, December 1856, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

² Meta Morris Grimball, “My Three Sons.” Sketches, 1856, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

³ Meta Morris Grimball, “Our neighbourhood, Wiltown, St. Paul Parish,” Sketches, 1857, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ In 1860, John Berkley Grimball owned 143 slaves in the city and at its plantation *The Grove* on Pon Pon River, Chalmers Gaston Davidson, *The Last Foray: The South Carolina Planters of 1860: A Sociological Study*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1971, 206.

⁶ Meta Morris Grimball, “City. Our Neighbors,” Sketches, [no date], Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

house, yet she would not have shared a dinner with her city neighbours for “we did not visit them for our class of associates were in a different set.”⁷

The small tenement house on South Bay, with its “charming view of the harbour,” had long been in the family. It was, in fact, the “dower house” of Meta’s mother-in-law, where “she lived, except during the holidays, given by the schools, which were passed in the country.”⁸ According to Meta, Mrs. Berkley Grimball never got used to plantation life:

In her youth, the life in the country caused that nervous difficulty of temperament, so dreadful. The want of amusement, the certain return of the fever, every autumn, which weakened and depressed...After her marriage, she resided generally in the city...The plantation owned by Mr. Grimball was near Coosawathie a cotton place. She never liked it.⁹

Unlike her mother-in-law, Meta’s religious inclinations and industrious temperament agreed with plantation life. Yet she still enjoyed the long periods spent in Charleston, where she took pleasure in driving around the city and visiting relatives. She also made the most of her urban leisure hours to write a diary and a series of sketches, becoming an acute chronicler of the domestic manners of the planter class.

Meta was the mother of a large family. When the children outgrew their old town house, a spacious dwelling located “just opposite, the scotch church ward” on Meeting Street was rented for \$900 a year.¹⁰ The change in the family’s urban arrangements happened almost at the same time as Mr. Grimball acquired a new plantation, moving the country residence of the family from “a rickety old house” to a “very comfortable establishment.”¹¹ A better house in the country did not mean that Meta spent more time on the plantation. The urban activities of her children – work, college, school, and society –combined with social customs and fear of the sickly season to keep the plantation mistress in town from early May until early December. She therefore spent over seven months each year in the city, the town house being *de facto* her primary residence.

⁷ Ibid. For a discussion of the social geography of Charleston, see Maurie D. McInnis, *The Politics of Taste in Antebellum Charleston*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005, 51.

⁸ According to Rogers, “A tenement was a triple dwelling in the same outer walls and under one roof but divided by partition walls,” George C. Rogers, Jr. *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1980 (1969), 71.

⁹ Meta Morris Grimball, “My Sister Wilkins,” Sketches, December 1856, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

¹⁰ Meta Morris Grimball, “City. Our Neighbors,” Sketches, [no date], Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

¹¹ They move in the new house in 1858. Meta Morris Grimball, Diary, 8 May 1861, 31-32, Documenting the American South Project at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

For plantation women such as Meta Morris Grimball, the city was primarily experienced from a town house, since elite white women - as a group - were housebound. It is from an urban dwelling that their knowledge of the city and its inhabitants, either free or enslaved, was primarily shaped and mediated. Houses and housing, notes Bernard L. Herman, “were the physical objects that composed the largest portion of early American urban settings.”¹² Town houses held both utilitarian and symbolic purposes: they lodged planting families when professional, political, educational or social activities called them in the city and they acted “as a medium for the assertion of social identity, as settings for the display of gentility and its applications, as sites of power and its negotiation.”¹³ How did southern patriarchy operate within these town houses? Scholars who have documented how race and class shaped the habitat of wealthy Southerners have hitherto shown little interest in gender considerations.¹⁴ After a review of the existing literature, one might easily come to the conclusion that when it came to the planning and use of urban domestic space, elite men and women were interchangeable.¹⁵ The evidence examined here proves that this was far from the case. In his classic work *The Production of Space* (1962), Henri Lefebvre demonstrates that any given social space is a social product, used as “a tool of thought and of action.”¹⁶ It imposes on its occupants a set of spatial practices that ensures social cohesion. The town house of a planter was a social product primarily constructed to affirm the authority of the

¹² Bernard L. Herman, *Town House: Architecture and Material Life in the Early American City, 1780-1830*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005, 2.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ The houses in which plantation women dwelt is a very promising avenue of investigation, as pointed out by Joan E. Cashin in her book *Our Commons Affairs: Texts from Women in the Old South*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996, 26. For pioneering works that “engender” plantation and urban landscapes, see James E. Delle, Stephen A. Mrozowski, and Robert Paynter, *Lines that Divide: Historical Archaeologies of Race, Class, and Gender*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000.

¹⁵ John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993; Idem, “The Plantation Tradition in an Urban Setting: The Case of the Aiken-Rhett House in Charleston, South Carolina,” *Southern Cultures*, 1999, 5 (4), 52-69; Martha Zierden, ed., *Another's Country: Archaeological and Historical Perspectives on Cultural Interactions in the Southern Colonies*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002; See also studies that address the relation of the elite to the architecture of their houses in colonial Virginia: Daniel Blake Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1980; Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1982; Jan Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson's Virginia*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1983; Mechal Sobel, *The World they Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth Century Virginia*, Princeton University Press, 1987, 127-153; Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, & Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

¹⁶ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1991, (1962), 26.

patriarch over his dependants, and particularly over the white women of the family. Gender was at work in the town houses of the planter class, just as race and class were.¹⁷

This chapter gathers a series of explorations of the ways planting men and women chose, imagined, and occupied their town houses. First, it reveals that a town house was an important medium of social assertion, meant to affirm the respectability of a planter in the theatre of the city during his life, but also after his death when it became the dower house of his widow. Second, this chapter examines the numerous factors that led a planting family to choose the situation of a town house, factors that included affordability and functionality, but also social standing, political allegiances, privacy, and proximity to one's network. Third, it turns to the gendered politics surrounding the planning and decorating of these town houses, activities that were closely supervised by the patriarch. The last part of this chapter documents the gendered uses of a planter's town house. Although at first glance these appear mixed, in reality urban domestic space segregated husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, gentlemen and ladies.

In towns and cities of the antebellum South, Greek revival mansions, Georgian row houses, suburban villas, small cottages, and old style plantation houses stood side-by-side. During a visit to Charleston in the late 1830s, Fanny Kemble observed:

It is in this respect (singularity) a far more aristocratic (should I say democratic?) city than any I have yet seen in America, inasmuch as every house seems built to the owner's particular taste; and in one street you seem to be in an old English town, and in another in some continental city of France or Italy.¹⁸

This observation could have been applied to New Orleans or Natchez during the same period, where French, Spanish and English architectural traditions blended to offer to the observer a rich and heterogeneous visual landscape. In building their town houses, planters followed the conventions of a "representational architecture," which held that the internal and the external appearance of a building should correspond to the social status of the

¹⁷ Michael O'Brien is one of the rare scholars of the South to comment on the "complicated gender dynamics" of elite social gatherings. See O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004, vol.1, 408.

¹⁸ Frances Ann Kemble, *Records of Later Life*, New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1882, 122.

occupant.¹⁹ Although very similar in many regards to elite town houses of the Atlantic world, the urban dwellings of the planter class were the result of individual decisions.²⁰ According to Enrico Dal Lago, they “were perfect examples of Thorstein Veblen’s “conspicuous consumption,” but they were also in many ways rational investments.”²¹ “Houses were the ultimate consumer object,” remarks Maurie D. McInnis in her study of the visual culture of Charleston, “the choice of a building’s size, arrangement, materials, style, and ornament revealed much about personal priorities and economic means.”²² It also revealed much about southern patriarchy.

Both for men and women of the planting class, a town house was a social marker. It was a clear sign that they belonged to the upper strata of the southern elite or, at least, that they aspired to. The practice of owning a town house in addition to a country house on the plantation was well established in the Seaboard states, from Maryland to Georgia, and it followed the planters in their migration westward. When they settled in Louisiana, Americans met with Creole planting families that had owned houses in New Orleans for almost a century.²³ Becoming a great planter was a process that involved acquiring more slaves and more lands, but also refining one’s domestic arrangements by transforming the log cabin into a Big House, laying carpets on the floor and, eventually, purchasing a house in the nearby town or city.²⁴ Ascendancy was achieved through homes that facilitated social rituals such as visiting, and needed at least to integrate a large common room that could accommodate several guests.²⁵ According to historian James D. Miller, this process was a joint effort within the planting family:

Whatever their initial priorities, most men hoped that domestic comfort and social advance would come to accompany planting and professional success. They did so in part because they understood that their own public standing was affected by perceptions of their private circumstances. They also understood the importance of

¹⁹ Donald J. Olsen, *The City as Work of Art: London, Paris, Vienna*, Yale University Press: New Haven, 1986, 287.

²⁰ Herman, op.cit., 37.

²¹ Enrico Dal Lago, “The City as Social Display: Landed Elite and Urban Images in Charleston and Palermo,” *Journal of Historical Sociology*, vol.14, no 4, December 2001, 374.

²² McInnis, op.cit., 281.

²³ Shannon Lee Dawdy, *Building the Devil’s Empire: French Colonial New Orleans*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008, 160-161.

²⁴ James D. Miller, *South by Southwest: Planter Emigration and Identity in the Slave South*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002, 67. Social ascension also went the other way around, as merchants and professionals climbed the social ladder by acquiring a plantation and a house in the country. William K. Scarborough, *Masters of the Big House: Elite Slaveholders of the Mid-Nineteenth-Century South*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 152.

²⁵ Joan E. Cashin, *A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, 82.

such progress to the women of the household and, therefore, to the ultimate success of the household.²⁶

Either in the East or in the West, the more successful a planter, the more likely his family was to own a town house.

The agricultural frontier of the early nineteenth century had, by the antebellum period, yielded to established communities with great fortunes and great town houses. Arriving in the Attakapas region (Louisiana territory) after the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the Weeks family planted cotton and indigo before seeing their son David become one of the most prosperous sugar planters of the Southwest. David Weeks married Mary Conrad in 1818 and they established their first residence on a sugar plantation situated at Grand Côte, an island. But the plantation soon appeared too remote for the young couple and they acquired a plantation on Bayou Parc Perdu, located a few miles away from New Iberia, a town that counted a couple of thousand souls. In 1825, the family moved once more, this time on the outskirts of town where the planter had purchased a large tract of land. There, he built a two-storey brick mansion in the Classical Revival style that became known as *The Shadows-on-the-Teche*.²⁷ While he visited his plantations, Mary and the children remained in town. Completed just before the planter's death, *The Shadows* was the most imposing dwelling in New Iberia and Mary ended her life there.²⁸ For the ambitious who lived long enough, a house in a small town was understood as a stepping-stone toward the purchase of a residence in a large city. In small towns as in great towns, planters and their town houses competed with the urban elite of merchants, notables, and professionals to dominate the townscape.²⁹ Town houses told much about a planter's status and aspirations.

Planters' town houses were as different as their owners; they were shaped according to individual, local, regional, national, and even transatlantic aesthetics. Some were splendid palaces, while some were modest one-story timber cottages. Most were somewhere in between. All were meant to signify the presence of the planter class to the other inhabitants of the community. Even the most humble urban dwellings - for instance the Creole cottages

²⁶ Miller, *op.cit.*, 111.

²⁷ "Weeks, David," Glenn R. Conrad, ed., *A Dictionary of Louisiana Biography*, vol.1, Baton Rouge: Louisiana Historical Association, 1988.

²⁸ William F. Weeks, who inherited the town house and several of the plantations, commissioned in 1861 two views of *Shadows-on-the-House* to Marie Adrien Persac. See John Michael Vlach, *The Planter's Prospect: Privilege and Slavery in Plantation Paintings*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002, 100-101.

²⁹ Lisa C. Tolbert, *Constructing Townscapes: Space and Society in Antebellum Tennessee*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999, 115.

with their modest facades that disguised large yards, kitchens, and servants' quarters - set them apart from the other residents of the city who could not afford such a stage on which to display their wealth and refinement. Because of the high costs associated with a peripatetic lifestyle, few planters could maintain two residences in grand style. Some invested most of their resources on their country seat and owned a modest house in town. Others rented a large dwelling on a seasonal or an annual basis. A significant number of migrant planters, however, invested significantly more time and capital in their town house than in their country house. No wonder that the country houses of the planter class often seemed modest to the observer, whether an insider or an outsider. Travelers to the South expressed disappointment at the lack of luxury they had learned to expect from elite southern interiors. In her diary, Miriam Badger Hilliard was unimpressed by the Big House of Leonidas Polk, one of Louisiana's largest planters.³⁰ The young plantation mistress from Arkansas remarked about *Leighton*: "This is not a fine house nor sumptuously furnished - comfort and convenience seem to be the object instead of pomp and show."³¹ By comparison to town houses, country houses often appeared as desolated and dilapidated places.³² There were conspicuous exceptions, for sure. But in the country, most planters chose convenience over display.

"Pomp and show" - to borrow Hilliard's words - were often held in reserve for urban residences. The enormous amount of time, care, and money that some planters put into luxuries such as owning, building, and decorating a town house indicate how important these houses and what happened in them were to elite planter culture. Rural and urban residences answered different needs and desires. Alternately inhabited according to the different seasons of the year by some planting families, these domestic spaces served complementary purposes: the rural property was often the source of wealth that supported the splendor of

³⁰ Joseph H. Parks, *General Leonidas Polk, C.S.A: The Fighting Bishop*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1962.

³¹ Myriam Badger Hilliard, *Diary*, 4 February 1850, 8, Typescript, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

³² A variety of sources document these differences between town houses and country houses: memoirs (Anne Simons Deas, *Recollections of the Ball Family of South Carolina and The Commingtee Plantation*, Charleston, South Carolina Historical Society, 1978 (1909), 13-22), novels (Carolina Howard Gilman, *Recollections of a Southern Matron*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1838, 250-251), probate inventories (*Charleston Inventories*), architectural books (Beatrice St. Julien Ravenel, *Architects of Charleston*, Charleston, University of South Carolina Press, 1992 (1945), 99-103). A few authors have noted this discrepancy. See Thomas J. Savage, *The Charleston Interior*, Greensboro, Legacy Publications, 1995, 5; Carole E. Borchert, *The Inventory of Lucretia Constance Radcliffe: the Material World of Elites in Federal Period Charleston, South Carolina*, M.A. Thesis, University of Delaware, 1996, 61.

the urban property.³³ Yet, when they acknowledged the existence of these town houses, historians of the planter class usually describe them as secondary residences; the Big House on the plantation is considered in the literature as the primary residence, since a planter, by definition, was a rural inhabitant.³⁴ Beach houses or pinewood houses were definitely secondary residences. Town houses, on the other hand, can more accurately be described as “complementary” residences for a majority of migrant planting families, and they were undeniably the primary residences for a minority.

If the town house was often smaller than the country house because of the spatial restrictions inherent to urban space, it was, as a rule, much more luxurious. This was especially true in areas where planters had long practiced seasonal migrations, in the Lowcountry of South Carolina or in Southern Louisiana. There, planters invested significantly more capital to furnish and decorate their town houses, although they often spent several months each year in the country. An analysis of planters’ estate inventories for the Charleston District reveals that the value of movable property attached to the city dwelling was, on average, two to three times greater to that of the country dwelling.³⁵ A comparison of the two houses of Harriot Horry is instructive. Much has been written about *Hampton*, her famous countryseat in Santee and nowadays a house museum operated by the South Carolina State Park Service. As a Big House, it was uncommonly large and elegant, with an Adamesque portico and several receptions rooms, including a ballroom.³⁶ One visitor described Hampton in 1804 as “the seat of wealth, splendor, and aristocracy.”³⁷ Yet, when it came to furnish and decorate her houses, the widow favored her dwelling on Tradd Street in

³³ See Duncan Clinch Heyward, *Seed from Madagascar*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1935, 68-69; Stoney, *Plantations of the Carolina Low Country*, op.cit., 34-35.

³⁴ Thomas N. Ingersoll, *Mammon and Manon in Early New Orleans: The First Slave Society in the Deep South, 1718-1819*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999, 250.

³⁵ See for example *Charleston Inventories*, Book G, 440-444; 466-468; Book H, p. 56-66, 100-102, 376-378. Judge of Probate, District of Charleston. Juxtaposed to sources such as diaries, prints, domestic fictions, and travel accounts, these inventories enable the mapping of the domestic space inhabited by the southern elite, both in rural and urban settings, and expose their multiple uses. To a great extent, estate inventories give us information about the most established planters in the city, and necessarily do not reflect all the variety of urban lodging. Inventories are examined to explore the quality of space usage constructed in these homes. On their usefulness, see Bernard L. Herman, op.cit., 56. See also Beatrice St. Julien Ravenel, *Architects of Charleston*, Charleston, University of South Carolina Press, 1992 (1945), 99-103.

³⁶ Circumstantial evidence suggests that much of the improvement of the house after the marriage of Harriot with Daniel Horry was influenced by her extended sojourn in England during her childhood. For instance, the plantation was renamed *Hampton*, probably for the country estate of actor David Garrick on the Thames. Garrick’s house included a portico “which bears a striking resemblance to the one which was to be constructed on Wambaw Creek more than thirty years later.” Micheal Foley, Marion Edmonds, Ray Sigmon, “Hampton Plantation State Park Visitor’s Guide,” South Carolina State Park Service, 1998 (1983), 15-16.

³⁷ Jonathan Mason, quoted in *ibid.*, 7.

Charleston. The estate inventory taken after her death in 1830 reveals that the household goods attached to *Hampton* were only a third of the furnishing, china, silver, and linen that were listed for her residence in the city.³⁸ Before her husband had passed away in 1785, the couple already divided his time and resources between *Hampton* and a town house on Broad Street, although the disparity in terms of movable property between the two residences was not as marked.³⁹

Although they belonged to the elite, some planters had absolutely no taste for urban living and felt no inclination to assert their standing in the city. Agrarians at heart, their plantations were their passion and they invested all their energy into them. Jacques T  l  sphore Roman was such a planter and *Beau S  jour* on the Mississippi was a paragon of elegance and luxury. And yet, if he could entirely eschew urban living himself, the sugar planter could not refuse to his wife C  lina, raised in New Orleans, the regular pleasure of a season in town. A few years after their marriage, he started renting a cottage in New Orleans, to which he referred in his letters to his wife as “ta maison.”⁴⁰ His identity was not tied to the house on Royal Street and when he sojourned alone in the city for business, Roman often stayed somewhere else. In fact, within a decade, C  lina’s town house was unsuitable for the family needs and another one was rented for \$30 a month.⁴¹

According to Alice Izard, the great-grandmother of Meta Morris Grimball, men and women of the planter class sought different things from a town house. Her son, for instance, had to ensure that his new urban address would be “respectable,” while his wife could expect it to be “gratifying.”⁴² The symbolic function of a town house was highly gendered. Primarily a reflection of a planter’s wealth and self-image, a town house was also a tool used to reinforce patriarchal authority over elite white women. A town house was intended to “gratify” a planting woman - that is, to please her, to oblige her, to indulge her. In sum, it was meant to reward her. Both for practical and symbolic reasons, country houses and town

³⁸ *Charleston Inventories*, Book G., 4 March 1831, 440-444.

³⁹ *Charleston Inventories*, Book B, 38-42; The Horrys and their fellow planters of the Lowcountry were not exceptional, neither in the South, nor in the North. The inventories from the estate of William Logan, a Quaker merchant that divided his life between his Philadelphia town house and *Stenton*, his “plantation” in the country, reveal a similar disparity. See Frederick B. Tolles, “Town House and Country House: Inventories from the Estate of William Logan, 1776,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, October 1958, 397-410.

⁴⁰ Jacques T  l  sphore Roman to C  lina Roman, Vendredi 24 d  cembre 1841, Roman Family Papers, Tulane University Special Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁴¹ Compte de Mme J. T. Roman, Roman Family Papers, Tulane University Special Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁴² Alice Delancey Izard to Margaret Izard Manigault, 5 January 1815, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

houses were therefore complementary in their gendered meanings. In elite planting families owning several residences, the town house was often destined to become a dower house, that is the principal dwelling of a planter's widow.⁴³ As with the mother-in-law of Meta Morris Grimball who lived in her dower house on Charleston's Bay, a significant number of planters' widows ended their lives in the town house that their husbands had chosen for them. Eldest sons, for their part, often inherited the Big House on the plantation.⁴⁴ Plantation women usually acquired their dower house in usufruct, and as such, they were not the legal owner. By its very nature, dower was ephemeral. The custom of the dower house, common in early modern England and in continental Europe, was transplanted in America by the colonial elite and was still very much practiced in the late antebellum period, and even in the Reconstruction South.

The dower house and the amenities that often came with it, such as carriages, horses, furnishing, linen, and silver were the most conspicuous materialization of a reward system, of a meritocracy for good and deserving wives.⁴⁵ After his marriage to Eliza Lucas in 1744, Charles Pinckney built a grand house on Colleton Square for his second wife.⁴⁶ Their eldest son, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, who inherited the Colleton Square House, also intended it to become the dower house of his two successive wives. In a will dated December 14, 1778, Pinckney gave to his wife Sarah Middleton a few slaves, the household furniture, horses, carriages, and "for and during her widowhood and no longer, the House and Lott of Land belonging thereto wherein I now live in Colleton Square." When she remarried or passed away, their son Charles was to inherit the property.⁴⁷ Sarah Middleton died a few years later and Pinckney remarried. In a second will dated October 8, 1807, the planter made

⁴³ "The most significant property right of women," dower was constituted of "a share of the real property owned by husband's during marriage that was designated for the support of widows." Marylynn Salmon, *Women and the Law of Property in Early America*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986, 16.

⁴⁴ On the presence of dowager mothers in Charleston, see Chalmers Gaston Davidson, *op.cit.*, 157.

⁴⁵ Although there are very few discussions of dowries that included town houses, historians have written on the treatment of women in planters' wills. See Joan Cashin, "According to His Wish and Desire: Female Kin and Female Slaves in Planter Wills", in Christie Farnham, ed. *Women of the American South: A Multicultural Reader*, New York: New York University Press, 1998, 90-119. See also Carole Shammas, Marylynn Salmon, Michel Dahlin, *Inheritance in America: From Colonial Times to the Present*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987.

⁴⁶ Within a few years, financial setbacks encouraged Pinckney to rent Eliza's house to Governor Glenn. After her husband's death, Eliza seemed to have resided most of the time at her daughter's house on Broad Street and in a smaller house, also on Colleton Square, while the Mansion became the urban residence of her eldest son Charles. Frances Leigh Williams, *A Founding Family: The Pinckneys of South Carolina*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978, 12-13.

⁴⁷ Last will and Testament of Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, 14 December 1778, Pinckney Family Documents Benjamin H. Rutledge Family Papers, 1675-1867, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

similar provisions to ensure that his Charleston house would become the dower house of his second wife, Mary Stead.⁴⁸ Pinckney was no exception. Henry Middleton also bequeathed a dower house in Charleston to his wife Mary.⁴⁹ Even Robert F. Allston, known by his contemporaries for residing year-round in the country, purchased a town house for his dutiful Adèle in 1857 for the sum of \$38,000.⁵⁰ Their daughter remembered in the *Chronicles of Chicora Wood*, “the beautiful house papa had bought and given to mamma in Meeting Street, next to the Scotch church.”⁵¹ In fact, it was Adèle who chose the house, while her husband was busy with politics in Columbia.⁵² Today converted into a house museum and known as the Nathaniel Russell House, the town house of the Allstons was an imposing urban seat that had previously served as the dower house of the former owners, another planting family. Although traditions and laws of dower significantly differed in Louisiana, where widows inherited a greater portion of plantation lands, town houses were also used as dower houses.⁵³ At the death of her husband, Aglaé Bringier inherited a sugar plantation and *Melpomene*, a town house in New Orleans.⁵⁴ The wills of these elite planters reveal that southern society considered the town house as a suitable place to ensure the material well-being of a lady.

As the usufructuary of a town house, a plantation woman had the right to use and enjoy the property, and sometimes, the right to receive profits from the fruits of her property.⁵⁵ Alice Izard, for instance, chose to live away from Charleston once she became a widow, yet she turned her dower house into a steady source of income to pay for her Philadelphia residence. For years, the care of the house was a source of conflict with her sons, and she was eager to remind one of them that: “altho’ it is mine only during my life,

⁴⁸ Last Will and Testament of Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, 7 October 1807, Pinckney Family Documents, Benjamin H. Rutledge Family Papers, 1675-1867, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston. Since Charles Pinckney outlived his second wife, his never-married daughter inhabited the house until it burned down.

⁴⁹ Last will and Testament of Henry Middleton, 1784, Pinckney Family Document, Benjamin H. Rutledge Family Papers, 1675-1867, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

⁵⁰ Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, *A Family of Women: The Carolina Petigrus in Peace and War*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999, 110.

⁵¹ Elizabeth W. Allston Pringle, *Chronicles of Chicora Wood*, Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 141. For a description of the house, see Maurie D. McInnis, op.cit., 51.

⁵² Pease and Pease, op.cit., 113.

⁵³ South Carolinians made unusually generous provisions for widows. Marylynn Salmon, op.cit., 157. John E. Crowley, “Family Relations and Inheritance in Early South Carolina.” *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 17 (1984), 35-57. For Louisiana rights of dower, see Elizabeth Bowles Warbasse, *The Changing Legal Rights of Married Women, 1800-1861*, New York: Garland Publishing, 1987, 48-56.

⁵⁴ Trist Family Papers, New Orleans Historical Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁵⁵ The English word *usufruct* derives from the Latin expression *usus et fructus*, meaning “use and enjoyment.”

you know I have the power of leaving it as I please.”⁵⁶ Belonging to the social circle of the Izards, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney ensured in his will that his widow would not do the same:

If my said wife shall leave the State for more than two years at one time, the said House and Lotts Negroes furniture and other articles before mentioned not consumed or destroyed are immediately after the expiration of the said Two years to go to my residuary Legates and Devisees hereinafter mentioned, for I mean the said house as a home for my dear wife during her natural life.⁵⁷

The house on the Bay represented the prominence of the Pinckneys in Charleston; it could not be rented, it had to be occupied by members of the family.⁵⁸ The wealthy widows who received a town house as part of their dowry - a privileged set of plantation women - rarely inhabited them alone. They were meant to become the urban seat of the extended family when they came to town for short or extended sojourns. For instance, the granddaughter of Aglaé Bringier recalled her urban stays at *Melmopene* with her “Bonnemaman”: “We had been spending the greater part of the winter in New Orleans, as usual, with my grandmother, Mrs. M.D. Bringier, whose spacious mansion, surrounded by large and beautiful grounds, was the winter resort of her children and grandchildren, though their “name was legion.”⁵⁹

Besides these dowagers, evidence suggests that town houses were often closely associated with women earlier in their life cycle. Just as slaves were more often willed to daughters than plantations and country houses, town houses were more likely to pass within a family from father to daughter and, sometimes, from mother to daughter.⁶⁰ They could also constitute the nucleus of a bride’s dowry.⁶¹ When Louise Bringier got married, her father gave her a town house on Esplanade in New Orleans.⁶² Charlotte Hunt received as a wedding gift from her father *Landsdowne*, a suburban villa in Natchez.⁶³ Yet, as with the

⁵⁶ Alice Izard to Henry Izard, 15 October 1806, Manigault Family Papers, Columbia, South Caroliniana Library.

⁵⁷ Last Will and Testament of Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, 7 October 1807, Pinckney Family Documents, Benjamin H. Rutledge Family Papers, 1675-1867, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

⁵⁸ During the nullification crisis, the house would be known as “Nullification Castle.” McInnis, op.cit., 80.

⁵⁹ “Memoirs of Madam Joseph Lancaster Brent (Miss Rosella Kenner) Recollections of a Grandmother,” quoted in Herman de Bachellet Seebold, M.D., *Old Louisiana Plantation Homes and Family Trees*, New Orleans: Pelican Publishing, 1941, 141.

⁶⁰ For a similar phenomenon in Latin America, see Fiona Wilson, “Marriage, Property, and the Position of Women in the Peruvian Central Andes,” Raymonde T. Smith, ed., *Kinship Ideology and Practice in Latin America*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984, 297-325.

⁶¹ Joseph Manigault to Gabriel Manigault, 17 December 1805, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia.

⁶² Seebold, op.cit., 132.

⁶³ For its part, Frank Surget Sr. bought *Elms Court* in 1852 for his daughter Jane. Randolph Delehanty and Van Jones Martin, *Classic Natchez*, Savannah & New Orleans: Martin-St. Martin, 1996, 33, 116.

widow who was temporarily granted the use of her dower house, a woman's authority over the town house she had brought to a marriage was tenuous at best. Once married, the husband became the legal owner and his authority prevailed. When the widower Henry Izard remarried in 1814, he got himself a new wife and a new town house. In a letter addressed to his mother and written the day after his second wedding, he remarked: "I last evening brought my little adventure to a close, & am now writing in a Room of which I am by courtesy of the law, the Master."⁶⁴ Even when protected through (rare) marriage contracts, a woman's enjoyment of her town house was almost always subordinated to the needs and desires of the patriarch.⁶⁵ In 1839, Mary Pringle inherited a Palladian mansion on King Street in Charleston where she was born in 1803 and that her father had purchased for her mother.⁶⁶ When Pringle's husband needed capital for one of his planting ventures, she reluctantly agreed to sell part of her urban property. To her daughter, she confided:

I have made a noble sacrifice today, for the advantage of my children. To enable Papa to purchase "Pleasant Meadows" (Hunts' plantation adjoining Richfield) which is for sale at \$18,000. I have consented, nay, magnanimously offered to let him sell the lower portion of my lot – my *dear hereditary land*. Would it be wrong to drop a tear when I am all by myself, to this act of duty.⁶⁷

Mary Pringle dutifully sacrificed parts of her beloved garden to fulfill her husband's rural ambitions. The gratification a lady of leisure found in the city – sometimes provided by her father – remained subsidiary to a planter's respectability, which was primarily derived from the country.

When in financial need, plantation women often envisioned the town house as a source of income. After the war, Mary Pringle rented several parts of her house, while her daughter Susan turned the flowers of the garden into bouquets and corsages that were sold by their former gardener (now a freedman) in the city.⁶⁸ Adèle Allston transformed her dower house into a female boarding school.⁶⁹ Only when this venture failed did the widow turned to planting. Seven decades earlier, Milliscent Jones Colcock had also opened a school

⁶⁴ Alice Delancey Izard to Margaret Izard Manigault, 16 May 1814, quoted in Wylma Wates, "Precursor to the Victorian Age: The Concept of Marriage and Family as Revealed in the Correspondence of the Izard Family of South Carolina," Carol Bleser, ed., *In Joy and Sorrow: Women, Family, and Marriage in the Victorian South, 1830-1900*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, 12.

⁶⁵ Marylynn Salmon, *op.cit.*, xv.

⁶⁶ Richard N. Côté, *Mary's World: Love, War, and Family Ties in Nineteenth-century Charleston*, Mount Pleasant, S.C.: Corinthian Books, 33.

⁶⁷ Mary Pringle to Mary Pringle Mitchell, 10 January 1854, quoted in Côté, *op.cit.*, 175.

⁶⁸ Côté, *op.cit.*, 272.

⁶⁹ Pringle, *op.cit.* See Chapter XXIX entitled, "Mamma's School."

in Charleston.⁷⁰ In New Orleans, Ann Devereux Polk also operated a boarding school after the Civil War.⁷¹ Much more common were the women who transformed their dower houses into boardinghouses, one of the few lucrative and respectable enterprises opened to women.⁷² Mrs. Faber, the country neighbour of Meta Morris Grimball, turned her handsome house with the cupola into a boardinghouse when she became a widow, given that “Mr. Brisbane was not a man of industrious habit, he did not look into his affairs.”⁷³ Since they were meant to become their dower house if they outlived their husbands, plantation women cultivated a special attachment to these town houses. Long after she settled in Philadelphia, Alice Izard referred to the house in Charleston that her husband had reserved for her as “my house.”⁷⁴ The dower house functions were manifold: a convenient and enjoyable place for a plantation woman to live out her life, an urban seat for the extended planting family, and a visible reminder of the status of the deceased.

For those planting families who almost entirely eschewed urban living, either by choice or by necessity, hotels and boardinghouses acted as temporary residences during their shorter and irregular sojourns in the city. Most towns of consequence built planters’ hotels in the nineteenth century. The choice of a temporary residence involved similar dilemmas of social assertion and gratification.⁷⁵ During her winter visit to New Orleans in 1850, Miriam Badger Hilliard, a young plantation mistress from Arkansas, was forced to stay at the hotel *Verandah*, since the more prestigious *St. Charles* was already full. If the dinner at the hotel was “elegantly served,” it was “badly prepared.” The hotel acted as an urban residence where Hilliard received calls and even gave a soiree for her relations, dressed in her “brocade and pearls.”⁷⁶

⁷⁰ “The autobiography of William Ferguson Colcock,” Colcock Family Papers, 1785-1917, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁷¹ Scarborough, *op.cit.*, 119. Born in Virginia, Frances Ann Devereux followed her husband, the Episcopalian bishop Leonidas Polk to Tennessee, and then to Louisiana, where they owned from 1841 to 1854 a sugar plantation that counted over two hundred slaves. They lived in New Orleans year-round in the second half of the 1850s, although the bishop still owned a cotton plantation in Mississippi. The general bishop was killed during the war.

⁷² In Charleston, women operated two-thirds of the boardinghouses listed in 1803, a proportion that dropped to 50% in 1823. Herman, *op.cit.*, 245.

⁷³ Meta Morris Grimball, “My sister Wilkins,” Sketches, [December 1856], Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

⁷⁴ When rented, a dower house also provided the widow with a substantial income. See Alice Delancey Izard to Henry Izard, 15 October 1806, Ralph Izard Papers, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

⁷⁵ Herman, *op.cit.*, 234.

⁷⁶ Miriam Badger Hilliard Diary, 27-31 January 1850, 7, typescript, Tulane University Special Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

As a traveler remarked in the Crescent City, however, hotels remained poor substitutes for town houses:

Many families take up their abode thus at hotels for several months, and many young couples live in the same way also during the first months of their marriage. That, however, is not so much because they relish hotel life, as because it is very expensive to establish themselves in their own houses in America, and a family generally will have a house wholly for themselves. A young couple will frequently not wait to be married until they are wealthy enough “to keep house,” as it is termed. That, however, in the mean time, is the object after which they strive. I have heard many ladies complain of the emptiness and weariness of life in an hotel, and deplore its influence on young girls, who have in it only too many temptations to live merely for pleasure, admiration, and vanity.⁷⁷

When her husband proposed to give up the house they rented on Boundary Street in Charleston for a hotel room, Mary Middleton was unhappy: “Fancy me being placed either in Meeting or Broad St. in May or June!” she told her daughter.⁷⁸ Middleton must have convinced her husband, since they kept renting the house for several years. Be it temporary or more permanent, planting men and women imagined their town residences as sites of refinement and comfort. Town houses and hotels imprinted an architecture of refinement and leisure on the visual landscape of the southern city.

A town house told much about a planter’s self-image and about his conception of “respectability.” The choice of a “situation,” that is a building’s relationships to the larger environment, was an important statement in the theatre of the city.⁷⁹ Until the turn of the nineteenth century, the ideal town house of a planter was a grand mansion centrally located, whose appearance was reminiscent of the elite urban architecture observed across the

⁷⁷ Fredrika Bremer, *The Homes of the New World: Impressions of America*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1854, vol.2, 226.

⁷⁸ Mary Hering Middleton to Eliza Middleton Fisher, 1 February 1840, Eliza Cope Harrison, ed., *Best Companions: Letters of Eliza Middleton Fisher and her Mother, Mary Hering Middleton, from Charleston, Philadelphia, and Newport, 1839-1846*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001, 110. Henry Middleton, her husband, was the owner of *Middleton Place*. During the first years of their marriage, he owned a town house in Charleston, but then he sold it when he became the American ambassador to Russia. Financially stressed after his return to America, he invested in a residence in Newport, Rhode Island, where he summered with his family. In Charleston, he rented a house on Boundary Street in Charleston neck for several years. See *ibid.*, 7, 51.

⁷⁹ “Situation,” a term often used in the eighteenth century, “referred in its limited and most specific sense to the location, suitability, and liabilities of a building lot, but also carried larger social implications about how individuals should appropriately present themselves in the world. Situation in this expanded sense embraced the relationships between people and their environments and the ways others perceived and valued those relationships.” Herman, *op.cit.*, 4-5.

Atlantic world; the town house served to assert the planter's standing as a member of a transatlantic elite. Etienne De Boré, the great sugar planter, owned a town house at the corner of Chartres and Conti Streets in the French Quarter. It was, according to Grace King, "a massive brick building, with a large courtyard opening on Conti Street, a true Spanish building; broad doorways, windows, rooms, hall, a staircase fit for a palace and beautiful enough for one, with its elaborate, fantastic, handwrought [*sic*] iron railing; the roof was a solid terrace, surrounded by a stone balustrade."⁸⁰ Across the street, was the *hôtel particulier* of the Destrehans, another planting family. As cities grew in the Early Republic, great planters started building great mansions in what were then considered suburban areas, notably because of the need for large and affordable lots (often unavailable in the oldest parts of the city), and lower municipal taxes.⁸¹ These first suburban villas blended vernacular and European architectures.⁸² As the decades went by, metropolitan influences waned, and antebellum villas often looked like the plantation houses that one could find in the adjoining countryside. Some were new buildings, while others had long been there. Towns and cities, remarks Lisa C. Tolbert "expanded by subdividing encircling plantations, transforming "big house" into town house and farm into urban grid."⁸³ Old plantation houses, once isolated, were now parts of moderately populated neighbourhoods. In New Orleans, for instance, Creole plantations became suburbs that carried the names of their former owners, such as Faubourgs Marigny, Boulogny or Lacourse. By the antebellum period, the archetypical town house of the planter class was a suburban villa, geographically removed from downtown.⁸⁴ Fredrika Bremer said of Charleston, "it is like a great assemblage of country houses, each one with its veranda or piazza ornamented with foliage and flowers."⁸⁵

It is no coincidence that these villas proliferated at the very same time that the peculiar institution came under attack and that denunciations of planters' absenteeism multiplied. Old and new, they inscribed in the urban landscape the rural identity of their owners. These villas

⁸⁰ Grace King, *New Orleans : The Place and the People*, New York : MacMillan and Co, 1895, 264-65.

⁸¹ George C. Rogers describes these suburban houses as a "cross between a townhouse and a country house," Rogers, op.cit., 65.

⁸² A great example of early suburban villa is the *Joseph Manigault House* (c.1790) at 350 Meeting Street in Charleston. Beatrice St. Julien Ravenel, *Architects of Charleston*, Charleston: Carolina Art Association, 1945, 55.

⁸³ Tolbert, op.cit., 6.

⁸⁴ These suburban villas were, at least in part, emulation of the villas that were found in London, England. See Basil Hall, *Travels in North America in the years 1827 and 1828*, Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, & Carey, 1829, vol.2, 190. On these early English suburban developments, see Lewis Mumford, *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and its Prospects*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961, 482-496.

⁸⁵ Fredrika Bremer, op.cit., 264. Of Savannah, Bremer said: "it is, even more than Charleston, an assemblage of villas which have come together for company." Ibid, 340.

belonged to a movement of assertion of the planter class's agrarianism within the city. Suburban villas especially attracted the socially ambitious who wanted to claim a place within the planter class, such as merchants and factors who had recently purchased plantations and slaves. Far from being the preserve of the nouveaux riches, they were often the choice of well-established planting families, such as the Vanderhorsts who owned an imposing villa in Charleston Neck. According to Maurie D. McInnis, "buildings that so clearly recalled the Lowcountry vernacular plantation house trumpeted the agrarian economy and slave society of South Carolina and served to elevate the patron in the eyes of contemporaries."⁸⁶ In Natchez, "the Aristocrats" erected those villas all around the town and gave them names such as *Richmond Hill*, *Hope Farm*, and *Cherry Grove*.⁸⁷ "There are many private residences, in the vicinity of Natchez, of an equally expensive character...whose elegant interiors, contrasting with the neglected grounds about them, suggest the idea of a handsome city residence, accidentally dropped upon a bleak hill," a traveler observed during his tour of the Southwest.⁸⁸ Suburban villas were architectural compromises that answered several needs of the planter class. In gendered terms, a villa reconciled a planter's desire to position himself as an agriculturalist in the theatre of the city (central to a man's identity), at the very same time that it allowed the women of his family to engage in urban social life (central to a woman's identity). Even for the most religious or for those who felt estranged from the aristocratic excess of the fashionable set, a suburban villa appeared as a very desirable residence. A growing number of planters chose in the antebellum period to build their principal residence on the periphery of towns and cities. On the outside, they looked like plantation houses, with their outbuildings, gardens, and even animals. Yet, they were geographically removed from the actual planting activities, since the fields and the quarters where slaves grew cotton, rice or sugar were located several miles away. Clearly, these planters were distancing themselves from the daily realities of the slave-based source of their wealth.

The acres that surrounded these houses essentially served ornamental functions. These planters' houses did not conform to an idealized plantation landscape in which the fields and

⁸⁶ McInnis, op.cit., 50.

⁸⁷ Michael Wayne, *The Reshaping of Plantation Society: The Natchez District, 1860-1880*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983, 11-14; Joseph Holt Ingraham, *The South-West: By a Yankee*, New York: Harper, 1835, vol.2, 23-24; D. Clayton James, *Antebellum Natchez*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968, 38.

⁸⁸ Ingraham, op.cit., 100.

the slave cabins were visible at a near distance.⁸⁹ Sometimes located four or five miles away from town, therefore too distant to be considered part of the urban landscape per se, these houses and their inhabitants were nonetheless integrated in the urban social world, easily accessible by the newly built road networks. Without living in the city, these planting families could be members of a church in town, own urban properties, or engage in short afternoon visits.⁹⁰ “Spatial privacy is an excellent index for measuring social status,” observes Leslie Weisman in *Discrimination by Design*. These planters chose to distance themselves from the city – without entirely isolating themselves – to better assert their elite status.⁹¹ As a result, towns and cities’ boundaries were fluid at the edges and these planter houses acted as a transition, as an “architectural border between town and countryside.”⁹²

Located downtown or at the periphery, the town houses of the planter class were sometimes passed down from generation to generation and old family mansions held a special prestige. Few families, however, could afford such stability in their urban housing, since these were expensive to purchase and to maintain. On the other hand, the business of renting one’s town house could potentially become very lucrative. Since they often held more symbolic than economic value, town houses were more likely to be exchanged than plantation houses, being sold first when a family faced financial difficulties. For the most prosperous, changing town houses was a great means of asserting one’s standing and shaping one’s self-image within the community.

Michel Doradou Bringier and his town houses epitomize that reality.⁹³ Bringier was one of the wealthiest planters of the South. Migrating between country and city, the Creole planter spent several months each year in New Orleans, a city that faced major

⁸⁹ For a discussion of the plantation idealized landscape, see John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993.

⁹⁰ Tolbert, *op.cit.*, 58-59, 102-103. Because of the fluidity of the border between town and country, a house that was used as the urban residence of a planting family might have been used before as the country residence of the previous owner. In New Orleans, some merchants and factors lived in the central district most of the year and moved to their summer residences in Faubourg Lacourse during the summer. See Mary Cable, *Lost New Orleans*, foreword by Samuel Wilson Jr. New York: American Legacy Press, 1980.

⁹¹ Leslie Kanés Weisman, *Discrimination by Design: A Feminist Critique of the Man-Made Environment*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992, 38.

⁹² Tolbert, *op.cit.*, 107.

⁹³ Lawrence Powell observes, “Creoles’ response to the decline of their community ranged between acquiescence and despair. A high rate of intermarriage between Americans and Creoles smoothed the path toward assimilation in both directions. So did the pull of profits. Ambitious Creoles gravitated to where money was changing hands the fastest, which was in cotton and uptown real estate.” Lawrence N. Powell, ed., *The New Orleans of George Washington Cable: The 1887 Census Office Report*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008, 11.

transformations in the first half of the nineteenth century, with the invasion of Americans and a demographic explosion. The first town house Bringier occupied with his wife Aglaé and their children was a two-storey building on the broad tree-lined Esplanade Street, a very prestigious address within the Creole community. But Creoles were losing political and economic grounds to the Americans in New Orleans, and quarrels between factions led the city government to divide itself into three municipalities in 1836. In this politically charged atmosphere, the ambitious Bringier chose to establish his urban quarters on Canal Street, at the edges of the American District. This was a highly symbolic address in antebellum New Orleans: it was the division line between the French and the English parts of the city, known as “the neutral ground.” The house was part of *Union Terrace*, a series of four town houses built in the Greek Revival Style with an imposing Ionic façade.⁹⁴ While most Creole planters resisted the Americanization of their city, Bringier chose to move with the power and the money. He also encouraged his progeny to marry Americans. By the middle of the 1840s, Bringier’s urban address was *Melpomene Plantation*, a suburban villa that he shared with his daughter Louise and her husband Martin Gordon Jr. Located in Faubourg Lacourse, a semi-urban area, the splendid residence was surrounded by lush gardens.⁹⁵ The transition was completed. While the first house on Esplanade Street could have been the *hôtel particulier* of a Parisian bourgeois that asserted his status as a member of a French transatlantic elite, the suburban *Melpomene* with its plantation architecture undeniably stated Bringier’s belonging to a class of American planters.⁹⁶

Michel Doradou Bringier’s wealth gave him an exceptional latitude in fashioning himself on the stage of the city. Most of his contemporaries did not have the same means, yet their town houses were often statements about their identity. For instance, other Creole planters, resistant to the American invasion, made a point of residing only in the French parts of the city, either in the Vieux Carré where their families had owned houses for more

⁹⁴ The house was built by Dakin and Dakin in 1836-37, the architects of the Verandah Hotel. The property on Canal Street was sold in 1847 and it was eventually converted to commercial uses. Samuel Wilson and al., *New Orleans Architecture: Volume 1: The Lower Garden District*, New Orleans: Pelican Publishing Company, 1971, 28-29. Idem., *New Orleans Architecture, Volume II: the American Sector*, 1972, 16.; Sale of property, Seaman Field to M.D. Bringier, 3 February 1835, Duncan F. Kenner Papers, Louisiana State University, Martin Gordon, Jr., to Benjamin Tureaud, December 9, 1849, January 19, [1850], in Benjamin Tureaud Papers, Louisiana State University, both quoted in Scarborough, op.cit., 220.

⁹⁵ The house, built by Joseph Theodore Bauduc in the early 1820s, was purchased by Martin Gordon Jr. Eventually, Bringier acquired it from his son-in-law, who built himself a residence on the other side of the lot. Wilson, op.cit., 1971, 27.

⁹⁶ In 1850, Aglaé, the widow of Michel Doradou Bringier, was the mistress of 673 slaves, 11 of whom lived in New Orleans, probably as house servants. Scarborough, op.cit., appendix A, 428.

than a century or in the newer Faubourg Marigny. American planters, for their part, chose the Lower Garden District for similar reasons. The urban seats of the planter class derived much of their value (both mercantile and symbolic) from the position they occupied within the urban landscape. What was considered a desirable urban location for a planter changed as the city itself changed, notably in relation to social pressure or politics.

At the lower end of the planter class spectrum, most families could not afford a palatial residence in town. Some preferred renting to purchasing a house in a less prestigious neighborhood. William Ferguson Colcock owned a plantation, but a political and public career led him, his wife Emmeline, their offspring, and their enslaved servants to reside in town the greatest part of the year. The little interest that Colcock paid to his planting ventures never provided him with the kind of money that was necessary to purchase a grand mansion in Charleston. Instead, Colcock rented the prestigious town houses of fellow planters. The 1850s was therefore a decade of serial moves for the family. After a residence in Washington, D.C., Colcock returned to Charleston. In May 1853, he hired the *Peronneau House* located at 93 Tradd Street. In the fall, they moved onto the Battery at *Daniel Heyward's House*. In April, they moved again, this time to the *Ravenel House* on Short Street. After a summer divided between Sullivan's Island and Woodland (a summer residence in the Lowcountry), the Colcocks returned in 1856 to Charleston, this time at the *Petigru House*, situated at the corner of Bull and Rutledge Streets. In 1858, they settled for a few years at the *Corbett House*, which they rented until the summer 1862, when they retired to Sullivan's Island to escape, once again, the yellow fever.⁹⁷ Over a period of ten years, the Colcocks inhabited five different town houses. As the busy mother of a large family, Emmeline was not always happy about all these moves, but with her habitual resignation, she conformed to her husband's wishes. For the socially conscious, instability for a good "situation" was considered preferable to a loss of status.

If the choice of a town house said a lot about a planter's self-image, it sometimes created tensions within the family. Planting men and women had different - and at times competing - priorities regarding the situation of the ideal town house that were partly shaped by gender identities and expectations. A primary criterion for a planting woman to enjoy a

⁹⁷ "The autobiography of William Ferguson Colcock," Colcock Family Papers, 1785-1917, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana. His father had been a prominent lawyer and justice of the South Carolina Court and was a member of the city aristocracy. Frederic Cople Jaher, *The Urban Establishment: Upper Strata in Boston, New York, Charleston, Chicago, and Los Angeles*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982, 345.

town house was its proximity to her social network, and particularly, the nearby presence of the extended family. Because of the limitations on elite women's movement in the city, even a move of a few streets could have dramatic consequences on the ability of two friends to see each other. When she was forced to move away from the Vieux Carré, Marie Peychaud lamented her inability to see her best friend: "Depuis que je suis rue de l'Esplanade, Eugénie et moi avons recommencé notre correspondance, car malgré tout le plaisir que nous avons à nous voir il nous est souvent impossible de sortir, alors nous nous écrivons nos ennuis, nos regrets d'être si éloignées l'une de l'autre."⁹⁸ Women therefore encouraged their relatives to move nearby, in the same street or in the same neighbourhood, so they could visit each other whenever they wanted. The widow Mary Wayne coveted a lot by the half-moon battery in Charleston. "I would like to own it, to build a pleasant villa upon that lot," she told her sister, "so as to have a home, of my own near your house... in a healthy part of the city."⁹⁹

This concern for proximity is especially apparent in the letters exchanged between Marie Bouligny Villeré and her sister Thérèse Bouligny Roman in the years that immediately followed the Civil War. The two sisters regretted their separation as Marie lived in New Orleans, while Thérèse inhabited *Beau Séjour*, the Roman plantation in St. Jacques Parish. Although her sister inhabited a palatial residence in the country, Marie would have preferred a modest town house nearby: "Quel dommage que tu ne sois pas en ville dans une petite maison tout près de chez nous, où nous pourrions nous voir presque tous les jours."¹⁰⁰ Marie's wish was almost fulfilled when Thérèse's husband decided to abandon planting and establish his family in the Crescent City. In charge of finding a house for her sister's family, Marie prioritized proximity to her own abode, while her brother-in-law Henri seemed more concerned with appearance, renovation, and rent.¹⁰¹ Finding the right house at the right price in the *postbellum* city was no easy task. After several months of research, Thérèse finally

⁹⁸ "Since I live on Esplanade Street, Eugénie and I have resumed our correspondence, because in spite of the pleasure we have to see each other, it is often impossible for us to go out, therefore we write to each other our troubles, our regrets of being so removed from each other." Marie Peychaud to Felix Grima, 10 November 1864, Grima Family Papers, New Orleans Historical Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁹⁹ Mary Morris Wayne to Ann Vanderhorst, 5 June 1847, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

¹⁰⁰ "What a pity that you are not in the city in a small house nearby, where we could see each other almost every day." Marie Bouligny Villeré to Thérèse Bouligny Roman, 10 juillet [1869], Roman Family Papers, Tulane University Special Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁰¹ Marie Bouligny Villeré to Thérèse Bouligny Roman, 23 December [no year], Roman Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

discovered the perfect house on Bourbon Street, “tout près de moi.”¹⁰² To her sister, she confided, “Je commençais à désespérer; je croyais que vous seriez obligés d’aller dans les faubourgs aussi j’ai été bien contente en trouvant celle-ci si près de nous tous surtout.”¹⁰³ A semi-detached cottage newly renovated, it was situated in a good neighborhood. Since the rent was out of reach for the young couple, Marie appealed to the extended family for financial help. Her beloved sister was finally nearby again.

Privacy was also an important concern for women when it came to choosing a town house. Like their northern counterparts, plantation women were influenced by the ideology of domesticity that restricted them to the private sphere.¹⁰⁴ In their exchanges over the town house to be rented in New Orleans, the Boulogny sisters discussed the height of the street side windows, insuring that the passers-by could not peek inside the living room.¹⁰⁵ In Charleston, Meta Morris Grimboll remarked that her friend Mrs Lewis was unhappy with the house that her husband had rented on South Bay, one of the most prestigious addresses of the city. At first glance, the house had everything that could please an elite woman; it was newly built, vast, luxurious, and it offered a delightful view on the Battery. But as Meta remarked, “Mrs. L. does not like the place, is rather too public. She is shy, & not always attentive to her appearance.”¹⁰⁶ The strategically located house hindered Mrs. Lewis’s movements around the urban property, particularly on the piazza and in the garden, where she could not venture without being subject to public view. Her enjoyment of the house was therefore considerably limited, since in the sub-tropical climate of the South, piazzas and gardens often acted as outdoor living rooms and even bedrooms. If she had chosen, Mrs. Lewis might have selected a property that was surrounded by brick walls that fenced the garden and the courtyard from the street. Or maybe she might have preferred one that had Venetian blinds on the piazza that sealed off the house from public scrutiny. Or she might

¹⁰² “Very close to me.” Marie Boulogny Villeré to Thérèse Boulogny Roman, [no date], Roman Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁰³ “I started to despair, I thought that you would be obliged to go live in the *faubourgs*, therefore I was very happy to find this one, most importantly, close to all of us.” Marie Boulogny Villeré to Thérèse Boulogny Roman, [no date], Roman Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁰⁴ On the influence of the ideology of domesticity in the South, see Marli F. Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-80*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998.

¹⁰⁵ Marie Boulogny Villeré to Thérèse Boulogny Roman, [no date], Roman Family Papers, Tulane Special Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁰⁶ Meta Morris Grimboll, *Diary*, 22 April 1861, 28, Documenting the American South Project at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The Lewises had rented the Nathaniel Russell Middleton house at 22 South Battery, which was built in 1857-1858. The owners spent their summers in Rhode Island and rented their Charleston house. For a description of the house, see Jonathan Poston, *The Buildings of Charleston: A Guide to the City’s Architecture*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997, 270.

have set her heart on a suburban villa that left a distance between the street and the house. In every case, the social aspirations of Mr. Lewis clearly contradicted his wife's desire for privacy.¹⁰⁷

Town houses and their adjoining piazzas and gardens were spaces that mediated the relationships of planting men and women with the other inhabitants of the city. To understand the working of these "liminal" spaces, we must first reconsider the ascription of a planter's town house – inside and out - as belonging exclusively to the private domain.¹⁰⁸ The analysis of gender and space in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries necessarily addresses the public/private dialectic. In the historiography, *gendered spaces* are often synonymous with *separate spaces* or *separate spheres*, which compartmentalize men in the public and women in the private. Like any binary model, the private/public dialectic displays some serious limitations. As pointed out by historian Lawrence Klein, it is wrong to assume that because men and women were at home that they were necessarily in private.¹⁰⁹ Most scholars have emphasized the function of town houses and country houses as "retreat from the public space," as "oasis of stability, gentility, and refinement in a sea of increasing chaos."¹¹⁰ Yes, the planter's urban dwelling was a private space used for biological and social reproduction, the *raison-d'être* of the family unit. But it was also a public space of social representation and commerce.¹¹¹ In

¹⁰⁷ For elite Charlestonians' concern for privacy and uses of piazza, see McInnis, *op.cit.*, 31, 38, 44.

¹⁰⁸ "Liminal phenomena begin as marginal and unclassifiable concepts and fall between the boundaries of organizing categories, although they eventually are incorporated into the social structure. Liminal phenomena are paradoxical, consisting of both this and that, or conversely, consisting of neither this nor that." Greg M. Thomas, "Women in Public in the Parks of Paris," Aruna D'Souza and Tom McDonough, eds, *The Invisible flâneuse? Gender, Public Space, and Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008 (2006), 42.

¹⁰⁹ Lawrence E. Klein, "Gender and the Public/Private Distinction in the 18th Century: Some Question About Evidence and Analytic Procedure," *18th Century Studies*, vol.29, no.1, 1995, 97-109; See also Sally McMurry, *Families and Farmhouses in Nineteenth-Century America: Vernacular Design and Social Change*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1988.

¹¹⁰ McInnis, *op.cit.*, 281; Peter A. Coclanis, *The Shadow of a Dream: Economic Life and Death in the South Carolina Low Country, 1670-1920*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, chapter 1.

¹¹¹ Historians have proposed several terminologies to describe these intermediary spaces, both physical and symbolic, located between the private and the public: semi-public (Stuart Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), quasi-public (Cynthia Kierner, *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-1835*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), informal public (Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), or multiple public (Jessica Kross, "Mansions, Men, Women, and the Creation of Multiple Publics in Eighteenth-Century British North America," *Journal of*

colonial Virginia, observes Kathleen Brown, “neither the mansion house, nor its organisation of household labor was intended for a privatized intensely emotional family life. Rather, they served the very different purpose of affirming male authority and social position through sociability.”¹¹² This did not change after the Revolution and it followed the planters westward. Late in the antebellum period, the southern family was still understood as a corporate unit under the guidance of a patriarch. The planter’s houses (both in the country and in the city) were used for broader exchange relations and were therefore built according to the precepts of a representational architecture.¹¹³

Since town houses and plantation houses served different (yet complementary) purposes, both functional and symbolic, they were built and organized differently. The spatial organization of these residences reflected their differing functions: while the isolation of the plantation limited the representation needs to a simple hall, urban sociability demanded multiple reception rooms. They usually included at least a dining room and a drawing room (sometimes called the parlor or the best room), while the most elaborated dwellings also included game room, ballroom, morning room or billiard room. Town houses were made to entertain acquaintances, and “they incorporate[d] the order, restraint, and propriety of the outside world into domestic life.”¹¹⁴ Sometimes, they included a library or an office, rooms almost entirely dedicated to commerce, although much of the time, corners of parlors and bedrooms were used to write business letters and meet agents and factors.¹¹⁵ Houses were also sites of politics, serving for political meetings and as polling stations during elections.¹¹⁶ Some planters even conveyed their partisan allegiances onto their furnishing. For instance, during the Nullification Crisis in Charleston, *recamiers* and chairs became bearer of political message.¹¹⁷ “The political bias of the inhabitants was often discoverable from the books on the table, or the prints and casts on the walls,” Harriet Martineau remarked in her

Social History, 1999, 33 (2), 385-408). I prefer to employ the simple term “public” which was regularly used by Southerners in describing houses.

¹¹² Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, & Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996, 267.

¹¹³ Herman, *op.cit.*, 38; Olsen, *op.cit.*, 287.

¹¹⁴ Diana diZerega Wall, “Family Meals and Evening Parties: Constructing Domesticity in Nineteenth Century Middle-Class New York,” in *Lines that Divide*, *op.cit.*, 110.

¹¹⁵ Kirsten E. Wood, *Masterful Women: Slaveholding Widows from the American Revolution through the Civil War*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004, 84, 90; Herman, *op.cit.*, 215.

¹¹⁶ Wood, *op.cit.*, 109.

¹¹⁷ Harriet Martineau quoted in McInnis, *op.cit.*, 318-319.

Retrospect of Western Travel (1838). After a visit at the house of the niece of Harriot Horry, the traveler observed:

One lady, who had contributed ample amount of money to the nullification funds, and a catechism to nullification lore, amused while she grieved me by the strength of her political feelings. While calling on her one morning, the conversation turned on prints, and I asked an explanation of a strange-looking one which hung opposite my eye; the portrait of a gentleman, the top of the head and the dress visible, but the face obliterated or covered over. She was only too ready to explain. It was a portrait of President Jackson, which she had hung up in days when he enjoyed her favour. Since nullification she had covered over the face, to show how she hated him. A stranger hardly knows what to think of a cause whose leaders will flatter and cherish the perpetrators of a piece of petty spite like this; yet this lady is treated as if she were a main pillar of the nullification party.¹¹⁸

Oriented toward public activities, the town house (even more so than the country house) was for the planting class an extension of the outside world.

Besides the private nature of the town house, we need to reconsider another assumption that emanates from the paradigm of the separate spheres: the idea that women held considerable power over domestic space, an idea that permeates the contemporary historiography. According to the ideology of domesticity developed in the nineteenth century, women's dominion over the private sphere demanded that they provide a refined lifestyle for their family. As such, the ideology contended, women were in charge of the planning, decorating and furnishing of houses.¹¹⁹ If it was well established in northern middle-class families, this practice was far from being followed in the antebellum South. Women were housekeepers - and as such they were the managers of the household and they ensured its smooth functioning - but they were not necessarily the ones who "produced" domestic space. In fact, elite white women were often portrayed as ladies of leisure, as "consumers" who enjoyed the spaces created for them by men. As the ideology of domesticity pervaded the postbellum South, women eventually assumed greater responsibility for furnishings and taste.¹²⁰ It is no coincidence that women gained greater control over the arrangement and the planning of domestic space after the Civil War, at the very same time that southern patriarchy lost some of its power.

¹¹⁸ Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel*, London: Saunders and Otley, 1838, vol.1, 228-229; On Sarah Middleton Pinckney, see Christine Jacobson Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness: Unmarried Women in the Urban South, 1800-1865*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006, 54-56.

¹¹⁹ Sarah A. Leavitt, *From Catharine Beecher to Martha Stewart: A Cultural History of Domestic Advice*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

¹²⁰ Jane Turner Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood, 1865-1895*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2003, 51-90.

Before the war, building, planning, and decorating town houses were at times female affairs, but most of the time, they were very much male affairs. After all, architecture and refinement had long been gentlemanly pursuits.¹²¹ Because houses were the embodiment of their respectability, planters oversaw almost every aspect of the construction inside and out, from the choice of the brick to the color of the walls. Planters such as Henry Laurens and Ralph Izard closely supervised the building of their town houses, which blended vernacular designs and fashionable European patterns. Some planters were even the architects of their own houses, such as Gabriel Manigault who introduced the Adams style to Charleston.¹²² Some were more conservative in their architectural choices, while others displayed more creativity. Henry Izard, for instance, chose to redesign the kitchen of *The Elms* “a few steps lower” than the best rooms and he imagined a giant wigwam to lodge his family in the Catawba. His sister admired her brother’s architectural projects: “How he talks of all his schemes! It delights me to hear him, because in forming them his mind must be amused; but to hear him, one would suppose that there was nothing so easy as to build a house, & furnish it.”¹²³ Building a house, either in the city or the country, was indeed a demanding venture that consumed a great amount of time, energy, and resources. If wives were occasionally encouraged to give some input into the planning of what would also become their residence, planning remained under the guidance of men and was understood as their project. After all, men were the legal owners of these houses. Undeniably, individual women planned houses, but it was mostly a male prerogative.¹²⁴

The same can be said of decoration. The evidence gathered for this research reveals how closely men were involved in the decorating process of houses, in the city and in the country.¹²⁵ This was true of all sorts of men - single, married and widowers - along the entire spectrum of the planter class. Men engaged themselves in tearing down walls, rearranging furniture, wallpapering, and even choosing china. Needless to say, they mostly supervised the work that enslaved servants performed. William Falconer was practicing medicine in New

¹²¹ Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992; Kross, loc.cit., 402.

¹²² Beatrice St. Julien Ravenel, op.cit., 53-64.

¹²³ Margaret Izard to Alice Izard, 16 march 1812, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

¹²⁴ Ralph Izard to Alice Izard, Charleston, 6 January 1817, quoted in McInnis, op.cit., 44.

¹²⁵ C.f. Carole Shammas suggests that women might have been major influence in promoting such enhancements to the domestic environment. *The Pre-Industrial Consumer in England and America*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990, 186-188.

Orleans in the late 1820s. On the eve of his marriage to Aurora Morgan, the daughter of a prominent Louisiana planter, he took charge of preparing the couple's nest. To the union, she was to bring four enslaved servants, while the young doctor (who would soon become a planter) was to provide a \$4000 town house and \$1500 of furnishing. In a letter to his fiancée, Falconer described the property he just acquired in Faubourg Lacourse, in the American part of the city:

I have purchase [*sic*] a beautiful house for us to live in with many conveniences. 'Tis a healthy & desirable place & very handsome plenty of room & accommodations can spare a room or less for sister Adele in winter should she favour us with her company in a visit. I am sure she will like it. Can keep a horse and big large kitchen yard & garden & all kinds of out houses. Bake oven well cistern everything – if you should be pleased my love. I am sure we can be easy comfortable & happy in it...Our furniture is nearly all ready I shall have the most of it in the house in a short time.¹²⁶

Two weeks later, he wrote to his fiancée again: “All our furniture is now intend [*sic*] purchasing is ready. Yesterday I purchase 45 yards carpeting to cover our hall. It is a spacious room & I think tolerable neat 21 feet long 16 wide.”¹²⁷ His decorative undertaking extended even to the littlest detail, as he told Aurora: “I have my love had all my silver marked with the initials of my name & yours in this way marked to “W. & A.F.” Don't you think I had a good deal of assurance to have this done.”¹²⁸ The young man clearly felt that choosing and decorating the couple's town house was his responsibility. Men made houses “comfortable” for women.¹²⁹

Several plantation women also took an interest in planning and decorating houses, although they had to subordinate their choices and their efforts to the patriarch's will. Town houses, one must remember, were closely associated with a planter's self-image. Because planting men controlled the family income almost entirely, most planting women could expect to decide what kind of candles or towels were used in the house, but they could not refurnish the drawing room according to their own taste. Others had more latitude with the family budget or they disposed of their own income, which allowed them to make important decisions regarding the appearance of town houses. Compared with their northern

¹²⁶ William R. Falconer to Aurora Morgan 6 September 1828, Morgan-Falconer Family Papers, 1827-1905, New Orleans Historical Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹²⁷ William Falconer to Aurora Morgan, 20 September 1828, Morgan-Falconer Family Papers, New Orleans Historical Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹²⁸ William Falconer to Aurora Morgan, 20 September 1828, Morgan-Falconer Family Papers, New Orleans Historical Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹²⁹ Mary Wayne to Ann Vanderhorst, 13 July 1853, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston, South Carolina.

counterparts, however, planting women seemed to have been comparatively less active in shaping their environment, well into the late antebellum period.¹³⁰ Even after several years of marriage, wives remained deferent over domestic arrangements. The rich heiress of a Georgia planter, Mary Ann Lamar Cobb lived in Athens in a large Greek revival house. She wrote to her husband of fifteen years, then in Washington: “By the by I am getting our cottage home so comfortable.” Proud of the decoration she did in one of the upstairs’ room, she nonetheless felt necessary to add, “tho’ you are the housekeeper.”¹³¹ Cobb, like most women of her class, could not entirely take credit for her decorating accomplishments, any more that she could decide where the family was to live. As a rule, women’s influence over the shaping of the town house extended with widowhood. It went hand in hand with maturity and economic power. When her son Henry was renovating *The Elms*, the family mansion in the Lowcountry, Alice Izard advised him on how to improve the place:

The dull old paper in the hall might be replaced by the light yellow one which I left in the store room & which was intended for that purpose; but your father wished to make great improvements & so, small ones never took place. Or the hall might be covered with a coat of plaster made with ochre like the passage of the house in town.¹³²

If the dowager felt that her competencies and her judgment regarding houses were superior to her son (whom she regularly criticized), she still showed reverence for her late husband’s decisions.

Some wives were less subservient and did not wait for their husbands’ approval to take the initiative of shaping their domestic environment. Married in 1821, Elias and Ann Vanderhorst were wealthy slaveholders. Most summers of their long marriage, Ann traveled to the North, often with at least one of the children. In their seasonal correspondence, the couple extensively discussed domestic matters. Most years, Elias was absorbed in improving one of his houses; painting the Big House at Kiawah Island, carpeting the parlor in Charleston, or renovating the Beach house. In September 1847, he wrote to his daughter: “I am fixing up your room for you with curtains... hope you will find it comfortable.”¹³³ But one winter, while Elias was in the country, Ann decided to have the parlor of the town house repainted. When he learned of his wife’s initiative, the planter was furious: “I am sorry you

¹³⁰ For the North, see Blumin, op.cit., 1989, 183-185.

¹³¹ Mary Ann Lamar Cobb to Howell Cobb, 8 January 1850, quoted in Cashin, *Our Common Affairs*, op.cit., 246-247.

¹³² Alice Delancey Izard to Henry Izard, 23 January 1807, Izard Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

¹³³ Elias Vanderhorst to Raven Vanderhorst, 29 September 1847, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

threw away \$40 for painting the parlour as I was well satisfied as it stood, being quite good enough for a man in my reduced circumstances.” With over two hundred slaves, two plantations, a wharf in Charleston, a schooner, a suburban villa, and few debts, the planter was not exactly what his contemporaries defined as a man in “reduced circumstances.” Once more, his wife had acted with her characteristic defiance.¹³⁴

Female decorating initiatives were not only criticized by husbands concerned over their wife’s overspending; but also by female advocates of the domestic ideology. Southern novelists such as Caroline Lee Hentz, Eliza Ann Dupuy and Caroline Gilman encouraged women’s domestic efforts, as long as they concurred with the patriarch’s wishes and desires. They also condemned women who displayed too much ambition and enterprise in shaping their environment. These domestic novelists imagined the plantation as the natural place for a woman to fulfill her destiny. As with the British novelist Maria Edgeworth, one of their main influences, the country estate was understood as “a space in which men and women could exercise socially useful roles and communicate freely with one another.”¹³⁵ Although situated mainly on plantations, these novels also painted their heroines in the cities of the Old South. At a stereotypical level, the town house - with its refinement, luxury, and distinct organization - was even believed to be superior to the country house.

In the novel *Louise Elton: or, Things Seen and Heard* published in 1853, the author Mary H. Herndon told more than one story. The narrative of a Northern governess who ends up marrying a Southerner, it is also a cautionary tale about the gendered politics of domestic space in the Old South. Early on in the novel, the protagonist and her brother experience the legendary southern hospitality while they are traveling in the countryside. As she enters the mansion of her hosts, Louise relates:

As I was walking across the parlor admiring the fine house...our friend returned. He inquired of me, if I would have anything? I told him I wished for nothing, at that time; that I was admiring the plan of the house; that I never had seen the parlors above stairs, except in towns and cities. This mansion, rejoined he, was planned by a lady. Do you not think her genius as an architect very tasty? I told him I did. Continued he: The whole fabric is very convenient: there may be a large company above stairs here, and

¹³⁴ Elias Vanderhorst to Ann Vanderhorst, 28 April [no year], Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

¹³⁵ Cliona O’Gallchoir, *Maria Edgeworth: Women, Enlightenment, and Nation*, University College of London: Dublin, Dublin, 2005, 11.

all the domestic duties be performed below, and the company may spend their time pleasantly without the slightest interruption.¹³⁶

The lady of the house, Mrs. Manville, is not only an inspired architect, according to Herndon; she is also a powerful woman. Since she provided the greater portion of the money to build the house, she decides how it would be decorated and what would be hung on the walls. Mrs. Manville, moreover, expects silence from her guests when she feels indisposed and she imposes an iron discipline on her servants. The master of the Big House, in *Louise Elton*, is indeed a mistress. But too much power is damaging to a woman's character according to the domestic novelist; Mrs. Manville might be intelligent and cultivated, but she is also cruel, capricious, bigoted, and conceited. As a result, her shadowy husband, their children, their guests, and even their slaves, suffer from her overreaching authority in the domestic space. To Herndon and her contemporaries, Mrs. Manville might be an architect of genius and a refined lady, but she epitomized the southern lady who misconstrues her prerogatives and her responsibilities; masters - not mistresses - should hold the power of shaping the domestic space.

Domestic novelists such as Herndon mirrored the subordinate roles allocated to women in society and they supported their virtual exclusion from the levels of authority that controlled the domestic environment.¹³⁷ In fact, according to these novelists, women's role was not to allocate spaces, but to personalize the spaces they were given, by adding flowers and handmade ornaments, or by arranging the pictures on the walls.¹³⁸ Southern novelists definitely lagged behind domestic feminists such as Catharine Beecher who advocated that women should effectively control their environment. As a result, plantation women were viewed as "passive clients," who accepted architectural traditions.¹³⁹ The South warned its women that being too active in shaping the domestic space - either by planning or decorating - meant stepping out of their prerogatives. It meant being unladylike. Houses were, before anything else, the embodiment of a planter's reputation, which was necessarily sullied by a too-enterprising wife. Even the town house, often destined to become a dower house, was shaped and decorated by planting men. Only if she outlived her husband and if

¹³⁶ Mary H. Herndon, *Louise Elton: or, Things Seen and Heard. A Novel*, Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Co, 1853, 21.

¹³⁷ Gerda R., Wekerle, Rebecca Peterson, and David Morley, ed., *New Space for Women*, Boulder (CO): Westview Press, 1980, 8.

¹³⁸ Caroline Lee Whiting Hentz, *Eoline or Magnolia Vale*, Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson, 1852, 25.

¹³⁹ Dolores Hayden and Gwendolyn Wright, "Architecture and Urban Planning," *Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society* vol.1, no.4, 1976, 923.

she was possessed of a sizeable dowry, might a plantation woman freely rearrange her space according to her own liking.

Once it was carefully shaped and decorated by the patriarch, the town house became the site of complex gendered politics. The style of a house, writes Reina Lewis “is premised on a culturally specific model of the ideal family who will inhabit it” and “to the role of ideal/imagined relations in stereotype.”¹⁴⁰ Most town houses of the planter class operated at an “ideal/stereotypical level of space”; they followed an ideal arrangement, “implicit in the architectural division of space.”¹⁴¹ Considering the hierarchical nature of Southern society, town houses were not democratically inhabited by all their inhabitants (nor was a country house, for that matter). There were great status, age and gender distinctions for all those who lived within it, both free and enslaved. In *Gendered Spaces*, historical sociologist Daphne Spain argues that women’s status tends to be lowest in societies in which housing is sexually segregated, since access to knowledge - the source of status - is restricted. Across time and continents, these gendered spaces have taken the forms of the ancient Greek gynaecium, the Ottoman harem, or the Victorian cigar room. The Old South appeared as an exception to this rule, according to Spain: “Although the Southern rural elite shared the British ideology of women’s proper place, they had neither the wealth nor the technology to create gendered spaces within their homes.”¹⁴² There is evidence to suggest that there were enough wealthy people in the South to model their houses according to their patriarchal ideology if they wished or felt that they needed to do so.¹⁴³ If few southern houses exactly corresponded to the great segregated mansions of the British aristocracy studied by Spain, even the relatively modest mansions of the planter class offered experiences of gendered segregation to their inhabitants. Planting families’ correspondence, estate inventories and travel accounts provide insight into the peopling of the town house’s space, and reveal that gendered segregation happened to a greater extent in urban settings.

¹⁴⁰ Reina Lewis, *Rethinking Orientalism: Women, Travel and the Ottoman Harem*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2004, 183.

¹⁴¹ Sara Mills, “Gender and Colonial Space,” *Gender Place and Culture*, vol.3, no.2, 136.

¹⁴² Daphne Spain, *Gendered Spaces*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992, 119.

¹⁴³ In his study of the wealthiest slaveholders, William Kaufman Scarborough found that 339 individuals owned at least 250 slaves during the 1850s, which represented a considerable fortune in terms of land and human labor. *Op.cit.*, 6.

In Richmond, Charleston, New Orleans or Natchez, town houses of the planter class “like their contemporaries in other [port] cities, referenced two geographies where local outsides and global insides defined social landscapes embedded in the genteel residences of the Atlantic world.”¹⁴⁴ They corresponded – on the inside – to an elite “type” of town house. After the death of her husband, Margaret Izard Manigault returned for a few winters in Charleston and, each year, she hired a different house. One year, she rented Colonel Morris’s house. The next, it was Dr. Tidyman’s, a place that Manigault extensively described to one of her sons away at school:

I wish you could see us in our new establishment. We are quite pleased with our house. Do you recollect Miss Datty’s. This fronts upon the side of her lot. There are two rooms & a dressing room on each floor. You enter the house at the end, & through the piazza. When you go from the piazza into a passage on each side of which there is a room. On the right, is your brothers’, & it has a door upon the piazza, so that he can go in & out without opening any other part of the house. On the other side is the dining room, which is furnished with a new carpet & rug, a side board, the old one, which is very nicely rubbed, & looks very bright, a new set of tables, & the prettiest wooden chairs painted green that I ever saw. There is a little store room under the stairs. On the next floor, there is a drawing room over the dining room, on one side of the stairs & my room on the other & a little dressing room over the store room. The drawing room is furnished with the green clock & rug which were at Col. Morris’s. New nice solid table which you bought. A table covered with green cloth between the windows, which is covered with looksy [*sic*] your aunt Ralph lent me the sophia & chairs which you remember in your aunt Middleton’s Drawing Room, & our piano & harps complete the picture of this room. Mine is just what is was at Col. M. On the third floor, Charlotte & Harriet have their room & dressing room & the room opposite will be occupied tomorrow by your sisters.¹⁴⁵

In mapping the space of the town house, Margaret Manigault provided important information about the functional hierarchy of what appears to be a typical Charleston single house.¹⁴⁶ In New Orleans, a planter of the same period would have described a classic Creole cottage, with no hallway, “two large rooms at the front, opening into three smaller ones at the rear.”¹⁴⁷ Bernard L. Herman describes those vernacular differences from city to city as

¹⁴⁴ Herman, *op.cit.*, 70.

¹⁴⁵ Margaret Izard Manigault to Charles Izard Manigault, 1 December 1811, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

¹⁴⁶ The single house is one of the basic types of house in Charleston. Type of housing is determined by floor plan and “by the relationship between the house and its outbuildings, the street, and the garden.” McInnis, *op.cit.*, 38.

¹⁴⁷ Soon, traditional differences were abandoned and replaced by the English model of interior arrangements, although, according to architect Benjamin Latrobe, it was poorly adapted to the local climate. Mary Cable, *Lost New Orleans*, New York: American Legacy Press, 1980, 10, 57.

“presence of place.”¹⁴⁸ Although significant, architectural particularities should not hide the fact that, on the inside, these houses unfolded and functioned similarly.¹⁴⁹

Because of the spatial constraints inherent to the urban landscape, town houses were often built in height, consisting of two or three stories. The hierarchy of rooms usually ran from the most public to the most private. Typically, on the ground floor, there was an office, a parlor or a reception room, and a dining room. The parlor, sometimes called the sitting-room, was always located on the first floor of the house, generally on the street side. It was the favorite place for the family members to get together, read, write, sew, converse and receive visitors during the day. In the absence of an office or a library, it was also in the parlor that business transactions were concluded. Some houses, such as the *Robert Mills House* in Columbia, included a “morning room,” exposed to the east and thus filled with natural light that made it particularly suitable for writing and sewing during the day.¹⁵⁰ Also located on the first floor was the dining room, the most formal room of the house, where the main meal of the day - the dinner – was served around 3 pm. Finally, the largest mansions frequently included a music room on the ground floor to ensure that teachers would remain in the most public part of the house when they gave violin or harp lessons to the children of the family.

On the second floor, was the drawing room (usually on the street side), and, overlooking the yard, the master bedroom. The drawing room was, by far, the most elaborated room of the house. Its decoration, ornamentation and furnishing were chosen to impress visitors, especially during the evening receptions where men and women danced, played cards or had tea. Right next to this main reception room was the master bedroom.¹⁵¹ The most opulent bedroom, its furniture and objects often surpassed in value the content of all the other bedrooms of the house combined.¹⁵² Usually located in the back of the house, it provided masters and mistresses with a panoptic view of the yard and the slave quarters.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁸ Herman, op.cit., 3.

¹⁴⁹ For instance, in Charleston, the floor plan of a suburban villa was similar to the one in a single house or a double house. McInnis, op.cit., 46.

¹⁵⁰ Nancy Mary Sambets, *Interpreting the Dichotomous Lifestyles of South Carolina Lowcountry Planters, 1830-1850*, M.A. Thesis, University of South Carolina, 1993, 18.

¹⁵¹ Master bedrooms were often located next to the hall in the country. In New Orleans, where Creole cottages tended to be simpler and less elaborated, master bedrooms were often located off the parlor. See Mary Cable, op.cit., 55.

¹⁵² *Charleston Inventories*, Book G, p.466-468; Book H, p.14-16, 56-66 and 102.

¹⁵³ Terrence W. Epperson, “Panoptic Plantations: The Garden Sights of Thomas Jefferson and George Mason,” in *Lines that Divide*, op.cit., 58-77.

Although husband and wife usually shared a room, some planting couples had separate apartments, which were the “logical conclusion” of the ideology of the separate spheres.¹⁵⁴ Master bedrooms were not entirely private spaces; they were also used for social and business meetings.¹⁵⁵ Southern women, on the other hand, did not use their bedrooms for mixed sociable encounters as did French *salonnières*. If she did, observed Nancy Izard Deas, a lady “will cause a vast deal of conversation, &c & c. & it does appear to me an unaccountable thing how a woman can admit strange men into her room when she is actually in bed.”¹⁵⁶

On the third floor of the town house was a series of two to four bedrooms. Usually mixed for the married, bedrooms became *homosocial* for the single.¹⁵⁷ Located in the most removed part of the town house, and thus the most private, they were sanctuaries shielded from the outside world.¹⁵⁸ Given that they were not primarily dedicated to social representation, they were the least ornate rooms of the house.¹⁵⁹ Bedrooms were used for several activities, and they contained desks, secretaries, reading easels and board games. Since there was an average of three or four bedrooms in the planters’ town houses, the distribution of these rooms between the several members of the family - the planter, his wife, their children, their parents, their guests - was founded on a segregation by gender and by age.

¹⁵⁴ Kross, loc.cit., 402. Separate apartments for husbands and wives were a relatively rare occurrence, in the country and in the city, although very significant. The Harfords had separated bedrooms in New Orleans. Carol Bleser, ed., *Tokens of Affection: The Letters of a Planter's Daughter in the Old South*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996, 155. The Sumters in South Carolina and the Polks in Louisiana had separated bedrooms in their country houses. Nathalie Delage Sumter Journal – Home House, near Statesburg, May 1838, photocopy of the original at the South Carolina Historical Society in Charleston, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina. Miriam Badger Hilliard Diary, 1849-50, 4 February 1850, 8, typescript, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁵⁵ John F. Marszalek, ed. *The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes, 1861-1866*, Baton Rouge : Louisiana State University Press, 1979, 76-77.

¹⁵⁶ Alice Izard Deas (Nancy) to Margaret Izard Manigault, 26 March 1813, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

¹⁵⁷ The preservation of intimacy was a growing concern for elite southerners in the Early Republic. The inside organization of their residences went through a major transformation during the late colonial period, going from one or two multi-functional rooms to an average of five to seven rooms having specific functions. On the emergence of the concept of intimacy, see Witold Rybczynski, *Home: A Short History of an Idea*, New York: Penguin Books, 1987 (1986), 15-49.

¹⁵⁸ The image of the bedroom as a sanctuary under female influence was omnipresent in domestic novels. See Caroline Lee Whiting Henz, *The Planter's Northern Bride: A Novel*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970 (1854), 441; Eliza Ann Dupuy, *The Country Neighborhood*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1855, 35; Idem., *The Planter's Daughter: A Tale of Louisiana*, Halifax, Milner and Sowerby, 1862 (1857), 30; Caroline Lee Whiting Hentz, “The Pet Beauty,” in *Courtship and Marriage; or, the Joys and Sorrows of American Life*, Philadelphia, T.B. Peterson, 1851, 68; Idem., *Eoline, or Magnolia Vale*, Philadelphia: T.B. Peterson, 1852, 25; Herndon, op.cit, 177.

¹⁵⁹ The value attached to these rooms in Charleston estate inventories represented only a negligible amount and the furniture and the objects kept there were often described as being “old” or “common.” For instance, in the inventory of John Gordon’s urban dwelling, these rooms occupied one third of the house surface, but they accounted for only 5% of the total value. *Charleston Inventories*, Book H, 102.

Unmarried men and women of the same sex shared a room and often a bed, a rule that also applied to visitors. Meta Morris Grimbball described the bedroom of her four sons as a “sort of Barack [*sic*].”¹⁶⁰ When the white inhabitants of a house became too numerous, especially during the gay season, rooms on the first and second stories welcomed a bed at night, beds that servants removed when the morning came.¹⁶¹

The town house rented by Margaret Manigault in 1811 corresponded almost exactly to this functional hierarchy - from the most public to the most private - with one conspicuous exception; instead of a parlor or an office, her eldest son’s bedroom opened directly on the dining room. It was located on the ground floor, so “that he can go in & out without opening any other part of the house.”¹⁶² The positioning of the young man’s apartment close to the street and somewhat beyond his mother’s supervision reflected his freedom of movement, day and night. By contrast, his several sisters shared bedrooms on the third floor, closely watched by their mother from her apartment on the second floor. In her study of the South Carolina elite, Lorri Glover argues that brothers and sisters were “equal partners in family matters” and that “scant attention was granted to gender.”¹⁶³ If this might have been true of their interactions as captured in family papers, the analysis of the functional hierarchy of their town houses and adjoining yards reveals another story, based on inequality and great attention to gender.

Nearly half a century later, the urban arrangements of the Grimballs replicated a similar spatial treatment of sons and daughters. During the winter, while Meta and her husband were at the plantation, the Grimballs’ sons remained in Charleston, to work or study. They transformed the family home into a bachelors’ heaven, with the tacit approval of their parents. In one of her sketches, Meta described their routine “free from restraint” during her absence:

There are several young men, their particular friends constantly at the house, the Nicholes, James Gibbs, Osbourk, Barnwell, William Brisbane are in, and out, at all times, these young men generally play Billiard, on a small table (Berkley much to his fathers annoyance) purchased for himself; and although strictly forbidden to bring this table in the house, these boys are allowed to play on it, in a building in the yard, which

¹⁶⁰ Meta Morris Grimbball, *Diary*, May 1861, 32-33, Documenting the American South Project at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

¹⁶¹ Motte Pringle, “Random Recollections,” quoted in Côté, *Mary’s World*, op.cit., 78.

¹⁶² Margaret Izard Manigault to Charles Izard Manigault, 1 December 1811, Manigault Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

¹⁶³ Lorri Glover, *All Our Relations: Blood Ties and Emotional Bonds among the Early South Carolina Gentry*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000, x.

was formerly used as a DRs shop. And having not light, the time for playing is short; for Bs services at Mr Courteney's are generally required, from 9 to 2, & from 3 to 6 or 9, Lewis is studying medicine, and his attention to the lectures, takes him up much. William is still in college, and will graduate this winter, and then turn his attention to law. This society forms a great happiness to these boys, and as really intercourse to please which we have with others, must be free from restraint.; this is entirely so; the bread & butter teas, they all take together, every evening the merry talk, a bright gas light, Berkley with his violin, Lewis annoyed by this music, and so prevented from study, William... James gibbs with a pompous voice reading aloud some play or story some listening others talking. & Martin Wilkins enjoying it all; form a sort of scenes, calculated to be long remembered and looked back to with regret.¹⁶⁴

The four sons and their manly pursuits of gambling and billiard playing were forbidden in the house, although tolerated in the yard. With the help of a reduced number of servants and the approbation of their parents, the Grimball's sons transformed – for a season - the family townhouse into a homosocial space. When their adult sister Elizabeth came to town to attend one of the sociable events of the gay season, she never stayed in the family's town house with her brothers. As a young and single woman, her body needed to be policed by a chaperone, and she consequently resided with an older female relative. In the summer, when the parents returned to the city, the allotment of space in the house on Meeting Street changed again. The sons went back to their “military barrack” on the third floor, next to their sister's room and Meta and her husband reoccupied the master bedroom on the second floor. One of the downstairs chambers went to Meta's father, the twice-widowed colonel Morris, a demanding guest who came in and out of the house as he pleased.

The spatial inequality of young men's freedom versus young women's control was far from exclusive to Charleston; it was even more forcibly inscribed onto the visual landscape of New Orleans. After the Louisiana Purchase, rigid rules governed courtship and marriage in Louisiana, and Creole daughters seemed to have been subjected to a closer spatial supervision than their Charleston counterparts. In a city with a long history of gender imbalance, white women's bodies had long been valuable commodities.¹⁶⁵ Young Creole men, for their part, benefited from extended rights and privileges that translated into a formidable spatial freedom. Across the French Quarter, one could find dozen of *garçonnières*,

¹⁶⁴ Meta Morris Grimball, “The Boys Housekeeping in Charleston,” Sketches, December 1856, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

¹⁶⁵ Paul Lachance, “L'effet du déséquilibre des sexes sur le comportement matrimonial: Comparaison entre la Nouvelle-France, Saint-Domingue et la Nouvelle-Orléans,” *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, vol.39, no.2, 1985, 211-231.

sometimes two or three on an urban lot.¹⁶⁶ These separated buildings located at the back of the main house, not far from the kitchen, the stable, and the slave quarters, were expressly built for the sons of the family. In French, *garçon* means a male child, and the idiom was often applied in the nineteenth century to a bachelor. The equivalent of the bachelor pad, the *garçonnière* was a domestic space separated from the main house, yet part of the same urban compound, where the young Creole man could drink, gamble, and perhaps even live with his colored mistress, known to the outside world as a servant or a housekeeper. The New Orleans' *garçonnière* was not indigenous to the city: it was imported from European architectural traditions and such annexes dedicated to male freedom were built under both the French and the Spanish colonial regimes. Americans that settled in the Crescent City also adopted them. In the late 1850s, Robert A. Grinnan included one at the back of his mansion at 2221 Prytannia Street in the Garden District.¹⁶⁷ In Mobile, the great cotton city, elite inhabitants also provided architectural equivalents for their eldest sons. The Warings purchased the house adjacent to their own for their bachelor sons. It was called *The Lodge* or *The Texas*, two terms that suggested the frontier and the wild activities that were happening there.¹⁶⁸ William Dawson, born in Charleston, built a detached dependency in the yard of *Carolina Hall* that was used as a billiard room.¹⁶⁹ Either a room on the ground floor or an entire *garçonnière*, the town houses of the southern elite were clearly conceived to ensure the spatial freedom of sons. Much work needs to be done on the architectural features of these bachelor quarters, far less documented than servant quarters, kitchen, and stables. Fortunately, archaeologists and architectural historians are starting to apprehend the built environment in gendered terms.

Although informative, bachelor pads are only one aspect of the gendered segregation experienced by planting men and women in their town houses. Such environments, scholars have observed, are “a less common cause of the concentration of users of one gender than instances of “segregation” created by social pressure or accepted practice in environments

¹⁶⁶ Ernest Vetter, *Fabulous French Town*, quoted in Liliane Crété, *La vie quotidienne en Louisiane, 1815-1830*, Paris: Hachette, 1979, 67. *Garçonnières* were also built on plantations. See Mary Ann Sternberg, *Along the River Road*, Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, La, 2001, 24.

¹⁶⁷ According to the Historic American Building Survey, the Robert A. Grinnan House included a *garçonnière*. Yet, S.F. Starr does not mention it once in his discussion of the house. *Southern Comfort: the Garden District of New Orleans*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1998.

¹⁶⁸ “The local explanation of the name is that it derived from a phrase “going to Texas,” meaning an escape in a distant land.” Elizabeth Barrett Gould, *From Fort to Port: An Architectural History of Mobile, Alabama, 1711-1918*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988, 126.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 123.

that are supposedly “mixed”.¹⁷⁰ The dining room and the drawing room, two complementary rooms usually located – respectively - on the first and the second floors of the house, exemplify this phenomenon. At first sight, dining room and drawing room appeared as opened and unsegregated spaces. In practice, however, these reception rooms were strongly associated with one gender; they were gender-specific. While in the eighteenth century dining assemblies had been essentially masculine affairs (with the exception of the hostess), they had become increasingly mixed in the nineteenth century. During the meal, the planter and his wife presided at each end of the table over a feast that displayed, through the finest china and silverware, the refinement of the hosts.¹⁷¹ But the dining room was only temporarily opened to women, since right after the last service, they were expected to leave the room and “withdraw” to another room, the “withdrawing room” (most often described in the South as the “drawing room”).¹⁷² In the absence of women, men could discuss politics, smoke, and drink, activities that were deemed inappropriate in the presence of ladies. This English custom was imported to the colonies and was still observed in the middle of the nineteenth century, notably in Richmond at the White House of the Confederacy during the Civil War. After a while, men joined women upstairs, in the drawing room.

In the best room of the house, men and women danced, conversed, and played cards. But as a letter of Henrietta Manigault (the daughter of Margaret) shows, the mixed company was, once again, only temporary:

We were at a dance last night at Colonel Morris’s, which was very pleasant, & quite in a new style. At about twelve o’clock they brought in some little round tables which they placed in the room which used to be Mama’s best room & on these tables they placed some large waiters filled with sandwiches & tarts which I could not eat enough of, because the other ladies had such delicate appetites; & if you know it would never do to eat alone; even Charlotte took it into her head to play the delicate lady on that occasion; we both danced enough & came home at about one o’clock. The Gentlemen supped down stairs.¹⁷³

If men and women spent part of the evening together in the drawing room, when the supper was served, men retreated downstairs. “Those with greater social status will spatially exclude

¹⁷⁰ Wekerle, op.cit., 6-8.

¹⁷¹ In planter John Ball’s inventory of his urban residence, an impressive 55% of the total value of the estate is constituted of china, silverware, linen, and glassware. *Charleston Inventories*, Book H, 56.

¹⁷² Julia Cherry Spruill, *Women’s Life and Work in the Southern Colonies*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1938, 73-74. In Natchez, houses were often organized according to a layout that provided two parlors on the ground floor; a larger one in the front, and a smaller one in the back. At the town house *Rosalie*, “the front parlor was for gentlemen, and the back parlor for ladies and musical recitals.” Delehanty and Martin, op.cit., 84.

¹⁷³ Henrietta Manigault to Charles Manigault [no date, winter 1812], Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

those with lesser social status, and when “superior” and “inferior” groups do share space, they will not stand in the same relationship to it,” Leslie Weisman observes.¹⁷⁴ When there was company, parlors and dining room located on the ground floor became sites of masculine socializing, while women remained in the drawing room, generally located on the second floor.¹⁷⁵ During his visit in America, Tocqueville noticed this custom that rigidly divided social gatherings along gender lines.¹⁷⁶

A drawing from Thomas Middleton, a prominent member of the Lowcountry elite, reveals how the dining room (almost always located on the ground floor, the most public of the house) was strongly associated with men. Entitled *Friends and Amateurs in Musick* (1827), it depicted “a rather typical summer afternoon gathering” of “a number of gentlemen friend and Amateurs in musick, [who] frequently met at each other houses to beguile away the time in listening to the soothing strains of their own music.”¹⁷⁷ The masculine assembly is represented as socializing, making music, drinking and chewing tobacco in a dining room. A eulogy to aristocratic life, this illustration taken at the house of Arthur Middleton shows that sociability was not only gendered at places such as coffee houses, social libraries, private clubs, and associations from which women were excluded, but also within the home. This tradition, which can be traced to the colonial mansions of the Virginian gentry, has been analyzed by historian Jessica Cross:

Hierarchically organized space gave men access to the more formal, ornate, and psychologically satisfying parts of the house for homosocial activities. Constituting the political and intellectual centers of the house, these rooms permitted male peer interaction on a number of levels [and] allowed for the spatial construction of masculinity. Here, “merry” or serious, men could be men.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ Weisman, op.cit., 86.

¹⁷⁵ For the description of a very similar evening in 1809 where men and women spent parts of the evening separately at Mrs. Thomas Radcliffe’s house at the corner of Meeting and George Streets, see Rogers, op.cit., 82-83.

¹⁷⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, quoted in Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History of American Family Life*, Free Press: New York, 1988, 56. It was also noted by Josiah Quincy who visited South Carolina in 1773. See Margaret Ripley Wolfe, *Daughters of Canaan: A Saga of Southern Women*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995, 47. Writers of advice literature condemned this custom. Dallett C. Hemphill, *Bowing to Necessities: A History of Manners in America, 1620-1860*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, 109.

¹⁷⁷ This drawing is extensively analyzed by Maurie D. McInnis. There is, however, no comment on the gender implications of the all-masculine company. Op.cit., 277-279, 286.

¹⁷⁸ Jessica Cross, loc. cit., 401.

Where was Mrs. Arthur Middleton during those leisurely afternoons where gentlemen gathered together at her house?¹⁷⁹ Was she at home in the drawing room? Was she visiting a friend? Or was she summering for her health at Sullivan's Island or at the Virginia Springs? Neither the drawing, nor the family papers tell. In the event that no ladies were at home that afternoon, why did the gentlemen not assemble in the drawing room, a much more comfortable and airy room? The answer probably lies in the strong association of the drawing room with women. More than any other room of the house, it was understood as a feminine space subject to female morality.¹⁸⁰ Even in the absence of ladies, behaviors that were deemed inappropriate in their presence were banned from the drawing room, although they could be freely indulged one floor below. When the Charleston conversation Club had meetings, women were forbidden to attend. According to Michael O'Brien, hostesses might even have presided over the dinners of the club in their town houses *in absentia*.¹⁸¹

While in the city, plantation women spent a great portion of their lives in parlors, drawing rooms and their adjoining piazzas. These spaces were dedicated to tea, visiting, and dancing, all forms of sociability over which ladies presided. The drawing room was by far the most elaborated room of the town house in terms of ornaments, decorations, and furnishing.¹⁸² Estate inventories suggest that Charlestonians invested three times more money in their drawing rooms than in their dining rooms.¹⁸³ The daily use of the drawing room by the planting family did not justify - in a purely financial sense - the money invested.¹⁸⁴ Decorated and furnished by the planter, these spaces were created for the enjoyment of ladies of leisure. When Alice Izard was informed of the domestic arrangements of her daughter Georgina, she wrote: "It gives me great pleasure to hear that their parlor is filled with so many objects of taste & literature. These can not fail to occupy, & adorn her mind. Her harp now being added to them, she can have few heavy moments, & altogether

¹⁷⁹ While some of the gentlemen on the drawing were singles, such as Middleton himself -then a widower and only to remarry three years later - his brother Arthur (1785-1837) was married to Alicia Hopton Russell (1789-1840) at the time. Longdon Cheves, "Middleton of South Carolina," *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, vol.1, no.3, July 1900, 228-262.

¹⁸⁰ Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, 67-68.

¹⁸¹ O'Brien, op.cit., 427-28.

¹⁸² The main reception room located on the second floor was sometimes called the "parlor" or the "best room."

¹⁸³ McInnis, op.cit., 133.

¹⁸⁴ My analysis of Charleston probate inventories suggest that in the country, about 40 percent of the total value attached to the movable property of the Big House was contained in these reception rooms, a proportion that reached 65 percent in the city. For example, see Book G, p.464-468; Book H, p.56-66, 102, 228 and 376-378.

she may be rendered an interesting companion for a man.”¹⁸⁵ Southern patriarchy was erected on agricultural fields, chattel slavery, great houses, but also on ladies of leisure.¹⁸⁶ Ornamental wives needed ornamental spaces just as they needed ornamental dresses. Town houses, after all, were meant to reward, to gratify plantation women.¹⁸⁷ Ultimately, it was the desire of the planter to assert his standing inside the hermetic circle of the urban elite that explains, in part, the great investment of space and capital into the drawing room.

The drawing room was usually located on the second floor and on the street side, no matter the orientation of the house. Scholars attribute this design to environmental factors; to catch the breezes and to raise the occupants of the house above the street and its dust, dirt, and odor. These environmental factors would explain why, in the nineteenth-century South, the drawing room remained on the second floor, at the very moment it was moved to the ground floor in the elite town houses of the North.¹⁸⁸ Scholars do not explain, however, why the dining room, mostly used when the thermometer was at its highest, would not have benefited from the same breezes. The analysis of the house from a gendered perspective suggests another interpretation, based on the symbolic function of the town house, and not only on practical considerations.¹⁸⁹

In 1835, the intellectual Thomas R. Dew described the drawing room as a free zone in the southern landscape, where momentarily, men and women were social equals.¹⁹⁰ The drawing room was understood as stage upon which women took a role outside of a

¹⁸⁵ Alice Izard to Margaret Izard Manigault, 6 January 1811, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

¹⁸⁶ “The leisure and gentility of white women (itself produced by domestic slaves) was, in the public record of the antebellum South, credited to the reputations of their husbands.” Walter Johnson, *Soul by South: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, 93.

¹⁸⁷ The strong association of women with drawing rooms was rarely transplanted to the country, where the decoration of the largest room of the Big House – usually the hall – was strongly influenced by the master. In his travel account, Thomas Chandler Haliburton observed: “In the hall you very frequently see the appliances for sporting – guns, belts, pouches, horns – while on the walls you will perhaps see engravings of celebrated horses.” Thomas Chandler Haliburton, *The Americans at Home; or, Byeways, Backwoods, and Prairies*, London, Hurst and Blackett, 1854, 27.

¹⁸⁸ Kenneth S. Severens, *Charleston: Antebellum Architecture and Civic Destiny*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988, 7; McInnis, op.cit., 39, 282; Albert Simons and Samuel Lapham, *The Early Architecture of Charleston*, Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1970 (1927), 22-23. On the cultural motivations behind the “healthy comfort” of piazzas, see John E. Crowley, *The Invention of Comfort: Sensibilities and Design in Early Modern Britain & Early America*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001, 230-260.

¹⁸⁹ Bernard L. Herman suggests that the design of the town house “related directly to the overall functions of the house and its outbuildings,” since “sociability, literally and symbolically, occupied a space above commercial endeavour.” Op.cit., 65.

¹⁹⁰ Thomas R. Dew, “Dissertation on the Characteristic Differences between the Sexes, and on the Position and Influence of Woman in Society,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, May-August 1835, vol.1, 507.

confining domestic sphere.¹⁹¹ Acknowledging female ascendancy over the drawing room confirmed the private nature of their contribution to the very important activities of sociability. This elevated room encapsulated the status of plantation women as ladies of leisure, as women above all the other women, both free and enslaved. Metaphorically, the location of the drawing room on the second floor, halfway between the most public and the most private rooms of the domestic space, allowed an explicit female ascendancy over a portion of the domestic space that was dedicated to the very public function of social representation. In her travel narrative *Homes of the New World* (1853), Fredrika Bremer gives a vivid portrait of the female influence over this room in Charleston:

The evening is, nevertheless, the flower of the day in this family...Then the lamps are lighted in the beautiful drawing-room, and all are summoned to tea. Then is Mrs. W. H. kind, and fat, and good, seated on the sofa, with the great tea-table before her loaded with good things; then small tea-tables are placed about (I always have my own little table to myself near the sofa), and the lively little Negro boy, Sam (Mrs. W.H.'s great favorite), carries round the refreshments. Then come in, almost always, three or four young lads, sons of neighboring friends of the family, and a couple of young girls also, and the young people dance gayly [*sic*] and gracefully to the piano, in all simplicity and good faith... Strangers, in the mean time, call and take their leave.¹⁹²

Drawing rooms were literally and symbolically endowed as “pedestal” for these women. A lady was never really a lady without a proper drawing room over which to preside. After the Civil War, Mary Pringle was forced to rent parts of her beloved town house, which she had inherited from her father. It is no coincidence that the widow reserved for herself the splendid drawing room, and not the bedroom she had shared with her husband for several decades.¹⁹³ Like most of her contemporaries, she was well aware of “the symbolic qualities of domestic space.”¹⁹⁴ Even relatively destitute, Pringle wanted to assert her standing as a lady on a pedestal.

In antebellum New Orleans and Mobile, a custom celebrated once a year the authority those women exerted over the social life of the city from the confines of their drawing

¹⁹¹ Cliona O’Gallechoir, *Maria Edgeworth: Women, Elightenment, and Nation*, University College of London: Dublin, 2005. 11; Kross, loc.cit., 403.

¹⁹² Bremer, op.cit., vol.1, 281-282.

¹⁹³ Richard N. Côté, op.cit., 350. It was in the adjoining room, the « withdrawing room or card room » of the second floor, that Mary Pringle gave birth to her thirteen children, as also did her daughter Rebecca. Ibid, 81.

¹⁹⁴ Herman, op.cit., 2.

rooms.¹⁹⁵ “New Year’s Day was the visiting day for the men, and receiving day for the ladies,” remembered Eliza Ripley.¹⁹⁶ The custom made a great impression on Bremer:

The ladies of “la haute volée” do not go out on this day, but sit at home, splendidly dressed in their drawing-rooms, which are decorated for the occasion, to receive gentlemen, who pay complimentary visits; and I have heard it said that many a gentleman who is blessed with a numerous acquaintance in good families makes himself quite ill by incessantly driving about on this day from one house to another, rushing up steps and down steps many hundred times from morning till late at night.¹⁹⁷

When Northerners settled in the Southwest, they imported the tradition of an annual gender choreography that Alice Izard had observed in New York at the beginning of the century: “this is a gay day here. All the gentlemen spend the morning in visiting their friends. The ladies are expected to be at home & treat with cake & wine. It is really pleasant to see people pay these attentions.”¹⁹⁸ In Charleston, few planters stayed in town for the holidays. Joseph Manigault remarked: “It is as unfashionable to be here at this season, as in London in summer. You meet nobody but shop keepers & tradesmen, I am heartily tired of their vulgar countenances.”¹⁹⁹ When the schools closed in December, families returned to their country house to celebrate Christmas, often bringing along friends and relatives.²⁰⁰ The presence of the absentee planters of the Lowcountry was needed, at least once a year, to display their paternalism to their slaves. After the Civil War, however, elite Orleanians progressively abandoned the tradition and spent the entire holidays in the country like their fellow Charlestonians. According to Eliza Ripley,

the beautiful custom of hospitality spread from the centers of fashion to the outskirts of society the *demi mondaines*, then the small tradesman, then the Negroes became infected with the fashion of “receiving” at New Year’s, in their various shady abodes. The bon tons gradually relinquished the hospitable and friendly custom of years. Ladies suspended tiny card receivers on the doorknob, and retired behind close blinds.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁵ Harriet E. Amos, *Cotton City: Urban Development in Antebellum Mobile*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1985, 65.

¹⁹⁶ Eliza Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans: Being Recollections of my Girlhood*, New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1912, 51. Eliza Moore, who was born in Lexington, Kentucky in 1832 had, from 1835, grown up in New Orleans, where she married a planter and then went on to live at *Arlington* plantation on the Mississippi.

¹⁹⁷ Bremer, op.cit., vol.2, 202.

¹⁹⁸ Alice Izard to Henri Izard, New York, 1 January 1807, Ralph Izard Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina. For the custom in New York, see Sven Blumin, *The Monied Metropolis: New York City and the Consolidation of the American Bourgeoisie, 1850-1896*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 44.

¹⁹⁹ Joseph Manigault to Gabriel Manigault, 30 December 1786, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

²⁰⁰ Pringle, op.cit., 156.

²⁰¹ Ripley, op.cit., 56-57.

To be valuable, such “ritualized enactment of the interchange between the occupants of rigid gender spheres” needed to be exclusive to the white elite in a racially segregated society. The New Year custom thus disappeared several decades earlier in New Orleans than in New York or San Francisco.²⁰² The rest of the year, however, visiting and tea drinking were very much homosocial activities. Parlors and drawing rooms acted therefore as the primary sites of female friendships and communities. There, they could share their thoughts and feelings, spread gossips and scandals.

The female authority over the drawing room, though, remained a delegated authority. As such, it could be curtailed by the patriarch’s will. Ultimately, he decided who could enter the drawing room. Ann Vanderhorst’s husband, Elias, despised his sister-in-law Mary Wayne, a colorful and sharp-tongued woman. In the first years of his marriage, he tolerated her presence, notably when his wife was confined in the city.²⁰³ But Wayne repeatedly criticized the planter’s penny-pinching habits and he felt that she took advantage of his hospitality. As a result, Mary was barred from the Vanderhorsts suburban villa. “Now, I have no other place to go to, but a hotel,” Mary wrote her sister, “for you are not permit [*sic*] to ask me to your house.”²⁰⁴ In spite of the planter’s opposition, the two sisters remained very close. In 1871, the planter told his daughter-in-law, “Mim & myself were married on the 4th March 1821 – 50 years on tomorrow. She is not aware of it, - so let it pass quietly – no golden wedding. That pest, Mrs Wayne, is expected – rooms taken for her at the Mills house. Mom will have a high time – a new Piano & receptions every Saturday.”²⁰⁵ The patriarch could assert his control over the domestic space, but not over the entire cityscape.

This chapter opened on the premise that understanding the urban experience of plantation women required better comprehension of the space where a Meta Morris Grimball or an Aglaé Bringier spent the greatest part of her time while in the city. Town

²⁰² Mary P. Ryan, *Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990, 30.

²⁰³ Sabina Rutherford to Ann Vanderhort, 12 May 1847, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston, South Carolina.

²⁰⁴ Mary Wayne to Ann Vanderhorst, 17 October 1857, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston, South Carolina.

²⁰⁵ Elias Vanderhorst to Della Allston Vanderhorst, 3 March 1871, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston, South Carolina.

houses were “signifiers that communicate[d] the order (and conflicts) of urban life.”²⁰⁶ The Old South placed the subordination of women at the center of its project of an organic society; as a result, intense gender politics were at work in the arrangements and uses of planters’ dwellings. Contrary to the ideology of domesticity, a town house was not “the empire of the mother,” neither an exclusively private, nor a female space.²⁰⁷ In the houses owned and decorated by fathers and husbands, there were few rooms that women might have called their own.²⁰⁸

On the eve of the Civil War, the planter class had long owned town houses in cities such as New Orleans and Charleston. Even by the mid-eighteenth century, large mansions had imposed the planting class on the visual landscape of the colonial town and affirmed their identity as members of a transatlantic elite. In the nineteenth century, the architecture and the situation of the stereotypical town house of the planter class changed as the peculiar institution came under attack. With their suburban villas, planters affirmed their agrarianism in the theater of the city. Planting men and women used town houses to represent themselves; they wanted to be seen as respectable cavaliers and ladies of leisure. Just like their elite contemporaries in the Atlantic World, the urban dwellings of planters were a “balancing of private lives and public spaces.”²⁰⁹ Largely dedicated to social representation (more so than country houses), town houses were enwrapped in symbolic meaning that held important gender implications for their inhabitants, young and old. While sons enjoyed a considerable spatial freedom, daughters’ movements in and out of the house were controlled. Town houses segmented individual experiences. While men smoked in the dining room, women drank tea in the drawing room. The elite domestic architecture – blending of individual, local, and transnational traditions - worked to ensure the subjugation of women to men, alternately mixing and segregating genders. Southern patriarchy, like all modes of oppression, was characterized by an “irreconcilable contradiction between incorporation and exclusion.”²¹⁰

Numerous voices in the South reminded women that, within the domestic space, they had to submit themselves in their movements and in shaping their environment.

²⁰⁶ Herman, *op.cit.*, 2.

²⁰⁷ Mary P. Ryan, *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing about Domesticity, 1830-1860*, New York: Haworth Press, 1982.

²⁰⁸ Joan E. Cashin, *Our Common Affairs*, *op.cit.*, 16.

²⁰⁹ Herman, *op.cit.*, 58

²¹⁰ Epperson, *loc.cit.*

Lavishly decorated parlors and drawing rooms were understood as showcases where ladies of leisure sat enthroned among objects and paintings chosen by their husbands. If she was good and subservient enough, and if she outlived her husband, the wife of a planter might then be rewarded with a dower house. Some plantation women, however, were not willing to wait until the death of their husbands to shape their environment according to their own liking. For women such as Ann Vanderhorst, repainting the parlor became a gesture of contestation of the patriarchal order and a rejection of their very own subordination. The space of the town house had escaped, however briefly, its owner's control.²¹¹

Historians have depicted the planter's town house as "a reaction to, and a retreat from, the city's public world where classes and races intermingled, and control and distinction were hard to maintain."²¹² It is more accurate, as this chapter has demonstrated, to understand it as an idealized version of urban world, where the environment was designed to control each participant. The members of the white family were not the exclusive occupants of the town house and its adjoining yard; enslaved men and women also populated and shaped the urban compound. The next chapter turns to the relations of plantation women with their slaves in the city, notably regarding urban housekeeping and the management of seasonal migrations.

²¹¹ Henri Lefebvre, *op.cit.*, 33.

²¹² McInnis, *op.cit.*, 281.

Chapter 3

Understanding Something of City Housekeeping: Racial Politics in the Urban Household

In October 1855, Louisa and Louis St. Martin left the family plantation to establish themselves permanently in New Orleans at the outskirts of the French Quarter.¹ The departure of the young couple and their children created “un bien grand vide” in St. Jean-Baptiste Parish.² A woman with few inclinations for urban life, Louisa had long postponed the move, preferring extended separations from her husband, who accumulated political offices and public charges, to distancing herself from her relatives.³ After years of resistance, she reluctantly agreed to settle in the Crescent City when the couple’s children reached school age.⁴ During the first few weeks on Claude Street, Louisa suffered from a “spleen affreux” that she found hard to overcome.⁵ Fortunately, in the city, her brother Rosémond frequently came for dinner. Her mother also intended to spend the winter in the city, so the pair of women would be able to see each other two or three times a week. Urban life meant a whole set of new occupations for the plantation woman. Until then, Louisa had never been the primary housekeeper; instead, she assisted her mother, a very capable woman, in the management of the domestic industries of the plantation. Becoming an urban housekeeper was a great challenge for Louisa since, according to her mother, she did not have the “tempérament assez fort pour soutenir à autant de fatigues.”⁶ From now on, the young woman in her mid-twenties would supervise the work of three enslaved servants, manage food and butchery, sew clothing for her children, and run errands for her family and her country relations.

Living in New Orleans also meant that Louisa had to negotiate a new set of relations with the slaves of the family. Her mother kept servants in the city who, during her absences

¹ The name is alternately spelled St-Martin and St. Martin.

² “a great void.” Louise St. Martin to Rosémond Perret, 26 October 1855, St. Martin Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

³ Louis St. Martin to Louisa Perret St. Martin, 12 March 1848, St. Martin Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁴ “a horrible spleen.” Louise St. Martin to Louisa Perret St. Martin, 24 October 1854, St. Martin Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁵ Louisa Perret St. Martin to Louise St. Martin, 6 November 1855, St. Martin Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁶ “temperament strong enough to support so many fatigues.” Louise St. Martin to Rosémond Perret, 26 October 1855, St. Martin Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

in the country, were hiring out their services. Henceforth, Louisa acted as the intermediary between her mother and her human properties. The slave Emélane was doing well. Rented for \$7 per month to Mrs. Marcial in the “faubourg d’en bas,”⁷ Emélane pleased her new mistress very much : “cette dame est bien peinée d’être aubligée de la rendre à la fin de son mois, elle aurait voulu la garder au moins un an.”⁸ Emélane was recalled to the plantation, but she did not want to go, wrote Louisa to her mother: “Surtout qu’Emélane n’a pas du tout l’envie de monter.”⁹ The slave’s wish was fulfilled when Mrs. St. Martin finally decided to loan Emélane to her daughter to become the nursemaid of Fanny, a sickly child.¹⁰ Fanny often awoke at night, as she adjusted with difficulty to the new town house: “Elle se croit toujours en voyage. Le premier soir de son arrivée, elle a fait une scène pour retourner disait-elle dormir dans son lit là bas dans sa maison chez sa grande et depuis dix fois par jour elle me demande à partir.”¹¹ As with little Fanny, the slave Sinthie also longed of the country.¹² Upon her arrival in the city, Louisa had noticed that her mother’s slave looked emaciated.¹³ Hired out to Madame Esclason, the servant displeased her temporary mistress who accused her of stealing.¹⁴ Sinthie was less fortunate than her fellow slave, for two years later, she was still in New Orleans against her will.

In the city, as in the country, mistresses such as Louisa St. Martin and servants such as Emélane and Sinthie belonged to a common household. “Slaveholders defined the household in part as a place” explains Kirsten Wood, “but a household also comprised the “domestic relations” contained within its physical space, namely marriage, parenthood, and servitude.”¹⁵ As they moved along the rural-urban continuum, planting families also moved

⁷ “lower faubourg.”

⁸ “This lady is sorry of having to let her go at the end of the month; she would had like to keep her for at least another year.”

⁹ “Especially since Emélane really does not feel like going up.” Louisa Perret St. Martin to Louise St. Martin, 23 October 1855, St. Martin Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁰ Louisa Perret St. Martin to Louise St. Martin, 6 November 1855, St. Martin Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹¹ “She still believes that she is traveling. The first night of our arrival, she made a fuss to return, she said, sleeping in her bed in her grandmother’s house and for the last ten days, she has been asking me to leave.” Louisa Perret St. Martin to Louise St. Martin, 23 October 1855, St. Martin Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹² Her name is alternately spelled “Sinthie” or “Cinthie” by the St. Martins.

¹³ Louisa Perret St. Martin to Louise St. Martin, 23 October 1855, St. Martin Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁴ Louisa Perret St. Martin to Louise St. Martin, 6 November 1855, St. Martin Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁵ Kirsten E. Wood, *Masterful Women: Slaveholding Widows from the American Revolution through the Civil War*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004, 3. For an extended discussion of the concept, see Elizabeth Fox-

these “complex relations of kinship and commerce among... slave and free, male and female.”¹⁶ Since the pioneering work of Julia Cherry Spruill, historians have extensively documented the work lives of plantation women to deconstruct the mythology of the leisured southern lady.¹⁷ A plantation mistress’ day was, according to Marli Weiner, “an endless stream of work.”¹⁸ Central to a white woman’s identity on the plantation, housekeeping becomes, paradoxically, invisible work in the city. Elite urban women are described in the historiography as the leisurely ones, seemingly performing no labor in their urban household and delegating to small armies of enslaved domestics the most menial tasks.¹⁹ In towns and cities of the Old South, plantation women seemed to embody the ideal of the lady on a pedestal, of lady of leisure. There, they were “slave-made ladies,” relieved from work by the servants whom their husbands (or fathers) had purchased in the slave market. Ladies, remarks Walter Johnson, “perhaps more than anyone else marked out the class hierarchy of the antebellum South.”²⁰ Historians of plantation women generally agree with this interpretation, understanding time spent in the city as a break from the plantation routine and the town house as a smaller and simpler space where housekeeping was not very demanding. The work lives of urban slaves, both males and females, are better documented.²¹ Historians have generally understood urban slavery as a more desirable form of oppression. If it involved a greater spatial proximity between masters and servants, it also meant highly skilled labor, the possibility of hiring oneself out, and of interacting with other slaves and free blacks. Scholars have suggested that relationships between owner and owned

Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988, 82-88.

¹⁶ James D. Miller, *South by Southwest: Planter Emigration and Identity in the Slave South*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002, 9.

¹⁷ Julia Cherry Spruill, *Women’s Life and Work in the Southern Colonies*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1938; Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995 (1970); Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Women’s World in the Old South*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1982.

¹⁸ Marli F. Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-1880*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998, 31.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 48; Cynthia Megan Kennedy, *Braided Relations, Entwined Lives: The Women of Charleston’s Urban Slave Society*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005, 131.

²⁰ Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, 93.

²¹ The pioneering work being Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820-1860*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1964. See also Claudia Dale Goldin, *Urban Slavery in the American South, 1820-1860: A Quantitative History*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976.

in the urban setting were especially complex, involved a great deal of negotiation and a balance of power more advantageous to the enslaved.²²

If keeping house in the city was a challenge for the inexperienced Louisa St. Martin, it was also demanding for the seasoned plantation mistress as the following pages reveal. Being away from the plantation and its domestic industries did not mean that plantation women led a life of leisure. They were household managers on the plantation, but also in the city where they ran households inhabited by ten, twenty, and sometimes even thirty persons, whites and blacks. Housekeeping occupied several hours in a plantation woman's day when she was in the city. It was also at the center of her interactions with slaves; racial politics circumscribed housekeeping within the town house. At the outset, this chapter shows that if urban housekeeping was primarily a responsibility of married white women, it affected every member of the planting household; free and enslaved, male and female, young and old. Second, it examines the logistics of the seasonal migration, in terms of organization, transportation of people and baggage, and distribution of house servants. Next, it delineates the virtues of the good urban housekeeper - industry, frugality, and hospitality, paradoxical virtues in a society that celebrated the leisure of its white women. Last and most importantly, this chapter explores the racial politics prompted by urban housekeeping, which abounded with regulation, disciplining, resistance, and negotiation.

For elite women, urban housekeeping was inextricable from the supervision of enslaved servants. Urban slavery was at its pinnacle in 1830 across the South. It declined in the following decades as the city competed with the country for the labor supply.²³ Prices were high in the slave market, especially for male hands who could work in the ever-expanding cotton fields. This has led some historians to describe slavery as a "marginal"

²² Virginia Meachan Gould, "If I Can't Have My Rights, I Can Have My Pleasures, And If They Won't Give Me Wages, I Can Take Them": Gender and Slave Labor in Antebellum New Orleans," Patricia Morton, ed., *Discovering the Women in Slavery: Emancipating Perspectives on the American Past*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996, 181.

²³ Urban slavery declined everywhere in the South, except in Natchez during the first six decades of the nineteenth century. D. Clayton James, *Antebellum Natchez*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968, 162.

institution in towns and cities of the antebellum South.²⁴ “Slavery is from its very nature eminently patriarchal and altogether agricultural,” a Louisiana planter affirmed, “it does not thrive with master or slave when transplanted to cities.”²⁵ Nonetheless, slaves were still very much in demand in the city and first-rate servants were costly. From the point of view of plantation women, slavery was central to their urban experience and to the domestic economy of their town houses. The great majority of urban enslaved men and women worked as domestics: 72 per cent of adult slaves in Charleston in 1848.²⁶ When in town, planting families could not live without servants, and some counted them by the dozens. It was especially true in Charleston and Natchez. Of the 2873 heads of families in Charleston in 1830, 401 listed at least ten slaves and another additional 106 listed more than twenty.²⁷ Natchez nabobs were also fond of large retinues of servants. The Duncans tallied twenty-three house servants at *Auburn*, while the Marshalls counted thirty-two at *Richmond Hill*.²⁸ Aristocratic Charlestonians and Natchezians tended to attach a greater importance to the number – and thus to the display – of servants than to their efficiency.²⁹ In New Orleans, large slaveholders were proportionately less numerous with 215 masters owning more than ten slaves, but only an additional twenty-two listed more than twenty.³⁰ There the wealthiest planters usually managed their household with fewer domestics. The Bringiers, while they were among the richest slaveowners of the entire South, had only eleven domestics, which was considered a large retinue of servants in New Orleans where most elite urban households made do with two to five domestics.³¹ This difference can be largely explained by the great demand for field hands in the antebellum New Orleans slave market and the

²⁴ Robert Fogel, *Without Consent of Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1989, 42. The proportion of slaves steadily declined in the cities of the antebellum South, in great part because of the influx of white immigrants and the rural demand for slave labor. Historians, starting with Richard C. Wade in *Slavery in the Cities*, have long argued that “slavery was incompatible with urbanization,” which would have explained the decline. Revisionist interpretations insist instead on the increasing demand for slaves in antebellum southern urban centers. See Claudia Dale Goldin, op.cit.

²⁵ Samuel Walker, quoted in Wade, op.cit., 3-4.

²⁶ Maurie D. McInnis, *The Politics of Taste in Antebellum Charleston*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005, 68. These figures are fragmentary, and no equivalents are available for Savannah, New Orleans and Natchez during the same period.

²⁷ Holdings tended to diminish over the next few decades, on account of the strong demand for field hands. Some of the slaves included in large holdings were not domestic servants, but employed on steamboats or in manufacturing. Wade, op.cit., 22.

²⁸ D. Clayton James, op.cit., 150, 155.

²⁹ Richard N. Côté, *Mary's World: Love, War, and Family Ties in Nineteenth-century Charleston*, Mount Pleasant, S.C.: Corinthian Books, 87-88.

³⁰ For a slightly larger free population. Goldin, op.cit., 20.

³¹ William K. Scarborough, *Masters of the Big House: Elite Slaveholders of the Mid-Nineteenth-Century South*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 435.

availability of white and black labor on a temporary basis. This does not mean that large households were not found in the Crescent City.³² In 1860, Céline Roman kept eighteen slaves in her town house on Royal Street where she lived with one of her daughters. The group was composed of three men, seven women, five adolescents, and three children.³³ A member of the Creole elite, Roman faced serious financial troubles and was known to live above her means. Then again, the number of house servants, just like the number of field hands, was an important indicator of a family status in the Old South, although it remains a very imperfect measure of wealth for the historian.³⁴

What characterized slavery in the urban household, especially after 1820, was the gender imbalance between male and female slaves, women outnumbering men.³⁵ In the city, enslaved women performed the great majority of household chores.³⁶ In the country, too, domestics were mostly women.³⁷ In both places, they worked as cooks, nurses, laundresses, seamstresses, maids, and clearstarchers.³⁸ Always on call, enslaved domestics worked long hours. Yet, for this majority of female urban domestics, conditions of slavery differed greatly from the plantation.³⁹ In the city, female servants were more autonomous and “their work often carried them into the bustling streets, alleyways, and markets of the city.”⁴⁰ Markets, points out Virginia Meacham Gould, “belonged to slave women,” where they could “disseminate information” beyond the surveillance of their owners, and where they “created

³² In colonial New Orleans, the Almonesters “were served by forty-four house slaves in their residence at the corner of the plaza on St. Peter Street.” Christina Vella, *Intimate Enemies: The Two Worlds of the Baroness de Pontalba*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997, 51-52.

³³ The occupation of all these slaves is not specified in the inventory. They were perhaps all employed as house servants for the widow Roman or some of them might have hired their time. Estate Inventory of the Estate of the late Jacques Téléphore Roman, 24 April 1860, Félix Grima, Public Notary, New Orleans, [translation of the original], Roman Family Papers, Tulane University Special Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

³⁴ In Charleston, the eldest son of the Pringles, Alston, counted ten servants in his town house, although he constantly struggled financially to earn a middle-class income. Côté, *op.cit.*, 123.

³⁵ In New Orleans, the sex ratio in 1771 was 126.8 female slaves for every 100 male slaves. In 1850, the sex ratio reached 149.5 female for every 100 male slaves. Wade, *op.cit.*, 23; Gould, *loc.cit.*, 185.

³⁶ Gould, *Ibid.*, 188.

³⁷ Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women & Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004, 32.

³⁸ Harriot Horry Rutledge Ravenel, *Charleston: The Place and The People*, New York: MacMillan, 1906, 399.

³⁹ According to Gould, “the conditions of slavery on the plantation must be understood as unique to the plantation and should not be transposed onto other forms of slavery. Nowhere is it more obvious that slavery could mean different things to different women than when comparing the day-to-day experiences of slave women living in antebellum New Orleans to those living on the plantations outside the city.” Gould, *loc.cit.*, 179.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 190.

a community.”⁴¹ Sending a female slave to live in a Charleston yard meant to James Henry Hammond turning her “loose in the town.”⁴² Although enslaved women lived in closer proximity to their owners in urban settings, their access to urban spaces paradoxically had the capacity to erode the absolute power of their mistresses. Mary Chesnut was told by her mother-in-law “not to send [her] female servants in the street on errands. They were there tempted, led astray.”⁴³ As women, however, they enjoyed less freedom than their male counterparts.⁴⁴ Since white women filled the role of housekeepers, and since enslaved women constituted the great majority of domestics, housekeeping was widely understood as a women’s sphere that reinforced gender identity across the color line.⁴⁵ When they were dutiful, skilled female servants were highly valued by their mistresses as workers and as companions. “Joint work and the ideology of domesticity, which encouraged white women to emphasize what they shared with black women – biology, home, family, children, nurturing, domestic work – also encouraged them to identify emotionally with them,” argues Weiner.⁴⁶ As a result, female slaveholders in towns and cities demonstrated a strong preference for female slaves.⁴⁷ This emotional bond, however, remained profoundly asymmetrical. In the words of one mistress, her maid was “the comfort – animal comfort – of [her] every day life.”⁴⁸

This does not mean that men, either free or enslaved, were entirely cut off from housekeeping. A minority of enslaved men worked as household servants and those who did (with the exception of the body-servant), worked under the authority of the mistress of the house, who was the primary supervisor on a day-to-day basis. In the wealthiest families, they often occupied the most prestigious functions and the least supervised. They were the butlers, footmen, coachmen, and body-servants of the master and of his eldest sons. They

⁴¹ Ibid., 191; see also Weiner, op.cit., 48. Studies of urban slave women concentrate on Latin America and the Caribbean. See Barbara Bush, *Slave Women in Caribbean Society, 1650-1838*, Kingston: Heinemann Caribbean; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990; Marietta Morrissey, *Slave Women in the New World: Gender Stratification in the Caribbean*, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989; Hilary Beckles, *Natural Rebels: A Social History of Enslaved Women in Barbados*, New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1989.

⁴² Carol Bleser, ed., *The Hammonds of Redcliffe*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1981, 11.

⁴³ 18 March 1861, C. Van Woodward and Elizabeth Muhlenfeld, ed., *The Private Mary Chesnut: the Unpublished Civil War Diaries*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1984, 42.

⁴⁴ Camp, op.cit. 28.

⁴⁵ Weiner, op.cit., 151.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 87.

⁴⁷ Gould, loc.cit., 185; See also Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1984.

⁴⁸ Côté, op.cit., 284; C.f. Jeffrey Robert Young, *Domesticating Slavery: The Master Class in Georgia and South Carolina, 1670-1837*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999, 110.

benefited from a greater spatial mobility than their female counterparts, navigating outside the house in their functions as gardeners, coachmen, and stable boys. The footmen, for instance, waited at the table, attended the door, and ran various errands. The butler was especially prominent in the city, as he was closely associated with refined performances of gentility and supervised the work of some of his fellow slaves.⁴⁹ According to Harriot Ravenel, Charlestonians took great pride in the skills of their servants:

Harry, the butler of Mrs. Henry IZARD, [had] the reputation of being the best and most thoroughly trained servant in the town. From the judging of the wines to the arrangement of a salt spoon there was nothing which these withered brown potentates did not decide and maintain. Nothing would have astonished either more than that master or mistress should dissent from his verdict... Jack [another butler] was intolerant of anything which he considered a breach of the etiquette of the table. Nothing could have induced him to serve a gentleman before a lady, or a younger before an elder brother. To place fruit and wine on a table-cloth instead of upon the mahogany was to him a falling from grace.⁵⁰

In the hagiographic histories of Charleston, the butler in the urban household occupied a place of his own, comparable to the status of the Mammy in the mythology of the plantation.⁵¹

For their part, white men retained the title of masters of the household, or in the words of a plantation woman, they were the “housekeepers.”⁵² When Richard Colcock became Superintendent of the Citadel, the military college of Charleston, his brother William wrote to their mother that in the management of their new urban establishment the Major and his wife were facing several challenges. “He begin [*sic*] to understand something of city housekeeping,” remarked Colcock.⁵³ Widely understood as a woman’s responsibility, housekeeping was nonetheless ultimately supervised by men, more or less closely depending on the dynamic of every family. They allocated the monies, disciplined the servants, and decided who would receive their hospitality and who would be entertained in their house. “Representing the household’s collective interest in the wider world,” white men were supposed to govern their domestic dependents, free and enslaved.⁵⁴ What was happening on

⁴⁹ McInnis, *op.cit.*, 258.

⁵⁰ Ravenel, *op.cit.*, 472-473.

⁵¹ Patricia Morton, “My Ol’ Black Mammy” in *American Historiography*, Caroline Matheny Dillman, ed., *Southern Women*, New York: Hemisphere Publishing, 1988, 35-45.

⁵² Mary Ann Lamar Cobb to Howell Cobb, 8 January 1850, quoted in Cashin, *Our Common Affairs: Texts from Women in the Old South*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996, 246-247.

⁵³ William Ferguson Colcock to Mary Colcock, 20 January 1850, Colcock Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁵⁴ Wood, *op.cit.*, 3.

the domestic front concerned them very much. When their household was run smoothly, their image was increased in the community. When it was not, whether because their wives were overspending, the entertaining in their home was not up to the highest standards of refinement, or their house servants were poorly trained or treated too harshly, a white man faced a failure of manhood. His reputation in the city was a stake. Elias Vanderhorst, for instance, understood the attachment of his wife for the nurse Maryam, a free mulatto woman with whom she traveled north during the summer. But in spite of his wife's insistence, he would not let the much-appreciated Maryam become a servant in his household:

You must recollect that I told you distinctly I could not make any arrangement whatever for her return to this place. I am one of the standing committee of the S.C. Association & appointee for the express purpose of preventing mulattoes & Negroes from returning to this place, therefore you see that I cannot without loss of reputation have anything to do in this business.⁵⁵

He encouraged instead his wife to hire a white woman. The sexual division of labor – and of authority - within the urban household reinforced the gender identity of both men and women, free and enslaved.

Primarily a responsibility of white women, the details of urban housekeeping concerned every member of the planting family. Housekeeping was a recurring theme of family correspondence, and was freely discussed between husband and wife, mother and daughter, or mother and son. The role that each member of a household was called to play in urban housekeeping was learned early: slaves were to serve, masters to manage. Trained from childhood, young blacks worked as little nurses or as fanners in the dining room. Older servants taught younger ones: the cook had her scullions, the butler his footmen, and the coachman his grooms and stable boys. Often born in the yard, they were offspring of house servants who perceived themselves as belonging to a particular caste of slaves. White children also learned the skills needed to become good housekeepers, starting with the good management of servants. White girls were taught to sew, to do needlework, to raise poultry, to write invitations, and to cultivate a garden. For a few years in the 1850s, the family of Annie Jeter lived in a place called *The Orange Grove* located at the corner of Chesnut and St.

⁵⁵ Elias Vanderhorst to Ann Morris Vanderhorst, 3 October 1835, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston, South Carolina. The planter was probably a member of the "Committee of Vigilance and Safety" created after the Vesey plot. Beatrice St. Julien Ravenel, *Architects of Charleston*, Charleston: Carolina Art Association, 1945, 136.

Andrew streets, then in the suburban part of New Orleans.⁵⁶ In her memoirs, she notes: “I had a flower garden and spent much time in it. Old Uncle Sampson worked it for me.”⁵⁷ When she was at school, a young slave was in charge of cleaning it up.⁵⁸ Raven Vanderhorst was still in her teens and was already initiated to the benefits of domestic industry. She raised her own poultry in the yard of the family villa in Charleston Neck as she told her cousin: “My hens and chickens have arrived from the country and I will sell them when they grow larger to get some pocket money as I am very badly off for money at present having spent all my weeks allowance in having a feast between Jane Heyward which made us both sick.”⁵⁹ The birds were probably sold by slaves in the city market, although the family archives do not tell. Parents insisted on training eldest daughters in the mechanics of a well-run household, for these could be called on in the event that a mother should pass away prematurely.⁶⁰ By the same token, sons were not entirely removed from the details of housekeeping. In the winter, when Meta and John Grimball were at the plantation, “Berkley the eldest has charge of the housekeeping, and the others complain of his obstinacy, and selfishness. He is scrupulously honest, and good tempered; but certainly determined to have his own way.”⁶¹ During the summer, John, one of the youngest sons and Meta’s favorite, “assisted with the house keeping” to the great pleasure of his mother.⁶² Such experiences better prepared young men to supervise their households when the time would come to take a bride.

As the story of Louisa St. Martin illustrates, getting married did not automatically mean that a plantation woman became a housekeeper. Young couples often cohabited with the parents of one of the spouses for a few years.⁶³ Older women were attached to the title of

⁵⁶ The house had a “large pigeon house, two rabbit houses, a duck pond, two deep wells, a long kitchen house and stable.” Annie Jeter Carmouche Memoirs, 5, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁹ Anna Raven Vanderhorst to Josephine, 27 May 1842, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston.

⁶⁰ Such did Emmeline S. Colcock in November 1858 when her mother passed away. 2 November 1858, William Colcock to Emmeline S. Colcock, Colcock Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana. See also Joanna Bowen Gillespie, *The Life and Time of Martha Laurens Ramsay, 1759-1811*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001, 36; Anya Jabour, *Scarlett’s Sisters: Young Women in the Old South*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007, 96-97.

⁶¹ Meta Morris Grimball, “The Boys Housekeeping in Charleston,” Pinebury, December 1856, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston.

⁶² Meta Morris Grimball, “My dear John,” Charleston, 15 October 1856, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston.

⁶³ Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, *A Family of Women: The Carolina Petigrus in Peace and War*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999, 56-57.

mistress of the household, a position of authority that came with a seat at the head of the table and which most women were only willing to forego when very old and feeble.⁶⁴ When she wintered in Charleston, Alice Izard requested that her daughter-in-law, the usual housekeeper of the house on South Bay, move back to her parents' home for the duration of Alice's sojourn in town. There was no room for two mistresses in one household.⁶⁵ Some women kept the title of housekeeper long after they stopped assuming the responsibilities, being 'helped' by unmarried sister-in-laws or older daughters who shared the same roof in the city.⁶⁶

Sooner or later, when young couples took up housekeeping, the skills of older women were sought after by their offspring. In the first few years of her marriage to William Falconer, Aurora Morgan had learned to keep house in New Orleans. Eventually, the couple settled in Pointe Coupée Parish, where William started planting. Once widowed, Aurora took over the planting business and became known as a skilled planter and an accomplished housekeeper. In 1860, her son Ramsay decided to follow in his father's footsteps and established himself in New Orleans. At first, Ramsay and his bride Ninn boarded with "a nice old lady."⁶⁷ Soon, however, the lack of space, freedom, and privacy started to weigh heavily on the young couple. Ramsay purchased a small house, which he furnished and fixed up for Ninn, just as his father had done for his mother thirty years earlier.⁶⁸ In this venture, the young man requested the help of his mother at two levels. He needed, first, "six or eight Balls [*sic*] cotton," and, second, her precious domestic skills: "you must come & stay with us & learn us how to keep house."⁶⁹ Although spatially separated, mother and offspring were bound together by housekeeping.

⁶⁴ Eliza Cope Harrison, *Best Companions: Letters of Eliza Middleton Fisher and her Mother, Mary Hering Middleton, from Charleston, Philadelphia, and Newport, 1839-1846*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001, 473.

⁶⁵ Alice Delancey Izard to Henry Izard, 2 April 1807, Ralph Izard Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

⁶⁶ Elizabeth W. Allston Pringle, *Chronicles of Chicora Wood*, Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 57; Pease and Peape, *op.cit.*, 89.

⁶⁷ Ramsay Falconer to Aurora Falconer, 6 March 1860, Morgan-Falconer Family Papers, 1827-1905, New Orleans Historical Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁶⁸ Ramsay Falconer to Aurora Falconer, 17 March 1860, Morgan-Falconer Family Papers, 1827-1905, New Orleans Historical Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁶⁹ Ramsay Falconer to Aurora Falconer, 13 July 1860, Morgan-Falconer Family Papers, 1827-1905, New Orleans Historical Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

In most planting families, the organization of seasonal migrations was the province of the mistress of the house. If men generally decided where and when to go, women were usually in charge of the details. Since these migrations meant moving an entire household, they were grand undertakings. Several weeks ahead, Meta Morris Grimball started preparing the migration that would see her husband, her youngest children, a few servants, and her things returning to the town house on Meeting Street in Charleston. Moving a household was a complicated and demanding business. These seasonal migrations to the city or to the sea were dreaded by Adèle Allston, recounts her daughter:

the packing up of everything necessary for comfort for every member of the household for the summer and autumn was terrific. It required so much thought, so many lists, so much actual labor. At the same time carpets, curtains, and all the winter clothing had to be aired, sunned, and put up with camphor against the moths. She was pretty well worn out and tired by this new aspect of her future life, this upheaval and earthquakes to be gone through twice a year, so that when she stepped into the boat she was not her gayest self.⁷⁰

The migration was one of the most time-consuming tasks performed by plantation mistresses and, as Catherine Clinton remarks, “the aggravations of transplanting a household at least somewhat offset the social benefits that rewarded such a move.”⁷¹ For some women, especially during their childbearing years, the migration was such a taxing undertaking that they would rather stay at the plantation all year long. Others feared that during their absence, their well-trained servants would take up bad habits that would be hard to break upon their return.⁷² In some families, such as the Vanderhorsts, men took charge of most of the details of the migration. These men were the exceptions that proved the rule, as Ann Vanderhorst acknowledged: “if ever their [*sic*] was an American lady who had reason to be spoiled it is myself.”⁷³

The transportation of people and things was an important aspect of the migration.⁷⁴ The geographic location of the wealthiest planters along the main river roads – in South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi or Louisiana - favored their mobility. For planting families who did not own a boat or lived further inland, traveling to the city was a costly and

⁷⁰ Pringle, *op.cit.*, 70.

⁷¹ Clinton, *op.cit.*, 176.

⁷² Weiner, *op.cit.*, 40.

⁷³ Ann Vanderhorst to Sabrina Rutherford, 21 June [no year], Vanderhorst Family Paper, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston.

⁷⁴ Lawrence Fay Brewster, *Summer Migrations and Resorts of South Carolina Low-Country Planters*, New York: AMS Press, 1947, 11.

time-consuming affair. For most of the nineteenth century, the ferries available in the Lowcountry fell short of the planter class's expectations. In 1801, Alice Izard advised her daughter, then at the plantation *Silkhope* in the Lowcountry: "Let me tell you too that you must not think of coming to town by Clement Ferry for it is worse than ever."⁷⁵ As late as 1866, there was no proper link between Edisto Island and Charleston and, according to a planter, the boat used was "scarcely fit for a man to travel on, much less a lady."⁷⁶ Either in Louisiana or South Carolina, carriages were also often used for the transportation of people, although bad road conditions after a heavy rain could delay a trip between country and city. By the late antebellum period, traveling had become easier for planters who had access to railroads. For the Grimball family, the migration was a complex process, reveals the plantation mistress' diary: "The boat has gone off to Town, and carried our numerous things and some of the servants and Elizabeth, Ella, & Lotty go off on Thursday [by the Charleston-Hamburg Railroad] and we the next day."⁷⁷ Baggage was often transported separately on schooners, either owned or rented.⁷⁸ For the Hilliard family, the annual winter visit to New Orleans meant several steps. First, they rode a carriage from their Arkansas plantation to the train depot. Then they took the cars to Vicksburg, where they boarded a steamboat that descended the Mississippi. After a stop at Natchez, they finally reached their destination.⁷⁹

Waterways were easy and popular migration routes. Steamboats, widespread in the antebellum period, belonged to a special category. On the Mississippi River, planters, servants, and baggage traveled to cities like Natchez and New Orleans on true floating palaces that connected plantations, towns, and cities.⁸⁰ As entrepreneurs competed to offer their elite clientele the most luxurious vessels, trips became highly ritualized affairs.⁸¹ Eliza

⁷⁵ Alice Izard Deas to Margaret Izard Manigault, 3 November 1801, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

⁷⁶ J. Townsend to Phoebe Townsend, 26 March 1866, Sosnowski Family Papers-Townsend Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston.

⁷⁷ Meta Morris Grimball, Diary, 8 May 1860, 31, Documenting the American South Project at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

⁷⁸ The Horrys, the Vanderhorst, and the Middletons, all owned their own schooners. Harrison, op.cit., 102.

⁷⁹ Miriam Badger Hilliard, 12-17 February 1850, Typescript, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁸⁰ Before the steamboats became widespread, "transportation between the country and the city is carried on by an active navigation service for several hundreds of leagues." Pierre Clément de Laussat, *Memoirs of My Life to My Son During the Years 1803 and After*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978, 24.

⁸¹ All steamboats were not equal. While the *Magnolia* was "a palace," the *M.W.* was "unendurable," "a hovel". Miriam Badger Hilliard, Diary, 25 January 1850, Typescript, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Ripley remembered the atmosphere on *La Belle Creole* during a trip she took in the plantation country in the 1850s:

In the cabin the scene is like that of an “afternoon tea,” an “at home,” a “reception,” whatever you will, for everybody knows everybody, and everybody shakes hands with everybody, and thus the newcomer is welcomed to the social atmosphere of a circle of Creole friends. “Comment ca va? Aye! Quel chance! c’est toi, are heard on every side, for some of these people rarely meet except in transit.⁸²

Such scenes were not exclusive to the Southwest, but were also observed by Fredrika Bremer on the Savannah River, while she was on her way to Augusta, Georgia:

In the saloon, a throng of handsome, but wild young girls, who had made, on their own account, a pleasure-party, and now ran about here and there, chattering, calling to one another, and laughing; and on deck, a few gentlemen, planters, who were polite and wished to talk, but talked only of “cotton, cotton, cotton,” and how the world was beginning to busy itself about American cotton.⁸³

What had been tiresome trips in the early nineteenth century dreaded by most plantation women became occasions of sociability. As time went on and means of transportation improved, planting families traveled more often and went further afield.⁸⁴

Each member of the household was reminded of his place in society while traveling between town house and country house. Steamboats and trains segregated ladies and gentlemen in different sections.⁸⁵ The very first generation of steamboats featured two cabins: one for men, one for women.⁸⁶ The ladies’ cabin was located under the upper deck, the quietest place on the boat. It counted twenty beds and the windows were decorated with white curtains. On the deck, there was an elegant circular cabin, reserved for gentlemen.⁸⁷ Although larger and more luxurious than the ladies’, the gentlemen’s cabin was also the dirtiest; the occupants being in the habit of spitting tobacco all over the carpet. Men could not enter the women’s cabin without the authorization of all the ladies present; the rule on board provided a fine of two dollars for transgressors.⁸⁸ There was no female equivalent of

⁸² Eliza Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans: Being Recollections of my Girlhood*, New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1912, 182-183; see also Miriam Badger Hilliard, *Diary*, 12 February 1850, Typescript, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁸³ Fredrika Bremer, *The Homes of the New World: Impressions of America*, Translated by Mary Howitt, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1854., vol.1, 360.

⁸⁴ John Hope Franklin, *A Southern Odyssey: Travelers in the Antebellum North*, Louisiana State University Press: Baton Rouge, 1976.

⁸⁵ Mary D. Robertson, ed. *A Confederate Lady Comes of Age: The Journal of Pauline DeCaradenc Heyward, 1863-1888*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992, 37.

⁸⁶ Frances Trollope quoted in Liliane Crété, *La vie quotidienne en Louisiane, 1815-1830*, Paris: Hachette, 1978, 347.

⁸⁷ J.G. Frugel, quoted in Crété, op.cit., 347-48.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 348.

this regulation on steamboats, since a lady did not risk two dollars by entering the gentlemen's cabin, but instead risked her reputation and her social standing. Trains likewise provided a gendered experience as Pauline DeCaradeuc recorded in her journal after a trip to Augusta during the Civil War:

A funny circumstance happened on the car day before yesterday. Daughter & I could't get seats in the ladies' car & had to go in the soldiers'. We were in the shade of the door, when three officers came in, and sat ahead of us, one very coolly pulled off his coat, then his vest, then his cravat & collar, & dear knows how much more would have come off, when he turned and saw me; they were all behaving shamefully smoking, drinking, &c., when they discovered us, they seemed terribly abashed & the one in dishabille instantly retired "to dress."⁸⁹

When they did not travel with a white person, blacks – either free or enslaved - were sent to their own sections of the boat or train, their lower status reflected in cheaper fares.⁹⁰ Such spatial segregation provided them with a brief window of unsupervised socializing.

At each step of the migration, enslaved servants were omnipresent. They performed most of the packing under the supervision of the mistress. When the family was ready to depart, a slave was "stationed on the levee from landing to listen for the boat whistle, generally heard and recognized as to name while the boat was many miles away." The family then drove in carriage to the river, while, the "spotter" waved "a large cloth or flat to get the pilot's attention, thus bringing the boat in for a landing."⁹¹ Enslaved men constituted the majority of workers on steamboats, some of them being the property of planters who hired out their time.⁹² Servants, mostly women, accompanied the planting family to the city. When the widow Amélie Drausin Fortier traveled between New Orleans and her plantation *Le Pélican*, she took the *Laurel Hill* with her four children and a retinue of three or four servants.⁹³ In early June, Céline Roman and her son and daughters usually boarded the *Belle Creole* or the *Music* in the company of eight or nine servants, children and adults. The group typically returned to the city at the end of September. Each migration was relatively

⁸⁹ Robertson, ed., op.cit., 73.

⁹⁰ In train, the last two or three cars at the end were "appropriated to coloured gentlemen and ladies." Joseph Holt Ingraham, *The South-West. By a Yankee*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835, vol.1, 172.

⁹¹ William Edward Clement, *Plantation Life on the Mississippi*, New Orleans: Firebird Press, 2000 (1952), 176.

⁹² Annie Jeter Carmouche Memoirs, 6, Tulane Special Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁹³ Freight Bill, Steamer C.D. Jr. Dr. New Orleans and Bayou Sara Packet, 20 February 1854; Receipt of passage to Steamer Laurel Hill, Dr. April 21 [no year], Brou-Rivest Family Papers, New Orleans Historical Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

expensive for Céline Roman, thirty to forty dollars each way for the group.⁹⁴ Slaves traveling alone were also encountered aboard, charged by their masters of some errands in the city.

In most planting families, the composition of the household of servants was not exactly the same from country to city. Rarely did an entire household migrate. There were exceptions, of course. One of the most conspicuous -and the most cited - was the Westons, rice planters near Georgetown. In her *Chronicles of Chicora Wood*, Elizabeth Pringle remembers:

Mrs. Weston, once speaking to my mother of the terrible move to and from the city each spring and fall said: “We have to take fifty individuals with us in the move, I mean children and all.”

My mother: “Why, Elizabeth, how is that possible?”

She answered: “We cannot possibly separate husband and wife for six months; so Harry, the coachman, has to have his wife and children, and the same with the cook, and the butler, and the laundress, until we are actually moving an army every time we move.”

To this anecdote, the writer – a great defender of the slaveholding class – added, “this shows some of the bondage of the old system not generally thought of.”⁹⁵ Most masters, however, did not display the same scruples. The wealthiest kept a handful of slaves in the city permanently who took care of the town house in their absence and ensured its surveillance. The Pringles, for instance, left four slaves under the authority of their butler Mack to “guard and maintain” their house in Charleston when they went to *Runimede*, their country estate, or when they traveled abroad.⁹⁶ More often, one or two slaves were in charge of the townhouse. In Charleston, the Izards entrusted a woman, Statira, while the Allstons confided this task to a man, Daddy Moses.⁹⁷ In New Orleans, the grandfather of the historian Charles Gayarre kept two old slaves, Marie and Agathe, to look after his *Hotel particulier*, while the St. Martins kept an unnamed female domestic.⁹⁸ Others kept no slaves in town and the house was abandoned to dust and neglect.⁹⁹ Staying in town when the masters were away was a privilege

⁹⁴ Freight Ticket, Mrs J.T. Roman to Steamer *Belle Creole*, 19 September 1849; Freight Ticket, Mrs. J.T. Roman to Steamer *Music*, Dr., 3 June 1854, Roman Family Papers, Tulane Special Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁹⁵ Pringle, op.cit., 158-159. Historians have repeatedly given the example of the Westons, almost presented as typical of the migrant planters, but they do not highlight the context in which it was formulated. See for instance, McInnis, op.cit., 244; George C. Rogers, *The History of Georgetown County, South Carolina*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1970, 320; Kennedy, op.cit., 136.

⁹⁶ Richard N. Côté, op.cit., 66; McInnis, op.cit., 253, 258.

⁹⁷ Alice Delancey Izard to Margaret Izard Manigault, 20 February 1805, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina; Pringle, op.cit., 191.

⁹⁸ Charles Gayarre, *A Sugar Plantation of the Old Regime*, 1887, quoted in Crété, op.cit., 132.

⁹⁹ Jacques Téléphore Roman to Céline Pilié Roman, 24 December 1841, Roman Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

that many slaves relished. Loyalty and obedience for part of the year was a small token to pay to be free of daily supervision for the rest of it.

In deciding who was to migrate and who was not, mistresses and masters sometimes took into account the wish of the enslaved. The most benevolent avoided separating families, especially mothers and young children. The Colcocks of South Carolina were, according to the standards of the time, the embodiment of the good masters. Their family correspondence reveals a genuine and uncommon affection for their slaves.¹⁰⁰ Emmeline Colcock was therefore very upset when she discovered that her brother-in-law had sent her slave Lucy to the city without her child.¹⁰¹ Slaveholders such as the Colcocks respected the mother-child bond, and separations for a sojourn in the city were avoided, as were separations caused by sale. Other did not have the same scruples. “Persons who own plantations and yet live in cities, often take children from their parents as soon as they are weaned, and send them in the country,” contended Angelina Grimké Weld.¹⁰² When it came to decide who was to migrate, planters usually followed the logic and the rules of the internal slave trade. Therefore, few masters and mistresses hesitated to separate husbands and wives.¹⁰³ Yet, as James D. Miller remarks, “ultimate decisions regarding food, shelter, and even marital and family relations remained the preserve of the master.”¹⁰⁴ Enslaved couples owned by migrant planters often lived miles apart for several months in a row. Cretia, the maid of Mary Pringle, was away from her husband and her oldest children for the greatest part of the year. Planting husbands and wives often chose to live apart for extended periods and seemed to regard such separations as inconsequential, and perhaps even beneficial, to their own marriages. They applied the same reasoning to their slaves. This is not to argue that slaves did not mind separations instigated by their masters, but as Cynthia Kennedy observes, “slaves who migrated with their owners likewise considered the migrations a normal part of their routine.”¹⁰⁵ They understood their lives according to the seasonal rhythm of their masters: “I

¹⁰⁰ In the Colcock family, most letters closed with formulas such as “tell maum Lucy howdye for me” or a “tell Laurence and Louisa that Maum Henry is quite well and sends her love to them.” Willie Colcock to Emmeline S. Colcock, August 1859; Emmeline Colcock to Mrs Huguenin, 11 December 1857, Colcock Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁰¹ Emmeline Colcock to Mrs. Huguenin, 23 March 1850, Colcock Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁰² “Testimony of Angelina Grimké Weld,” Theodore Dwight Weld, ed., *American Slavery As It Is*, New York, 1839 (Reprint New York: Arno Press, 1968), 36.

¹⁰³ McLinnis, op.cit., 268.

¹⁰⁴ Miller, op.cit., 62.

¹⁰⁵ Kennedy, op.cit., 165-166.

don't know nothing 'bout crops cause we summered," remarked the ex-slave and servant Abbey Mishow.¹⁰⁶

Some slaves, however, were not easily transplanted. Sinthie, one of the servants of Madame St. Martin, longed for the country, but her mistress found her most profitable in the city. Unhappy, Sinthie did not accept her lot passively. The slave seemed resolved to feign sickness in spite of Louisa's medical cures, which she described in details to her mother:

Je vous dirais aussi que Sinthie est toujours malade il y a sept semaines qu'elle suit un traitement au lieu de se trouver mieux elle se dit toujours la même, elle n'a jamais eu la fièvre, elle va et vient dans la cour mais elle ne se trouve pas assez bien pour travailler. Je lui ai fait prendre plusieurs bains sédatifs dans l'espoir que cela la rétablirai mais pas du tout elle se plain toujours de son ventre. Je crois pour ma part tant que Sinthie n'ira pas à l'habitation qu'elle se dira toujours malade, car c'est son seul désir, la vue seule de sa cabane serait assez pour la guérir.¹⁰⁷

The verdict of Louisa was clear: Sinthie was not willing to work in the city anymore and needed to be returned to her cabin on the plantation. Only there could the servant be employed profitably. But Madame St. Martin would not yield to the slave's resistance and Sinthie was to remain in the city to hire out her labor for fifteen dollars a month.¹⁰⁸ Although the documents do not tell why Sinthie preferred life in the country, perhaps it lay in a family or romantic attachment. Unlike Sinthie, most urban slaves envisioned the country – and in particular work in the fields – as degradation and loss of autonomy.¹⁰⁹ “The slaves upon the plantations are far more ignorant than those who live in the cities,” noted a journalist in 1843, “the latter...become shrewd, acute, oftentimes very intelligent.”¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Abbey Mishow, George P. Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, “South Carolina Narratives,” Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood, 1972, vol.3, part 3, 198.

¹⁰⁷ “I will tell you also that Sinthie is always sick. For the last seven weeks, she has been following a treatment, but instead of feeling better, she says that she still feels the same. She never had the fever, she comes and goes in the yard, but she does not feel good enough to work. I told her to take several sedative baths in the hope that it would help her recover, but not at all, she still complains of stomach aches. I believe for my part that as long as Sinthie won't be going to the plantation, she will say that she is still sick, because it is her only desire, the view of her cabin would be enough to cure her.” Louisa Perret St. Martin to Louise St. Martin, 10 août 1858, St. Martin Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁰⁸ The mistress still cared for the welfare of the slave and added to her letter that if Sinthie needed shoes or anything else that Louisa should provide her before leaving the city for the country. Louise St. Martin to Louisa Perret St. Martin, 10 août 1858, St. Martin Family Papers, Tulane Special Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁰⁹ Kennedy, op.cit., 138.

¹¹⁰ “Sketches of South-Carolina, Number Four: ‘Slaves and Slavery,’” *Knickerbocker Magazine*, 21 July 1843, Eugene L. Schwaab, ed. *Travels in the Old South: Selected from Periodicals of the Times*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1973, vol.2, 326.

Starting in the colonial period, planting families were important players in the economy of slave hiring in towns and cities.¹¹¹ Keeping a good slave in the city in the absence of the masters was not a wasted slave; it was a profitable business decision. Towns and cities of the South readily provided a market for slave hiring, which Kennedy describes as “both a lucrative strategy for slave owners to supplement their incomes and a practical way for slave hirers to meet seasonal-variant labor needs.”¹¹² Numerous masters hoped to turn a profit from their human properties while they were absent from the city or even the region. Planting men and women envisioned their movable properties – their slaves – as assets that should be capitalized, just like their immovable properties. During their prolonged absences from Charleston in the 1830s, the Grimballs rented their town house on the Bay and hired out their slaves.¹¹³ Mary Wayne, a planting widow of the Lowcountry who did not own a town house, regularly sent her servants to the city in the 1840s and in the 1850s to finance (in part) her frequent trips to the North. Her sister, Ann Vanderhorst, acted as the intermediary between the absentee Mary and her human properties, as Louisa St. Martin did for her mother in New Orleans.¹¹⁴

Even the most benevolent masters engaged in this system in which profit took precedence over the well-being of the slaves. Away from Charleston, the Colcocks had hired out three of their slaves, but as Emmeline Colcock wrote to her mother, “We have heard that our servant Charles is in a bad way with his arm and is under medical treatment – instead of making money for us he will cost us all that Elizabeth & Thomas make for us.”¹¹⁵ Slave hiring was not a panacea and expected profits did not always materialize as Alice Izard also learned. In 1805, she lent her slave Statira to her daughter Nancy who was traveling to the north, but within a few months, the slave was in a “very hopeless state.” “Could I have foreseen this melancholy event,” Izard stated, “how gladly would I have left Statira among her friends in Carolina!”¹¹⁶ The mistress thus decided to return her servant to Charleston “to hire herself out which she did, but would never bring in any wages.” Within a few years, the

¹¹¹ Eliza Lucas Pinckney noted in her letters that “two men and two women bring me small wages,” quoted in Ravenel, *op.cit.*, 323.

¹¹² Kennedy, *op.cit.*, 149.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Mary Wayne to Ann Morris Vanderhorst, 10 April 1844; Mary Wayne to Ann Morris Vanderhorst, 17 October 1857, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston.

¹¹⁵ Emmeline Colcock to Mrs. Huguenin, 9 February 1850, Colcock Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹¹⁶ Alice Delancey Izard to Margaret Izard Manigault, 26 September 1805, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

mistress decided to sell the slave to her son; the once trusted Statira had become “worthless.”¹¹⁷

For the migrant planters who believed they could control their human properties from a distance, slave hiring proved lucrative. Most urban slaves relished the possibility of choosing their own work and willingly brought part of their wages to their owners or to their representatives. Self-hiring represented great freedom both in terms of labor and of living arrangements. These slaves could often “live out,” that is resided away from their masters.¹¹⁸ When they purchased a plantation in Pointe Coupee Parish in 1859, the Jeters took some of their house servants to the country, but kept most in the city:

Pa did not bring the other servants from New Orleans because they did not want to come and he thought to do so would make them dissatisfied and influence the others to be. Aunt Polly lived in a house by herself that Pa rented for her and Uncle Henry to live in and whenever any of the servants that were hired out were sick or unemployed, they went there and were taken care of.¹¹⁹

These houses were often invisible from the streets.¹²⁰ The interiors of urban blocks, less in demand because they lacked streets frontages, were developed in courts accessed by dead-end alleys. These marginal spaces often located in the core of the town were the most segregated areas of Charleston at the end of the antebellum period.¹²¹ With the benediction of their owners, slaves created an underground black city, with its markets and tipping houses.¹²² In New Orleans, Congo Square (previously known as Place Publique), was another space of the city that was taken over by the Blacks on Sundays, with the acquiescence of the white population. Such concessions and negotiations, more than any kind of disciplining, bred the most loyal and industrious urban slaves. Both owner and owned found benefits in a

¹¹⁷ Alice Izard to Margaret Izard Manigault, 6 January 1811, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

¹¹⁸ Wade, *op.cit.*, 67, 75.

¹¹⁹ Annie Jeter Carmouche Memoirs, 16, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹²⁰ Segregation described very different phenomena before and after the Civil War. There were no segregated neighborhoods in Charleston or New Orleans. Indeed, before the Jim Crow laws, racial superiority was stamped on Charleston’s urban landscape by the invisibility of black housing from the streets frontage. See J.W. Joseph, “Archaeology and the African-American Experience in the Urban South”, in *Archaeology of Southern Urban Landscapes*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002, 112-113.

¹²¹ A quantitative analysis of the first decennial census of the United States suggests that the courts settlement by the free Black population was well underway by 1790. This conclusion is drawn from an examination of a random sample of 320 cases (confidence level of 0.05 and confidence interval of 10) from the 1790 census of the United States for the St. Phillips and St. Michaels parish, Charleston District, South Carolina. Because the census did not comprise the address or occupation for heads of families, the route followed by the census taker was recreated with the help of the Jacob Milligan’s 1790 *Charleston Directory and Revenue System*, Charleston: T.B. Owen, 1790.

¹²² Philip D. Morgan, “Black Life in Eighteenth-Century Charleston,” *Perspectives in American History*, New Series, I, 1984, 189; John Michael Vlach, *loc.cit.*, 150-160.

labor and residential system that suited so well the peripatetic lifestyle of the migrant planters.

The logistics of the migration was only one of a series of challenges that came with urban housekeeping. Once a family was settled in the town house, the life that awaited a plantation woman was not leisurely. In the city as in the country, their workload was essentially managerial, yet still involved some manual labor. Mrs. William Howland of Charleston was one of a kind in the housekeeping front, according to Fredrika Bremer: “no one can rightly know her or value her until they have seen her in her daily life, within her own home.”¹²³ The Swedish traveler spent several weeks in the Howland’s town house, observing with admiration the several duties of the urban housekeeper:

Thus, I see her quietly busied from morning till evening; now with the children, now with meals, when she assists her servants to arrange the table, or when meals are over and removed, and all is in order which needs looking after (for the Negroes are naturally careless), she will be busy cutting out and making clothes for them, or in dressing and smartening up the little Negroes of the house; then she is in the garden, planting flowers or tying up one that has fallen down, training and bringing into order the wild shoots of trailing plants; or she is receiving guests, sending off messengers, & c. and all this with that calm comprehension, with that dignity which, at the same time, is so full of kindness, and which is so beautiful in the mistress of a family, which makes her bear the whole house and be its stay as well as its ornament.¹²⁴

A perfect model of domesticity, Mrs. Howland insured that everyone was fed and clothed, the house cleaned, the guests well entertained, and the garden flourishing.¹²⁵ Bremer presents Mrs. William Holland as an exception among southern women, since “in the Slave States people commonly consider coarse work as somewhat derogatory, and leave it to be done by slaves.”¹²⁶ This view was undeniably reinforced by the discourse of the southerners she encountered, more than by the reality of their everyday life. While some elite women took great care to perform a minimum of domestic work themselves, the majority actually spent several hours daily running their household. Enslaved servants relieved mistresses of most

¹²³ Bremer, *op.cit.*, 279; Marli Weiner misidentifies Mrs. W.H. as Mrs. William Holbrook in *Mistresses and Slaves*, *op.cit.*, 27.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 280.

¹²⁵ For an extensive discussion of the different tasks of the plantation mistress in the country, see Weiner, *op.cit.*, 31.

¹²⁶ Bremer, *op.cit.*, 280.

manual labor, yet slavery itself created a certain number of chores. In some families, notably the Hermanns of New Orleans, white women handled and even washed the dishes to ensure that “careless” servants did not break the precious china.¹²⁷ The mistresses also carried a set of keys around the house, since the distrust toward domestic slaves led elite Southerners to lock up food, alcohol, and other valuables. At the *Hermann-Grima House* in New Orleans, right behind the china pantry, where the white women of the family washed the dishes, was the storage pantry, which was locked most of the time. Most elite women performed some form of domestic work everyday, no matter where they found themselves along the urban-rural continuum.

When established in new quarters, preoccupations with the household left behind were never ended. Plantation women’s work lives remained closely tied to the other end of the continuum. They did not stop being plantation mistresses when they were away from the country, no more than their husbands stopped being planters when they were away from the rice or cotton fields. Most mornings, before Mary Pringle entered into her round of social activities, she descended to the ground floor of the house in Charleston, where there was, in addition to a class room, a plantation office, a storeroom, and a sewing room. There Mary and her daughters cut the fabric that the maids next sewed into clothes for the field hands.¹²⁸ Harriot Pinckney also prepared her plantation slaves’ outfits in her Charleston house, probably in the basement where a kitchen and the offices were located, and then she wrote to her overseer detailed instructions on how to distribute them.¹²⁹

Conversely, from their retreat in the country, elite women were compelled to supervise the housekeeping of the town house. In the winter, when Meta Grimbball was at the plantation, her three eldest sons kept house because it was “cheaper than boarding.”¹³⁰ When she returned to Charleston for a week or two of “winter shopping,” she carefully examined, and if need be, redressed her sons’ housekeeping. Mary Middleton, who cherished the quietness of *Middleton Place*, a plantation built along the Ashley River about a dozen miles from Charleston, also oversaw from a distance the urban housekeeping of her husband, who rented a house in Charleston. When in 1844 Henry Middleton organized a dinner in honor of

¹²⁷ *Hermann-Grima House*, New Orleans, http://www.hgghh.org/hg_house/pantry.htm

¹²⁸ Côté, op.cit., 187.

¹²⁹ Weiner, op.cit., 32; George C. Rogers, Jr., *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1980, 68.

¹³⁰ Meta Morris Grimbball, “Country Sketches, 1858-1859,” Margaret Ann Morris Grimbball Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston.

Henry Clay, Mary was charged with sending “the plateau, plate, & China & best wine” to the city.¹³¹ Ann Vanderhorst, who spent most winters at the plantation with her husband, asked her son Lewis to have a look at the town house in her absence:

Do see what Peter has been doing at the house if he has finished the white washing, & did you find the house well swept...& the garden walks clear, & no fowls in it; Say to Bella I insist that the fowls should be kept out of the garden near the house; Do nail up the gate yourself, & looking my green house, & tell me if the plants look fresh Is my corn & Cauliflours [*sic*] growing well?¹³²

The well-being of children, husbands, servants, and even plants depended, it seemed, on the ability of elite women to manage both places.

If they could justify being away from the plantation for several months a year (notably for health reasons), elite women could not easily neglect their duties toward their black family. This became even more important in the antebellum period when the pro-slavery rhetoric rested on the benevolence of masters and mistresses. Yet, some women would have nothing to do with tedious chores such as making slaves’ clothes, supervising the dairy or raising a poultry yard. Planters then subcontracted these female tasks; they entrusted a head slave or hired a white woman (often the wife of the plantation overseer) to manage those responsibilities.¹³³ They also purchased ready-made clothing, an expensive alternative. Because refusing these tasks undermined the paternalistic ethos of the slaveholding class, their peers privately criticized such unworthy mistresses.

Aware of the need for a well-ordered household, but not willing to forgo the life of leisure that their elite status promised them, some plantation women confided the core of their household duties to another woman, who became the deputy manager of domestic affairs. Sometimes this woman was a head slave, “the urban variant of a plantation driver,” in which case, mistresses kept the keys.¹³⁴ The real passport for leisure came with the hiring of a white housekeeper, whose race allowed the entrusting of a wider range of responsibilities, starting with the very symbolic keys. Martha Washington, Jane Amelia Petigru, and Varina

¹³¹ Mary Hering Middleton to Eliza Fisher, 7 April 1844, in Harrison, ed., op.cit., 374.

¹³² Ann Vanderhorst to Lewis Vanderhorst, 17 March 1853, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston.

¹³³ Spruill, op.cit., 78; Henry Laurens, an absentee planter, hired married overseers for *Wambaw* and *Mepkin*. See Laura Rose Sandy, “Mary-Anne Schad and Mrs. Brown: Overseers’ Wives in Colonial South Carolina,” Marjorie Julian Spruill, Valinda W. Littlefield, and Joan Marie Johnson, eds, *South Carolina Women: Their Lives and Times*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009, vol.1, 67.

¹³⁴ Kennedy, op.cit., 136.

Davis all benefited of the services of a reliable white housekeeper.¹³⁵ Like most white domestics in the United States, these women were often foreign-born, usually German or Irish. A good housekeeper, it seemed, was hard to find. As their husbands found with their overseers, elite women were often unsatisfied with their work. Planters often acquiesced in the hiring of white housekeepers when their political ambitions placed greater demands on their households in terms of hospitality and sociability or when multiple pregnancies weakened the health of their wives. Widowers who did not wish to remarry, such as Henry Laurens, hired a white housekeeper to run their households.¹³⁶ However hired housekeepers remained a rarity, even among the wealthiest.¹³⁷

The seasonal rhythms of the city meant major variations in the workload of both mistresses and servants. The winter in the city was busy for everyone, from factors, innkeepers, and servants to elite white women. There were few idle afternoons during the gay season, when social life was much more intense and elite women had parties to organize and visits to pay. “For slave women” observes Cynthia Kennedy, “the “season” meant extra rooms to clean, more fires to tend, more women to wash and dress, more dresses to launder, more food to cook, more trips to the market through muddy, foul-smelling city streets, and more messes to clean up.”¹³⁸ Summers went a slower pace for everyone. Idle most afternoons, Meta Grimball still dedicated all her mornings to the particular challenges of urban housekeeping. To earn her summer leisure hours, Meta had to busy herself during the entire winter at the plantation:

A Plantation life is a very active one. This morning I got up late having been disturbed in the night, hurried down to have something arranged for breakfast, Ham & eggs, ... wrote a letter to Charles... had prayers, got off the boys to town. Had work cut out, gave orders about dinner, had the horse feed fixed in hot water, had the box filled with cork: - went to see about the carpenters working at the negro houses, where there are men mending chimneys, white washing, & these carpenters Mr. Grimball told me he wished me to see about every day, & now I have to cut out flannel jackets, and alter some work.¹³⁹

¹³⁵ Spruill, *op.cit.*, 77; Pease and Pease, *op.cit.*, 89.

¹³⁶ In May 1770, Henry Laurens hired the widow of an overseer as his urban housekeeper. See George C. Rogers, Jr., Editor & al., *The Papers of Henry Laurens*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, vol.6.

¹³⁷ In slave societies, when there was no white mistress around, the housekeeper was often the concubine of the master. This reality is better documented for the Caribbean than for the American South. See Beckles, *op.cit.*, 55-71; 142-143.

¹³⁸ Kennedy, *op.cit.*, 130.

¹³⁹ Meta Morris Grimball Diary, 29 December 1860, 5-6, Documenting the American South Project at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

By contrast, time spent in the country, particularly for elite men, was synonymous with retirement and relaxation. While women faced a substantial amount of work with the management of the domestic industries central to large plantations, men found time for hunting and horse riding, two hobbies synonymous with the mythology of the cavalier-planter.

The material culture of the town house mirrored the seasonal rhythm of the city. Carpets were removed and beds were rearranged to distinct winter and summer spots.¹⁴⁰ During the warm season, simpler furniture was acceptable and comfort took precedence over display in the subtropical city. For instance, when they first moved to their new town house in Charleston in 1794, Alice Izard noted: “Our furniture is certainly not calculated to make a figure; but in summer one does not require much & I can readily put up with the want of elegancies at present.”¹⁴¹ In the country too, there were quieter seasons when domestic industries were less demanding and where women spent hours daily reading or visiting. To many plantation women, a peripatetic lifestyle meant alternating periods of intense industry and relative leisure.

No matter the place or the season, a good housekeeper was, by definition, industrious. In a letter to his son, pastor Charles Colcock Jones drew up a long list of the qualities of a good wife: economy came second, next to industry.¹⁴² Several decades after her death, Aglaé Bringier was praised for her efficiency and her thriftiness: “Friends, making a call, found her in the middle of a heap of rough garments. Without halting in her work, she explained that these were the dresses of her women slaves, which she was overhauling. She saw no excuse for waste.”¹⁴³ A good urban housekeeper, even in the wealthiest planting families, was therefore also a frugal housekeeper.

A second challenge of urban housekeeping was its cost. Big plantations were almost self-sufficient worlds that provided an abundance of food: meat, fish, game, poultry, cereals, eggs, dairy, fresh fruits and vegetables. The urban table relied much more on the market,

¹⁴⁰ Millescent Colcock to Mary Colcock, 3 November 1825, Colcock Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁴¹ Alice Delancey Izard to Ralph Izard, 25 December 1794, Izard Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina. Plantation houses went through similar seasonal changes. See Nancy Mary Sambets, *Interpreting the Dichotomous Lifestyles of South Carolina Lowcountry Planters, 1830-1850*, Master Thesis, University of South Carolina, 1993, 67.

¹⁴² Charles Colcock Jones, *Children of Pride*, quoted in Weiner, op.cit., 26.

¹⁴³ Harnett T. Kane, *Plantation Parade: The Grand Manner in Louisiana*, New York: William Morrow and Company, 1945, 78-79.

where provisions were often available at “prohibitive prices.”¹⁴⁴ In most families, the husband determined the budget for housekeeping, while women were in charge of everyday consumption.¹⁴⁵ Since occasions of hospitality were numerous in the city, the expenses of urban housekeeping were not easily contained. Very frugal, Meta Morris Grimbball kept a close account of her domestic expenses. The seasons spent in Charleston were financially stressful for Meta. Her guests needed to be pleased and the ordinary menu of the family would not do. A compliment from her father, who was staying at the Meeting Street house for a few weeks, turned into resentment: “Papa is very naïve, he told me he was better here than he had been because of his diet at my table. The Market, is high and I pay nearly \$2 each day for dinner, when by ourselves it costs me 50¢.”¹⁴⁶ The presence of her father stretched her already strict budget. Elite women envisioned the weeks spent at resorts such as Sullivan’s Island as opportunities for saving, during an otherwise costly summer season in town. The economies weighed heavily on Mrs. Lowndes’ enjoyment of the place:

We are pleased with our Island Residence, we find it very cool and agreeable one, and as yet we have not been much troubled with company, therefore we have not found it an expensive one We get our marketing from town every day, I got Philis to attend to it for us, which is very economical, we now hope to get a dish or two from the sea as the Col has come and we send Charles out with the servant to fish.¹⁴⁷

No wonder that when financial resources became strained, even the most urbane woman longed for the country and its autarkic life. “Times are very hard. You father has not had any rice sold yet and now none can be sold. No one can get money owing to the unsettled state of the country,” wrote Adèle Allston to her son in 1860. “I wish to go into the country and spend the winter there. We will see when Father comes to town what we had best do.”¹⁴⁸

Elite women proved resourceful in finding strategies to vary their family’s diet, offset the costs of the city market and reduce the financial pressures created by frequently entertaining guests. During the months spent in the country, they worked hard at making

¹⁴⁴ Laussat, op.cit., 48.

¹⁴⁵ The budget for housekeeping was an important source of tensions within planting families. For examples of conflicts and negotiations, see Elias Vanderhorst to Ann Vanderhost, 7 November 1841 and 23 May 1842, Vanderhost Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston. For women’s role as the household consumer in the colonial period, see T.H. Breen, “An Empire of Goods: The Anglicization of Colonial America, 1690-1776,” *Journal of British Studies*, vol.25, 1986, 467-499.

¹⁴⁶ Meta Morris Grimbball, Diary, 9 June 1861, 35, Documenting the American South Project at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

¹⁴⁷ M.W. Lowndes to E. B. Lowdes, 23 July [early 1830s], Pinckney-Lowndes Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

¹⁴⁸ Adèle Allston to Charles Allston, 9 November 1860, Adèle Petigru Allston Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

preserves or salting meat, thus ensuring that their table would be well provided during the months spent in the city. Some even took pleasure in those domestic industries, one of the few distractions available to them at the plantation. Women did not hunt or fish like the men of their families.¹⁴⁹ Alice Izard was pleased to discover her daughter Nancy at *Cedar Grove*, the Deas's plantation house, "well, & very housewifely employed in making orange marmalade."¹⁵⁰ If the domestic industries of the plantation were demanding to some elite women, it was notably because they did not spend the entire year in the country. To reduce the costs of urban housekeeping, others imported plantation self-sufficiency to the city. When the Hermanns built their Federal mansion on St. Louis Street in New Orleans, they installed a baker stove in the kitchen.¹⁵¹ Although common on Creole plantations, such an amenity was rare in the yards of New Orleans where most households purchased their bread daily at the bakery. Before marrying her second husband, a merchant, Mrs. Hermann had been a plantation mistress, and now she used her knowledge of country housewifery to make important economies. Numerous elite women took advantages of a large urban lot to keep a cow, establish a poultry yard, and a garden.¹⁵² The choice made by several planting families to reside in suburban villas at the urban periphery multiplied the prospects for self-sufficiency. Large lots were filled with flower and vegetable gardens, fruits trees, farm animals, and greenhouses. Charleston appeared to Fredrika Bremer as "a great assemblage of villas standing in their gardens."¹⁵³ Gardens characterized the urban landscape across the South and were valued by planting families for several reasons: they were ornamental, they provided subsistence, and they were income producing, since the surplus of fruits, vegetables, and flowers could be sold in the city market.¹⁵⁴

For the greatest economy, however, nothing compared with the food that came directly from the plantation, a steady source of provisions. "We get butter & vegetables from

¹⁴⁹ Spruill, op.cit., 64.

¹⁵⁰ Alice Delancey Izard to Margaret Izard Manigault, 8 February 1805, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

¹⁵¹ *Hermann-Grima House*, New Orleans, http://www.hgghh.org/hg_house.htm

¹⁵² Marie Bouligny Villeré to Thérèse Bouligny Roman, [no date], Roman Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁵³ Bremer, op.cit., 269.

¹⁵⁴ Lisa C. Tolbert, *Constructing Townscapes: Space and Society in Antebellum Tennessee*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999, 136. On the meaning of gardening for American women, see Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984.

the country quite a help,” Meta Morris Grimball acknowledged.¹⁵⁵ Planters, and in particular plantation women, had long supplied town markets with their gardens.¹⁵⁶ They also provided for the tables of their urban relatives. The letters exchanged between Louise Perret and her mother Madame Darenbourg Perret during the spring of 1834 included long lists of produce circulating between country and city.¹⁵⁷ From her plantation, Madame Darenbourg Perret sent Louise in New Orleans a dozen fresh eggs, two tongues, some cream cheese, six pairs of pigeons, a bunch of asparagus, a basket of flowers, a fleeced turkey, capons, artichokes, a bag of potatoes, a little butter, four bottles of anise, five chickens, leeks, chamomile, a bag of oatmeal, and sausages for gumbo.¹⁵⁸ Those items were given by a large network of country neighbors and relatives, and were transported to the city either by a male slave, a neighbor, or a “caboteur.”¹⁵⁹ Food also circulated the other way around, the city furnishing the country with certain items. Amélie Brou, for instance, sent oranges and pecans to her relatives at *Pelican Plantation* in St. Charles Parish.¹⁶⁰

Both in the city and in the country, elite housewives depended on goods provided by the other end of the continuum. When in the country, they needed provisions and goods that were only found in the city. Historians have documented how factors were in charge of providing “groceries and sundry other articles for the folks in the country.”¹⁶¹ But professional merchants, and notably itinerant Jewish peddlers, were not the exclusive suppliers of plantation women.¹⁶² Purchases made in the city for the country were also a recurrent feature of family correspondence.¹⁶³ Next to food, the items more often circulated

¹⁵⁵ Meta Morris Grimball, 6 October 1859, Diary June 1859-September 1860, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston.

¹⁵⁶ Spruill, op.cit., 64.

¹⁵⁷ Louise Perret was the future Madame St. Martin of the introduction, the mother of Louisa.

¹⁵⁸ See the letters exchanged between Madame Darenbourg Perret and Madame Drausin Perret, March and April 1834, St. Martin Family Papers, Tulane Special Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁵⁹ Madame D’Arenbourg Perret to Louise Drausin Perret, 8 avril 1834; 7 juin 1837, St. Martin Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana. This family network was particularly closely knitted, since six brothers Perret had “obtained concessions of contiguous lands in St. Charles Parish.” Stanley C. Arthur, ed. *Old Families of Louisiana*, New Orleans: Harmanson Publisher, 1931, 366.

¹⁶⁰ Amélie Brou to [Solidelle], [no date], Brou-Rivet Family Papers, New Orleans Historical Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁶¹ C. J. Colcock to William Ferguson Colcock, 21 January 1822, Colcock Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁶² Kate Stone noted in her journal: “Sample of winter goods from Barriér in New Orleans came today. We bought only calicoes but got some nice soft materials for the boys and Sister.” John Q. Anderson, ed., *Brokenburn: The Journal of Kate Stone, 1861-1868*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1972, 53. On the role of Jewish peddlers and merchants in supplying rural women, see Anny Bloch Raymond, *Des berges du Rhin aux rives du Mississippi: Histoire et récits de migrants juifs*, Paris: Michel Houdiard, 2009, 47-48.

¹⁶³ Pease and Pease, op.cit., 37.

through those female networks were related to sewing, such as fabrics, garments, and patterns, elite women being in charge of clothing their entire families.¹⁶⁴ Mothers-in-law sent flannels to their daughter-in-laws, and sisters chose hats and combs for one another.¹⁶⁵ When an entire network of women was in the country, husbands, brothers, and fathers took over the duty.¹⁶⁶ Urban women kept their country relatives abreast of the latest fashion, sometimes even sketching in their letters the pattern of a collar observed in the boutiques or the streets of the city. These exchanges of goods between relatives and friends were understood as ritual exchanges that functioned to create social networks.¹⁶⁷ As well, some willing mistresses and masters acted as buyers for their plantation slaves.¹⁶⁸ Shopping for the members of one's household, both blacks and whites, was part of a housekeeper's duties.

A third challenge of urban housekeeping was the sheer volume of hospitality and entertaining it involved.¹⁶⁹ The planting elite abided by the rule of reciprocity: to be invited, one needed to invite. While in Vicksburg, Mississippi in 1850, a plantation mistress noted, "Gov. Quitman is not making himself at all popular. Excuses himself from entertaining and giving parties on account of his house being unfurnished. Lent and a variety of pretexts which satisfy none but himself."¹⁷⁰ The governor, a very wealthy man and the owner of a large house in Natchez, displeased his peers. To join the best circles of society, a planting family on the rise needed to be hospitable. The main function of towns and cities in the lives of planting families was to provide opportunities for sociability, many of which took place in town houses: morning visits, dinners, evening teas, balls, and weddings. The town house

¹⁶⁴ Carol Bleser, ed., *Tokens of Affection: The Letters of a Planter's Daughter in the Old South*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996, 58-59.

¹⁶⁵ Milliscent Colcock to Mary Colcock, Charleston, 21 January 1822, Colcock Family Papers, Tulane Special Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana; Amelie Brou to Solidelle, [no date], Brou-Rivet Family Papers, New Orleans Historical Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana; Mathilde Perret to Louisa Perret St. Martin, 3 avril 1858, St. Martin Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁶⁶ Louis St. Martin to Pierre-Auguste St. Martin, 23 mai 1847, Louis St. Martin to Louisa St. Martin, 18 avril 1851, St. Martin Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.; Anderson, op.cit., 13.

¹⁶⁷ Lynn Kennedy, "Out of Whole Cloth?: Sewing and Family in the Old South," *Family Values in the Old South*, Craig Thompson Friend & Anya Jabour, eds, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010, 111-133.

¹⁶⁸ Charles Lyell, *Second Visit to the United States*, vol.1, 265, quoted in McNinnis, op.cit., 255. Bennet H. Barrow, a Louisiana planter, asked his slaves to make a list of items they wanted, and he purchased them for the holidays in St. Francisville or New Orleans. This was part of a broader "system of rewards." Edwina Adams Davis, ed. *Plantation Life in the Florida Parishes of Louisiana, 1836-1846 as reflected in the Diary of Bennet H. Barrow*, New York: Columbia University, 1943, 52.

¹⁶⁹ On food and hospitality of southern planters, see Joe Gray Taylor, *Eating, Drinking, and Visiting in the South: An Informal History*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008 (1982), 53-64.

¹⁷⁰ Miriam Badger Hilliard, Diary, 19 February 1850, Typescript, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

readily provided a stage for the display of wealth and sophistication, often more so than did the Big House on the plantation.

Next to frugality and industry, elite women as hostesses needed to master the art of refinement.¹⁷¹ Urban housekeepers were subject to greater pressures and expectations than their rural counterparts, who already had to live up to high standards of housekeeping and hospitality.¹⁷² The urban setting both facilitated and complicated such performances; every delicacy, from ice to champagne, was easily found, although at exorbitant prices. From the colonial period onward, southern housekeepers “were very ambitious to place before their guests fruits and vegetables out of season.”¹⁷³ To do so, they took care of their gardens, learned the secrets of successive plantings, greenhouses, and hotbeds.

With a constant flow of guests and visitors, the town house was continually submitted to the scrutiny of the outside world. Some elite women avoided the city precisely because the level of refinement and the intensity of urban social life overwhelmed them. Other women, on the other hand, felt a strong calling for urban sociability. Within the bounded ambitions of southern womanhood, the reputation of being a great hostess was perhaps the highest social ambition available to elite women. Neither the most industrious, nor the most frugal, Ann Vanderhorst was nonetheless an accomplished housekeeper and a great hostess. Even the dim economic reality of the post-war years did not restrain her from organizing parties and dinners in her town house and she took much pride in working wonders with a frugal budget.¹⁷⁴ “Well I must go throw some graces around my drawing room, in the shape of fresh flowers, for they are all coming here this evening,” Vanderhorst told her son, “We will have some delightful music and exquisite poetry, Hamlet is my favourite.”¹⁷⁵ Hospitality, argues John Hope Franklin, “was a “cheap, easy, and delightful virtue,” especially since most of the work devolved to the slaves.¹⁷⁶ Evidence suggests that it also represented a significant amount of work for elite women who supervised most details

¹⁷¹ The scholarship on hospitality and refinement is extensive. See particularly Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992; David Shields, *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British North America*, Chapel Hill: Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia by the University of North Carolina Press, 1997.

¹⁷² Weiner, op.cit., 25.

¹⁷³ Spruill, op.cit., 67.

¹⁷⁴ Mary Morris Wayne to Ann Morris Vanderhorst, 18 February 1867, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

¹⁷⁵ Ann Morris Vanderhorst to Arnoldus Vanderhorst, 19 April 1869, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

¹⁷⁶ John Hope Franklin, *A Southern Odyssey: Travelers in the Antebellum North*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976, 189.

of hospitality and entertaining. They were involved at each step of the preparation; they wrote the invitations, planned the menus, prepared the shopping lists, and then delegated the tasks to slaves. The latter delivered the invitations, cooked the meals, went to the market, cleaned the house and waited on guests.¹⁷⁷ For such events, mistresses were especially dependent on the cooperation of skilled and well-trained servants as Ann Vanderhorst discovered. While preparing a party during the gay season of 1861, her cook,

whom she described as “my whole dependence,” claimed he was sick and “could do nothing more.” So instead, Ann found herself fixing the chicken salad, the pate and sweetmeats, dusting the drawing room, carrying gilt plates and dishes up and down the stairs, and arranging the flowers. At the end she claimed she was “perfectly exhausted.”¹⁷⁸

Special events, observes Maurie D. McInnis, were “perfect opportunity” for servants “to jeopardize their slaveowners’ entertainments and challenge their mastery.”¹⁷⁹

Women were often critical of other women’s shortcomings on the housekeeping front. According to his sister, the first marriage of Henry Izard was unhappy because his wife Emma - then on her deathbed - was a failed housekeeper:

I believe that which dimmed the luster of her bright qualities was the want of a necessary tho’ humble virtue called economy & attention to the minutiae of domestic arrangements.... She was not to blame, dear amiable woman, for she had never been accustomed to attend to anything in the domestic arrangements nor economy in anything... Our Brother was certainly calculated for a most excellent domestic character, & had his home offered the comforts & amusements it was entitled to possess he never I firmly believe would have quitted it to make as he used to do a cure for ennui - & his dear little wife would have been spared many a bitter hour occasioned by jealousy...¹⁸⁰

Having pushed her husband out of the domestic circle, Nancy Izard Deas opined, Emma was responsible for the moral vices and financial problems of her husband. When Henry Izard remarried, the women in his family, starting with his mother, were awed by the housekeeping skills of the second wife: “this lady enjoys excellent health, can take long walks without fatigue, relish a jest with great gout, & is an excellent housekeeper & workwoman. All these qualities he has a great esteem for. The two last are very desirable & he has felt the

¹⁷⁷ Herman, *op.cit.*, 35; Ripley, *op.cit.*, 42.

¹⁷⁸ McInnis, *op.cit.*, 288.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 288. “Paradoxically, the most favoured slaves, the house slaves and the skilled elite, were often in the vanguard of slave resistance at all levels.” Bush, *op.cit.*, 61.

¹⁸⁰ Nancy Izard Deas to Margaret Izard Manigault, 26 April 1813, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

want of them.”¹⁸¹ Unfortunately, so many domestic virtues were not enough to rescue Henry from his bad habits and, within a few years, the planter and father of several children took his own life. These southern women undeniably attributed a lot of power to domesticity, decades before the ideal became prevalent across the country.¹⁸²

The virtues of the good housekeeper - industry, frugality, and hospitality - were paradoxical virtues in a society that was so proud of its “slave-made ladies.”¹⁸³ The ideals of southern womanhood clashed with the everyday life of most elite women who, sooner or later, ended up being busy housekeepers, no matter where they lived along the rural-urban continuum. About to marry the daughter of a great planter, a Northerner emphasized that his fiancé “has none of the habits of a Southern woman - & I understand from those who know the family at home that they are utterly free from that indolent helplessness & languid carelessness which is usually the Characteristic of women bred up among slaves.”¹⁸⁴ Again and again, travelers to the South noted countless exceptions to the stereotype in places such as Charleston, Natchez, and New Orleans. “The name of a Southern lady, in the minds of some, is associated with wealth, effeminacy and luxuriance in dress and living,” remarked a Maine traveler, “I would not attempt a comparison between N.E. and the South, but I would fearlessly say, that to many of the descriptions of southern effeminacy, hot headed recklessness, indolence of habits and want of enterprise, there are many noble exceptions.”¹⁸⁵ By encouraging their daughters to enjoy their belledom, mothers and fathers of the planter class fed the stereotype of the leisurely southern women, considered inferior to their northern counterparts as housekeepers by novelists and domestic advisers.¹⁸⁶ Plantation women themselves were deeply ambivalent about the role they were called to play within the

¹⁸¹ Alice Delancey Izard to Margaret Izard Manigault, 16 May 1814, quoted in Wilma Wates, “Precursor to the Victorian Age: The Concept of Marriage and Family as Revealed in the Correspondence of the Izard Family of South Carolina,” Carol Bleser, ed., *In Joy and Sorrow: Women, Family, and Marriage in the Victorian South, 1830-1900*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1991, 11.

¹⁸² Wates, loc.cit.; For a discussion of southern domestic novelists critique of ornamental femininity, see Elizabeth Moss, *Domestic Novelists in the Old South: Defenders of Southern Culture*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992.

¹⁸³ Johnson, op.cit., 93.

¹⁸⁴ Harrison, op.cit., 20.

¹⁸⁵ “Southern Ladies” (by a Maine Schoolteacher), *Portland Transcript* 2, 12 July 1838, Schwaab, op.cit., 338-39.

¹⁸⁶ Fredrika Bremer observed, “I admire what I saw of the Southern ladies and mistresses of families. The young girls, on the contrary, I should like to see a little more active in the house, and more helpful to their mothers in various ways. But it is not the custom; and the parents, from mistaken kindness, seem not to wish their daughters to do anything except amuse themselves, and enjoy liberty and life as much as possible,” *Homes of the New World*, op.cit., 337.

elite household. How could they be “decoratively useful”?¹⁸⁷ “The majority of mistresses,” Marli Weiner observes, “found the duties required of them so extensive and the difficulties of directing slave labor so pervasive, that domestic work seemed at best a never-ending series of challenges and at worst an overwhelming nightmare.”¹⁸⁸ Ann Elliott Morris, the mother of Ann Morris Vanderhorst and the grandmother of Meta Morris Grimball, was an energetic housekeeper whose life was spent between a Lowcountry plantation, a town house in Charleston, and *Morrisania*, a country estate in New York. When the character and the domestic abilities of one of her daughters were questioned, she reportedly claimed that her daughter “was born to grace a throne.”¹⁸⁹ After all, the peculiar institution promised white women a life of leisure, not a life of toil. A generation later, her granddaughter, Raven Vandherhorst Lewis, commented on her husband’s dissatisfaction with her housekeeping: “Mr Lewis says that I am a lady living in a boarding house. I would not be a driver for servants for a fortune I always say if they want a driver to make them do the work that they must have driver Friday who is very severe with the whip.”¹⁹⁰ Morris and her granddaughter were aware of the illusory nature of the stereotype, since both women spent hours daily running their households, yet they were not willing to forgo the promises of leisure, luxury, and refinement embodied in the notion of the “slave-made ladies.”

The greatest challenge of urban housekeeping undeniably lay in the management of servants. A good urban housekeeper smoothly handled her house servants, be they two or twenty-five. She trained cooks, butlers and maids, which required a greater investment from the slaveowner than teaching field hands to pick cotton. She also controlled their work and their movement and, when needed, she ensured that they were properly disciplined. Maintaining slave discipline “in the crowded conditions of town life” was more difficult “than in the isolated, self-contained environment of the rural plantation.”¹⁹¹ The city diluted

¹⁸⁷ Kennedy, *op.cit.*, 82.

¹⁸⁸ Weiner, *op.cit.*, 30.

¹⁸⁹ Meta Morris Grimball, “Morrisania: My Father’s Family,” 1854, 6, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

¹⁹⁰ Raven Vanderhorst Lewis to Ann Vanderhorst, October 10 [1857], Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

¹⁹¹ James, *op.cit.*, 173.

the authority of the slaveowner. Masters and slaves lived closely together, sharing an urban compound: “a gathering of buildings” formed of a master’s house, a yard, servants’ quarters and other outbuildings.¹⁹² Town houses were urban plantations that “ordered the actions and relationships of both black and white residents.”¹⁹³ The urban compound was designed to support a life of refinement, but also to regulate the slaves.¹⁹⁴ Distinct environments, city and country entailed distinct work relationships between mistresses and servants.

Spatially speaking, urban slavery was remarkably oppressive for domestic servants. Slaves were kept at a distance in the country, but since the urban setting “induced proximity,” Richard Wade writes, “they had to be placed in such a way that social distance between the races was maintained even under conditions of close physical proximity.”¹⁹⁵ As with the most elaborated mansions that echoed a gendered segregation of space, slaveowners built outbuildings for their slaves that corresponded to their conception of a racially ordered society, hence adopting the British architectural tradition of creating separated spaces between masters and servants.¹⁹⁶ Within the town house, from the simplest to the most elaborate, was inscribed the spatial segregation of the races. The relatively modest house that Marie Villeré found for her sister’s family in New Orleans (see chapter 2) included a separate entry for the domestics and, at the back of the yard, a two-storey building, also for the servants.¹⁹⁷ At the other end of the spectrum, the imposing *Miles Brenton House* in Charleston pushed the architectural segregation even further, with several outbuildings, a separate entry, and a ground floor in the main house mostly reserved for the interactions with the slaves. To meet there, masters and servants followed a different path: the mistress used the stairs located at the center of the house, whereas the servants used an entry that opened onto the yard.¹⁹⁸ In most houses, storerooms and pantries were used as intermediary spaces that

¹⁹² John Michael Vlach, ““Without Recourse to Owners”: The Architecture of Urban Slavery in the Antebellum South,” Carler L. Huggins and Elizabeth Collins Crowley, eds, *Shaping Communities*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997, 151.

¹⁹³ Herman notes that at the turn of the nineteenth century, there was across the Atlantic World a “near universal concern with the explicit segregation of services from the main body of the house, their provision for quarters for the enslaved labor and for the servants, and their understanding of the total lot as a “house” of which the main dwelling was only one defining element.” Herman, op.cit., 134.

¹⁹⁴ McInnis, op.cit., 168.

¹⁹⁵ Wade, op.cit., 55.

¹⁹⁶ In Charleston, for instance, some wealthy slaveowners explicitly chose to build their outbuildings in the Gothic Revival style, a style that they never embraced for their own houses. McInnis, op.cit., 239; Vlach, loc.cit.; See also Cary Carson, “Segregation in Vernacular Buildings,” *Vernacular Architecture*, vol.7, 1976, 24-29.

¹⁹⁷ Marie Boulogny Villeré to Thérèse Boulogny Roman, [no date], Roman Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁹⁸ McInnis, op.cit., 252.

“acted as both a physical and a metaphorical buffer zone between housekeepers and slaves.”¹⁹⁹

That said, the lives of masters and servants were far from being entirely segregated. If the cook worked separately, the kitchen being an independent building, most servants shared a spatial intimacy with their white folks. Slaves were omnipresent inside the town house: they cleaned floors, rocked the baby’s cradle, dressed their masters, and waited at the table.²⁰⁰ Maids and mistresses could spend several hours side-by-side, sewing, cutting, or stitching in sewing rooms, bedrooms, parlors, and morning rooms. The presence of slaves in the immediate environment of the white family extended well into the night, young servants even slept on the floor of their masters’ bedrooms.²⁰¹ Some housekeepers truly valued the work of favorite house servants and, at times, racial barriers gave way to affection, chitchat, and companionship. Yet, racial distance was maintained.

One of the main objectives of the urban compound was “to seal off” the slaves from the outside.²⁰² There were local variations from city to city, and from one neighborhood to the other one, but everywhere, the urban compound worked in a similar fashion, observes Wade:

The physical character of the enclosure was the central fact of the slave’s immediate environment. It circumscribed his movement; it inhibited his contact with the outside world; it threw him back on his master. The design itself expressed his subordination. To the whites the walls might suggest privacy and security; to the blacks they meant confinement and restraint.²⁰³

In Charleston, “broken junk-bottles” were “set upon the garden walls,” noted a traveler.²⁰⁴ As they created a controlling environment, urban slaveowners made few efforts to offer comfortable spaces for their slaves. To prevent communication with the outside world, there were often no windows on the back walls of outbuildings, thus precluding air circulation.²⁰⁵ This physical design was also mandated by insurrection fears as a way to prevent communication among slaves in the urban environment. Understood primarily as a tool to control the movements of their human properties, thick walls also allowed slaveowners to hide their cruelest deeds. Then again, the most oppressive features of the urban compound

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 177.

²⁰⁰ Annie Jeter Carmouche Memoirs, 4. Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

²⁰¹ Interview with Paulina Worth, in Rawick, op.cit., vol.3, part 4, 260.

²⁰² Wade, op.cit., 59.

²⁰³ Ibid., 112.

²⁰⁴ G.M., “South Carolina,” *New England Magazine*, November 1831, vol.1, Issue 5, 339.

²⁰⁵ McInnis, op.cit., 182.

operated primarily at a symbolic level and did not necessarily translate into actual brutality. Sometimes, truly benevolent masters owned the most repressive-looking environments. The Pringles' townhouse in Charleston, today known as the *Miles Brewton House*, was surrounded by an impressive fence topped by pointed ironwork. Emblematic of the visual culture of slavery, this fence - both decorative and functional - was ironically inherited by a woman who was deeply ambivalent toward the peculiar institution.²⁰⁶

Although cramped and uncomfortable, urban quarters were appropriated by house servants who painted walls, posted prints and pictures, built furniture, weaved rugs and sew curtains.²⁰⁷ Wealthy slaveowners acknowledged their slaves' right to claim a space of their own within the urban compound, either their workspace or their lodging.²⁰⁸ Venturing only occasionally into the kitchen, the stable, or the slave quarters, the housekeeper respected her servants' need for a minimum of privacy and a relative measure of autonomy.²⁰⁹ The urban compound where both masters and servants were segregated, yet lived in close proximity, was the model to follow, but practical reasons prompted other living arrangements. "Usually house servants were too few in number and were kept too close to their owners to be able to create discrete, separate places for themselves," points out John Michael Vlach.²¹⁰ When town lots were too small, upper floors, attics, and backrooms housed servants.²¹¹ Housekeepers needed their slaves nearby, so they often chose convenience, control, and safety over racial ideals.

In theory, the more the environment regulated the movements and the interactions of the house servants, the less the housekeeper needed to intervene. In the purest disciplinarian tradition, masters' bedrooms were commonly located on the second floor, with a panoptic view on the yard, the kitchen and the slaves' quarters.²¹² Elite women spent much time in their bedrooms, where they met friends, wrote letters, or supervised housekeeping. With a simple peek at the window, they could see what was going on in the yard. The

²⁰⁶ Côté, op.cit., 181. He notes the presence of two "gagging irons" in the 1834 household inventory of Mary Pringle. Ibid., 184.

²⁰⁷ A house servant even posted a picture of Abraham Lincoln in her room. See Camp, op.cit., 116.

²⁰⁸ Herman notes that "Servants throughout the North Atlantic rim at the turn of the nineteenth century laid claim to spaces within their masters houses - and made those spaces their own." Op.cit., 154.

²⁰⁹ McInnis, op.cit., 254.

²¹⁰ John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993, 234.

²¹¹ Gould, loc.cit., 191.

²¹² Terrence W. Epperson, "Panoptic Plantations: The Garden Sights of Thomas Jefferson and George Mason," James E. Delle, Stephen A. Mrozowski, and Robert Paynter, eds, *Lines that Divide: Historical Archaeologies of Race, Class, and Gender*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000, 58-77.

displeased mistress had then several options opened to her: she could ask her husband to discipline a slave, she could do it herself, or she could send the disorderly to the workhouse.

In spite of a spatially controlling urban compound, resistance by the enslaved was an ordinary occurrence in the town houses of planting families. “Our servants behave very well in the main,” wrote William Colcock from Washington to his mother in Charleston, “but of course we have our troubles like the rest of the world.”²¹³ “Troubles,” according to the slaveowner, were all these expressions of resistance, such as carelessness, laziness, insubordination, illness, flight, rebellion, suicide, and even homicide. From childhood, African-Americans refused their enslavement as Pauline Worth, an ex-slave raised in a small town of South Carolina, remembered: “I recollects when my old Missus used to get after me en whip me, I would run under de house. Didn’ wat to sweep the yard en dat how-come she get after me wid a swich. I was small den en she was tryin to learn me.”²¹⁴ Usually small manifestations, the resistance of house servants took dramatic forms at times. In June 1850, Bram, Matthew and Rebecca, three of the best domestics of the Colcocks ran away. “Don’t you think we have been visited with signal ingratitude?” he complained to his mother, “Who would have thought that Bram would have deserted me?”²¹⁵ It was a terrible blow for the planter and Democrat representative who blamed the fanatical influence of abolitionists on his ignorant slaves. With the departure of almost half of the house staff, the housekeeping of the family was much disrupted. “We are subjected to much inconvenience for want of their services, particularly in the attendance of the baby,” he admitted. In the redistribution of the chores among the remaining servants and the white members of the family, Colcock acknowledged at least one benefit: “I go to market myself but find that no inconvenience, but rather a source of economy.”²¹⁶ When Bram and Matthew were captured two months later, they were sold in the slave market. Selling a house servant meant wasting hours spent in training.²¹⁷ By and large, the control and regulation of human properties were collective efforts in the urban South through curfews, patrols, black codes and municipal bylaw. Runaways were proportionately few, rebellions even fewer.

²¹³ William Ferguson Colcock to Mary Colcock, 20 January 1850, Colcock Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, South Carolina.

²¹⁴ Pauline Worth, in Rawick, op.cit.

²¹⁵ William Ferguson Colcock to Mary Colcock, 11 June 1850, Colcock Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, South Carolina.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ John F. Marszalek, ed. *The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes, 1861-1866*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979, 151.

Masters of their household, white men were called to govern their domestic dependants and, as such, disciplined the house servants. During the long months his family spent in Charleston, John Berkley Grimball was often absent, either gone to the plantation or traveling north. But at the second he set foot in the town house, he resumed his patriarchal authority. In July 1859, Meta noted: “The maids are so very late at their ironing that I drew Mr Grimball’s attentions to the fact, and he scholded [*sic*] one and gave the other 2 slaps which caused a great amount of feeling, Patty the one scholded [*sic*] is very high tempered and the other a grim old soul.”²¹⁸ The masculinity of white men was closely linked to their ability to maintain a semblance of domestic order within their household; the insubordinate slave was to be punished, not damaged. Failure to do so through the right combination of strength, firmness, honor, and benevolence meant a failure of manhood. When Carrie Holmes married Isaac White, she was given the servant Margaret, who had been raised in a Charleston yard. But the slave did not appreciate the change, wrote Carrie’s sister Emma in her diary:

Margaret had become so excessively negligent & indifferent to her duties & withal so impertinent that Carrie asked Isaac to punish her. He, who is always so kind & thoughtful even towards a servant, would not do so during the day so as not to disgrace her before the other servants but took her after dark to an extreme end of the garden, intending to reprimand her & with a light strap gave her two or three cuts across her shoulders. She tore away from him with one wrench, tore off all her clothing, which must have been previously loosened purposely, and to his astonishment sprang into the creek.²¹⁹

Why did Margaret choose to kill herself? Did she find the separation from her family and friends too hard to handle? Perhaps she did not like being taken away at the extreme end of the garden at night by her master who may have had other plans in mind besides a little whipping on the shoulders? The diary does not answer these questions. The episode is nonetheless telling for what it reveals of gendered expectations. The most “terrible” aspect of the event was not the loss of a slave who had always belonged to the family, but the unmanly reaction of Isaac: “It put poor Isaac nearly crazy, for he blamed himself as the cause of her suicide, accusing himself of undue severity. Carrie says she hopes never to spend such another awful night – to see a strong man bowed with fearful anguish, weeping like a little child and accusing himself almost as a murderer.” When the body was found a few days later,

²¹⁸ Meta Morris Grimball, 8 July 1859, Diary June 1859-September 1860, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

²¹⁹ Marszalek, *op.cit.*, 237.

Isaac had it examined by a doctor and a group of gentlemen “to prove there was no mark of violence.”²²⁰ Isaac’s honor was safe.²²¹

Accordingly, the gender identity of elite women was at stake in their interactions with house servants. Southern laws unequivocally stated that masters and mistresses were entitled to discipline their slaves through corporal punishments. But when mistresses used the whip too liberally, most Southerners grew somewhat uneasy. Southern patriarchy celebrated women who were submissive, dutiful and nurturing, while disapproving of the ones who were authoritative and forceful. The power of mistresses was to be exerted surreptitiously, especially in towns and cities where close by neighbors could watch what went on in adjacent yards. Southerners eagerly condemned - either through the court of justice or the tribunal of social peers – ladies who abused their power over their human properties.²²² Madame Lalaurie of New Orleans is perhaps the most famous of these too harsh mistresses and her crimes were readily shared with the abolitionist writer Harriet Martineau.²²³ Born into a planting family, Madame Lalaurie was reputed “so graceful and accomplished, so charming in her manners and so hospitable.” But there was a little problem with the Creole lady: her slaves “looked singularly haggard and wretched.” A lady neighbor once saw her pursuing a little slave “cowhide in hand” until the child fell accidentally and died. The little corpse was buried, in a “shallow hole dug by torchlight in the corner of the yard.”²²⁴ The cook, whom the mistress kept chained to the fireplace, decided one morning to burn the place down.²²⁵ Among the ruins, the rescuers discovered at the back of the urban compound an outhouse, where starving slaves were bound to the wall, next to hanging dead bodies. As the news spread of the cruel deeds, “the rage of the crowd” was aroused and the mob forced the woman into exile in France. Undeniably an extremely brutal slaveowner, Madame Lalaurie was nonetheless a convenient scapegoat for her contemporaries. The slaveholding society

²²⁰ Ibid., 238.

²²¹ Nell Irvin Painter contends that “slaveowning women were not willing even to imagine relinquishing the labor of their slaves... slave mistresses preferred the enjoyment of unlimited class privilege to the limitation of their husbands’ opportunities for adultery. Reluctant to pit their class position against their gender interests, they avoided the facts and kept their secrets.” Virginia Ingraham Burr, ed., *The Secret Eye: The Journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 1848-1889*, introduction by Nell Irvin Painter, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990, 66.

²²² Fredrika Bremer tells the story of “two ladies in Charleston who were publicly accused for the murder of their slaves, the one by hunger, the other by flogging, and who, although they were acquitted by cowardly laws and lawyers, yet fell under the ban of public opprobrium, and were left to a dishonorable solitude and to – the judgment of God.” Op.cit., vol.2, 243.

²²³ Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel*, London: Saunders and Otley, 1838, vol.1, 264.

²²⁴ Ibid., 264-65.

²²⁵ Ibid., 265.

had purged itself of the “monster in the shape of a woman.”²²⁶ Interestingly, nobody seemed to question the role played by Mr. Lalaurie, the third husband of Madame, several years her junior and “a man of good character.”²²⁷

In antebellum America, the moral superiority of women was celebrated. For abolitionist writers such as the Grimké sisters, Fredrika Bremer, and Harriet Martineau, female expressions of violence came to symbolize the corrupting effect of slavery. Sarah Grimké told the story of a “slave, who was the seamstress of the family was continually in her mistress’ presence, sitting in her chamber to sew, or engaged in other household work, with her lacerated and bleeding back, her mutilated mouth, and heavy iron collar, without, so far as appeared, exciting any feelings of compassion.”²²⁸ When the architect Benjamin Latrobe arrived in New Orleans, he was shocked by the Creole ladies who scolded their house servants. What housekeepers commonly understood as a normal method of disciplining became, in the eyes of the architect, “a sort of savage pleasure.”²²⁹ At a ball he attended in the French Quarter, Latrobe “fancied that [he] saw a cowskin in every pretty hand gracefully waved in the dance.”²³⁰ According to many observers, the cruelty of white women was primarily triggered by sexual jealousy, and not by the need to have the domestic work done.²³¹ Women’s uses of violence, contrary to men’s, could not be rational or legitimate; they were inherently deviant, unpredictable, and unnatural.²³² On her way to New Orleans, Fredrika Bremer encountered a former planter who asserted, “women are not infrequently the most horrible tormentors of the house-slaves, and I would rather be one of the field-hands than the house-slave of a passionate woman. The institution of slavery seems to change the very nature of woman.”²³³ According to prevailing cultural expectations,

²²⁶ Bremer, op.cit., vol.2, 245.

²²⁷ Ibid. See also Fred R., Darkis, Jr., “Madame Lalaurie of New Orleans,” *Louisiana History*, 23, fall 1982, 383-399; L. Souvestre, “Madame Lalaurie: A Contemporary French Account.” Translated by Harriet Molenaer. *Louisiana Studies*, vol. 7, winter 1968, 378-390.

²²⁸ Sarah Grimké, quoted in Gerda Lerner, *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina: Pioneers for Women’s Rights and Abolition*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004, 27.

²²⁹ Benjamin H. Latrobe, *Impressions Respecting New Orleans: Diary and Sketches, 1818-1829*, ed. by Samuel Wilson, New York: Columbia University press, 1951, 53.

²³⁰ Ibid, 54. The violence of white women also disturbed travelers to the West Indies. See Morrissey, op.cit., 149-50.

²³¹ According to Fredrika Bremer, Madame Lalaurie (which she spelled Lallorue) tormented her victims because of her sexual jealousy toward female slaves. Op.cit., vol.2, 245.

²³² In her study of the Caribbean, Barbara Bush argues, “white women were themselves an oppressed group, facing competition from black women for the attention of white men, a factor which arguably made them more brutal.” Bush does not specify more brutal than whom? Men? Or what the observer expected of women? Bush, op.cit., 114.

²³³ Bremer, op.cit., vol.2, 189. See also vol.1, 292.

mistresses should be too soft-hearted to ensure that slaves were properly disciplined; they were supposed to be the conscience of the South. Some historians of slavery have interpreted white women's cruelty through the same essentializing lens, perpetuating the idea that emotions – and not slavery as a system – were responsible for female violence.²³⁴ Moreover, the use of corporal punishment to discipline house servants absolutely must be placed in historical perspective. “In a world where mothers expected whipping to teach a four-year-old not to cry (and where wives could count themselves lucky if their husbands did not beat them),” remarks Kirsten Wood “we should not be surprised that slaveholding [women] used force deliberately and instrumentally against slaves.”²³⁵ When housekeepers scolded their servants, they assumed their status as privileged members of the ruling class in a slaveholding order, yet somehow their actions contravened their gender identity.

This great contradiction of southern society was partly solved with the creation of workhouses in most towns and cities. In Charleston, the Work House was a public institution that had once been the prison for whites. Instead of white ladies debasing themselves with a whip in hand, slaves were flogged by black overseers.²³⁶ In 1825, notes Maurie McInnis, “an editorialist recommended the treadmill, saying that female slaveowners, ‘whose humanity too often stands between the Negro and the well-merited visit to the Work-House,’ would find it particularly useful as an alternative to the cowhide.”²³⁷ The treadmill was “a drum with broad steps which revolved rapidly. The slaves’ arms were fastened to a handrail above it. Only the strongest and most agile could move their feet in time with the movement of the drum; the others were soon helplessly suspended by their arms, the edge of the steps hitting their legs, knees and bodies at every turn.”²³⁸ The slaveowners (men, but especially women) were encouraged to delegate the actual punishment of their slaves to others. This enabled masters and mistresses to distance themselves from the realities of

²³⁴ Camp, *op.cit.*, 43. Fox-Genovese, *op.cit.*

²³⁵ Wood, *op.cit.*, 50.

²³⁶ For most of the 1830s, the master of the Work House was Frederick Wesner, himself a plantation owner at St. James, Goose Creek. Beatrice St. Julien Ravenel, *Architects of Charleston*, Charleston: Carolina Art Association, 1945, 143-44.

²³⁷ McInnis, *op.cit.*, 82. The treadmill was only in operation for a decade and a half, slaveholders finding that it was a bizarre mode of discipline.

²³⁸ Lerner, *op.cit.*, 55.

domination.²³⁹ For Angelina Grimké, passing by the workhouse was like “walking on the very confines of hell.”²⁴⁰

Planting families did not limit the punishment of slaves to the city and its penal institutions. Workhouses and prisons ended up being expensive. In 1863, it cost ten dollars a month to imprison a slave. When possible, slaveowners sent the unruly house servant to the country to work in the fields instead.²⁴¹ When two of her maids tried to run away, Céline Roman asked her son to have them work in his sugar plantation: “je te prierai de les faire enfermer tous les soirs & les dimanches & de leur faire voir qu’ils ne sont pas libres & qu’il faut qu’elles travaillent.”²⁴² Both mother and son would benefit from this measure: “les frais sont trop cher ici en prison & cela fera du bien à ta récolte.”²⁴³ Such sentences were reserved for the worst offences, since transporting the slave from the city to the country was, in itself, a complicated and costly business. At the other end of the continuum, slaves working in the country learned to envision the city as the theatre of the harshest forms of punishment. When they committed the worst crimes – such as slapping or trying to kill a white person – they could either be hanged or they could be sent to the city. In 1836, recounted the plantation mistress Rachel O’Connor, “a first rate house servant” who “returned the blows” after being chastised by her mistress was “shipped...for N.Orleans to be confined for life, either in the dungeon or put to the ball and chain.”²⁴⁴ As a punishment, Joseph Holt Ingraham noted, the chain gang “is considered very degrading and merely the threat of the Calaboose or the “ball and chain,” will often intimidate and render submissive the most incorrigible.”²⁴⁵ In Natchez and New Orleans, chain gangs could be seen daily cleaning and repairing the streets.

Slavery as a system needed an “extreme degree of domination” to operate in the urban household just as in the cotton fields. Slaveowners - men and women - held arbitrary

²³⁹ See Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Studies*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.

²⁴⁰ Diary of Angelina Grimké, 1829, quoted in Lerner, op.cit., 55.

²⁴¹ Maria Simons to Ann Vanderhorst, 15 June 1829, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston.

²⁴² “I ask you to have them locked up ever nights & Sundays & to show them that they are not free & that they have to work.” Céline Roman to Henri Roman, 25 janvier 1863, Roman Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

²⁴³ “The jail fees are too high here & this will be helpful for your harvest.” Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Allie Bayne Windham Webb, *Mistress of Evergreen Plantation: Rachel O’Connor’s Legacy of Letters, 1823-1845*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983, 197-98.

²⁴⁵ Joseph Holt Ingraham, *The South-West. By a Yankee*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835, vol.2, 185, 189.

power over their human property.²⁴⁶ Masters and mistresses, both the benevolent and the cruel, were primarily interested in the economics of slavery; in the chores a servant could perform in their town house and, when they were away, in the wages they could turn in. Most slaveowners were aware that respecting the humanity of the slaves through rewards and negotiations made good and loyal servants, much more so than the threat of the cowhide. Clean houses, refined meals, and lush gardens were obtained through cooperation between the housekeeper and her servants. No matter where they found themselves along the rural-urban continuum, the great majority of elite women were neither cruel monsters, nor paragons of kindness.²⁴⁷ Urban housekeepers, contends Marli Weiner, were more likely to be “benevolent mediators” than their rural counterparts, because in towns and cities, there were fewer concerns that separated mistresses and servants.²⁴⁸ The evidence gathered here does not support this argument, although it was the role they were asked to play by southern commentators, who lauded the “humanity” of female slaveowners. These women were in an uncomfortable position, sandwiched between two dependences, dependence on the protection and the ability to provide as the competence of white men, and dependence on the labour and the collaboration of enslaved servants. As remarks Cynthia Kennedy, a “lady could not fully realize her life’s goal without exploiting enslaved women.”²⁴⁹ If the servants did not do their work properly, they could say goodbye to their hours of leisure. As a result, the peculiar position of elite women within southern society – simultaneously privileged and oppressed - bred complex feelings and contradictory gestures toward house servants. The writings of Meta Morris Grimball reveal how conflicted she was; while she kindly took care of her father’s old nurse, she was often ruthless and intransigent with her own maids.²⁵⁰

In the city or in the country, true leisurely women were not that numerous in the planter class. The few that enjoyed this degree of leisure stirred the envy of their counterparts. Miriam Badger Hilliard was the young mistress of a plantation in Arkansas and

²⁴⁶ Fogel, *op.cit.*, 5.

²⁴⁷ “Although practically every slaveholder abandoned this role when temper or financial needs required a brutal disregard for the slave’s humanity, they eventually returned to their benevolent posturing to convince themselves (not to mention the increasingly critical world outside the South) of their own admirable intentions.” Young, *op.cit.*, 174.

²⁴⁸ “The potential for women to share a common perspective was much greater in the city than on the plantation,” argues Weiner since “female slaves and wealthy mistresses in cities felt more goodwill for one another.” Weiner, *op.cit.*, 150.

²⁴⁹ Kennedy, *op.cit.*, 82.

²⁵⁰ Meta Morris Grimball, 10 June, *Diary June 1859-September 1860*, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

the mother of a toddler. She often felt overwhelmed by her duties and frustrated by the indifference of her husband towards her domestic achievements, either in industry, economy or hospitality. The expected rewards of a life dedicated to domesticity and to plantation slavery were not forthcoming. What had happened to the leisurely and carefree belle she used to be only a few years ago? A trip to New Orleans and to the sugar plantation of the Episcopalian bishop Leonidas Polk promised to be enlightening: “I have heard so much of Mrs. Polk’s admirable system of housekeeping, that, as I am a novice in this art, I should doubtless find it both profitable & agreeable.”²⁵¹ But in the end, the visit to the Polks added to her dissatisfaction. Hilliard was astonished by Mrs. Polk, who delegated – unashamedly it seemed – her most sacred duties as a mother and a housekeeper:

She appropriates to her own use a suite of apartments – viz – Bishop’s study, bed chamber, bath-room. She has a faithful nurse (Negro) to whose care she abandons her babes entirely. Only when she has a fancy to caress them does she see them. Eight children and cannot lay to their charge the loss of a single night’s rest. In another department she is equally fortunate in having a housekeeper who gives out, regulates, and is everything she ought to be.²⁵²

Simultaneously admiring and envious of the domestic arrangements of Mrs. Polk, Hilliard could not help but question some of her assumptions, starting with the peculiar institution itself. “Negroes are nothing but a tax & annoyance to their owners” she stated a few months later, “When we change our residence, I cast my vote for a free state.”²⁵³ Hilliard was not alone. Other plantation women questioned the reliance of southern society on slavery. These doubts were usually expressed by women who had traveled north and abroad, and who had seen that, in the free states, there were plenty of well-run household and leisurely ladies.²⁵⁴ Women of the planter class alternately felt confusion, frustration and resignation vis-à-vis their household responsibilities and the peculiar institution.

“Mistress and servants found themselves bound together in mutual dependency in spite of themselves,” once remarked Eugene Genovese.²⁵⁵ The leisure of plantation women, in the city as in the country, was attached to the subservience of enslaved servants. Elite women were highly “dependent upon the cooperation of their slaves for the smooth running

²⁵¹ Miriam Badger Hilliard, Diary, 17 January 1850, Typescript, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

²⁵² Miriam Badger Hilliard, Diary, 4 February 1850, 8, Typescript, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana. See also entry for 20 June 1850.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 24, 23. For a different interpretation of Hilliard’s diary, see Walter Johnson, *op.cit.*, Chapter 3.

²⁵⁴ Young, *op.cit.*, 155.

²⁵⁵ Eugene D. Genovese, “Life in the Big House,” Nancy F. Cott and Elizabeth H. Pleck, eds., *A Heritage of Her Own: Toward a New Social History of American Women*, New York: Touchstone, 1979, 290.

of their household.”²⁵⁶ Each time a house servant challenged their mastery (a regular occurrence), elite women felt how shaky were the foundations which undergirded their pedestal. “Jenny is sick, or at least keeps her chamber for some days past and I have to depend upon Henny for everything – to cook, wash, milk, etc. don’t you pity me?” wrote the daughter of a planter from New Orleans.²⁵⁷ If she could not find another servant to perform the work that the resistant slave would not do, the lady had to roll up the sleeves of her fine dress and do most of the work herself. Fathers and sons might take over some domestic chores usually performed by male servants – such as running errands - but the housework effectively fell upon white women who saw their leisure hours disappearing in smoke.²⁵⁸

The great instability of the urban household during the Civil War and the years that immediately followed meant that ladies, young and old, spent much of their time doing the work of house servants. “[We] lead a very quiet monotonous life,” wrote Emma Holmes in August 1863, “our morning occupied in becoming accomplished chambermaids, laundresses & housekeepers.”²⁵⁹ Two years later, there was not much left of her antebellum life of leisure: “I am very weary, standing up washing all breakfast & dinner china, bowls, kettles, pans, silver, etc. & minding Sims, churning, washing stockings, etc. – a most miscellaneous list of duties, leaving no time for reading or exercise.”²⁶⁰ Letters and diaries written by elite women during the war are long litanies to the ingratitude of the servants gone and of the illnesses brought by the domestic chores done.²⁶¹ In occupied New Orleans, strenuous housework exhausted Louisa St. Martin who eagerly awaited the end of the war:

Plaise à Dieu que cette guerre si triste puisse finir cette année c’est l’espoir de beaucoup ici... J’ai été souffrante pendant quinze jours d’un grand feu dans la bouche et dans la poitrine il a fallu me rafraîchir et me purger depuis je suis beaucoup mieux. Je suppose que c’est la fatigue qui me donne cela comme vous le savez je suis obligée de tout faire dans mon ménage sauf le blanchissage que la domestique veut bien faire ce qui est beaucoup pour moi.²⁶²

²⁵⁶ McInnis, op.cit. 247.

²⁵⁷ Bleser, ed. *Tokens of Affection*, op.cit., 149.

²⁵⁸ Weiner, op.cit., 199.

²⁵⁹ Marszalek, op.cit., 289.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 469-70.

²⁶¹ Céline Roman to Henri Roman, 7 January 1863, Roman Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana; A. Grima to Alfred Grima, 30 October 1863 and 27 November 1863, Grima Family Papers, New Orleans Historic Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

²⁶² “May it please God that this sad war can end this year. It is the hope of many here... I have been unwell during fifteen days of a great inflammation in the mouth and the chest. We had to freshen me up and purge me and since I feel much better. I guess it is the exhaustion that is the cause of this. As you know, I have to do everything in my house except the laundry that the servant accepts to do, which means much to me.” Louisa

Others faced their fall from the pedestal with a remarkable stoicism. When Mary Pringle returned to her house in Charleston, a major challenge awaited her: cleaning (mostly by herself) her three-storey house, which had been used as the head quarters of the Union army in the city. To her daughter, the woman in her sixties wrote: “I am doing it as thoroughly as if I were removing the contamination of a serpent’ rail.”²⁶³ These urban housekeepers experienced the consequences of the war deep into their bodies; their gender more than ever becoming the defining circumstance of their life.²⁶⁴

What is that “something” that we should understand about city housekeeping? And what does housekeeping tell us about plantation women’s experience of the urban South? It was primarily a female affair, yet it concerned every member of the household, from the master who scolded the maids to the child slave who swept the yard. The peripatetic life of planting families and the urban environment posed unique challenges to elite women as housekeepers in terms of logistics, workload, cost, hospitality, and, most importantly, management of house servants. To enjoy the city, women depended on the cooperation of maids, seamstresses, cooks, butlers, and footmen. Their labor, observes Cindy Kierner, “furnished slaveholding women with the leisure time they needed to read, write letters, attend prayer meetings, and do benevolent work – activities that enabled them to participate, either figuratively or literally, in the public sphere and its concerns.”²⁶⁵ To the ambitious and the accomplished housekeepers, town houses were privileged sites to pursue an intense social life beyond the domestic and private sphere. In their quest to refute the stereotype of the lady on the pedestal, historians of plantation women have tended to exaggerate the divide between plantation women and urban women of the slaveholding class. As it is demonstrated here, leisured ladies and industrious housewives were often the very same women at different hours of the day, seasons of the year, or periods of their lives.

Perret St. Martin to Louise St. Martin, 22 mai 1864, St. Martin Family Papers, Tulane Special Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

²⁶³ Côté, op.cit., 251.

²⁶⁴ For the changing relation of elite women with housekeeping in the postbellum era, and the transformation of domestic space (notably the migration of the kitchen into the house), see Jane Turner Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood, 1865-1895*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2003, 75-88.

²⁶⁵ Cynthia A. Kierner, *Beyond the Household: Women’s Place in the Early South, 1700-1835*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998, 6.

Besides reflecting the social status and the gender relations of their inhabitants, the town house – understood broadly in this chapter as the urban compound - was also a manifestation of the racial relations inherent to southern society. To plantation women, the domination of house servants by means of thick walls, curfews, and chains seemed as normal as their own gender subordination. “By encoding domination and subordination into everyday life – through architecture, town planning, work rules, and etiquette – relationships of power were mystified and naturalized,” remarks one historian.²⁶⁶ Yet, ordinary expressions of slave resistance were sources of frustration and anxiety for plantation women and led some of them, particularly at ease in towns and cities, to question southern patriarchy and the peculiar institution.

If the urban environment provided house servants with more favourable conditions of enslavement, it did not necessarily humanize relations between owners and owned. Cruelty was a regular occurrence in towns and cities, where, as anywhere else in the South, the economics of slavery usually prevailed. Still, ladies and slaves shared a common outlook on the urban South; both groups – subordinated in different ways - found in towns and cities amenities and opportunities that were often nonexistent in the country, starting with the possibility of socializing and creating communities. Twenty years after the end of the Civil War, a plantation mistress complaining about the scarcity of house servants in the country remarked, “Darkies are much harder to get around here than on the river; they are *such ladies & so full of going to cities.*”²⁶⁷ Scholars have well documented the attraction of the urban South for African-Americans, but much less so for plantation women. The next chapter of this dissertation explores why ladies were “so full of going to cities” during the gay season.

²⁶⁶ James E. Delle, “Gender, Power, and Space: Negotiating Social Relations under Slavery on Coffee Plantations in Jamaica, 1790-1834,” in *Lines that Divide*, op.cit., 262.

²⁶⁷ Emily Morrison Bondurant to Alexander J. Bondurant, 3 April 1883, Bondurant-Morrison Family Papers, UVA, quoted in Jane Turner Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood, 1865-1895*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2003, 72. [Emphasis in original].

Chapter 4

The Gay Season

In the winter 1856, the sugar planter Hore Browse Trist was in mourning. His beloved daughter Rosella had just passed away prematurely of “nervous or typhoid fever.”¹ When she died, the girl was not at *Bowden*, the plantation of her widowed father, but at *Melpomene*, the suburban villa of her grandmother Aglaé Bringier. She spent the cold season there, with her sister Wilhelmine and her maternal cousins, to be educated by the best teachers of New Orleans.² The loss of Rosella was especially great since that winter she was supposed to make her entrance into society. “Willie told me,” proudly reported the planter to his sons, “when [she] arranged her hair & her toilette [she] could not but carry [her] thought forward to the time when she would eclipse [them] all in the ballroom & the drawing room.” Rosella’s future was indeed very promising in the Crescent City. Born of the union between an Anglo-American who had been the ward of Thomas Jefferson and the daughter of one of the wealthiest Creole planting families, she was destined to a great career as a belle and, most importantly, to a brilliant marriage. But Rosella would never experience her very first gay season with its round of balls and evenings at the opera.

Now that Rosella was gone, the patriarch repeatedly complained of the scarce letters and long absences of his remaining daughter. Although surrounded by books and slaves, Hore Browse Trist felt immensely lonely at his plantation.³ In October, he wrote Wilhelmine: “You are certainly coming back to Bowden, as Henry brought a message to Lavinia from you that the house must be scrubbed & cleaned & whitewashed, there will be therefore no necessity for being bored with Mde Loze or any other dame or demoiselle de compagnie. Tant mieux.”⁴ Perhaps to make his plantation house more attractive to his surviving daughter, he began major renovations that fall, tearing down

¹ Hore Browse Trist to his sons, 14 January 1856, Trist Family Papers, New Orleans Historical Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

² Memoirs of Madam Joseph Lancaster Brent (Miss Rosella Kenner) “Recollections of a Grandmother” in Herman de Bachellet Seebold, *Old Louisiana Plantation Homes and Family Trees*, Gretna, N.O.: Pelican Publishing Company, 1971, 142.

³ On the influence of H.B. Trist on Louisiana politics and his love of books, see Joseph G. Tregle, Jr., *Louisiana in the Age of Jackson: A Clash of Cultures and Personalities*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999, 103.

⁴ Hore Browse Trist to Wilhelmine Trist, 27 October 1856, Trist Family Papers, New Orleans Historical Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

walls and purchasing new wallpaper. A few weeks later, however, while Wilhelmine was still in the city, the planter followed his beloved Rosella to the grave, succumbing to the complications of jaundice induced by his propensity for drink. Until the end, H.B. Trist had yielded his own desire to be surrounded by his family to the social imperatives of seeing his children carve a place for themselves within the southern master class. For plantation daughters, this meant spending extended periods of time in the city, where they received an education, made their debut, attended balls and the theatre, were courted, got married, and eventually resumed a plantation life. In this process focused on the young, older women played an instrumental role of guidance. Behind every belle was a mother, a grandmother, or an aunt.

In the mythology of the Old South, the belle is overwhelmingly portrayed in a rural environment, be it dancing in the Big House of a prosperous plantation or picnicking in its adjacent countryside.⁵ As a result, historians of southern women have not questioned the spatial component of the stereotype: as a rule, the belle is portrayed in the country.⁶ But to enter society, a plantation girl needed a critical mass of friends, acquaintances and potential suitors. Sometimes that society was found in summer resorts, such as the Virginia Springs, Saratoga Springs or Newport. But for the majority,

⁵ Like any stereotype, the belle is part reality and part fiction. According to Christie Ann Farham, “although it could be distorted into an expression of vanity and false values, the ideal [of the Southern belle] provided the means for positive action in a situation in which only passivity had been deemed acceptable. In this sense, the Southern belle, rather than being a superficial and self-centered ideal type, appealed to young women as a model of empowerment.” Christie Anne Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South*, New York: New York University Press, 1994, 127. For her part, Jane Turner Censer notes that the belle was one feminine ideal among others: “through the early part of the nineteenth century, the celebration of the belle had conflicted to some extent with the other pervasive ideal of modest, retiring womanhood. Belledom was simply the best-known in a life that otherwise was supposed to be largely oriented to self-abnegation and service.” Jane Turner Censer. *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood, 1865-1895*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003, 11. Recently, Anya Jabour has been quite critical of the historical treatment of young women as southern belles: “The few extant book-length studies of white girls and young women in the antebellum South perpetuate, rather than investigate, the mystique of the southern belle by using the word “belle” in their titles.” According to Jabour, southern belledom would essentially be a postbellum construction and she prefers the much more anachronistic term “Scarlett’s sisters.” The evidence gathered for this research contradicts Jabour’ terminological choices, although they support several of her conclusions about the meaning of coming-of-age for white women. Anya Jabour, *Scarlett’s Sisters: Young Women in the Old South*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007, 2. See also Giselle Roberts, *The Confederate Belle*, Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003.

⁶ Censer notes in passing that the “social scene that centered on the wooing of belles tended to be possible only in larger towns and cities.” Censer, *ibid.*, 30. Although she acknowledged that “for rural girls, [coming-of-age] often necessitated a visit to a metropolitan area,” Anya Jabour contends that “time of life proved a more useful interpretive distinction than comparisons between rural and urban, planter and professional, or Upper South and Lower South.” Anya Jabour, *ibid.*, 8.

society was primarily located in the towns and the cities of the region. The belle was first and foremost an urban character. The most celebrated period in an elite southern woman's life was ironically not spent at the plantation, but in the city. For Rosella and Wilhelmine Trist, as for most daughters of the planter class, their first gay season represented a rite of passage from childhood to adulthood. The anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff defines rites of passage as "a category of rituals that mark the passages of an individual through the life cycle, from one stage to another over time, from one role or social position to another, integrating the human and cultural experiences with biological destiny; birth, reproduction, and death."⁷ These rites have multiple functions, notably "to resolve social problems," and "perpetuate the social order."⁸ A winter in town was understood in the Old South as a rite of passage that Steven M. Stowe describes as a "passage from country to city to country."⁹ This passage was essential to the reproduction of the master class.

Southerners were not unique. In New York and Philadelphia, "beaux" and "belles" attended balls and the theatre for what they understood as a period in life that was all about amusement, excitement and freedom. In the South, though, even more than in the North, belledom and its urban pleasures were, according to the ideal, meant to be ephemeral. The reality, however, was rather different as many elite southern women challenged this constraining ideal whenever they could. This chapter argues that once they had experienced the gay season, its amusements and intense sociability, and despite prevailing ideologies that located them on the plantation, many plantation women longed to return to the city. The gay season was addictive and it sometimes turned the plantation girl away from her destiny as a plantation mistress, the devoted mother of a white and black family. When rural isolation became too heavy, Southern women looked to the city as an escape from their loneliness, their boredom, and their toil. The city thus threatened the very foundation of an organic, patriarchal, and rural society, and condemned planting men such as Hore Browse Trist to loneliness. After delineating the contours of the gay season through its rhythms, highpoints, and sites, this

⁷ Barbara Myerhoff, "Rites of Passages: Process and Paradox," Victor Turner, ed., *Celebration: Studies in Festivity and Ritual*, Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982, 109.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁹ Steven M. Stowe, "City, Country, and the Feminine Voice," Michael O'Brien and David Moltke-Hansen, eds, *Intellectual Life in Antebellum Charleston*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986, 313.

chapter examines how plantation girls were transformed into city belles. Next, it highlights how fathers and mothers differently guided their daughters toward a good marriage. After exploring the numerous voices criticizing the gay season and its corrupting effects, this chapter concludes with examples of women who chose to prolong their belledom, thus expressing a subtle form of resistance to the patriarchal norms of southern society.

In the winter, the towns and cities of the South were dynamic, healthy, crowded places. In the months that followed the harvest and preceded planting, planters came to the city – alone or with their family – to settle their business with their factor, attend political meetings and the races, and engage in a social round. In great numbers, planters, “even the most devoted,” thus deserted their plantations at the very moment they were at their healthiest.¹⁰ In addition to the migrant families who owned town houses, planting men and women traveled to Charleston, Savannah, Mobile or New Orleans from the most remote parts of the state or even from neighboring states. They stayed with friends, rented houses, and filled the boarding houses and hotels of the southern city. Large numbers of visitors also arrived from outside the region.¹¹ Just as Southerners summered in the North, there were Northerners who wintered in the South.¹² “Here invalids from the North resort in winter for the benefits of their health, and to enjoy the pleasures of a refined society,” noted a traveler to Charleston on the eve of the Civil War.¹³ Others came on business, as the agents of the mercantile firms of New York or as the miniature painters who immortalized the master class on canvas.¹⁴ There were also parents and daughters, a “modest beauty from Ohio” and a “red-cheeked, blue-eyed miss from New

¹⁰ Harriot Horry Rutledge Ravenel, *Charleston: The Place and The People*, New York: MacMillan, 1906, 385.

¹¹ Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, vol.1, 2004, 52-58.

¹² W.C. Corsan, *Two Months in the Confederate States: An Englishman's Travels Through the South*, edited by Benjamin H.Trask, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996, 6. C.f. John Hope Franklin, *A Southern Odyssey: Travelers in the Antebellum North*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976, 83.

¹³ “Life and Travel in the Southern States,” *Great Republic Monthly*, I, 1859, 80-84, Eugene L.Schwaab, ed. *Travels in the Old South: Selected from Periodicals of the Times*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1973, vol.2, 493.

¹⁴ Thomas Pinckney Jr. to Harriot Pinckney, 2 January 1802, Anna Wells Rutledge, ed., “Letters from Thomas Pinckney Jr. to Harriott Pinckney,” *The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, vol.XLI, no.3, July 1940, 107.

England,” eager to engage in “music, dancing, nonsense, eating, and flirting until three o’clock in the morning – the same things for three or four months thereafter.”¹⁵ This seasonal influx of strangers infused a good dose of energy and novelty to urban society that made it more exciting for the habitués.

For most of the nineteenth century, the beginning of the gay season was announced by the reopening of the theatres in November or December, and usually stretched until Lent.¹⁶ Once Lent was over, there was in addition “a short season of gayety before the extreme hot weather [came] on.”¹⁷ In the subtropical climate, the coolest months of the year facilitated large gatherings of people in theatres, halls and private residences, which would have been suffocating in the dog days of summer. Yet, climate was not the sole factor in determining the timing of the social season. In the old British colonies, the planting elite had consciously emulated the English gentry, who gathered in London during the winter months.¹⁸ Concurrent with sittings of the colonial legislatures and courts, the social season was observed in most colonial towns, although it was shorter in Williamsburg than in Annapolis or Charleston.¹⁹ Far from being exclusive to the British colonies, winter festivities were also well established in New Orleans at the time of the Louisiana Purchase. A traveler observed in the French Quarter: “Winter is the gay season, balls are frequent. Indeed in a place so bare of the means of education, and where the privileges of religion are so curtailed, there is an abundance of amusement.”²⁰ The season of carnival, as it was already called, emulated for its part a Parisian custom.²¹ Modulated by the harvest, the climate, religion, and European influences, the gay season was also governed by the rhythm of the curfew, set

¹⁵ Mrs. Hall, quoted in Mary Cable, *Lost New Orleans*, New York: American Legacy Press, 1980, 110.

¹⁶ The period of religious observance was usually shorter in Protestant Charleston than in Catholic New Orleans, but still known and acknowledged by the residents of both cities. Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in the Wilderness: The First Century of Urban Life in America, 1625-1742*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955, 440. For a breach of this tradition in the 1790s, see Eola Willis, *The Charleston Stage in the XVIII Century: with Social Settings of the Time*, New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968, 327.

¹⁷ Mattie A. Wayne to Mary Wayne, 12 April [1871], Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

¹⁸ Cynthia A. Kierner, *Beyond the Household: Women’s Place in the Early South, 1700-1835*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998, 50.

¹⁹ Cynthia Megan Kennedy, *Braided Relations, Entwined Lives: The Women of Charleston’s Urban Slave Society*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005, 157.

²⁰ Charles Caesar Robin, quoted in Grace King, *New Orleans: The Place and the People*, New York: MacMillan, 1895, 170-171.

²¹ Samuel Kinser, *Carnival, American Style: Mardi Gras at New Orleans and Mobile*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990, 8.

at nine o'clock in the winter in most southern cities. As slaves vanished from the streets, visiting gentlemen customarily retired from the drawing room, unless they had been expressly invited to remain longer.²²

At the nucleus of the gay season was an intense sociability. Urban culture was experienced collectively in the South. The southern elite and their guests patronized sociable cultural activities, such as dancing, dining, card playing, music, opera, and the theatre.²³ If sociable encounters were primarily amusements, they also fulfilled the very practical functions of reinforcing all sorts of relations: social, professional, business, and even matrimonial. These social reunions happened throughout the year, but with greatest frequency during the winter. Between the receptions organized and the receptions attended, there was not much time for solitude for the men and women who belonged to the best society.

Although similar in spirit and in the social values they embodied, the highpoints of the gay season differed in each city; in New Orleans, it was Mardi Gras, in Charleston, Race week. The first week of February was “the Charleston carnival.”²⁴ Since the 1760s, schools, businesses, and the legislature interrupted their activities for a week entirely dedicated to the track and to dancing.²⁵ In the early 1830s, one traveler noted: “At the races, all Carolina comes up to Charleston, as the tribes of Greece met at Olympia.”²⁶ The Charleston races were the first of a southeastern horseracing circuit that moved north to Virginia in the spring and the summer.²⁷ Horseracing was also popular in the Southwest, where New Orleans and its Metairie course formed the epicentre of a racing network that included St. Francisville and Natchez.²⁸ Primarily the hobby of gentlemen,

²² Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, *A Family of Women: The Carolina Petigrus in Peace and War*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999, 59; Robert C. Reinders, “Slavery in New Orleans in the Decade before the Civil War,” Elinor Miller and Eugene D. Genovese, eds, *Plantation, Town, and County: Essays on the Local History of American Slave Society*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974, 371.

²³ Carl Bridenbaugh, *op.cit.*, 464.

²⁴ Ravenel, *op.cit.*, 385.

²⁵ Kierner, *op.cit.*, 42.

²⁶ G.M., “South Carolina,” *New England Magazine*, October 1831, vol. I, no.4, 250.

²⁷ Richard N. Côté, *Mary's World: Love, War, and Family Ties in Nineteenth-Century Charleston*, Mount Pleasant: Corinthian Books, 2004, 36; Kierner, *op.cit.*, 42; On the decline of racing in Virginia in the later antebellum period, see Patricia C. Click, *The Spirit of the Times: Amusements in Nineteenth-Century Baltimore, Norfolk, and Richmond*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989, 59-71.

²⁸ Founded by a group of wealthy planters, the Pharsalia race course of Natchez was, however, deserted by the elite by the 1850s, as it allowed races of horses and mules owned by poor whites and free Blacks. The Natchez planters preferred the more select crowd of New Orleans. Laura D.S. Harrel, “Horse Racing in

racers had long been attended by the ladies of Charleston. When in 1799 the members of the Jockey Club decided to finance their new track by imposing an admission fee on the spectators, the ladies were outraged. In a series of articles that appeared in the *South Carolina Gazette*, a “Female Jockey” protested in the name of female coverture:

There are four of us, my old aunt, two marriageable sisters and my maiden self. We ride to the Jockey-ground in our family coach every day during the Races, but we do mortally hate to pay anything for it. Conceive, then, our indignation at the new turf-tax on coaches. Think what a rage we are in with the Stewards of the Jockey Club... I ache all over every time I think of it. What! Covert women into Ways and Means for Men, from the mere sportive production of creative fancy?... I know their subscriptions are liberal and their purses heavy, but by what right have they to enlarge their sweep-stakes by our means? ...Ye Gods! Over what a precipice of despotism and prodigality are we passing. To impose taxation on amusements that have hitherto been free for everyone to enjoy!”²⁹

Having no say in the decision to impose the additional tariff and claiming their right to attend the races in a coach (a sign of their elite status), these women echoed a concern about “taxation without representation.” In New Orleans, American women also attended the races, but not their Creole counterparts. “We were at the races for the day before yesterday,” Anna Farar told her father in Mississippi, “almost all the ladies of our acquaintance were there, but they [the races] were not worth seeing & appear to excite very little interest.”³⁰ According to Eliza Ripley, “so very unfashionable it was for ladies to go to races in the extreme South. There may have been some *demi-mondaines* scattered here and there, in inconspicuous places.”³¹ In 1854, a group of “Lexington Belles” stunned the Creole society as they paraded at the Metairie course. “Ladies had never been in evidence at a horse race in Louisiana,” explained Ripley. “The bare idea was a shock to the Creole mind, that dominated and controlled all the fashionable, indeed, all the respectable, minds in New Orleans at that day.”³²

The social season truly began in the Crescent City with the *bal du roi* on January 6th, which launched the winter festivities known as “Carnival,” a series of dances that led

the Old Natchez District, 1783-1830,” *Journal of Mississippi History*, XIII, April 1951, 123-25; D. Clayton James, *Antebellum Natchez*, Baton Rouge : Louisiana State University Press, 1968, 99, 254-255.

²⁹ Willis, op.cit., 423.

³⁰ Anne F. Mercer to Benjamin Farar, 14 March 1824, Farar Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

³¹ Eliza Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans: Being Recollections of my Girlhood*, New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1912, 248.

³² *Ibid.*, 246. Often born into southeastern families who had migrated west a generation or two earlier, the ladies of Kentucky were used to taking part to the races, unlike their Creole counterparts.

to a grandiose and final ball on Mardi Gras.³³ A preserve of the fashionable Creoles at first, Carnival became widely celebrated by the American population during the antebellum period and spread to every class of society.³⁴ Creoles were particularly fond of masked and costume balls. The daughter of a Natchez planter who spent most winters in New Orleans in the 1820s, Anna Farar Mercer was a reluctant dancer. While her friend attended twenty-two balls in the winter season 1824, she attended only one, a masked ball, “merely as spectators in dresses that we had worn [sic] all day.”³⁵ Mercer was startled by the spectacle: a masked man played the drunken Indian, while another was disguised as an old woman. Such masquerades were not exclusive to the French city and were regular occurrences in the social calendar of Charleston, Augusta and Mobile.³⁶ By the mid-nineteenth century, though, the essentially private affairs that constituted the Orleanian carnival developed a popular component that notably included street parading, and which would eventually set Mardi Gras apart from the winter festivities held elsewhere in the urban South.³⁷

Beyond the parades of Mardi Gras and the excitements of the track, what truly defined the winter season in the urban South were the dancing parties.³⁸ “People seemed to do nothing but dance during this period of cool and generally clement weather and lighter agricultural work,” Berquin-Duvallon observed.³⁹ Exclusivity characterized balls in larger cities such as Charleston and New Orleans. In medium size cities, such as Mobile or Savannah, the assemblies were usually more heterogeneous and democratic. Sojourning in Mobile in the early 1830s, the British actor Tyrone Power attended a ball

³³ Kinser, *op.cit.*, 59.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 9, 22.

³⁵ Anna F. Mercer to Benjamin Farar, 5 March 1824, Farar Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

³⁶ Maurie D. McInnis, *The Politics of Taste in Antebellum Charleston*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005, 285; 14 August 1852, Virginia Ingraham Burr, ed. *The Secret Eye: The Journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 1848-1889*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990, 113; 12 February 1866, Mary D. Robertson, ed. *A Confederate Lady Comes of Age: The Journal of Pauline DeCaradeuc Heyward, 1863-1888*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992, 97.

³⁷ Eventually, carnival as we know it “was not bequeathed to Louisiana by France” but “by the collision, coordination, and precipitation of five disparate elements: white plantation society’s winter festivities, black society’s need to adapt African customs in order to preserve them, the Gulf Coast’s proximity to and influence by Caribbean festivities, its similar influence by the festive practices of Anglo-Americans migrating westward, and, cutting across all these factors, the Spanish and then American commercialization of leisure time.” Kinser, *op.cit.*, 21; See also Reid Mitchell. *All on a Mardi Grad Day: Episodes in the History of New Orleans Carnival*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995.

³⁸ Pease and Pease, *op.cit.*, 60.

³⁹ Berquin-Duvallon, *View of the Spanish Colony on the Mississippi*, quoted in Kinser, *op.cit.*, 22.

“given in honour of the birth-day of Washington,” celebrated the third Monday of February:

Here, to the number of six hundred, was assembled all of the democracy of Mobile having a claim to the term respectable, properly applied to habit and character, not to calling or wealth. I have seldom seen a better dressed and never a better conducted assembly, whilst nothing could be more perfectly democratic.

Here you might see the merchant's lady, whose French ball-dress cost one hundred and fifty dollars, dancing in the same set with the *modiste* who made it up; whilst the merchant changed hands with the wife of his master-draysman, and the wealthy planter's daughter footed to her brother's Schneider, himself tricked out in some nondescript uniform of his own making.⁴⁰

Smaller towns and economic downturns made white society more inclusive, while large urban centers and economic prosperity were synonymous with exclusivity. Cynthia Kennedy notes that each ball in these larger centers served “to reenact and reinforce the social boundaries of slave society.”⁴¹ More than mere dancing and socializing, balls during the colonial period and afterward in the Early Republic, were an overtly political form of celebration. They might have lost some of their civic connotation in the antebellum period, but none of their political meaning.⁴²

Synchronized with the meetings of the court and the legislature in the colonial period and the first decades of the Republic, the winter social season in seaport cities was detached from formal politics as Columbia and Baton Rouge became the capitals of South Carolina and Louisiana respectively. As early as the 1800s, commentators in both cities complained of the lack of excitement triggered by their respective carnivals. Contemporaries and historians alike have advanced several explanations for this supposed decline of the winter festivities: the economic stagnation of the Lowcountry, the emergence of the ideology of the separate spheres, or the rising influence of evangelicalism.⁴³ Interestingly, both in New Orleans and Charleston, critics blamed the

⁴⁰ Tyrone Power, *Impressions of America during the Years 1833, 1834, and 1835*, quoted in Walter Brownlow Posey, “Alabama in the 1830s: As Recorded by British Travellers,” [sic] *Birmingham-Southern College Bulletin*, vol. XXX, no.4, December 1938, 24.

⁴¹ Kennedy, *op.cit.*, 4.

⁴² As historian Daniel Kilbride has suggested in his study of Alice Izard's salon, “Historians of early American politics and culture are just beginning to understand what the Manigault women knew implicitly: that associating, conversing, and even dancing were not merely private acts, but political practices.” Daniel Kilbride, “Cultivation, Conservatism, and the Early National Gentry: The Manigault Family and their Circle,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, 19 (summer 1999), 222.

⁴³ Robert Mills, *Statistics of South Carolina, including a View of its Natural, Civil, and Military History, General and Particular*, Charleston: Hurlbut and Lloyd, 1826 (The Reprint Company, Spartanburg, 1972), 458; McInnis,

Americanization of the city for the deterioration of the gay season and of “polished society” generally. In 1853, a Charlestonian remarked,

we have become gradually *Americanized*. The earnest pursuit of money... for the mere vulgar ambition of being known as a ‘rich man’” replaced the pursuit of culture which alone can make wealth enjoyable...The Puritan spirit... of New England, has spread... to the region once granted by Charles II, to his courtly favorites.⁴⁴

Much of those criticisms, often expressed by the elderly, can be explained by a nostalgic outlook on an imagined aristocratic past, more than on a true decline.⁴⁵ Carnivals, races, and balls were never as magnificent as the first that one had attended. “The young people are impatient to go to Charleston” remarked a plantation mistress in 1840, “but old Mr. P is very unwilling to leave the country where he is enjoying tolerable health.”⁴⁶ On the eve of the Civil War, the attraction of the gay season was still great on the younger generations as the diaries of Emma Holmes, Gertrude Clanton or Pauline DeCaradeuc reveal. Moreover, the association of dancing with the young undeniably grew stronger overtime.⁴⁷ Mary Wayne remarked that Charleston society “is only for school boy, & girls, - & exclude the highly cultivated ladies, & gents.”⁴⁸ The winter balls were described by a Creole man as “les amusements de leur âge” and belonged to a youth culture, in which older people were peripheral, yet omnipresent.⁴⁹ Parents and

op.cit., 27.; Pease and Pease, op.cit., 2. See also Charles Fraser, *Reminiscences of Charleston*, Charleston: John Russell, 1854.

⁴⁴ William Porcher Miles, “American Literature and Charleston Society,” *Southern Quarterly Review*, VII, April 1853, 406.

⁴⁵ Kinser acutely observes, “The first ingredient in what became a tradition of Carnival celebration at New Orleans only in the 1830s and 1840s is not the fact but the imagination of colonial upper-class gaiety.” Kinser, op.cit., 18.

⁴⁶ Mary Hering Middleton to Eliza Middleton Fisher, 16 January 1840, Eliza Cope Harrison, *Best Companions: Letters of Eliza Middleton Fisher and her Mother, Mary Hering Middleton, from Charleston, Philadelphia, and Newport, 1839-1846*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001, 101.

⁴⁷ In the colonial period, balls “were enjoyed by old as well as young” notes Julia Cherry Spruill, *Women’s Life and Work in the Southern Colonies*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1938, 103. As the nineteenth century progressed, dancing became associated, for aging men, as a sign of irresponsibility and, to an extent, of effeminacy. See Lewis A. Erenberg, *Steppin’out: N.Y. Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930*, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981.

⁴⁸ Wayne opposed Charleston and New Orleans’s gay societies, the latter being, in her view, more opened to older people. Since Wayne had long been a controversial figure of Charleston’s society, often breaking the rules of what was expected of a lady (notably by traveling unescorted or by visiting less-refined people), she was often excluded from the best social circles of her own city. Mary Wayne to Ann Vanderhorst, 7 December 1870, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

⁴⁹ Victor Grima to A. Grima, 9 March 1866, Grima Family Papers, New Orleans Historical Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana; Kennedy, op.cit., 158.

older members of the elite were closely involved in controlling, creating and financing the events of the gay season.

Since the gay season was characterized by the scope of its assemblies, it needed sites that could accommodate large groups of people. Balls, for instance, were given in town houses, halls, hotels, theatres, and even at the opera. The primary site of elite sociability was the town house. With their sizeable drawing rooms, dining rooms, and ballrooms, the urban dwellings of the southern elite were conceived for entertaining, not for privacy or intimacy. Piazzas, courtyards, and gardens also played a significant role in these social gatherings. Private receptions were complex affairs that included music and dancing, supper and card playing.⁵⁰ Groups of guests mingled or segregated themselves in different rooms of the house according to gender, age, and interest. When they were attending a soirée in a town house, plantation women were not confining themselves to a private sphere; they were going “in society” or as the Creoles said, they were going “dans le monde.”⁵¹ After the Revolution, white women “won an acknowledged place in the social world,” remarks Dallett C. Hemphill, but that place “was located mainly in private spaces of ballrooms and drawing rooms.”⁵²

The gay season also brought men and women together in liminal spaces such as halls, theatres, and hotels. These sites of elite sociability differed from city to city, but they functioned according to similar logics of exclusivity, class self-affirmation, gender and racial segregations. In Charleston, the most important of these sites was St. Andrew’s Hall, where the master class gathered for dinners, concerts, and balls.⁵³ The theatre too had long been an important site of elite sociability. Charles Fraser noted in his reminiscences, “the ladies were heard to say that “they could live in the theatre.””⁵⁴ Already in the 1730s, a playhouse was built in the colonial town in close proximity to churches and schools.⁵⁵ It was already one of the most exclusive forms of entertainment, where only the most affluent citizens could afford the highly priced tickets for plays and

⁵⁰ McInnis, *op.cit.*, 285.

⁵¹ Eugénie Lavie to Félix Grima, 27 December 1864, Grima Family Papers, New Orleans Historical Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁵² Dallett C. Hemphill, *Bowing to Necessities: a History of Manners in America, 1620-1860*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, 122, 144.

⁵³ McInnis, *op.cit.*, 62.

⁵⁴ Charles Fraser, quoted in Willis, *op.cit.*, 158.

⁵⁵ Willis, *op.cit.*, 21-22.

recitals.⁵⁶ In the 1790s, two theatres competed to attract the wealthiest patrons. Publicizing itself as republican and democratic, the French or city theatre was the most dynamic, yet it was superseded by the Charleston Theatre - federalist and aristocratic.⁵⁷ In the antebellum period, the theatre had lost none of its attraction, and was still patronized by the elite and the socially ambitious.⁵⁸ Theatres were also important sites of elite sociability in New Orleans. Appearing during the Spanish colonial period, the first playhouses were modest places, but eventually became impressive sites.⁵⁹ As in Charleston, they reflected the local politics; Americans and Creoles usually patronized different institutions geographically removed from each other. Then again, visiting planters often frequented several theatrical institutions. During her winter visit to New Orleans in 1850, Miriam Hilliard went to the theatres most evenings. One night, she saw Mrs. Howard at Placide's Varieties. The following night, she went to "the American theatre to see Miss Davenport in the Stranger," while the third one, she "intended to see Romeo and Juliet but prevented by the calling of [friends]."⁶⁰ A few weeks later, she returned to the American theater.⁶¹ According to Mary Ryan, the 1840s represented a turning point in theatre attendance, since they finally became appropriate leisure spaces for women from the middle and upper classes. This argument does not apply to the South (nor New Orleans, one of the city she examines) where theatres had long been patronized by elite men and women. Elite status came for white women with an access – although clearly circumscribed – to a series of liminal spaces that belonged to the public sphere.⁶²

⁵⁶ Frederick P. Bowes, *The Culture of Early Charleston*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942, 31.

⁵⁷ The theatres advertised themselves according to the clientele they hoped to attract. George C. Rogers, Jr. *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1980 (1969), 110-111.

⁵⁸ McInnis, op.cit., 109. For an extensive study of the plays presented at the French Theatre, see Richard L. Soddors, "The Theatre Management of Alexandre Placide in Charleston, 1794-1812," Ph.D. Dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1983.

⁵⁹ The theatre in colonial New Orleans was located on St. Peter Street and subscriptions were expensive. Christina Vella, *Intimate Enemies: The Two Worlds of the Baroness de Pontalba*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997, 34.

⁶⁰ Miriam Badger Hilliard, Diary, 28-31 January 1850, Typescript, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁶¹ Miriam Badger Hilliard, Diary, 11 February 1850, Typescript, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁶² Mary P. Ryan, *Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990. For a study of theatres in the Upper South, see Click, op.cit., 34-56.

The most emblematic site of elite society in the Crescent City was the French Opera House. “All the fashionable young folks felt the opera was absolutely necessary to their social success and happiness,” remembered Eliza Ripley, who, after growing up in New Orleans, married a Louisiana Planter. “The box was only five dollars a night, and pater-familias certainly could afford that!”⁶³ Although tickets could be obtained by the night for the theatre or the opera, planting families often purchased a share and thus subscribed for several seasons. Céline Roman, for instance, owned a share of the Opera worth \$500.⁶⁴ The grandmother of Laura Locoul “had a season box at the Opera. Her box was a *baignoire*, a prestigious seat where, every year, young debutantes would sit in order to watch and be watched.”⁶⁵ In smaller towns, where the size of the population could not sustain theatres or ballrooms, hotels were often at the centre of social life. Catering to the need of a wealthy and transient population, theatres, halls, operas, and hotels were the pleasure palaces of the Old South.

The success of a theatre, a dance hall, or a hotel depended on the ability of its promoter to create an environment that reflected the values of the master class. At the Washington Course in Charleston, all kinds of people attended the races, yet it was far from being a democratic gathering. Each category of citizens watched from a different stand: there was one for the members of the Jockey Club and their guests, called “the Grand Stand,” there was a Ladies Stand, and a Citizen’s Stand where one could encounter sailors, artisans, and free Blacks.⁶⁶ Behind that series of stands was Charles F. Reichardt, the architect who also conceived the New Theatre and the Charleston Hotel.⁶⁷ In the urban South, the same architects often designed both town houses and great public buildings. As in private dwellings, steamboats, or railway, every member of southern society was reminded of his or her status in these sites of amusement. In St. Andrew Hall in Charleston, slaves and free blacks were admitted only in their functions

⁶³ Ripley, *op.cit.*, 66-67.

⁶⁴ Estate Inventory of the Estate of the late Jacques Térésphore Roman, 24 April 1860, Félix Grima, Public Notary, New Orleans, [English translation], Roman Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

⁶⁵ Laura Locoul Gore, *Memories of the Old Plantation Home & Creole Family Album*, Commentary by Norman and Sand Marmillion, Zoë Company: Vacherie, Louisiana, 2007 (2001), 74.

⁶⁶ Nancy Mary Sambets, *Interpreting the Dichotomous Lifestyles of South Carolina Lowcountry Planters, 1830-1850*, M.A. Thesis, University of South Carolina, 1993, 27.

⁶⁷ Beatrice St. Julien Ravenel, *Architects of Charleston*, Charleston: Carolina Art Association, 1945, 176.

as servants and workers. Free blacks could attend most theatrical performances, but sat in reserved sections and entered through a segregated door.⁶⁸

Even when they belonged to the same race and class, men and women experienced these public sites differently. In February 1828, a British traveler attended a ball in St. Andrew's Hall:

The room was large, the ball handsomely got up, and every thing ordered in the best style, with one small exception – the ladies and gentlemen appeared to be entire strangers to one another. The ladies were planted firmly along the walls, in the coldest possible formality, while the gentlemen, who, except during the dance, stood in close column near the door, seemed to have no fellow feeling, nor any wish to associate with the opposite sex.⁶⁹

Used to the much more integrated sociability of London, the traveler noticed the spatial segregation of men and women in the southern ballroom. Likewise, when ladies entered the theatre in Charleston, they first went into a luxuriously furnished withdrawing room and, from there, they took a corridor that led them to the boxes.⁷⁰ In New Orleans, the French Opera was publicized as “The Ladies Theater.”⁷¹ Its internal organization clearly delineated the spaces for men and women Eliza Ripley remembered in her memoirs: “there were no single seats for ladies, only four-seated boxes. The pit, to all appearances, was for elderly, bald gentlemen only, for the beaux, the fashionable eligibles, wandering around in the intermissions or standing “at attention” in the narrow lobbies behind the boxes during the performances.”⁷² Laura Locoul who went to the Opera twice a week with her grandmother noted:

During the intermission between the acts, we would see the gentlemen leave the ladies to go to a little restaurant across the street. There, they would get what today we would call “hot dogs.” But, back then we called them “pattes toutes chaudes” or little hot patties. The gentlemen would bring them back to the ladies in little white sacks. The ladies would take them, ever so delicately, in their white-gloved fingers and eat them. There were also small pastry shells with a top filled with oysters, chopped meat or chicken, oysters being the most popular. Men were never

⁶⁸ In St. Charles Theater in New Orleans, for instance, “so-called African Negroes” could attend from the highest gallery. Cable, *Lost New Orleans*, New York: American Legacy Press, 1980, 170.

⁶⁹ Basil Hall, *Travels in North America in the years 1827 and 1828*, Philadelphia: Carey, Lea, & Carey, 1829, vol.2, 195.

⁷⁰ McInnis, op.cit., 109.

⁷¹ Ryan, op.cit., 80.

⁷² Ripley, op.cit., 65. There were lattice boxes fronting the stage, “in demand by ladies who were pregnant and wished to see without being seen.” Mary Cable, op.cit., 175.

seen eating at the Opera, so they must have had theirs already, plus their drinks, while out getting the *pattes* for the ladies.⁷³

On the second floor of the Opera, there was a “crush-room” (saloon) for gentlemen and a series of “rooms for the retirement of ladies.”⁷⁴ Built in the late 1850s, the French Opera House competed with the Theatre d’Orléans on Royal Street, long-patronized by the Creole elite.⁷⁵ While the ladies remained in the theatre, gentlemen could go through a passageway that led to the contiguous Orleans Hall, where were held, at regular intervals, the famous quadron balls. “Such spatial hypocrisy,” remarks Mary Ryan, “permitted gentlemen to pass unobserved between the separate quarters of wives and mistresses.”⁷⁶ This gendered organization of the Richmond Theater had dramatic consequences for the ladies when a fire swept the place in December 1811. Entrapped in boxes with their large and very flammable dresses, women accounted for a disproportionate number of the victims.⁷⁷

While private clubs and elite associations were behind the erection of some of these sites, most were initiatives of commercial entrepreneurs and, later on, of city boosters. The aristocratic gay season represented for the democratic and enterprising middling classes of the urban South a formidable series of business opportunities.⁷⁸ Even during the colonial period, the entrepreneurs of Charleston, Williamsburg, or New Orleans organized balls during the winter months and advertised them broadly.⁷⁹ The importance of commerce was even greater in the nineteenth century. The business community of Mobile launched several public subscriptions to build a new theatre in the 1840s and 1850s.⁸⁰ As the newspapers of that city reveal, these fundraising operations were explicitly intended to meet the demands of the planters who, according to the

⁷³ Gore, *op.cit.*, 74.

⁷⁴ *New Orleans Delta*, May 1859, quoted in Cable, *op.cit.*, 175.

⁷⁵ Before the Opera was built, the Creole elite mostly went to the Theatre Orleans. Tuesday and Saturday were for the elite; Sunday for the humble and the slave. Vella, *op.cit.*, 295.

⁷⁶ Ryan, *op.cit.* 80.

⁷⁷ Click, *op.cit.*, 34.

⁷⁸ Kinser observes: “It would be an error to suppose, therefore, that the dancing fever at New Orleans among all classes was just a frontier phenomenon, endlessly indulged for lack of something better. It was also a democratic phenomenon and a capitalist phenomenon and as such characterized French, English, and other Western European areas where a broad and enterprising middle class attained in the late 18th and early 19th centuries the means to develop their notions of leisure time.” Kinser, *op.cit.*, 69.

⁷⁹ Kierner, *op.cit.*, 50.

⁸⁰ “Three-fifth of theatergoers in Mobile reportedly hailed from outside the city. This situation made it extremely important to the local economy that theaters be available for the use of professional troupes.” Harriet E. Amos, *Cotton City: Urban Development in Antebellum Mobile*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1985, 46.

Alabama Tribune, came in the winter to Mobile “principally on a double errand – business and pleasure.”⁸¹ Their objective was to attract both planting men and women. A planter who came to Mobile instead of New Orleans with his wife and children during the winter months stayed at the hotel, shopped in the stores, purchased slaves and agricultural supplies, and traded with cotton factors. He might decide to register his children in the local colleges and academies, and even purchase a town house. Dancing and music teachers, hairdressers, milliners, hotels, caterers, factors, real estate speculators- all took advantages of the gay season and wanted its continuation. The largest hotel in Mobile, the Battle House, organized soirées followed by suppers to attract both city and country dwellers. It even became a favourite honeymooning destination of the newly married planting couple from the cotton districts of Alabama and Mississippi.⁸² Then again, all the efforts of city boosters were not enough to recreate the exclusive society and the cultural offering of older and larger cities like Charleston in the East and New Orleans in the West.

Mardi Gras and Race Week were the highpoints of a gay season that was designed for the amusement of the master class, but perhaps even more so for strengthening the social order of the Old South, be it in terms of race, class, or gender. Everyone’s place into society was ritualized and spatialized. Inscribed in the urban landscape of the largest cities of the South, sociability was elaborate, ceremonial, and even theatrical.⁸³ During the gay season, elite southerners displayed “their otherness, indeed their lofty absence from the life surrounding them.”⁸⁴ Balls, races, theatres, and carnival served to reinforce social distinctions.⁸⁵ Charlestonians and Orleanians alike cherished an ideal of “courtly spectacle,” although very few of them could truly claim a direct affiliation with the European aristocracy. Elite women played a central role in this process of class distinction. The gay season was composed of a series of heterosocial gatherings, where both men and women attended. The city during the winter season did not exclusively belong to men, nor was it was male public space. Then again, in the sites of elite sociability, from the town house to the opera, the spatial practices of men and women

⁸¹ *Alabama Tribune*, 27 September 1849, quoted in Amos, op.cit.

⁸² Amos, op.cit., p.46.

⁸³ The same phenomenon applied to the urban North. See Catherine E. Kelly, *In the New England Fashion: Reshaping Women’s Lives in the Nineteenth Century*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999, 165.

⁸⁴ Kinser, op.cit., 30.

⁸⁵ Kierner, loc.cit., 188.

reveal obvious gender segregation. The bodies of elite women remained contained in drawing rooms, in ladies' stands at the races, or in boxes at the opera.

If the gay season was a spectacle, the main protagonist was undeniably the belle. All the other members of urban society – parents, slaves, milliners, and even beaux – served as her supporting cast. For a plantation girl, the city was the stage where she was launched into society, and a season in town, the stepping stone toward achieving her destiny: marriage. Hopefully, she would make a good one. Introducing one's daughter to society between the ages of seventeen and nineteen was an important affair that few planting families were willing to forgo. In this process, the daughters of a family were not equals: the eldest often got the most elaborate launch, while the youngest might have to settle for a simpler affair. In her study of antebellum Charleston, Cynthia Kennedy highlights the economic dimensions of marriage for the master class. The social season was fundamentally a “marriage market” in which elite girls were “commodified” and weddings represented “capital mergers.”⁸⁶ The failure of a daughter to succeed at belledom meant that “she became unmarketable goods.”⁸⁷ This was true in the colonial period and it was still the case on the eve of the Civil War.⁸⁸ For each of the parties involved – parents, grooms, brides, and contemporaries - money was a major determinant of matrimonial happiness, although it was not always openly acknowledged.⁸⁹ A good marriage was a financially secure one, for love alone did not ensure a life of leisure. Young women, such as Varina Howell, expected of marriage

⁸⁶ Kennedy, op.cit., 102.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 161-162; Jane Turner Censer also uses the economic metaphor: “Admiration and popularity were commodities to be traded for a good marriage when their value stood at the zenith, once a belle's stock began to drop, she had to use caution and sell quickly.” Censer, op.cit., 11.

⁸⁸ According to Lorri Glover, during the colonial period “marriage remained far more financially focused for a far longer time in Carolina than it did in other parts of the British Empire.” Lorri Glover, *All Our Relations: Blood Ties and Emotional Bonds among the Early South Carolina Gentry*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000, 8. The same conclusion applies to Louisiana, where arranged marriages were still practiced at the beginning of the 19th century. By the antebellum period, however, they were the exception, not the norm. On the changing marriage patterns in New Orleans, see Thomas N. Ingersoll, *Mammon and Manon in Early New Orleans: the First Slave Society in Deep South, 1718-1819*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999, 162-165.

⁸⁹ Frederic Cople Jaher, *The Urban Establishment: Upper Strata in Boston, New York, Charleston, Chicago, and Los Angeles*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982, 326.

“both romantic fulfillment and economic security.”⁹⁰ Some parents did not seem to care much about the happiness of their daughters, yet most did.⁹¹ Elias Vanderhorst, for instance, would not give the hand of his daughter to a man who, although very wealthy and well connected, had suffered a nervous breakdown. Nor would he have a fortune hunter in his family, because “when he found himself disappointed as regards the money, [his daughter] would have been illtreated.”⁹² Then again, he stated, “when she does marry, I hope she will marry a man with some pretensions to blood.”⁹³ Micaela Almonester, whose marriage was arranged by her mother, learned what it meant to be ill-treated.⁹⁴ Catherine Fitzsimmons’s family at first opposed her union to James Henry Hammond who seemed more interested in the plantation and slaves she inherited than in her personal qualities.⁹⁵ On the other hand, not to marry at all condemned young women to the margins of southern elite society. Few parents wished a life of “single blessedness” for their daughters.⁹⁶ The marriage markets of Charleston and New Orleans were remarkably similar, yet they led to few alliances of eastern and western planting families. They were parallel, yet disconnected worlds.⁹⁷

The first major investment planting families made to prepare girls for marriage was by providing them with a good education. Usually begun at home, either under the care of their mother, a governess or a tutor, girls’ schooling was carried on in female academies and convents when they reached their teens.⁹⁸ Since those institutions were usually located in towns and cities of the South, attendance at these academies

⁹⁰ Joan E. Cashin, *First Lady of the Confederacy: Varina Davis’s Civil War*, Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006, 37.

⁹¹ Michael P. Johnson, “Planters and Patriarchy: Charleston, 1800-1860,” *Journal of Southern History*, 46, vo.1, 1980, 66; Glover, 2000, op.cit., 64.

⁹² Elias Vanderhorst to Ann Morris Vanderhorst, 8 October 1847, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston, South Carolina.

⁹³ Elias Vanderhorst to Ann Morris Vanderhorst, 15 August 1848, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston, South Carolina.

⁹⁴ Her marriage with her fellow Creole Célestin de Pontalba was a long series of court suits, included an attempted murder from her step-father, and ended up in a legal separation. Then again, “arranged matched worked about as well as any other mating system; husbands and wives, matched by their parents, could and did learn to love each other immoderately.” Vella, op.cit., 110-111.

⁹⁵ In the light of what is known of their long conjugal life, the bride’s family was probably right in the first place. See Carol Bleser, ed., *The Hammonds of Redcliffe*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1981.

⁹⁶ Christine Jacobson Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness: Unmarried Women in the Urban South, 1800-1865*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006.

⁹⁷ William K. Scarborough, *Masters of the Big House: Elite Slaveholders of the Mid-Nineteenth-Century South*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 24.

⁹⁸ Steven M. Stowe, “The Not-So-Cloistered Academy: Elite Women’s Education and Family Feeling in the Old South,” Walter J. Fraser, Frank Saunders Jr., and Jon L. Wakelyn, eds, *The Web of Southern Social Relations: Women, Family, and Education*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985, 90-106.

represented the first prolonged exposure to urban society for the daughters of planting families who did not lead a peripatetic life. Sometimes, that urban education was relatively short. Mrs. Hayne, of Charleston, took young ladies as boarders “who desire to spend a month... in the city either for the assistance of finishing Masters in accomplishments, or the advantages of Society.”⁹⁹ Usually, however, that urban education was counted in years, not in months. In nineteenth-century Charleston, the most prestigious female academies were run by female refugees of Saint-Domingue and included in their curriculum subjects such as French, grammar, history, geography, music, drawing, needlework, and dancing.¹⁰⁰ Della Allston studied successively at the academies of Mrs. Du Prée and Madame Togno.¹⁰¹ When she returned to the plantation after her first year at the latter, Della had “improved in health as well as everything else, especially music.” The following fall, the Allstons decided to enroll their second daughter, Elizabeth, then only nine years old as a boarder at Madame Togno’s academy.¹⁰² When a couple of years later the family moved to the town house on Meeting Street, she continued to attend the academy, but as a day student. In New Orleans, girls could attend ornamental schools, such as the ones directed by Madame Desravaux and Madame Cenas, however, the education of girls had long been dominated by the Catholic nuns.¹⁰³ Louisa Saint-Martin went to the Couvent du Sacré-Coeur, as did most Creole women.¹⁰⁴ Americans also highly regarded the education provided by the Ursulines. The McCollams, sugar planters near Donaldsonville, sent their daughter to the Convent in New Orleans although they were not Catholics.¹⁰⁵

Different factors determined the choice of a school, including proximity, prestige, religious affiliation, curriculum, and tuition fees. The Ursulines promised to parents a

⁹⁹ Quoted in Orville Vernon Burton, *In My Father's House are Many Mansions: Family and Community in Edgefield, South Carolina*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985, 84.

¹⁰⁰ The name is alternately spelled “Tunno” and “Togno.” Farnham, *op.cit.*, 37-40.

¹⁰¹ Her real name was Adela, like her mother, but she was usually called Della. Adèle Allston to Benjamin Allston, 29 January 1851, Adèle Petigru Allston Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

¹⁰² Elizabeth W. Allston Pringle, *Chronicles of Chicora Wood*, Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1940, 26.

¹⁰³ Emily Clark, *Masterless Mistresses: the New Orleans Ursulines and the Development of a New World Society, 1727-1834*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007, 140-149; Scarborough, *op.cit.*, 78.

¹⁰⁴ Louis St. Martin to Louisa Perret St. Martin, 13 mai 1852, St. Martin Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁰⁵ J. Carlyle Sitterson, “The McCollams: A Planter Family of the Old and New South,” in *Plantation, Town, and County: Essays on the Local History of American Slave Society*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1974, (1940), 294.

good education, in addition to a strict control of their daughters' movements. The Saint Domingue refugees emphasized manners and mastery of French, besides heightening the political and racial consciousness of their pupils. Kate Stone of Louisiana attended the Nashville Female Academy, a school reputed for the modernity of its installations.¹⁰⁶ The Townsends of Edisto Island registered their daughter Phoebe at the South Carolina Female Collegiate Institute in Barhamville, located at the outskirts of Columbia, for the excellence of its curriculum.¹⁰⁷ In addition to ornamental studies, girls learned several languages (Italian, Spanish, Latin, and German), as well as philosophy, logic, astronomy, geology, arithmetic, and bookkeeping.¹⁰⁸ "The South, which vilified the strong-minded woman," Christie Anne Farham explains, "nevertheless attempted to offer Southern women an education explicitly designed to be the equivalent of that offered to Southern men."¹⁰⁹ The wealthiest families even sent their daughters to institutions located in the larger cities of the country and even abroad. In Philadelphia, New York, or Paris, plantation girls finished their education by acquiring foreign languages, and most importantly, polished manners and extended social networks.¹¹⁰ Well educated, southern women animated the city, a traveler remarked with admiration:

During the season of gayety, in the winter months, the public assemblies and private coteries of Natchez are unsurpassed by those of any other city, in the elegance, refinement, or loveliness of the individuals who compose them. If you will bear in mind, that the southern females of wealth are usually educated in the most finished style, at the first female seminaries in the north, and, until recently, not seldom in Europe; and recollect the personal beauty, sprightliness, and extreme refinement of the southern lady, you will not be surprised that elegant women grace the private circles, and shine in the gay assemblies of southern cities.¹¹¹

Once married, educated belles were to return to the country where they spread their graces in rural communities, "hence every village can draw around it a polished circle of its own; for refinement and wealth do not always diminish here, as in New England, in

¹⁰⁶ John Q. Anderson, *Brokenburn: The Journal of Kate Stone, 1861-1868*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1972, 3. Farnham, op.cit., 145.

¹⁰⁷ M.C. Townsend to Dame, 4 June 1858, Sosnowski Family Papers-Townsend Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston.

¹⁰⁸ Farnham, op.cit., 65-67.

¹⁰⁹ Farnham, op.cit., 3.

¹¹⁰ Joan E. Cashin, *Our Common Affairs: Texts from Women in the Old South*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996, 5.

¹¹¹ Joseph Holt Ingraham, *The South-West. By a Yankee*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835, vol.2, 207.

the inverse ratio of distance from a metropolis – and elegant women may often be found a blooming in the depths of forests far in the interior.”¹¹² The goal of a higher education was not to promote female independence or careers, but was a marker of gentility: it was “preparation for pedestals.”¹¹³ It was also preparation for the marriage market. “The warmest defenders of such schools” the *Southern Index* critiqued in 1850, “are those prudent mamas whose only care is marriage for their daughters.”¹¹⁴

Planting parents entrusted the physical, intellectual, and moral welfare of their daughters to the directors of these schools.¹¹⁵ Yet, the values and objectives of parents, girls, and educators clashed at times. The Latimers, cotton planters of upper Georgia, wanted the best for their offspring, their daughter Rebecca remembered. When a Presbyterian academy was established in the town of Decatur by the Dr. John S. Wilson, her parents started to “keep up two establishments, one in town the other on river plantation.”¹¹⁶ But there was a problem: “Dr. Wilson was unutterably opposed to dancing. His opposition became a serious matter when he forbade his scholars to attend dancing parties. For a while the controversy ran high. It put me in a panic because I loved to dance like I loved candy.”¹¹⁷ While Dr. Wilson threatened to dismiss from the academy any student who would attend the big ball at the Decatur Hotel, the young Latimer hoped that her father, who was in favor of dancing, “would assert his rights to govern his own household.” Yet, she did not go to the dance, for as her father explained his daughter:

I must stay [alone at the plantation] from Monday until Saturday night, to give you school privileges. This is why I bought this home in town. Otherwise we would not be here... Little girl, Dr. Wilson is trying to educate your mind and I must help him. After a while there will be time a plenty to educate your heels.¹¹⁸

By the end of the school year, Rebecca’s father resumed his authority and rewarded the sacrifice of the young girl by giving a dancing party at home.

¹¹² Ibid., 208.

¹¹³ Christie Farnham Pope. “Preparation for Pedestals: North Carolina Antebellum Female Seminaries.” Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1977. See also Anya Jabour, “Grown Girls, Highly Cultivated”: Female Education in an Antebellum Southern Family,” *Journal of Southern History* 64, February 1998, 23-64.

¹¹⁴ *Southern Index*, July 1850, no. 38, quoted in Farnham, op.cit., 1994, 31.

¹¹⁵ C.f. Jabour presents the female academy as a “woman-centered, woman-controlled space within a male-dominated society,” where girls learned “to define their own lives and to resist patriarchal control.” Jabour, op.cit., 61.

¹¹⁶ Rebecca Latimer Felton, *Country Life in Georgia in the Days of My Youth*, New York: Arno Press, 1980 (1919), 62.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 61.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 62.

If dancing was not on the curriculum of the most religious academies, it was clearly a priority for southern parents who wished to prepare their daughters for the marriage market. As Latimer's father liked to say, dancing "gave girls a graceful walk."¹¹⁹ Elite planters had long patronized music and dancing masters. In colonial Charleston, more than twenty such masters advertised in the newspapers.¹²⁰ In New Orleans, Canadian governor Vaudreuil gave the impetus by bringing to the French colony, in the mid-eighteenth century, the dancing master B  b   who instructed the young to the etiquette of the ball.¹²¹ In the nineteenth century, music too was of utmost importance to the education of the Southern belle. Learned from private tutors or in academies, music was meant to be kept as a private entertainment. The piano, the harp, or the opera were not always studied out of great personal inclination, but as a cultural obligation; it made girls more marriageable.¹²²

Since the future happiness of plantation girls was at stake in the drawing rooms and ballrooms of the city, this grooming period was crucial in determining the ease with which they would, later on, move in the best social circles. Failed beginnings for plantation girls (that is their inability to attract good suitors) were often blamed on a lack of exposure to urban society.¹²³ The peripatetic elites of both Charleston and New Orleans organized balls and parties for their children who learned early the genteel manners they would need to master later on. In the early 1830s, Joseph Holt Ingraham observed the "dazzling crowd" who gathered at the Salle d'Orl  ans for one of the children's balls of the winter season: "There were several cotillions upon the floor, and the dancers were young masters and misses – I beg their pardon – young gentlemen and ladies, from four years old and upward – who were bounding away to the lively music, as completely happy as innocence."¹²⁴ These events were intergenerational affairs, since "there were at least five hundred persons in the hall, two-thirds of whom were spectators." The largest group of the assembly was composed of ladies, "nearly two

¹¹⁹ Felton, op.cit., 61.

¹²⁰ Kennedy, op.cit., 28.

¹²¹ Kinser, op.cit., 17.

¹²² Candace Bailey, *Music and the Southern Belle: From Accomplished Lady to Confederate Composer*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2010.

¹²³ Kennedy, op.cit., 161-162.

¹²⁴ Ingraham, op.cit., vol.1, 119.

hundred...maid, wife, and widow.”¹²⁵ In spite of the focus on the young, and especially on young women, such genteel rituals were performed by all the members of a family, the basic unit of social and economic action. “On every side,” Ingraham met “the delighted looks of their parents and guardians, or elder brothers and sisters.”¹²⁶ In the ballroom, ladies and gentlemen watched their offspring from different spots:

On double rows of settee arranged around the room, and bordering the area, were about one hundred ladies, exclusive of half as many, seated in the alcoves. In addition to an almost impenetrable body of gentlemen standing in the vicinity of the grand entrance, the promenade... was filled with them, as they lounged along, gazing and remarking upon the beautiful faces of the dark-eyed Creoles.¹²⁷

By ten o'clock, the children returned home escorted by nurses and enslaved servants, while their parents took over the dance floor.¹²⁸ Children were also invited to smaller and more private social gatherings. While a student at Mrs. Togno's academy, Elizabeth Allston went to her “first child' party,” which was given for the son of a planting family. For the occasion, “Mamma had a pretty white muslin frock made for me... a very full, very short skirt barely covering my knees, a long expanse of white stocking, and black slippers.”¹²⁹ In New Orleans too, girls were often dressed in white for children's balls.

Plantation women experienced the city – especially during their first gay season - primarily through a transformation of their bodies. The transition from childhood to adulthood was marked by a change in dress and hairstyle.¹³⁰ Handkerchiefs, gloves, fans, and parasols were more than accessories; in the world of flirtations, they became instruments of communication.¹³¹ Fashion was also a social marker of class, race, gender, and age. Parents prepared their daughters for their first gay season by investing in a new wardrobe. “I fear you will think me extevegant [*sic*] but paying for ball-dresses ribonds

¹²⁵ Ibid., 122.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 121.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 118.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 124-125. During her visit in Charleston, Harriet Martineau observed, “At the same hour when the customary sins of the slavemarket were being perpetrated, hundreds of little people of Charleston were preparing for their childish pleasures – their merry dancing-schools, their juvenile fancy balls – ordering their little slaves about, and allowing themselves to be fanned by black attendants while reposing in preparation for the fatigues of the evening.” Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel*, vol.1, Saunders and Otley, 1838, 236.

¹²⁹ Pringle, *op.cit.*, 163; For a children's party at Vicksburg, Mississippi, see Miriam Badger Hilliard, *Diary*, 9 March 1850, Typescript, Tulane Special Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹³⁰ Gerilyn Tandberg, “Decoration and Decorum: Accessories of Nineteenth-Century Louisiana Women,” *Southern Quarterly*, 1988, vol.27, no.1, 14; Jabour, *op.cit.*, 33.

¹³¹ Daniel R. Shafer, *Secrets of Life Unveiled*, Baltimore, 1877, 231-234, quoted in Elizabeth Aldrich, *From the Ballroom to Hell: Grace and Folly in Nineteenth-Century Dance*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991, 103-104.

[sic] and laces the money disappierd [sic] before I thought of its being half gone,” Mary Farar wrote her husband from New Orleans, “I tell the girls they must give you an account of all there [sic] extravagance which they have promised to do.”¹³² In spite of the formulaic apologies of overspending mothers, fathers eagerly financed fashion.¹³³ Fathers and husbands invested in elaborate wardrobes for their daughters and wives, remarks Cynthia Kierner, because “accomplished and well-dressed women enhanced the stature of the men who possessed them,” or who aspired to possess them in the marriage market.¹³⁴ At no other time during an elite woman’s life would she ever be able to indulge in fashion without giving rise to criticism. In fact, such spending seemed excessive retrospectively, especially for rural women who attended few balls once married.¹³⁵ Contemplating the contents of her “big cedar chest, crammed with silks, crepes, embroideries, linens, velvets, etc,” Miriam Hilliard regretted “the extravagance of [her] girlhood,” wishing she “had the contents in money.”¹³⁶

The urban environment exacerbated the need for fashion. During her first visit in New Orleans, Priscilla Bond observed, “so much wealth and fashion. The ladies dress so much, they seem to think that’s their life, to dress and flirt.”¹³⁷ The etiquette in the larger cities of the South demanded that women change their dress several times a day.¹³⁸ As a result, outfits purchased in small towns would not be suitable for the city, warned one woman to her sister, “as they will look odd and old fashioned,” even less so dresses sewed in the country.¹³⁹ “The handsome dresses were made by city dressmakers and everything else was made at home,” Kate Stone remembered in retrospect.¹⁴⁰ The wealthiest planters offered a European wardrobe to their daughters. During their European Grand Tour, the Allstons purchased in Paris ball dresses for their daughter Della, which had the “most beautiful artificial flowers.”¹⁴¹ For the financially strained, the

¹³² Mary Farar to Benjamin Farar, 14 March 1820, Farar Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹³³ Jabour, op.cit., 34.

¹³⁴ Kierner, op.cit., 190.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 147.

¹³⁶ Miriam Badger Hilliard, Diary, 17 January 1850, Typescript, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹³⁷ Kimberley Harrison, *A Maryland Bride in the Deep South: The Civil War Diary of Priscilla Bond*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006, 195.

¹³⁸ Kierner, op.cit., 146-47.

¹³⁹ Tolbert, op.cit., 71.

¹⁴⁰ Anderson, op.cit., 9.

¹⁴¹ Pringle, op.cit., 144.

debut of one's daughter could place a great stress on the family budget.¹⁴² Ironically, female fashion was often inconvenient for the material conditions of the city and its social gatherings. In March 1793, a "Bachelor" made a "Theatrical Request for the Ladies" in the *South Carolina Gazette*:

That they will be kind enough to lay aside the dress of feathers (particularly at a time when either the turban or some more similar ornament is the rage), as these preclude the gentlemen who have the honor of being their attendants, from even a glance at the stage- and the subscriber will deem it a particular honor of the Fair to be seated, except during the intervals of performance.¹⁴³

As they went to the theaters and the ballrooms in the winter, walking in the muddied streets of the city, women sometimes went barefoot, as a slave or a male escort carried their ball shoes in their hands.¹⁴⁴ In the 1850s, hoopskirts also posed unique challenges in terms of movement in large crowds of people. "A lady in hoops transported her enclosed, private sphere with her; a wide skirt represented the circle within which a female was to be protected," Drew Gilpin Faust observes.¹⁴⁵ Such preoccupation was especially important in the city, where women's bodies were constantly exposed to society – and thus threatened. Fashion helped to contain these young women's bodies.

The beginnings of one's daughter's social life meant more than investing in silk and tulle; it meant investing in bricks and mortar too. Planting households who otherwise spent the entire year in the country transplanted themselves in the city.¹⁴⁶ It was a *passage obligé* for those who wanted the best marriage prospects. Even the planters who had no taste for the city recognized the importance of urban debuts.¹⁴⁷ The year his daughter Della entered society, Robert Allston purchased the town house destined to become the dower house of his wife Adèle.¹⁴⁸ Other planting families, who led a peripatetic life between their plantation and the nearby small town, understood the

¹⁴² Pease and Pease, *op.cit.*, 62-63.

¹⁴³ "Theatrical Request for the Ladies," *South Carolina Gazette*, March 1793, quoted in Willis, *op.cit.*, 166-167.

¹⁴⁴ "Slaves preceded them, carrying lanterns, and other followed with towels and buckets of water," Cable, *op.cit.*, 169.

¹⁴⁵ Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996, 223.

¹⁴⁶ Cynthia Kennedy affirms that "only those families with young, marriageable daughters repositioned themselves in the city each winter, and only unmarried girls (and their mothers) attended "seasonables." Evidences gathered here suggest that other planting families also engaged in the gay season, even if they had no daughter to introduce in the marriage market. C.f. Kennedy, *op.cit.*, 159.

¹⁴⁷ This was also the custom for the English gentry in the nineteenth century. See F.M.L. Thompson, *English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century*, London: Routledge, 1963, 99.

¹⁴⁸ Pringle, *op.cit.*, 141.

advantage of establishing themselves in the largest cities of the South for a season or two, where there was a larger and usually a wealthier pool of potential mates for their daughters. In 1838, Captain Huguenin of Jasper County, in the Lowcountry, “took a house in Charleston” where his wife spent the winter with their daughter Emmeline and their granddaughter Julia.¹⁴⁹ The widowed Mary Weeks exchanged her town house of New Iberia for a residence in New Orleans for a few winters, to find suitable partners for her daughters.¹⁵⁰ Others traveled longer distances. The Rutledges of Tennessee, who had migrated west from South Carolina, returned to Charleston to present their daughter Henriette. For the Rutledges, the democratic crowd of suitors in Nashville - where they owned a town house in addition to their plantation house - fell below their marital aspirations.¹⁵¹ The wealthiest planting families organized a coming-out party, usually given by the parents at their town house. The house was turned upside down for the occasion: carpets were removed and bedrooms became buffet rooms.¹⁵² Without a town house from which to be launched, plantation girls from more modest families made their debuts in public or semi-private balls.

In Charleston, the list of semi-private balls was impressive. Before Race week, there was the Bachelor’s Ball, organized by a group of unmarried gentlemen where “all the World and his wife” attended.¹⁵³ The St. Cecilia Society gave three balls: one in January, two in February. “These were the most exclusive and elegant balls of all,” Elizabeth Pringle pointed out, “but the Jockey Club ball, which always ended the race week, was the largest and grandest – not so exclusive.”¹⁵⁴ To those were added three or four private balls each week during the entire gay season, most of which were debutante balls. Although financially stressed, the Pringles gave a great ball for their daughter Rebecca in February 1857 at their house on King Street.¹⁵⁵ Likewise, balls had long been important affairs in New Orleans. Some evenings of January and February, balls were

¹⁴⁹ “The autobiography of William Ferguson Colcock”, 10, Colcock Family Papers, 1785-1917, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁵⁰ Allie Bayne Windham Webb, *Mistress of Evergreen Plantation: Rachel O’Connor’s Legacy of Letters, 1823-1845*, Albany: State University Press, 1983, 277.

¹⁵¹ Genon Heckerson Neblett and Mary Bray Wheeler Baker, *Chosen Exile: The Life and Time of Septima Sexta Middleton*, American Cultural Pioneer, London: Rutledge, 1980, 73.

¹⁵² Pease and Pease, op.cit., 60.

¹⁵³ Thomas Pinckney Jr. to Harriot Pinckney, 23 January 1802, Anna Wells Rutledge, ed., “Letters from Thomas Pinckney Jr. to Harriott Pinckney, *The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, vol.XLI, no.3, July 1940, 113.

¹⁵⁴ Pringle, op.cit., 145-46.

¹⁵⁵ Côté, op.cit., 162.

counted by the dozen.¹⁵⁶ There were private balls, society balls, public balls, and children's balls. The lower sort went to the public ones, while the middle and upper classes usually attended private and society balls.

Essentially semi-private events, society balls were organized by elite young unmarried men and were based on a subscription.¹⁵⁷ For example, one of the Grimball sons was a steward of the Jockey Club, while Louis St. Martin was a *commissaire* of the Carrolton balls. Both in Charleston and New Orleans, the semi-private balls of the gay season were planned by young men for young women and were primarily opportunities for courtship.¹⁵⁸ During the winter months of 1823 to 1829, Jacques T  l  sphore Roman borrowed \$139 from his widowed mother to purchase tickets for a series of masked and society balls, and for balls given in the honor of Lafayette and Washington.¹⁵⁹ Thus men, and especially young men, were behind public or semi-private events. Private balls, however, were organized by older women, usually with the approbation and financial support of husbands. No matter who organized the ball, the belle was the center of attention. Investing in the debut of one's daughter was both "a family project and an economic strategy" for the southern planting class.¹⁶⁰

With the right education, manners and dresses, a plantation girl was ready to enter the world. After having entrusted their daughters to professional educators, parents resumed their authority. In these family affairs, mothers and fathers played different roles. Fathers furnished the means and the environment to secure the launch into society, and when their daughter met a potential mate, they usually gave the final approbation to the match. Mothers took care of everything else: ordering gowns, hosting parties, chaperoning, and guiding their daughters among their potential suitors. While the economic position of a family was a man's business, its social position was a woman's

¹⁵⁶ Kinser, *op.cit.*, 69.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁵⁸ Louis St. Martin to P.A. St. Martin, 23 mai 1847, St. Martin Family Papers, Tulane University Special Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁵⁹ Registre de la succession de la veuve J. E. Roman, St. James Parish, Probate 399, 20 may 1829, Roman Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁶⁰ Johnson, *loc.cit.*

business, and an important one, indeed. Reversal of fortune could be forgiven, not moral or cultural reversals.¹⁶¹ Kin specialists, older women were charged with “building and patrolling the social boundaries so crucial to urban slave society.”¹⁶²

Mothers launched into society daughters who would become, in turn, mothers. Adèle Allston enthusiastically took on this female duty, her daughter remembered:

These years were very happy ones. Mamma enjoyed the return to the social life of the city very much after her long experience of country life; and of course, it was a joy to have her lovely daughter to introduce into society. My sister was absolutely docile and did just what mamma wanted her to do. She never had a wish about her own clothes, and no wonder, for mamma had perfect taste and got everything for her that was beautiful.¹⁶³

As the obedient Della reigned “supreme in belleship,” her mother was “deeply gratified.”¹⁶⁴ During her coming out in New Orleans society, Laura Locoul felt that her mother “really did relive her young life with me.”¹⁶⁵ Some women seemed literally to resuscitate after years of apathy. The feeble Jane Amelia Petigru, for instance, entirely redecorated the family town house in Charleston for the debut of her daughter Caroline. But soon enough, the panic of 1837 strained her husband’s finances and he imposed an austerity regime on the household expenses. Unable to launch her daughter into the world in the manner she had envisioned, Jane Amelia felt powerless, locked herself in her room, and resumed her complaints of poor health.¹⁶⁶

At some periods of their life, mothers experienced the round of urban gaiety as a burden. Pregnancies, widowhood, diseases and money shortages constrained the enthusiasm of even the most urban women. Between two pregnancies, young mothers were often unwilling to travel to the city, in spite of the eagerness of their husbands to engage in the round of gaiety. “Pourquoi ma bonne amie ne voudrais-tu pas venir passer

¹⁶¹ Poorly chaperoned, the four Hampton girls engaged in sexual relations with their uncle, the planter and politician James Henry Hammond, at his house in Columbia. The four girls never married. Bleser, ed., *The Hammonds of Redcliffe*, op.cit., 32-33; Carter, op.cit., 75-77.

¹⁶² Kennedy, op.cit., 2; Daniel Blake Smith coined the term “kin specialists,” highlighting the contribution of elite women of the colonial Chesapeake to the family economy by maintaining contact through letters and visits within extended family networks. Daniel Blake Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980.

¹⁶³ Pringle, op.cit., 166.

¹⁶⁴ Pease and Pease, op.cit., 119.

¹⁶⁵ Gore, op.cit., 75.

¹⁶⁶ Pease and Pease, op.cit., 48-49.

quelques jours en ville?” Louis St. Martin asked his wife Louisa in 1849.¹⁶⁷ “Voilà la saison des plaisirs qui va recommencer; pourquoi ne serais-tu pas de celles qui vont récolter cette nouvelle moisson de jouissances que ramène le carnaval? Prépare-toi d’avance; car je vais employer toute mon éloquence pour te persuader à venir en ville.”¹⁶⁸ Even the most persuasive husbands were aware that transplanting a household composed of young children and slaves nurses for a few weeks of festivities might not be worth the effort.¹⁶⁹ Pregnancies also altered the bodies of women who did not feel like belles anymore. “Never fear of your being so fat, as to be ashamed to appear in the beau monde; your fine form cannot be altered by being larger, for there is Mrs. Smith of S.C. who though much larger than you, her person is very much admired. Your face too, particularly now being in vulgar health, as you call it, would be an ornament to any ballroom,” a sister reassuringly wrote.¹⁷⁰

Wives and mothers often renounced urban gaiety in favor of the welfare of others. “I received a very sad letter from Emma who is apparently much depressed by her long solitude at Sav[annah] river, & disappointed at not having been able to go to town for Eliza’s wedding,” Eliza Middleton Fisher told her mother in March 1842:

Her remaining on the plantation was her own choice however – she thought it her duty to be with her husband, who in addition to his difficulties, has had sickness among his people to contend with – It is really a great pity that poor Emma [should] be imprisoned (altho’ voluntarily) in such a hole – especially as the state of her eyes prevents her from passing much time in reading.¹⁷¹

It was also the choice of Eliza’s mother to remain in the country, even though she repeatedly complained of solitude and loneliness at *Middleton Place*.¹⁷² Her other daughter, Catherine, was mentally ill, and Mary Middleton felt it was her duty to shield her from

¹⁶⁷ “Why my good friend wouldn’t you like to come in the city for a few days?”

¹⁶⁸ “Here the season of pleasure is about to return; why would not you be among those who will harvest this new crop of festivities that Carnival brings back? Be ready; because I will employ all my eloquence to persuade you to come in the city.” Louis St. Martin to Louisa Perret St. Martin, 11 avril 1849, St. Martin Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁶⁹ Joseph Manigault to Gabriel Manigault, 17 December 1805, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

¹⁷⁰ Mary Walton Morris to Sabina Robert Rutherford, 5 November 1810, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

¹⁷¹ Eliza Middleton Fisher to Mary Hering Middleton, 3 March 1842, Eliza Cope Harrison, ed. *Best Companions: Letters of Eliza Middleton Fisher and Her Mother, Mary Hering Middleton, from Charleston, Philadelphia, and Newport, 1839-1846*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001, 248.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 191.

the gaze of strangers.¹⁷³ When in town, explained the mother, Catherine “will not stir out of the house even to walk in the Piazza.”¹⁷⁴ Middleton’s isolation was heightened by her husband’s unwillingness “to send a Man with [her] letters to Charleston.”¹⁷⁵ Away in Philadelphia, Eliza repeatedly encouraged her mother to go to the city, “within call of... many agreeable friends.”¹⁷⁶ In the winter 1841, she insisted:

I hope you may decide to spend some days at least [in Charleston] & cannot understand why you should not allow yourself that gratification – The change of scene [would] be of service to you, & I am sure Killy would like it... and I daresay if you reflect upon all the inducements... & leave the solitude of M. Place for a season.¹⁷⁷

Although tempted, her mother was hesitant: “It will not be worth while for only a week to pack & unpack, & it pains me to let Cathe be exposed to visitors who will call.”¹⁷⁸ “I was sorry to find that you had given up your visit to Charleston,” Eliza wrote a few weeks later, “as I think the change [would] have been beneficial to you, & particularly so to Catherine, who I am sure is better for a little amusement and variety - & as to trouble – there is nothing to be done (worth doing) in this world – without that.”¹⁷⁹

“So much trouble”: these were also the words used four decades earlier by the recently widowed Alice Izard to decline the invitation to send her youngest daughters and grand-daughters to Charleston “to partake of the pleasures of the Ball.” First, there were the sixteen miles that separated her Lowcountry rice plantation from Charleston, which were believed too dangerous to be traveled alone by unescorted young ladies. “The fears attending their return outweighed everything in the end,” observed Izard. Other very material factors contributed to her decision. The girls “are in want of many articles of dress” she explained to her eldest daughter Margaret, “which it would have been too troublesome to you to procure in so short a time, such as shoes, stockings, gloves, tippets.”¹⁸⁰ But the town-loving girls eventually convinced the plantation woman. After asking Margaret to lodge her siblings under her roof on East Bay Street, Izard also instructed her concerning the garments she had to purchase for the urban appearance of

¹⁷³ Ibid., 7, 24, 55.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 229.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 185.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 158-59.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 193.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 246.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 248. [emphasis in the original].

¹⁸⁰ Alice Izard to Margaret Izard Manigault, 10 February 1805, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

her sisters and nieces: “The girls will want long white gloves, & stockings. The latter either silk or cotton with open clocks. Caroline takes very large ones. Shoes they will want also.”¹⁸¹ Alice Izard confided the care of her siblings for a few weeks to her daughter. When mothers were unable or unwilling to accompany their daughters in the world, they found plenty of grandmothers, aunts, and sisters willing to play the chaperon. The urban debuts of elite girls were intergenerational affairs among women of the same family.

While some planting fathers eagerly engaged in the festivities of the gay season, others promptly returned to their businesses, either planting or politics, after having escorted wives and daughters to the city. For their daughter’s sake, some planting couples willingly chose to live separately for extended periods of time. While the father of Mary Boykin planted in Mississippi, her mother was in Charleston with the children. The Boykins had taken this resolution when Mary started being courted by young men at a country dance. These southwestern fellows were not the kind of suitors they wanted for her.¹⁸² In most cases, this familial strategy clearly paid off. Once their daughter had married, couples resumed their joint residence. In other cases, these separations had greater consequences. Benjamin Farar, a planter of the Natchez District, spent winters at his plantation, while his wife Mary was in New Orleans with their daughters. Benjamin complained of being “heartily tired of keeping house, not a cheerful welcome when I return from the passage of the day.”¹⁸³ From her urban residence, Mary was also unhappy. She did not understand why her husband was so eager to leave the city to return to the plantation:

I must confess to you my Benny that I felt a little hurt at your anxiety to visit Natchez so soon after my joining you; and even when we do part, I feared there was more pleasure than pain express [*sic*] in your continence. How have I fancied a thousand times that I had lost the art of pleasing you, that you were more happy from me than with me.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ Alice Izard to Margaret Izard Manigault, 19 February 1805, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

¹⁸² C.Vann Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981, xxxi.

¹⁸³ Benjamin Farar to Mary Farar, 17 March 1819, Farar Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁸⁴ Mary Farar to Benjamin Farar, 30 March, 1819, Farar Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

It was perhaps during Mary's winters in New Orleans that Benjamin Farar fathered an illegitimate child with a white woman of Natchez.¹⁸⁵ More often, however, planters separated from their wives chose to find solace in the arms of black women. While Ann Vanderhorst spent her winters in Charleston, her husband Elias fathered a son with a female slave of his plantation *Round-O*.¹⁸⁶ Some planters were compelled to remain in the country by the supervision of their crops; others simply had no taste for urban – or their wives' – society.

Some young women too had no inclination for the gay season and its marriage market. What would induce a girl not to participate in the gay season? To contemporaries, the principal reasons had to be material. If she could not put up a good show, it was understandable that a young woman would prefer not to go to the city. Thomas P. Alston was puzzled about his daughter Mary's "change of mind about going to Charleston." Wondering what were her "reasons for remaining in such a deserted place" as Waccamaw, he wrote,

your mother & I speculate often on the consideration which may have moved you to prefer the country to the city -- the quiet of the one to other. . . Pride says it is because you have not money enough - or you require a maid to aid in making your toilet or that you have not a coach or &c &c discretion says it is because you have not your mother to accompany you, nor an Aunt or other relative or some discreet friend to act as your chaperone. . . It cannot be any matter of the heart – any tender affection – any lover – any engagement. Let us hear all.¹⁸⁷

Since they confirmed the exclusiveness of planter's society, material impediments were easily acknowledged. However a number of young women were unwilling belles; they found much to criticize in what they understood as superficial rituals.¹⁸⁸ Mary Allston, for instance, preferred to "work in worsted & learn Italian" instead of going to the ball.¹⁸⁹ Some avoided the gay season and its sociability on moral and religious grounds. A

¹⁸⁵ Benjamin Farar to Anna Mercer, no date, Farar Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁸⁶ Quash, a mulatto man, was born between 1840 and 1843. He was ironically the property of Ann Vanderhorst and was deeded out in 1864 to his half-brother, Elias Vanderhorst who married Della Allston. He appears in the family correspondence during the Civil War. See Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina. Richard T. Archer also had a liaison with his slave Patty at his plantation in Holmes County, Mississippi, while his wife remained in Port Gibson. Scarborough, *op.cit.*, 28.

¹⁸⁷ Thomas P. Alston to Mary Alston, 2 March 1846, Alston Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

¹⁸⁸ Carter, *op.cit.*, 21.

¹⁸⁹ Thomas P. Alston to Mary Alston, 2 March 1846, Alston Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

number rejected its inevitable outcome: marriage. Some southern girls were reluctant belles who resisted their “assigned adult roles.”¹⁹⁰ This phase of resistance was relatively short, since southern women married young, typically between eighteen and twenty.¹⁹¹ Yet, even for the willing belles, a gay season was not all fun and romance: who wanted to play the wallflower at the ball? Then again, not finding a suitable partner or rejecting marriage did not mean that these women eschewed the gay season; women who embraced a state of single blessedness were often among the most enthusiastic urbanites and socialites of the South.¹⁹²

Supported by a large female network and surrounded by eager suitors, most girls found much to enjoy during a winter in town. In addition to urban amusements, they had the opportunity to choose a husband. Marriage was usually based on love and affection in the Old South, and most girls looked forward to meeting the right candidate.¹⁹³ Most of them experienced only a couple of seasons in the city as belles before getting married. During that brief period of their life, the balance of power was clearly in women’s favor. Men had to prove through long and patient courtships that they deserved a belle’s affection. In the process, some men clearly felt their vulnerability. In the winter of 1802, as Thomas Pinckney was courting Eliza Izard, he noted: “I see her every day read to her, play chess with her, and she treats me familiarly, but if I once proposed myself and was refused, all these things are gone.”¹⁹⁴ While young men felt that these flirtation and courtship rituals were burdensome, women (young and old) knew that it was in their interest to perpetuate them. After all, it was the only period where men would intensively seek out the presence of women in social gatherings.¹⁹⁵ After the first encounters in the ballroom, courtship essentially took place in the drawing room, family parlor, or music room of the town house, always in the presence of a chaperone. The drawing room was a space under female authority in which the behavior of young

¹⁹⁰ Jabour convincingly argues that “young women’s attempts to find fulfillment and independence beyond the bonds of matrimony represented a serious and sustained (if ultimately unsuccessful) effort to exert control over their own lives and to free themselves from the strictures of southern patriarchy.” Jabour, *op.cit.*, 86. For reluctant belles, see *Idem.*, 125-128.

¹⁹¹ Jane Turner Censer, *North Carolina Planters and their Children, 1800-1860*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990, 68, 72-73.

¹⁹² Carter, *op.cit.*

¹⁹³ C.f. Jabour, *op.cit.*, 136.

¹⁹⁴ Charles Pinckney Jr. to Harriot Pinckney, 23 January 1802, Rutledge, *loc.cit.*, 112.

¹⁹⁵ O’Brien, *op.cit.*, 2004, vol.1, 408.

men was rigidly supervised.¹⁹⁶ Adèle Allston “found this part of her duty very trying,” so she sent her youngest daughter to study her lesson at one end of the room as her sister Della met her suitors at the other end.¹⁹⁷

Beyond the confines of the town house, the urban setting with its large gatherings and broad movements of people provided a range of opportunities for lovers who wanted to escape, for a few minutes, watchful chaperons. An evening at the theater was understood by Thomas Pinckney as an opportunity to declare his love to Eliza Izard, without being overheard by her parents.¹⁹⁸ The city was also a privileged ground for runaway matches.¹⁹⁹ William Ferguson Colcock had long been courting Emmeline Huguenin, the youngest sister of his deceased wife. Although her father had given his consent, her mother would not yield to the match. Since “Emmeline was constant” to him, William “proposed to her to run away with [him] & she consented, provided [he] would take her immediately out of the City.” In Colcock’s autobiography, the city appears as an essential component of the couple’s elopement:

On the evening of the 26th of March 1838, [Emmeline] went to the theatre, in company with her brother Cornelius & his wife I met her with my father’s carriage, having previously sent a hired carriage & horses to wait for us at my father’s farm, near the race course. As soon as Cornelius & his wife got out of their carriage, they ascended the steps of the theater, which were very crowded, I handed Emmeline out & hurried her quickly to my carriage & we were not seen by the others until they got to the box-office at the door of the theatre.

From there, the couple drove to the house of a family friend, “at the corner of coming and Calhoun Sts,” where a minister was waiting to perform the ceremony of marriage. But since Emmeline “had no hat,” Colcock “dispatched [his] nephew Charles, down King Street,” the retail center of the city. Propriety had to be respected. The nephew “soon returned with an untrimmed, plain, straw bonnet.” After the ceremony, the newlyweds went to the farm on the outskirts of town and from there, a hired carriage brought them to a friend’s place on the Cooper River. After a few days of honeymooning, the newlyweds returned to the house of William’s father in Charleston, where “Emmeline’s wardrobe had been sent.” But the Huguenins were gone. Upon

¹⁹⁶ Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987, 50-121.

¹⁹⁷ Pringle, op.cit., 145.

¹⁹⁸ Charles Pinckney Jr. to Harriot Pinckney, 23 January 1802, Rutledge, loc.cit.

¹⁹⁹ For a definition of the expression “runaway match,” see Harriot Horry Rutledge Ravenel, *Charleston: The Place and The People*, New York: MacMillan, 1906, 168.

hearing of the scandalous elopement, Emmeline's father, who had remained at his plantation *Roseland* for the winter, "came immediately down & took the rest of his household into the country."²⁰⁰ Emmeline and William had brought dishonor to the Huguenins. For several months, the Huguenins refused any kind of contact with the newlyweds, but within a few years, they had reconciled. The marriage was not a misalliance and for most of their married life, the Colcocks would be living in the city. In other families, runaway daughters were indefinitely ostracized, having circumvented patriarchal authority.

A wedding in the city was the highpoint of the career of a southern belle. Although they were celebrated throughout the year, the weddings of the gay season were the most fashionable. Catholic weddings were celebrated in a church, in the presence of a large group of witnesses. The parents of Pauline DeCaradeuc, of French and Italian descent, were married at St. John Catholic Church in Charleston.²⁰¹ Protestant weddings were usually celebrated at home. Varina and Jefferson Davis wed in February 1845 at *The Briars*, the Natchez house of the bride's parents. Della Allston also married Arnoldus Vanderhorst in her parents' Charleston house. The ceremony was held, her sister remembered, in the

beautiful oval drawing room or ballroom. It had a very high ceiling and was papered in with small sprigs of golden flowers scattered over it. There were four large windows on the south, opening on the iron balcony which ran round on the outside. And on the opposite side of the room, two windows exactly like those opening on the balcony, running from the tall ceiling to the floor, but the panes of these were mirrors. It made you think you were looking into another crowded room.²⁰²

Even when celebrated in front of relatively small assemblies, these weddings were anything but private affairs. The union of two prominent members of the master class was an important event that aroused the interest of broad social networks along the rural-urban continuum. In December 1801, Thomas Pinckney informed his cousin Harriott, then in the country: "It is rumoured in Town that Miss Shubricks [*sic*] wedding is to be uncommonly brilliant. The Colonel's new furniture is to be paraded on the

²⁰⁰ "The autobiography of William Ferguson Colcock," 10-11, Colcock Family Papers, 1785-1917, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

²⁰¹ Mary D. Robertson, ed., *A Confederate Lady Comes of Age: The Journal of Pauline DeCaradeuc Heyward, 1863-1888*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992, 5.

²⁰² Pringle, op.cit., 187.

occasion, and the Brides [*sic*] costume is, (I am told by the universal chronicle, Miss Hannah Drayton) inconceivably Elegant.”²⁰³ Married on Thursday, January 7 1802, the wedding was followed the next day by “a grand wedding dinner, and a Ball in the evening.”²⁰⁴ At the Jockey Ball in Charleston, Beatrice St. Julien Ravenel remembered, “the latest bride is, of right, taken down to supper by the president, and feels that she has achieved distinction!”²⁰⁵ The newlyweds of the planting class often started their conjugal life by honeymooning in a southern city. After being married in Natchez, Varina Howell and Jefferson Davis traveled to New Orleans and then established their household at her husband’s plantation.²⁰⁶

With the moral and social guidance of her mother and the financial support of her father, the southern belle had achieved her destiny. Older women, now enjoying both greater mobility and authority, guided the younger ones in a series of urban rituals that were essential to the reproduction of the master class. As planting men pursue their ambition of independence in the country, they often delegated this important mission to their wife. In this process, young women sometimes challenged the parental authority, taking advantages of the urban environment to choose their own destiny (although most followed the paved path). From now on, however, many plantation women associated the city with pleasures, culture, community, empowerment, and self-assertion.

In addition to motherhood and housewifery, most elite white women aspired to an ideal of ornamental femininity that blended refinement, civility, and most importantly the cultivation of social networks. Society was a female ambition, and it was instilled in girls from early childhood. Only in the social sphere could elite white women hope for equality with men, as they were subordinated legally, economically, and politically. Too much society, however, endangered southern womanhood as it had long carried the

²⁰³ Thomas Pinckney to Miss Harriot Pinckney, 22 December 1801, Rutledge, *loc.cit.*, 102.

²⁰⁴ Thomas Pinckney to Harriot Pinckney, 2 January 1802, *loc.cit.*, 106. Six decades later, Mary Anna Colcock wrote from Charleston, to her sister in the country: “Sue Mazick’s sister was married last night to Mr. Richardson Miles. I did not go to the wedding for several reasons. 1st the weather was bad. 2nd my dress was not finished. 3rd I was not invited.” Mary Anna Colcock to Emmeline Colcocok, 12 February 1858, Colcock Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

²⁰⁵ Ravenel, *op.cit.*, 428.

²⁰⁶ Cashin, *op.cit.*, 2006, 37-38.

reputation of breeding immorality. The fashionable life of the city made women profligate, superficial, gossipy, but also ambitious, insubordinate, and outspoken. Female honor in the South notably called for chastity and stoicism, which were not exactly the virtues cultivated in the city's ballrooms and drawing rooms.²⁰⁷ Numerous voices condemned the gay season and its worldly pleasures. During the colonial period, critics complained that balls and races interrupted business and shortened assembly sessions.²⁰⁸ Moralists criticized unnatural mothers who used wet nurses to preserve their figure and enable them to engage in social amusements. In the New Republic, every reincarnation of the aristocratic mores of the *Ancien Regime* was condemned; too much society was said to pervert the natural and private nature of women.²⁰⁹ As the ideal of domesticity became all-pervasive in the antebellum period, regional domestic advisers repeatedly told women that their place was not in the city, playing the belles at the ball, but in the country, as the mothers of a black and white family.²¹⁰

Writing in 1835, Thomas R. Dew encapsulated the opinion of his contemporaries in the *Southern Literary Messenger*:

In the little concerns of life, and the petty tactics of the drawing and ball rooms, woman will always display more skill and cunning than man. These are the scenes with which she is more conversant, and which she studies far more deeply than he. A skilful tactician in the drawing room, may almost be compared to a general in the field.²¹¹

But society corrupts the very essence of a woman:

when vanity is excessive, or badly regulated, woman is too apt to substitute art for nature, and to attempt to impose upon the world by outward show and hollow pretensions; to manage and intrigue for the purpose of carrying her plans, and consummating her schemes; and when in danger of detection, she has recourse to evasions and devices, which in the end may produce the character of falsehood and hypocrisy.²¹²

Tacticians who ruled the social world of the southern city from their drawing rooms were by implication debauched and fast. When she encountered one of those socialites, Miriam Hilliard surprisingly remarked: "she is devoted to the fashionable world, and yet

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁰⁸ Kennedy, *op.cit.*, 28.

²⁰⁹ Hemphill, *op.cit.*, 105, 109.

²¹⁰ Virginia Cary, *Letters to a Young Lady on the Death of her Mother*, Richmond: Ariel Works, 1830, 141; Maria J. McIntosh, *Woman in America: Her Work and Her Reward*, New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1850, 89.

²¹¹ Thomas R. Dew, "Dissertation on the Characteristic Difference between the Sexes, and on the Position and Influence of Woman in Society," *Southern Literary Messenger*, May-August 1835, 502.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 501.

preserves a heart uncorrupted.”²¹³ To eschew criticism, prudent socialites learned to downplay their personal ambitions, and thus could, as with Alice Izard, become celebrated *salonnières*, while unflinchingly affirming that the “more retired life is, in general, better suited to the female character.”²¹⁴

In the South, social commentators often divided elite white women into two groups: the religious and the fashionable. The first group condemned the gay season and its superficial pleasures, while the second group embraced it. The rise of evangelicalism in the South, especially after the 1820s, led to the most vocal denunciations of balls, gambling and cards playing, but also of lavish dresses and décolletages. Cutting across social divides, the ideal of pious womanhood promoted by evangelicals reached large numbers of Southerners.²¹⁵ The wealthiest planting men and women, however, did not convert massively to evangelicalism, but remained faithful to the Episcopal Church, which was known, like the Catholic Church, for its tolerance of aristocratic amusements.²¹⁶ It was not unusual for elite women to pick and choose among religious prescriptions. Converted to Methodism while at a female academy in Macon, Gertrude Clanton still enjoyed her debut in Augusta’s society: “although I did not dance and was thus incapacitated from entering into all the excesses of gayety yet I spent a delightful winter as a gay girl of fashion.”²¹⁷ Even if her religion condemned the theatre, she attended several plays. Angelina Grimké was raised in a family where the theatre was believed a “sinful enjoyment” and the young woman disliked the superficiality of urban society. In her diary she admitted, “Often...have I returned home, sick of the frivolous beings I had been with, mortified at my own folly, and weary of the ball-room and its gilded toys. Night after night, as I glittered now in this gay scene, now in that, my soul has been disturbed by the query ‘Where are the talents committed to thy charge?’”²¹⁸ For

²¹³ Miriam Badger Hilliard Diary, 7 March 1850, Typescript, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

²¹⁴ Alice Izard to Margaret Izard Manigault, 7 March 1814, Ralph Izard Papers, Library of Congress, quoted in Jeffrey Robert Young, *Domesticating Slavery: The Master Class in Georgia and South Carolina, 1670-1837*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999, 151.

²¹⁵ Kierner, op.cit., 145.

²¹⁶ Scarborough, op.cit., 53; Amos, op.cit., 67.

²¹⁷ 8 April 1855, Burr, op.cit., 118.

²¹⁸ Sarah Grimké, Diary, 1827, quoted in Gerda Lerner, *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina: Pioneers for Women’s Rights and Abolition*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004, 25.

a while, she also gave up novel reading, dancing, and parties. Yet Angelina's conversion was short-lived; she soon resumed her sinful life.²¹⁹

Ambivalent about the moral dangers of the city, religious women still valued the accessibility of churches. A dozen religious denominations maintained places of worship both in Charleston and New Orleans. Since there were no Roman Catholic churches near their plantation in South Carolina, the deCaradeucs regularly took the cars to attend mass at the Most Holy Trinity Church in Augusta, seventeen miles away.²²⁰ When in Savannah one winter, their daughter Pauline went to church to hear "some real sweet church music."²²¹ One day, as "it ha[d] been raining very much, [she] went to church three times."²²² The following winter, she was in Augusta, where she "visited the Jewish synagogue and the Methodist meeting, the former impressed [her], the latter amused."²²³ Churches were places to pray, to listen to sacred music, but also to see and be seen. Families rented pews in church as they rented boxes at the opera. "Mr. Parker's Church is finished and is crowded on Sabbath to overflowing," Mary Bryan Harford wrote in booming New Orleans. "The pews are to be sold soon, I hope that we shall buy one, or we shall be excluded entirely after the sale. At present the seats are free."²²⁴ Some churches segregated the rich and the poor, the black and the white; other did not.²²⁵ No matter the denomination, however, congregations were preponderantly female everywhere. In the winter 1819, Benjamin Latrobe observed how the religious landscape segregated men and women:

Sunday in New Orleans is distinguished only, 1., by the flags that are hoisted on all the ships, 2. By the attendance at Church (the Cathedral) of all the beautiful girls in the place, & of 2 or 300 quarteroons [*sic*], negroes, and mulattoes, & perhaps of 100 white males to hear high Mass, during which the two bells of the Cathedral are jingling, 3., by the shutting up of the majority of the shops & warehouses kept by the Americans, & 4, by the firing of the guns of most of the young gentlemen

²¹⁹ Eventually, however, the superficiality and cruelty of Charleston's urban life led her to abandon the South entirely and become one of the greatest abolitionists of the nineteenth century. *Ibid.*, 30.

²²⁰ Mary D. Robertson, ed., *A Confederate Lady Comes of Age: The Journal of Pauline DeCaradeuc Heyward, 1863-1888*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992, 8.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

²²² *Ibid.*, 44.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 72.

²²⁴ Maria Bryan Hartford to Julia Bryan Cumming, 5 December 1835, Carol Bleser, ed., *Tokens of Affection: The Letters of a Planter's Daughter in the Old South*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996, 79.

²²⁵ Sandra Margaret Frink, "Spectacles of the Street: Performance, Power, and Public Space in Antebellum New Orleans," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 2004, 231-232.

in the neighboring swamps, to whom Sunday affords leisure for field sports. 5. The Presbyterian, Episcopal, & Methodist churches are also open on that day, & are attended by a large majority of the ladies of their respective congregations.²²⁶

As white women prayed inside, white men were usually outside, sometimes just loitering in front of the church.²²⁷

To an extent, religion was a convenient outlet for girls and women who felt alienated from the fashionable set, reveals the biographer of Martha Laurens Ramsey. The daughter of Henry Laurens (merchant, slave trader, politician and a great critic of social frolics), Martha lost her mother when she was young. Since her father did not remarry, nobody “tutored her wordlessly in the social graces.”²²⁸ Away in Europe during the American Revolution, she was not introduced to Charleston society and when she finally married in her late twenties to the twice-widowed physician of her father, she ended up in a middle-class household where finances were shaky at best. Martha never felt that she belonged to the fashionable circles. No wonder that in her religious exercises, she wrote: “I hate all company, all amusements, all business that diverts my mind from spiritual things.” About the rituals of the tea, she expostulated: “they examine laces, dresses, ornaments, and finery,” and speak only of “this agreeable party, that set, the other amusement.” Martha wanted “to escape the...circle of worldly delights.”²²⁹

Periods of economic decline, political crisis and war led to the most virulent critics of the gay season and its amusements. In the winter 1774, on the eve of the Revolution, the Charleston theatre was dubbed in the *South Carolina Gazette* the “Devil’s Synagogue” by a “foolish female,” while a group of citizens accused it of “Vice and Obscenity...tending to the Corruption of Youth and the Injury of many Families.”²³⁰ Balls were labeled “frivolous and unrepblican.”²³¹ During the Civil War, when resources were scarce, these amusements seemed like self-indulgence.²³² In the *Mobile Register*, novelist Augusta Jane Evans asked: “Can mirth and reckless revelry hold high carnival in

²²⁶ Benjamin H. Latrobe, *Impressions Respecting New Orleans: Diary and Sketches, 1818-1829*, New York: Columbia University press, 1951, 35-36. A few weeks later, as he returned to the Cathedral, he noted: “The congregation consisted of at least 4/5th women, of which number one half at least were colored.” *Ibid.*, 62.

²²⁷ Farnham, *op.cit.*, 129.

²²⁸ Joanna Bowen Gillespie, *The Life and Time of Martha Laurens Ramsay, 1759-1811*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001, 84.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 76-77,78.

²³⁰ Willis, *op.cit.*, 65-66.

²³¹ Kierner, *op.cit.* 194.

²³² Faust, *op.cit.*, 234-247.

social circles while every passing breeze chants the requiem of dying heroes?²³³ In occupied New Orleans, Eugenie Lavie remarked: “Je souffre un peu trop de l’absence de ceux qui me sont chers, pour aller chercher des distractions dans le monde. Je ne puis porter ma physionomie triste parmi un tourbillon de jeunes filles toutes plus joyeuses les unes que les autres.”²³⁴

Then again, the amusements of the gay season were not all equal in the eyes of their critics. Some were perceived as edifying, such as music and conversation, while others were mere dissipations.²³⁵ Dancing was by far the most often condemned amusement. The theatre, too, had bad press, although southern promoters had long presented the stage as an “elegant rational amusement.”²³⁶ Both in Charleston and New Orleans, evenings at the theatre, the opera, or the ball were turned into benefits, morally acceptable amusements associated with charitable causes, such as the refugees of Santo Domingo, the Orphan House or the victims of a great fire. During the Civil War, ladies and gentlemen even took over the stage, improvising themselves amateurs actors to raise money for the Confederate Cause.²³⁷ Thus such genteel amusements were not just conspicuous display, but also a mark of the benevolence and the patriotism of the master class. If the religious and the fashionable coexisted in the urban South, undeniably the latter prevailed within the planting elite.

The Civil War exacerbated these tensions.²³⁸ Young women, exiled in the country, were among the greatest critics of their counterparts. How could one indulge while brothers and fiancés were dying on the battlefield? Such urban frolics shocked Pauline DeCaradeuc who had lost two brothers in the first year of the war. In her diary on June 2, 1863, she was upset by a girl friend who “is full of gaiety and writes me of all the “fun” she is having in Charleston, it all grates harshly on my heart now! and I don’t know how any one can feel so bright and happy now and even feeling so, how they can

²³³ Augusta Janes Evans, quoted in *ibid.*, 244.

²³⁴ “I suffer too much from the absence of my dear ones, to go seek distractions into the world. I cannot carry my sad physiognomy in the midst of a joyful whirl of young girls.” Eugénie Lavie to Félix Grima, Grima Family Papers, New Orleans Historical Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

²³⁵ For a discussion of the changing perceptions of amusements in the nineteenth-century urban South, see Click, *op.cit.*, 2-6.

²³⁶ Willis, *op.cit.*, 252.

²³⁷ Willis, *op.cit.*, 222-223; 4 March 1861, John F. Marszalek, ed. *The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes, 1861-1866*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979, 11.

²³⁸ Faust, *op.cit.*, 245.

write those feelings to me, whose heart is so wretched and sorrowful as mine.”²³⁹ On the very same day, from her exile in Camden, Emma Holmes felt,

so mortified at the disgraceful character the Charleston girls have acquired – once considered so modest and refined & well behaved that a Charleston lady was recognized by her lady like manners anywhere, & now the foreigners say that they have met fast girls, but not equal to those of Charleston. And those very ones are the ultra fashionables, who seem to have forgotten alike the dead & the living and with the grass scarce green on the graves of their brothers, cousins & other relatives, have shared in all the gaiety of the past winter [...] everybody is ‘dressed to death’ as if no war was going on.²⁴⁰

Although young women were not alone in these urban gatherings – men and even soldiers attended them - the only ones to blame were females. Then again, when Emma Holmes made a short visit to Charleston a few months later, she went to several dances and parties, and enjoyed herself greatly. Forced to return to small town Camden, Holmes resumed her criticism: “In spite of national humiliation & grief & individual sorrow & carking cares, Folly and Frivolity still reign supreme among a certain set, the same who danced before the sod was settled over the bloody graves of their kindred during the war.”²⁴¹ Others who eventually reintegrated into the urban circles noted the schizophrenic aspect of it all. Speaking of herself in the third person, a plantation girl who attended several dances and “sociables” in 1865 remarked that, “at these I really didn’t recognize Pauline de Caradeuc in the character of a belle, she has been so long in quiet & retirement, that I almost had forgotten her in society.”²⁴² In peacetime, critics of urban gaiety often came from the periphery of the planting elite and from the middle classes that felt excluded from the most select circles.²⁴³ William Gilmore Simms, forever ambivalent toward the elite of the Lowcountry, described in his novel *The Golden Christmas* the society of Charleston as “loose morals, vulgar fashions, bad manners, and gross, coarse, nameless people.”²⁴⁴

With critics coming from all sides, parents were perhaps the first ones to fear the dangerous effect of the gay season on their daughters, yet most believed that some

²³⁹ Robertson, op.cit, 16.

²⁴⁰ Marszalek, op.cit., 264.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 487.

²⁴² Robertson, op.cit., 73.

²⁴³ See Jonathan Daniel Wells, *The Origins of the Southern Middle Class, 1800-1861*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

²⁴⁴ Mary Ann Wimsatt, *The Major Fiction of William Gilmore Simms: Cultural Traditions and Literary Form*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989, 173; see also John Caldwell Guilds, *Simms: A Literary Life*, Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1992, 203.

exposure to urban gaiety would forge their character. Thomas Alston told his daughter Mary, “I certainly have no objection to your partaking (in moderation) of the gaudies [sic] of a season in Charleston -- in fact I would wish you to have some experience of enjoyment of a life of pleasure & fashion.”²⁴⁵ For her part, Alice Izard thought that it was important that her youngest daughter, “see the nature of a public amusement. I have done it with all my daughters, & it has had no ill consequences. Young minds are apt to regard the amusements they are kept from, as something superior to all other enjoyments. When experience shows them in their real light, they lose their luster.”²⁴⁶ In the long run, however, Alice Izard wished that her daughters and granddaughters would “foster an appreciation for more sober pastimes.”²⁴⁷ Girls needed to learn to indulge the pleasures of the city with moderation, to resist its temptations, or they could become “given up to the world.”²⁴⁸

The standards of propriety of the gay season changed over time; that which had been condemned in the past could become respectable a few decades later.²⁴⁹ Throughout the entire period, however, a young woman (unmarried or married) who went to the ball unaccompanied was thought to be a public woman, a prostitute.²⁵⁰ Heterosocial by definition, balls were highly gendered and ritualized affairs.²⁵¹ Della Allston, for instance, “was not allowed to dance the “round dances,” as they were called – the waltz, the polka, and the mazurka – as only those who were considered the fast set danced them; and a ring of spectators would form around the room to watch the eight or ten girls who were so bold as to dance them.”²⁵² Ann Vanderhorst allowed the waltz at her house, and as a result, “stiff” mothers did not permit their daughters go to her

²⁴⁵ Thomas P. Alston to Mary Alston, 2 March 1846, Alston Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

²⁴⁶ Alice Izard to Margaret Izard Manigault, 23 December 1807, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

²⁴⁷ Daniel Kilbride, *An American Aristocracy: Southern Planters in Antebellum Philadelphia*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006, 27.

²⁴⁸ Pease and Pease, op.cit., 49.

²⁴⁹ Time and context changed the standards of propriety. What was acceptable at a country dance might be critiqued in the city. Kelly, op.cit., 173. During the war, for instance, the parents of Elizabeth Allston “never allowed [her] to accept invitations to stay with [her] friends who had remained in Charleston. It was said that society was too informal and too gay.” Pringle, op.cit., 302.

²⁵⁰ Ravenel, op.cit., 428.

²⁵¹ They “linked the sexes in carefully formalized and ritualized ways” remarked Mary Ryan, “women mingled with the opposite sex in a stylized and dispassionate public dramatization of heterosexual relations.” Ryan, op.cit., 81.

²⁵² Pringle, op.cit., 144. See also Pease and Pease, op.cit., 61.

parties.²⁵³ Her husband, Elias, “beg[ed] and insist[ed]” unsuccessfully that their daughter Raven “did not waltz, or dance the polka, or the Rounda with any gentleman.”²⁵⁴ Interestingly, nobody seemed to mind the boldness of the beaux dancing with these fast belles. The double standard that differentiated sisters’ and brothers’ behaviors was especially visible during the gay season. Elite young men were notorious for their moral transgressions. Planting parents had long warned sons of the corrupting influence of urban pleasures.²⁵⁵ Mary Pringle told her sons that she approved of dancing, yet condemned the “idle pleasures of a card table” and the “degrading pleasures of a wine party.”²⁵⁶ Yet, dissipation was a necessary rite of passage into southern manhood and mastery. They dressed as women in masquerade balls.²⁵⁷ Similarly they went to quadroom balls, privileged sites of miscegenation from which white women were excluded by city ordinances.²⁵⁸ However, young women on the eve of marriage demanded decency of their future partners and thus helped men transition into formal respectability.²⁵⁹ Men typically married when they were ready to settle on a plantation, that is to become the independent masters of large worlds.²⁶⁰ They did not marry to be left alone on the plantation by their sociable wives. Yet they were aware that giving, once in a while, a sojourn of a few days or a few months in town to their female dependants reinforced the bounds of patriarchy.

The gay season was meant to be ephemeral; it was a passage from country to city to country. Once married, women were expected to live according to ideals of

²⁵³ Mary Wayne to Ann Vanderhorst, 26 March 1846, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

²⁵⁴ Elias Vanderhorst to Anna Raven Vanderhorst, 15 August 1848, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina. Ironically, the much-protected Della Allston ended up marrying Elias Vanderhorst, and was thus submitted for much of her adult life to the authority of Ann Vanderhorst, the mother with loose morals.

²⁵⁵ Jaher, op.cit., 323.

²⁵⁶ Côté, op.cit., 105.

²⁵⁷ Ryan, op.cit., 29.

²⁵⁸ Kinser, op.cit., 63.

²⁵⁹ Lorri Glover, *Southern Sons: Becoming Men in the New Nation*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007.

²⁶⁰ Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

submission and self-sacrifice, ideals that conflicted with the self-centered world of urban gaiety. But some women did not want to return to the country after a sojourn in the city. Maria Bryan “did not care about returning to the humdrum sort of life” at the plantation after “quaffing so largely to the sweets of fashionable life in Augusta.”²⁶¹ Some young women, such as Mary Morris, chose to postpone marriage for several years. Not exactly in line with the beauty standards of her time, yet financially independent as the owner of a Lowcountry plantation, “she loved excitements, & society.”²⁶² According to her niece, “she might have made a suitable match, a Mr Stephens, but having that his father intended for him to settle in the western part of the state, she expresses on several occasions such a rooted disgust [*sic*] to a country life that the thing was stopped.” When she eventually married General Wayne, her new husband proved not only “guilty of very dishonorable conduct,” but he insisted on residing in the country.²⁶³ “Poor woman! What is her lot unmmarried, she is unprotected; married she becomes a slave to an imperious & usurping husband – so our lot is a miserable one & nothing but religion can support us under it,” Mary’s friend complained.²⁶⁴ Soon, however, the now widowed Mary could resume her gay life.

Before getting married, other young women tried to impress their urban preferences on their fiancé. Some were successful, other less so.²⁶⁵ About to marry Jefferson Davis, Varina Howell hoped that Natchez would become their primary place of residence, instead of *Brierfield* or *The Hurricane*, the Davises’ plantations. Since he refused, she reluctantly moved to the country once married, yet she never abandoned her urban aspirations. The years spent in Washington as the wife of a Senator were the happiest of her life. A great conversationalist and an accomplished hostess, Varina thrived in the cosmopolitan city. While she reluctantly settled at *Beauvoir*, a Mississippi plantation, after the Civil War, she never abandoned her urban aspirations and when her husband passed away, she moved to New York.²⁶⁶

²⁶¹ Bleser, *op.cit.*, xxviii.

²⁶² Meta Morris Grimball, Sketches. “Morrisania, My Fathers Family”, [1854], South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

²⁶³ Meta Morris Grimball, Sketches. “Morrisania, My Fathers Family”, [1854], South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

²⁶⁴ Mary Legaré to Ann Vanderhorst, May 1845, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina. [Emphasis in original]

²⁶⁵ Burton, *op.cit.*, 129.

²⁶⁶ Cashin, *op.cit.*, 2006.

Another solution to this dilemma was simply to marry men whose profession kept them in town for the greatest part of the year. This allowed women to lead socially intense lives and thus indefinitely prolong their belledom. Octavia Levert was probably the most famous of these everlasting southern belles. The daughter of a military officer, governor of Florida, and plantation owner of Georgia, she married a physician of Mobile. In the Cotton City, she held a fashionable salon and published her *Souvenirs of Travel*.²⁶⁷ Modeling herself after the French *salonnières*, she assembled every Monday from 11 a.m to 11 p.m. “the most fashionable guests,” including writers, artists, actors, actresses, politicians, and even filibusters.²⁶⁸ “To be a novelty in fact or reputed,” Thomas C. De Leon observed, “was sufficient to secure *entrée* into her salon.”²⁶⁹ James De Bow, described Levert as an “accomplished, intellectual, and fascinating lady,” and her home as “the centre of attraction for a large and polished and intellectual circle.”²⁷⁰ Well into her middle age, married and the mother of five children, she cultivated her aura of belledom. For decades, Levert was admired by her female peers, especially those who shared her urban inclinations.²⁷¹ Others women, especially the most devout, were horrified by her personal ambitions.²⁷²

In South Carolina, Harriott Pinckney Rutledge also chose to make her life in the city and thus refused to become a plantation mistress. Granddaughter of Harriot Horry, she was born into a family of rice planters and spent part of her youth at *The Hampton*. In 1827, at the relatively mature age of twenty-five, she married John Edwards Holbrook, a medical doctor, college professor, and naturalist.²⁷³ Independently wealthy and the owner of thirty-four slaves, she could marry down without renouncing to a life of leisure. In the town house of her grandmother on Tradd Street, this curious, well-read, and sociable

²⁶⁷ Octavia Levert, *Souvenirs of Travel*, Mobile, New York: S.H. Goetzel and Company, 1857.

²⁶⁸ Amos, op.cit., 66-67.

²⁶⁹ Thomas Cooper De Leon, *Belles, Beaux, and Brains of the 60's*, quoted in Amos, op.cit., 67.

²⁷⁰ James D.B. De Bow, “Editorial Miscellany,” *De Bow's Review* 27 (July 1859), 112-118, quoted in Eugene L. Schwaab, ed. *Travels in the Old South: Selected from Periodicals of the Times*, with the collaboration of Jacqueline Bull, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1973, vol.2, 479.

²⁷¹ Maria Bryan Harford to Julia Bryan Cumming, 26 January 1833, Bleser, op.cit., 141; Woodward, op.cit., 18.

²⁷² Susan Petigru King was also one of the great socialites of the urban South, although a controversial figure. In her novels, she criticized the superficiality of Charleston's society, yet was one of its most active members in real life. See Pease and Pease, op.cit., 77-83; Carter, op.cit., 60-64.; O'Brien, op.cit., 2004, 56-57.

²⁷³ Lester D. Stephens, *Science, Race, and Religion in the American South: John Bachman and the Charleston Circle of Naturalists, 1815-1895*, University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 2000, 84-85. For the scientific career of her husband, see 78-100.

woman became the center of an intellectual circle. According to her niece, “here were not politics; science and literature reigned supreme.”²⁷⁴ During the weekends, she relocated with her husband to her country seat, *The Hollow Tree*, four miles from town.²⁷⁵ There, she notably entertained Louis Agassiz, the eminent Swiss scientist, and Fredrika Bremer, the Swedish traveler.²⁷⁶ Fond of society, although never much of a belle, Mrs. Holbrook aspired to a fuller, urban life. In fact, cities were centers of intellectual stimulation for many plantation women.²⁷⁷ During the gay season, they attended public lectures at lyceums, and went to the museums.²⁷⁸ They also purchased the books they would be reading upon their return in the country.²⁷⁹ Within “the refined enclosure of the drawing-room,” many were “frank and fearless in the expression of their feelings and opinions.”²⁸⁰ At breakfast, Emma Holmes conversed about “the Equality of the Sexes” with a family guest.²⁸¹ In Savannah, Mary Telfair and her friends met “once a week at each others’ houses – Scandal is prohibited but we *talk sentiment, tell anecdotes and make puns.*” Striving to make their coterie “intellectually satisfying,” they also discussed their readings, although it gave their “conventions an air of pedantry alias *bluestockingism.*”²⁸² By choosing to remain single, Mary Telfair rejected her rural fate.²⁸³ Women like Levert, Holbrook, and Telfair were exceptional. Most plantation daughters ended up marrying planters and could, at best, aspire to a migrating life between country and city.

In the view of southern society, the greatest danger of the city and its gay season was that it could become addictive and turn plantation girls away from their destiny as

²⁷⁴ Harriott Horry Rutledge St. Julien Ravenel, *Charleston: The Place and the People*, New York: MacMillan Company, 1906, 475.

²⁷⁵ The property was previously known as *Belmont*, the main plantation of Eliza Lucas Pinckney, Mrs. Holbrook’s great-grandmother.

²⁷⁶ Ravenel, op.cit., 478; Fredrika Bremer, *The Homes of the New World; Impressions of America*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1854, vol.1, 271.

²⁷⁷ “Much in intellectual life depends on how people talk to one another,” Michael O’Brien observes, “to converse at dinner, to stop in a bookshop, to pause on a walk, to discuss in the parlor were counterbalance to much that is solitary in the life of the mind. Writing is usually done alone, but thinking can be collective.” O’Brien, op.cit., vol.1, 395.

²⁷⁸ Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand & Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America’s Republic*, Chapel Hill: Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, University of North Carolina Press, 2006, 28-29; Jabour, op.cit., 100.

²⁷⁹ C. Van Woodward and Elizabeth Muhlenfeld, *The Private Mary Chesnut: The Unpublished Civil War Diaries*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1984, 48; Kelley, op.cit., 20.

²⁸⁰ Mary Howard Schoolcraft, *The Black Gauntlet: A Tale of Plantation Life in South Carolina*, Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1860, 457-458.

²⁸¹ Holmes added in her diary: “it always makes me indignant to hear men arrogates to themselves such vast superiority over women, mentally as well as physically.” Marszalek, op.cit., 291-92.

²⁸² Mary Telfair, quoted in Carter, op.cit., 14.

²⁸³ Carter, op.cit., 22-24.

plantation mistresses, the mothers of white and black families. Belledom, just like the gay season, was to be ephemeral. Young women were constantly reminded by friends, parents, ministers, and novelists that it was meant to be a temporary stage in a woman's life. Just like spring, marriage was to follow a winter in town, hence the necessity of feeding the imagination of young women with a "plantation mystique." Domestic novelists were undeniably the foremost promoters of an idealized vision of plantation life, and they encouraged elite southern women to accept their lot without question.²⁸⁴ They also filled their novels with female characters who become lost in society, and thus brought their families into financial and moral ruin. These cautionary tales clearly told elite young women which paths they had to follow; and these paths led to the plantation.

Young women experienced acutely the contrast between the careless life of the belle and the multiple responsibilities that awaited them once married to a planter. As Miriam Hilliard revealed in her diary, the fulfillment of domesticity proved disappointing. About to attend a ball in Vicksburg, Mississippi, her first since the birth of her little boy, Miriam Hilliard proudly noted in her diary: "I am the only married lady invited – quite willing to pass single in this instance."²⁸⁵ Yet, playing the belle for a night had a devastating effect on her morale:

Well, I went to the ball, passed a delightful evening. With a lady, that means of course, agreeable partners in abundance – a mistake, bringing three claimants for my hand at once: I think I forgot I was an "old married woman" rather on the wane, more especially as the Supreme Judges followed me up as if I were an oracle of wisdom and the fountain of wit. By some accidental hit or lucky chance, they have placed me on a pedestal, which if I am smart, I will not allow them to approach too nearly, lest it crumble into dust. Like Cinderella I am afraid of being transformed to rags... Reached my chamber and my deserted boy, at 2 O'clock sleeping sweetly; as I gazed at him, I felt that he was my pride and glory – compared to him, all other triumphs were but dress & tinsels. I never felt more forcibly how valueless the word's flatteries. A word of approval from my husband is worth to my heart a thousand such unsatisfying tributes. The reaction of my spirits was so great that I wept myself to sleep.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁴ Stowe, loc.cit.

²⁸⁵ Miriam Badger Hilliard, Diary, 7 March 1850, Typescript, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

²⁸⁶ Miriam Badger Hilliard, Diary, 18 March 1850, Typescript, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Evidently torn, Hilliard eventually convinced herself that marriage and motherhood were the highest calling for a woman of her class. She nonetheless questioned the very foundations of a society based on slavery and rural plantations.

Other women took longer to express disenchantment with plantation life. But after spending five, ten, or fifteen years in the country, they decided to indulge their urban inclinations, even if it meant living apart from their husbands. Ann Vanderhorst was such a woman. She spent almost half of the year separated from her spouse. She stayed in the city while he was in the country, or she traveled to the North as he remained in the South. “How much pleasanter it must have been for you in Columbia than here” the planter wrote his wife in 1837 from his plantation. “It is indeed very pleasant to be in society, we can forget the cares of home, children, & every thing else...for it is most certainly an agreeable life, but these are sacred duties which parents have to perform...you know we cannot always remain young & the world neglect the aged.”²⁸⁷ In spite of his mild attempts to remind his wife of her “sacred duties,” she would never lose her enthusiasm for society. “I went to a ball the other night” she told her sister in February 1870, “& was quite a belle.”²⁸⁸ Well into her seventies, Ann Vanderhorst still loved the gay season.

Céline Pilié Roman was also such a woman. She grew up in the French Quarter of New Orleans, the daughter of Saint Domingue refugees. There she met Jacques Télésphore Roman, sixteen years her senior, whom she married in 1834. Roman was a sugar planter and two years after the wedding, he purchased a plantation along the Mississippi River that Céline named *Beau Séjour*. The plantation was a paragon of elegance and luxury, famous in Louisiana for its oak alley. Very soon, he also started renting a cottage in New Orleans for Céline.²⁸⁹ If Jacques Télésphore could entirely eschew urban living himself, he could not refuse his urbane wife the regular pleasure of a season in town. When it came to beautify his country residence, Jacques Télésphore spared no expense, encouraging his wife to purchase all the dishes, carpets and furniture

²⁸⁷ Elias Vanderhorst to Ann Morris Vanderhorst, 25 November 1837, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

²⁸⁸ Ann Morris Vanderhorst to Mary Wayne, 3 February 1870, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

²⁸⁹ Jacques Télésphore Roman to Céline Roman, 24 décembre 1841, Roman Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

she longed for. When his wife wanted to improve the modest town house, on the other hand, Jacques T  l  sphore insisted servants were too busy and money was scarce.²⁹⁰

After ten years of marriage and the birth of four children, C  lina missed family and friends and decided to extend her urban sojourns, returning to the plantation briefly during the sickly season. She registered her children in school in the city and she rented a larger town house.²⁹¹ Although Jacques T  l  sphore regularly complained of her absences, nothing in C  lina's behavior was socially reprehensible. She did not justify her presence in New Orleans by her desire to go to balls or the theater (although she did), but by the necessity of caring for her relatives.²⁹² The planter therefore financed the urban life of his wife and children. More of a misanthrope as he aged, the planter obstinately refused to reside in town, developing a great aversion for the city. In a letter to his wife, he wrote, "Je me trouve mieux & voudrais bien vous avoir tous ici pour ne plus revoir cette maudite ville."²⁹³ The planter died prematurely in 1848. His will reveals the extent of his dislike of the city and of the life his wife chose to lead away from him. "The city is a center of corruption" he wrote in his will, "I want my children to be brought up in the country as much as possible."²⁹⁴ If any of his children tried to sell her/his part of their father's plantation, she or he or she would be disinherited. Jacques T  l  sphore's plantation was his shrine. As for C  lina, if she chose to remarry, she would lose her dowry, the custody of her children, and the service of the domestic slaves. From now on, a family assembly constituted of seven men was in charge of the succession. Year after year, they examined closely the personal expenses of the widow Roman who was, in their view, squandering the estate of her deceased husband. The patriarch ironically exerted a greater control over his wife now that he was dead, than when he was alive. Instead of

²⁹⁰ Jacques T  l  sphore Roman to C  lina Roman, 24 d  cembre 1841, Roman Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

²⁹¹ Compte de Mme J. T. Roman, Roman Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

²⁹² In Charleston, Meta Morris Grimball explained in similar terms the urban residence of her sister-in-law Mrs. Wilkins: "she was a moss [*vis*] devoted daughter, to her suffering mother, and in the discharge of this duty, was much separated from her husband, after their marriage he undertook a planting interest." Meta Morris Grimball, "My Sister Wilkins," December 1856, Sketches, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

²⁹³ "I feel better now and I would like to have you all here with me for not having to see this damned city." Jacques T  l  sphore Roman to C  lina Roman, vendredi soir [1846], Roman Family Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

²⁹⁴ Will of Jacques T  l  sphore Roman, 2 January 1847, Parish of St. James, (English Translation), Roman Family Papers, Tulane University Special Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

being a responsible plantation mistress, Céline had chosen to be an urban belle, although a dedicated mother, daughter, and sister. For this expression of self-interest, she was being disciplined by the patriarch through his will.

Most women of the planting class, who shared Céline Roman's inclination for the city, proved much more patient. They accommodated themselves instead of overtly resisting the patriarch's will. Abiding by the plantation mystique, they waited to indulge their urban propensities fully; until their husbands gave them a town house, until their daughters made their official entrance into society, or until they became widows. These women knew that southern patriarchs rewarded dutiful and submissive women with a gay season in town. As Margaret Ripley Wolfe concludes in her *Saga of Southern Women*, "elaborate public social rituals and the genuine affection that existed in many private male-female relationships took the edge off some of the harsher aspects of what in the more extreme instances amounted to masculine tyranny."²⁹⁵

By the end of the Civil War, some of the main sites of the gay season had disappeared, destroyed by the great upheaval brought forth by secession. The Charleston Race Course, converted into a prison during the war, was transformed by freed people into a graveyard for Union soldiers.²⁹⁶ After the death of Aglaé Bringier in 1878, *Melpomene* was sold and turned into a freedmen's school.²⁹⁷ Yet, the gay season was not about to disappear, as some of its components are still celebrated today in the South. Urban rituals of elite sociability outlived slavery and the plantation economy. The very first winter after Appomattox, the gay season was resurrected.²⁹⁸ In spite of financial hardships, Elizabeth Allston remembered fondly her debuts in postbellum Charleston:

Private parties were too delightful; the young men of the family giving the party always waxed the floor, and they became experts in doing it, and that was really the sole thing absolutely necessary to the success of a party. We were sure of good music, for there were four or five girls going into society that played delightfully

²⁹⁵ Margaret Ripley Wolfe, *Daughters of Canaan: A Saga of Southern Women*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995, 3.

²⁹⁶ David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001, 68-69.

²⁹⁷ Mary Cable, *Lost New Orleans*, New York: American Legacy Press, 1980, 65.

²⁹⁸ Censer, *op.cit.*, 2003, 25.

for dancing. The refreshments generally consisted of rolls, handed in dishes of exquisite china and water in very dainty glasses.²⁹⁹

As young men provided the environment, women the music, these parties served to reaffirm the cultural superiority of the former master class. Money and slaves were gone, but elite sociability and gregarious amusements remained. In the defeated South, the belle became a powerful figure of the plantation mythology, and she was removed from her urban environment. “A conquered people clung to traditional values and celebrated the Southern belle as the symbolic expression of white supremacy and the quintessence of Southern culture,” Christie Ann Farnham explains.³⁰⁰

In the slaveholding South, elite women, young and old, undeniably occupied a key role in the self-perpetuation of the gay season, either as belles shining at the ball or as mothers launching their daughters into the world. Even if urban pleasures were often considered “effeminate,” the gay season was, however, not solely for and by women. It involved a series of heterosexual rituals that required both the participation and the money of men. Ladies and gentlemen engaged together in a round of winter gaiety that served to reproduce the southern elite, starting with its marriage market. Elite southerners understood the gay season as a reward that patriarchs gave to their female dependents. As such, it reinforced the bounds of southern patriarchy. Celebrated and indulged in by the elite who hence affirmed its exclusiveness, urban pleasures became the focus of criticism when they led women to neglect their duties as wife, mother, and plantation mistress. The gay season was meant to be a passage, not a destination.

Some women, though, such as Willemine Trist, Miriam Hilliard, Octavia Levert, or Céline Roman never totally embraced the plantation mystique and chose instead to lead their lives in the city. These women prioritized their own desires. As such, they enacted a form of resistance. Such female self-assertiveness was no resignation.³⁰¹ These women did not gravitate to the city to indulge endlessly in superficial pleasures. They yearned for society -that is the company of both men and women- which they readily

²⁹⁹ Pringle, *op.cit.*, 320.

³⁰⁰ Farnham, *op.cit.*, 186.

³⁰¹ C.f. Jabour, *op.cit.*, 180. Jabour argues that “for many southern women, the wedding day would prove to be a threshold between a culture of resistance and one of resignation.” This study suggests instead that southern women manifested a culture of resistance throughout their life, culture apparent in their relation to the city. For southern female culture as fundamentally a culture of resignation, see introduction in Joan E. Cashin, *Our Common Affairs: Texts from Women in the Old South*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996.

found in the urban South. The isolated plantations offered – relatively speaking – few social opportunities; from this perspective, it was the least desirable place within the country-and-city continuum for women. During the gay season in antebellum New Orleans, according to Grace King, “the whole city was one neighborhood, what one really could call a neighborhood, courtyard doors all open, balcony touching balcony, terrace looking on to terrace. Society was close, contiguous, continuous.”³⁰² As they promenaded the streets in search of society, plantation women became part of a “moving spectacle” that reflected the gendered geography of the southern city.

³⁰² King, *op.cit.*, 266.

Chapter 5

Places “Inviting and Agreeable to Ladies”: The Geography of Respectability in the Urban South

In the summer 1842, Charleston was, according to Elias Vanderhorst, “uncommonly healthy & more dull than ever.”¹ Raven, the planter’s teenage daughter, did not look at the city with the same eyes. During that very same summer, Charleston appeared to her as an exciting and eventful place. “Cousin Meta’s house was struck by lightning yesterday morning,” Raven wrote her mother:

A servant boy was much injured but is recovering, the children were playing in different parts of the house, but none of the family were injured. It entered through the chimney tearing part of it away, the plastering was torn down in some places, and a closet was torn open, and a band box was torn open, and the place where the wine was in the hat was scorched, and the pedal of the piano was torn off, and cousin Meta was thrown from her chair. It entered the next house tearing away part of the partition.²

A few weeks later, another “house [was] struck by lightning in Tradd St,” fortunately, “no one was killed but some were stunned.”³ Besides these natural disasters, human dramas proliferated in town. A “gentleman committed suicide,” another was “instantly killed” in a carriage accident, while “a fishing-boat was upset off the Battery and one man was drowned.”⁴ With tales of lightning, drowning, suicide, and carriage accidents, Raven was clearly engaged with urban life. For the young girl, Charleston was more than healthy that summer; it was fascinating.

Raven Vanderhorst was a “bright & gay” girl. Under the guidance of her governess, she rehearsed the rituals of ladyhood: drinking tea, paying visits, receiving calls, and organizing dancing parties for her girlfriends.⁵ She walked on the Battery in the evening, the city promenade along the water, usually with one of her brothers. When the temperature

¹ Elias Vanderhorst to Ann Morris Vanderhorst, 27 August 1842, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston, South Carolina.

² Anna Raven Vanderhorst to Ann Morris Vanderhorst, 1 July 1842, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston, South Carolina.

³ Anna Raven Vanderhorst to Ann Morris Vanderhorst, 27 July 1842, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston, South Carolina.

⁴ The last two quotations are from the governess Miss Richardson, in Raven’s letter to her mother. Anna Raven Vanderhorst to Ann Morris Vanderhorst, 8 July 1842 and 17 August 1842, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston, South Carolina.

⁵ Sabina Rutherford to Ann Morris Vanderhorst, 12 May 1847; Anna Raven Vanderhorst to Ann Morris Vanderhorst, 14 July 1842 and 27 July 1842, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston, South Carolina.

allowed, she took the boat with a group of friends to Sullivan's Island, where they went for picnics and sea bathing. What Raven enjoyed the most, though, was horse riding: "I rode with Henrietta Martin on horse back yesterday evening. We had a very pleasant ride and I expect to ride again this evening."⁶ A month later, "I rode on horse-back Wednesday evening with Arthur Lynah, and had a very pleasant ride, as far as the Public Cemetary [*sic*], and from there, over Brown's bridge, through Broad St. and up King St home."⁷ Raven "as it appears is quite a Lionne, as is the expression in Paris for a bell [*sic*]," her brother Lewis stated, she "drives her buggy about Charleston, & rides on horse back as well as any one."⁸ While her mother encouraged her promenades and even bought her a new horse, her father disapproved of them: "hope I shall not hear that you have had your leg, arm, neck, or back broken by some wild horse – driving horses is rather too masculine an amusement for a young lady."⁹

Perhaps to tame the lioness a little, Raven's parents decided in 1845 to register her at Mrs. Heriot and Mrs. Ramsay's Seminary in Charleston. Mrs. Ramsay had very strict ideas about the behavior appropriate to her pupils and Raven's behavior clearly did not conform.¹⁰ First, she condemned Raven for driving a carriage, instead of walking, as her schoolmates did. Carriages were the privilege of ladies, and Raven was not quite a lady yet. Then, there was a problem with the hat she wore to school. A few weeks before entering the seminary, Raven had asked her mother to buy the hat: "I wish it to be without a feather, for if I am to board at Mrs R. she would not let me wear it I want it to be very fashionable with a wreath of white roses round the crown and trimed [*sic*] with blue ribbon, but I leave it to your taste my Dear Mother."¹¹ Mrs. Vanderhorst's taste, however, clashed with Mrs. Ramsay's ideas of propriety; she did not approve of feathers, or of wreath of roses for that matter. Mrs. Ramsay and Mrs. Vanderhorst were not the same kind of ladies; one was religious, the other fashionable. One believed in women's restraint, self-control, and modesty, while the latter

⁶ Anna Raven Vanderhorst to Ann Morris Vanderhorst, 5 August 1842, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston, South Carolina.

⁷ Anna Raven Vanderhorst to Ann Morris Vanderhorst, 23 September 1842, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston, South Carolina.

⁸ Lewis Morris Vanderhorst to Ann Morris Vanderhorst, 14 August 1847, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston, South Carolina.

⁹ Elias Vanderhorst to Ann Morris Vanderhorst, 15 August 1848, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston, South Carolina.

¹⁰ Mrs Ramsey to Ann Morris Vanderhorst, 2 November 1845, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston, South Carolina.

¹¹ Anna Raven Vanderhorst to Ann Morris Vanderhorst, 16 October 1845, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston, South Carolina.

avored society, fun, and freedom. “Religious women were persuaded that the very qualities which made any human being a rich, interesting, assertive personality – a roving mind, spirit, ambition – were propensities to be curbed,” Anne Firor Scott argues in her classic study *The Southern Lady*.¹²

As a self-styled patriarch, Elias Vanderhorst sided with Mrs. Ramsay and her submissive feminine ideal. A hat – a simple hat – thus became object of heated debates between Raven’s parents. “I am sorry that you have suffered some busy body, some “Quick Fidget,” to prejudice our mind against Mrs. Ramsay,” Elias Vanderhorst told his wife:

She was entirely right in taking the flowers out of Raven’s hat as they were not at all appropriate to one of her age – I wish no “Birman” Wood, stuck upon the top of my daughter head – when she gets older – (there is a time for all things) she can wear, if she pleases, a white satin hat with an ostrich feather. What you say of Mrs. Ramsay’s religion is out of place & ungenerous, if she is over zealous it is better so than to be the other way – a woman unless she has religion to guide her is not good for much.

I regret to have to tell you, though it is necessary you should know it, that Raven’s conduct at school has been outrageous - because a long lesson was given her, on what she considered long, she got into a whirl wind of passion & insulted Mrs. Ramsay – torn her book to pieces & threw it upon the floor – I was sent for – Mrs. R., said that she had too much respect for me to turn Raven out of her school, though that young Lady declared there was no thing she so much desired.¹³

The assertive Raven, supported by her mother, however won her case, and was withdrawn from the seminary. Behaving “remarkably well” in the following weeks, she was rewarded by her father who “gave her a handsome hat” to replace the one ruined by Mrs. Ramsay.¹⁴ Her father, who had lost the argument, thus reasserted his authority. Growing up in an elite planting family, Raven Vanderhorst learned that horse rides, carriages, hats, ribbons, flowers and feathers were very serious matters. As a lady in the making, she was learning to walk on the tight rope between the respectable and the unrespectable, her body constantly policed within the cityscape.¹⁵

¹² Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930*, Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1995 (1970), 13.

¹³ Elias Vanderhorst to Ann Morris Vanderhorst, 2 November 1845, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston, South Carolina.

¹⁴ Elias Vanderhorst to Ann Morris Vanderhorst, 2 November 1845, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston, South Carolina.

¹⁵ At once the most personal, intimate thing that people possess and the most public, the body is the “basic political resource” in struggles between dominant and subordinate classes, historian Dorinda Outram notes. Quoted in Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women & Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004, 62.

In the great mythology of the Old South, Charleston – and to a lesser extent New Orleans - were immortalized first and foremost as the urban transposition of the plantation world with its white masters and black servants. Race long appeared in the literature as the defining identity that shaped at every level -symbolic, economic, social, and physical- the cities of the slaveholding South.¹⁶ Studies considering the growing heterogeneity of antebellum cities, shaped by a large influx of immigrants and mounting class discontent, have started to complicate the social geography of the urban South.¹⁷ Gender, however, remains a relatively neglected category of analysis. This comes as no surprise since, until about a decade ago, few historians recognized that gender might have influenced the cityscape. In the historiography, *gendered spaces* were synonymous with *separate spheres*, which compartmentalized men in the public and women in the private. When they discovered “women on the streets, occupying public space, [historians] have imagined the women defying separate spheres,” Catherine Kelly acutely remarks.¹⁸ Far from being literally confined to domestic space, ladies were daily encountered in the streets of the southern city.

When they spent a season in town, plantation women blended into a larger group of urbanites; they were “ladies.” Defined primarily by their gender and their respectability, this group included white women of lesser means who displayed a morality beyond reproach, yet it necessarily excluded black women, no matter how pale was their skin or proper their code of conduct. This chapter reveals that, as a group, ladies had a direct impact on the social construction of the southern cityscape, both by their conception of the city and by their spatial behavior. Although fundamentally contained, ladies shaped the urban South, as did other groups of urbanites.¹⁹ Moreover, a number of plantation women proved remarkably

¹⁶ Thomas N. Ingersoll, *Mammon and Manon in Early New Orleans: The First Slave Society in the Deep South, 1718-1819*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999; Maurie D. McNinnis, *The Politics of Taste in Antebellum Charleston*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

¹⁷ See for instance Frank Towers, *The Urban South and the Coming of the Civil War*, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004; Dennis C. Rousey, “Friends and Foes of Slavery: Foreigners and Northerners in the Old South,” *Journal of Social History*, 2001, vol. 35 no.2, 373-396. Idem, “Aliens in the Wasp Nest: Ethnocultural Diversity in the Antebellum Urban South,” *Journal of American History*, 1992, vol.79, no.1, 152-164.

¹⁸ Catherine E. Kelly, *In the New England Fashion: Reshaping Women’s Lives in the Nineteenth Century*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999, 213.

¹⁹ Peter A. Coclanis, “Introduction: The Sociology of Architecture in Colonial Charleston,” *The Shadow of a Dream: Economic Life and Death in the South Carolina Low Country 1670-1920*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, 3-11; Amy L. Young, ed., *Archaeology of Southern Urban Landscapes*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002; J.W. Joseph and Martha Zierden, eds, *Another’s Country: Archaeological and Historical Perspectives on Cultural Interactions in the Southern Colonies*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002. Enrico Dallago, “The City as Social Display: Landed Elite and Urban Images in Charleston and Palermo,” *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 2001, vol.14, no.4, 374-396.

active in creating respectable public spaces within the southern city, thus expanding their own freedom of movement. Claiming a right to urban space was, for ladies as for any subordinated group, as important as claiming economic or political rights. After delineating the gendered geography of the city, which strove to contain different groups of women according to patriarchal interests, this chapter follows the “moving spectacle” of plantation women as they shopped, visited, and promenaded in the city. Finally, it examines a series of liminal spaces— pleasure gardens, promenades, parks, and cemeteries - that ladies claimed for themselves, thus feminizing the cityscape.

Containing women within the urban environment had long been a preoccupation in Charleston and New Orleans. Colonial authorities upheld an urban-based settlement pattern for the colonies throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which could be described as an “epoch of coercive town planning.”²⁰ Following in the footsteps of the Spanish, the English and the French believed that towns acted as safeguards of civilization. In December of 1679, the Lords Proprietors of Carolina gave clear directives to the local administration: “you are to take care to lay out the streets broad in straight lines and that in your Grant of the Towne lotts [*sic*] you doe bound every ones Lands towards the streets in an even line and to suffer no one to incroach [*sic*] with his buildings upon the streets whereby to make them narrower then they were first designed.”²¹ It was in its opening moment that Charleston’s famous regularity was founded. More than an abstract model, the urban planning prescribed by the Lords Proprietors became reality.²² One of the earliest settlers from the West Indies, Maurice Mathews, lauded the newborn agglomeration:

²⁰ Carville Earle and Ronald Hoffman, “The Urban South: The First Two Centuries,” Blaine A. Brownell and David R. Goldfield, eds, *The City in Southern History: The Growth of Urban Civilization in the South*, Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1977, 49.

²¹ *Collection of the South Carolina Historical Society*, vol.1, 102, quoted in Henry A.M. Smith, “Charleston – The Original Plan and the Earliest Settlers,” *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, vol.9, 1908, 14.

²² The inspiration for the Grand Model of Charleston is generally attributed in the literature to contemporary British influences, especially the baroque civic planning. The Grand Model of Charleston with its modest central plaza and its mere handful of perpendicular streets appears too standardized and too elementary to be the product of the British planning tradition. The capital of Carolina was most likely designed after the symmetric model codified by the Spaniards and applied to hundred of cities founded all over America. Early colonial cities in the West Indies, such as Port Royal in Jamaica and Bridgetown in Barbados had grown spontaneously and, consequently, were unplanned. After the earthquake that destroyed Port Royal in 1692, the colonial authorities planned Kingston, whose design was almost a replica of Charleston’s Grand Model.

The Town is run out into four large streets. The Court house which wee [*sic*] are now building is to be erected in the middle of it, in a Square of two ackers [*sic*] of land upon which the four great streets of 60 foot wide does center... whereby wee [*sic*] shall avoid the undecent and incommodious irregularities which other English Collonies [*sic*] are fallen unto for want of ane [*sic*] early care in laying out the Townes.²³

Four decades later, royal engineers, charged to plan a metropolis at the limits of the French empire, imagined a similar design for New Orleans.²⁴ For the site chosen by Bienville on the Mississippi River, LeBlond de la Tour and his associates drew an orthogonal grid, characterized by a rigid symmetry and a central plaza flanked by a seat of government and a church.

But why did the founders of both Charleston and New Orleans value such an orderly and rigid urban plan? The modern planning ideas elaborated during the Renaissance were extremely influential in America during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Not only were they familiar landmarks for the settlers transplanted to a foreign territory, but they also worked as a unifier around common esthetics and cultural traditions. The gridiron plan “represented a perfected, purified Europe, ready to be stamped into the soil of the New World wherever Europeans willed it.”²⁵ Confronted by the savagery of both the land and its inhabitants, the colonizer erased the previous landscape and created a new one; he renamed places, he modified the environment, and he tried to enslave the Amerindian who had shaped the land before him. In the Western World imagination, subduing nature -overly represented as a woman- was a necessary step to civilization.²⁶ “Americans have inherited from the European intellectual tradition a way of conceptualizing the city,” writes Mona Domosh and Joni Seager, it is “rational, planned, orderly; in other words, it is masculine. The

“Mayo’s Plan of the Bridgetown (1722)” reproduced in Warren Alleyne, *Historic Bridgetown*, Barbados National Trust, 7; “A Plan of Kinston by Christian Lilly (1702),” Colin G. Clarke, *Kingston, Jamaica: Urban Development and Social Change, 1692-1962*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975, 159. See also *Nuevas Leyes*, quoted in Leonardo Benevolo, *The European City*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1993, 120-122.

²³ Maurice Mathews, “A Contemporary View of Carolina in 1680,” *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, vol.55, 1954, 154.

²⁴ Shannon Lee Dawdy, *Building the Devil’s Empire: French Colonial New Orleans*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008, 16.

²⁵ Peirce Lewis, quoted in Dawdy, *op.cit.*, 67.

²⁶ For an extensive discussion of the Western conception of nature being female, see Caroline Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980. For the implications of this conception in the American colonies, see Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches & Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996, 17-18. For a later period, see Susan R. Schrepfer, *Nature’s Altars: Mountains, Gender, and American Environmentalism*, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005.

countryside on which the city is imposed is represented as feminine. The city is seen as the expression of the human intellect's dominance over nature – man controls nature.”²⁷

Charleston and New Orleans were both planned to create an idealized social order in which subordinated groups would be segregated from the centre of power. Amerindians were banned from the townscape, Africans and the poor condemned to marginalized spaces, while white women were isolated and subordinated into individual family dwellings. Colonial planners devised these gridiron plans that reveal, according to Shannon Lee Dawdy, “a conscious conviction that spatial control yielded political control.”²⁸ For instance, the church built at the center of New Orleans was meant, according to Emily Clark, to “provide a venue for the inculcation of morality,” especially to the women of ill-repute who migrated to the French colony in the first years of settlement. Religion “was an important addition to coercive methods of social control that included corporal punishment and imprisonment.”²⁹ Both in New Orleans and Charleston, the gridiron plans as laid out on paper were short-lived; Charleston never had a central plaza, nor did New Orleans get its fortifications.³⁰ By the antebellum period, nonetheless, the symmetry of the plan still struck the visitors who walked the city.³¹ Next to a series of public buildings and places of worship, Charleston and New Orleans were fundamentally agglomerations of homes turned toward the harbor.

At the outset of Charleston's golden age in the 1730s, the harbor and its wharves was the favorite promenade of ladies young and old.³² In an article entitled “The Vice of the Bay” published in the *South Carolina Gazette*, the members of the Meddlers' Club questioned the propriety of female promenading along the harbor:

²⁷ Mona Domosh and Joni Seager, *Putting Women in Place: Feminist Geographers Make Sense of the World*, New York and London: Guilford Press, 2001, 71. In creating idealized plantation landscapes, southern planters held the same concerns of symmetry and control. See John Michael Vlach, *Back of the Big House: The Architecture of Plantation Slavery*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993.

²⁸ Dawdy, op.cit., 66. Although, as Emily Clark judiciously remarks, “projections of elite desire were compromised and confounded by the poor, people of color and other marginalized groups who invested the urban landscape with their own meanings and turned its spaces, buildings, and boundaries to their own purposes.” Emily Clark, “Elite Designs and Popular Uprisings: Building and Rebuilding New Orleans, 1721, 1788, 2005,” *Historical Reflections*, vol.33, no.2, 164.

²⁹ Clark, *ibid.*, 168.

³⁰ Katherine Saunders, “As regular and formidable as any such worke in America”: The Walled City of Charles Town,” J.W. Joseph and Martha Zierdin, *Another's Country: Archaeological and Historical Perspectives on Cultural Interactions in the Southern Colonies*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002, 208-209.

³¹ Harriet Martineau, *Retrospect of Western Travel*, Saunders and Otley, 1838, vol.1, 236; G.M., “South Carolina,” *New England Magazine*, October 1831, vol. 1, Issue 4, 246.

³² They also walked along the greens and the orange grove at the western limit of the town, an area that was then essentially inhabited by the poorer people who could only afford cheaper land remote from the economic core. David S. Shields, “Mean Streets, Mannered Streets: Charleston,” *Common Place*, July 2003, vol.3, no.4.

It is a Custom that will never resound to the Honour of Carolina, and tends to promote Vice and Irreligion in many Degrees. And tho' it may be objected that the Heat of the Climate will not permit them to walk in the Day, and it can't but conduce to their Health to walk and take the air; yet I think there are many more fitting places to walk on than the Bay; For have we not many fine Greens near the Town much better accommodated for Air, than a Place which continually has all the nauseous Smells of Tarr, Pitch, Brimstone, &c. and what not, and where every Jack Tarr [*sic*] has the Liberty to view & remark the most celebrated Beauties of Charles-Town, and where besides (if any Air is) there's such a continual Dust, that I should think it were enough to deter any Lady from appearing, least her Organs of perspiration should be stopt, [*sic*] and she be suffocated.³³

Walking on the Bay was not only unhealthy and inappropriate for ladies, affirmed these local male censors, it went against metropolitan customs: "I have heard that in Great Britain the Ladies and Gentlemen choose the Parks and such like Places to walk and take the Air in, but I never heard of any Places making use of the Wharfs for such Purpose except this."³⁴ Since there were no parks yet in the southern metropolis, the countryside at the western limit of town was judged a "fitting" place for female strolling. The real concern of the members of the Meddler's Club, however, was protecting ladies from the gaze of Jack Tar the sailor, the embodiment of the lower-class white man. "I have heard it said that most Women love Seafaring Men better than Land-Men," one of the authors contended, "and who knows but most that appear there do it with a design to pick up a Sea Spark." Easily seduced by "a common Jack Tarr [*sic*]" who would "pretend to be a Gentlemen, and tho' of so short an Acquaintance as two or three Evenings, after promising the Fair One Marriage, should find her pliant, desire her to walk a little further in private, and there perform what I dare not name."³⁵ Painted as passive, erotic objects, subjected to the voyeuristic control of Jack Tar (the degenerate man), the ladies strolling along the Bay needed to be protected from their innate depravity. Already in the first half of the eighteenth century, the southern city was painted as a dangerous place where proper women risked their health and their moral ruin.³⁶

In the slaveholding cities that emerged out of these colonial experiments, elite white men – the so-called gentlemen – charged themselves with the crucial task of protecting ladies and their respectability. They did so individually and collectively. Gentlemen were easily

³³ Meddlers' Club, "The Vice of the Bay," *South Carolina Gazette*, 30 August 1735.

³⁴ Quoted in Hennig Cohen, *The South Carolina Gazette, 1732-1775*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1953, 215-216.

³⁵ *South Carolina Gazette*, 30 August 1735.

³⁶ Daphne Spain, *How Women Saved the City*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, 24. See also Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

recognizable in the cityscape. “When a sugar planter walked the streets of New Orleans with his cottonade britches, alpaca coat, panama hat and gold-headed cane, he was looked upon as the king of creation and everybody bowed down to him,” Laura Locoul Gore noted in her memoirs.³⁷ Canes were not only fashionable; gentlemen used this tool to discipline the unruly – either black or white - who crossed their paths.³⁸ Although a gentleman might be physically endangered as he walked the streets of the city - victim of robbers or rebellious slaves - his elite status was never threatened, regardless of where he went in the city. Gentlemen enjoyed a freedom of movement denied to ladies. Men were “destined by nature to guard and protect” women, confined to the domestic circle by their sedentary nature and inferior strength.³⁹ Protection, however, remained a euphemism for containment. Unrecorded in law, the containment of white women belonged in the South to the world of prescriptions, ideals, and traditions. Ladies were told that the most respectable place for them was the home. By definition, a respectable woman was a private woman. Clergymen, writers, fathers, and mothers constantly warned young women against depraved behaviours. “It is highly improper for school girls to be seen too often in the Streets,” a planter lectured his daughter, “being the common resort of *vulgar and depraved women* and not Ladies.”⁴⁰ When women went outside their home, they “were channelled into selective sectors of public space, where their movements were charted by both gender prescriptions and class [and race] distinctions,” Mary Ryan observes. The cityscape was therefore “divided into a patchwork of male and female, homosocial and heterosexual regions.”⁴¹ If they ventured beyond these respectable regions of the city, a male escort became mandatory. The cityscape experienced by elite white women was thus different from the one experienced by the other groups of men and women, including the men of their class.

As members of municipal governments, gentlemen provided ladies with a suitable and orderly environment that included sidewalks, lights, parks, and regulations controlling the movements of the undesirables. When they made improvements to urban infrastructures

³⁷ Laura Locoul Gore, *Memories of the Old Plantation Home & Creole Family Album*, Commentary by Norman and Sand Marmillion, Zoë Company: Vacherie, Louisiana, 2007 (2001), 20.

³⁸ Ingersoll, op.cit., 175.

³⁹ Thomas R. Dew, “Dissertation on the Characteristic Differences Between the Sexes, and on the Position and Influence of Woman in Society,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, 1835, vol.1, 507.

⁴⁰ Richard Singleton to Marion Singleton, 15 June 1830 and 8 May 1831, quoted in Jeffrey Robert Young, *Domesticating Slavery: The Master Class in Georgia and South Carolina, 1670-1837*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999, 214-215.

⁴¹ Mary P. Ryan, *Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990, 16.

or when they voted new ordinances, municipal authorities and the newspapers that publicized their initiatives often singled out one group of beneficiaries: “the ladies.”⁴² For instance, the Aldermen of Mobile decided in 1825 to drain Theatre Street, as they indicated in the Minutes, “so that the ladies could approach the Theatre without the inconvenience of mud and water.”⁴³ In Charleston, when the Mayor inaugurated White Point Gardens in 1838, he declared in his annual report: “everything should be done by the strict enforcement of judicious regulations, to render the place inviting and agreeable to ladies, as the surest means of causing it to be resorted to by the respectable classes of society, and of effecting the great object for which it was designed.”⁴⁴ By “everything,” Mayor Pinckney meant notably the exclusion from the park and its adjoining promenade of “slaves and coloured persons... except in attendance on the children of citizens.”⁴⁵ In small-town Tennessee, *The Shelbyville Expositor* declared: “nothing adds more to the comfort of a town or city, than good streets always kept in order, and firm, well-built pavements upon which ladies may walk, even in unpleasant weather, without any danger of impairing their health by getting their feet wet from wading through mud and water.”⁴⁶ Those were the gifts of the city patriarchs to their dutiful dependants.

In spite of these improvements, the movement of ladies in the streets of southern towns and cities remained uneasy. Everywhere, sand, mud, water and filth drenched and fouled the hem of a lady’s dress.⁴⁷ Her distinctive clothing - long skirts, trains, and delicate shoes – served to mark her status, yet these were cumbersome and limited her mobility. More than a choice, the dress was a cultural obligation. A woman who wore the much more

⁴² These improvements were made at different periods. For instance, Charleston built brick sidewalks and installed street lights in the 1760s. Coclanis, op.cit., 7. Natchez made the first important infrastructure works in the 1810s. D. Clayton James, *Antebellum Natchez*, Baton Rouge : Louisiana State University Press, 1968, 81-83.

⁴³ Minutes of the Mayor and Board of Aldermen, vols for 1824-29, City Vault, Mobile City Records, quoted in Elizabeth Barrett Gould, *From Fort to Port: An Architectural History of Mobile, Alabama, 1711-1918*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1988, 31.

⁴⁴ The park was also created because it was believed that the “pure and refreshing breezes of the sea” were healthful. Maurie D. McInnis, *The Politics of Taste in Antebellum Charleston*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005, 85.

⁴⁵ Blacks were banned in 1838 from the “enclosure of the Garden at White Point” and forbidden from walking “on the East and South Batteries.” Charleston, Ordinances, July 30, 1838, quoted in Richard C. Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820-1860*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1964, 267. However, the presence of enslaved servants in the park brought criticism. “It now takes from four to two wenches, *with their attendants*, to take one baby in the air,” Charleston Courier, 28 July 1841, quoted in Wade, op.cit., 267.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Lisa C. Tolbert, *Constructing Townscapes: Space and Society in Antebellum Tennessee*, Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, 1999, 142.

⁴⁷ Gail Gibson, “Costume and Fashion in Charleston, 1769-1782,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 1981 vol.82, no.3, 236.

convenient outfit of men - pants or breeches – faced prosecution in the southern city.⁴⁸ On the other hand, it distinguished her from the other urbanites; ladies could not dress like men, nor could blacks dress like whites, or depraved women dress like respectable ones. In Charleston, the city ordinance of 1806 forbade blacks from smoking cigars, pipes, or carrying a cane like gentlemen.⁴⁹ As well, black women who dressed like ladies were denounced. In the *Charleston Courier*, “A Resident and Native” asked:

Shall they, in silks and laces, promenade our principal thoroughfares, with the arrogance of equals – by their insolent bearing making the modest lady yield them on the walk, and the poor white woman to feel that to be virtuous and honest give her place, in appearances, below the slaves, in the gratification of her desire for dress and distinction?⁵⁰

Ladies needed to be distanced – and thus protected - from a particular group of blacks, the free women of colour. These women were the most conspicuous product of miscegenation, the living proof of white men’s interracial relationships. Because their skin was sometimes so pale that they could pass for whites, they posed a serious threat to a society based on the enslavement of one race by the other.⁵¹ In Spanish New Orleans, Governor Estebán Miró forbade as early as 1786 women of color from wearing jewels, silks, feathers or curls in their hair. They were ordered to comb their hair flat or to cover it with a tignon, the head scarf worn by slaves. The tignon law was “an attempt to distinguish women of color from white women and render them less attractive,” Carolyn Morrow Long remarks.⁵² Miró, who was married to a Creole plantation woman, apparently issued the proclamation at the demand of his wife. The most depraved of all women, the prostitutes, also needed to be differentiated

⁴⁸ Jonathan David Sarnoff, “White Women and Respectability in Antebellum New Orleans, 1830-1861,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Southern Mississippi, 2003, 23-4.

⁴⁹ McInnis, op.cit., 68.

⁵⁰ *Charleston Courier*, 26 October 1859, quoted in Michael P. Johnson and James L. Roark, eds, *No Chariot Let Down: Charleston’s Free People of Color on the Eve of the Civil War*, Chapel Hill: University Press of North Carolina, 1984, 105.

⁵¹ Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*, Baltimore: Penguin, 1969, 136-178.

⁵² Carolyn Morrow Long, *A New Orleans Voodoo Priestess: The Legend and Reality of Marie Laveau*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006, 20. Black women were also “forbidden by law to use a coach in daylight, enter a public room if a white woman was there, or sit in the presence of a white.” Christina Vella, *Intimate Enemies: The Two Worlds of the Baroness de Pontalba*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997, 16. See also Caryn Cossé Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718-1868*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997, 19.

from respectable women. As they plied their trade, “fancy women” were required to wear plain clothes and simple hats.⁵³

Black and white prostitution flourished in the port cities. Archetype of the “bad” woman, the prostitute was the embodiment of the unrespectable woman. “As a woman’s space that defied femininity,” Philipa Levine observes, “prostitution had to be relegated to the physical world of commerce. Its segregation from residential districts was needed not only to sharpen the distinction of respectable and unrespectable but also to separate the business of sex from the place of feminine domesticity.”⁵⁴ The movement toward a greater segregation of “good” and “bad” women had long existed in the early modern world and it was especially apparent in Charleston.⁵⁵ Each of these groups became associated with one of the two rivers surrounding the city; the Cooper, where most of the wharves were located, with the “bad” women, and the Ashley River, on the residential side, with the “good” women. In Natchez, the area near the landing, known as Natchez-under-the-Hill, was “the resort of dissipation. Here is the bold-face strumpet, full of blasphemies, who looks upon the virtuous part of her sex with contempt and hatred; every house is a grocery, containing gambling, music, and dancing, fornicators, &c.”⁵⁶ In Mobile, the eighty white women who were prostitutes according to the 1860 census lived in the outlying Seventh ward, sharing the area with three quarter of the free blacks of the city.⁵⁷ In antebellum New Orleans, prostitution flourished in the neighbourhood known as the “Swamp,” near the Mississippi, but at a distance from the French Quarter. “It was an incredible jumble of cheap dance halls, brothels, saloons and gaming rooms, cockfighting pits, and rooming houses. A one-story shantytown jammed into a half-dozen teeming blocks,” notes one author.⁵⁸

⁵³ New Orleans adopted in 1857 the *Lorette Ordinance*, which sought to make prostitution less visible in the city. Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004, 3. For the term “fancy women,” see Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996, 124.

⁵⁴ Philippa Levine, “Erotic Geographies: Sex and the Managing of Colonial Space,” Helena Mitchie and Ronald R. Thomas, eds, *Nineteenth-Century Geographies: The Transformation of Space From the Victorian Age to the American Century*, New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003, 158.

⁵⁵ Elizabeth Cohen, “See and Known: Prostitutes in the Cityscape of Late Sixteenth-Century Rome,” *Renaissance Studies*, vol.12, no.3, 1998, 392-409.

⁵⁶ Henry Ker, *Travels Through the Western Interior of the United States, 1808-1816*, quoted in James, op.cit., 41.

⁵⁷ Harriet E. Amos, *Cotton City: Urban Development in Antebellum Mobile*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1985, 94.

⁵⁸ Al Rose, *Storyville: Being an Authentic, Illustrated Account of the Notorious Red Light District*, 1974, quoted in W.C. Corsan, *Two Months in the Confederate States: An Englishman’s Travels Through the South*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996, 19.

In “those hoses [*sic*] where sailors frequent,” gentlemen were also encountered, as southern ladies were well aware.⁵⁹ In Charleston, gentlemen attended cockfighting contests where they rubbed shoulders with men of all classes, and they drank the best wine at the fashionable City Tavern, located a few steps from Chalmers Alley, home of the most renowned brothels of the region.⁶⁰ In Mobile, planters gambled their crops alongside sailors in illegal gaming houses, located in the backs of coffee-houses.⁶¹ While some gentlemen would never mingle with the lower classes, many did.⁶² Brothels, coffee-houses, and gaming rooms were marginal spaces within the city. They were “spaces of intersection,” where “cross-gender, but also cross-class, [and cross-race] encounters were negotiated in monetary terms – places in which the female body was reconceived as a commodity.”⁶³ Planters were involved in prostitution as clients, but also as business men. In New Orleans, John McDonough, a wealthy merchant and plantation owner, rented some of his urban properties to brothel keepers.⁶⁴ Although most prostitutes were Irish or German immigrants in the Crescent City, a number of them were enslaved women. Sophia, the property of one of the largest slaveowners of Louisiana, worked as a prostitute in a brothel on Bienville Street, where she was arrested by the police.⁶⁵ On the eve of the Civil War, the city council of New Orleans created zones reserved for commercial sex, arguing that they provided an outlet for male’s naturally uncontrollable sexuality, and thus protected the bodies of respectable women.⁶⁶

⁵⁹ Margaret Peronneau, SC & AGG, October 15, 1779; Diary of Catherine de Rosset, July 8, 1798, De Rosset Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, both quoted in Philip D. Morgan, “Black Life in Eighteenth-Century Charleston,” *Perspectives in American History*, New Series, I, 1984, 210.

⁶⁰ Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in the Wilderness: The First Century of Urban Life in America, 1625-1742*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955 (1938), 279.

⁶¹ Amos, *op.cit.*, 149. For a general evolution of patterns of respectability and irrespectability in the United States, see John C. Burnham, *Bad Habits: Drinking, Smoking, Taking Drugs, Gambling, Sexual Misbehavior, and Swearing in American History*, New York: New York University Press, 1993.

⁶² For white men sociability across class, see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethic and Behavior in the Old South*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1982; Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor & Slavery: Lies, Duels, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions The Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South*, Princeton: Princeton, 1996.

⁶³ Aruna D’Souza and Tom McDonough, “Introduction,” *The Invisible flâneuse? Gender, Public Space, and Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008 (2006), 7.

⁶⁴ Judith Kelleher Schafer, *Brothels, Depravity, and Abandoned Women: Illegal Sex in Antebellum New Orleans*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009, 12.

⁶⁵ Her master was Laurent Millaudon. *Ibid.*, 42.

⁶⁶ Throughout the South, Alicia Long remarks, there was a “widespread acceptance of a sexual double standard that assumed women’s inherent lack of libido and contrasted it to uncontrollable male sexuality that had to be indulged by prostitutes to protect respectable women from male lust.” Long, *op.cit.*, 7.

The efforts to regulate prostitution echoed broader concerns with controlling the white poor in the antebellum city. Although poverty had always been a problem in the urban South, it gained magnitude as immigrants flocked to Charleston and New Orleans. In both cities, they were perceived as undesirables, sources of disease, violence, and immorality. Even within the protective enclosure of their town houses, plantation women felt the threatening presence of the white poor. New Orleans in the 1830s was “disturbed by robberies,” Mary Bryan Harford wrote her sister:

There is no watch in the city, and every day we heard of some daring attempt and mostly successful, but I little thought we were to have our turn also until a few nights since. As I was sleeping quietly I heard the most awful yell I ever remember...It was Jenny [the enslaved servant] who came running in, and crying out that some men had broken open the door. We ran into the room where she had been sleeping, and it was as she had said. The door had been prized open in some way or other. The noise and the sudden light flashing in upon her from the lamp in the street woke her up, and the terrible noise she made induced them to run off. I was dreadfully alarmed though for a minute. Mr. Harford [her husband] had seized up his pistol which was loaded. I went to the open door and I heard it go off, and was feeling so awfully under the fear that someone had been killed. He shot if off without seeing anyone, however, and because, he said, if they were lurking near that he might convince them that the house was on the alert...It is said that it is a regular gang of robbers and housebreakers from Europe, and you would be equally amused and astonished if you could hear of some of their doings. They are so expert that they have even stolen different articles from under the head of gentlemen without waking them. They take off every thing they can find, even to chairs and sofas.⁶⁷

Antebellum Charleston faced similar problems of social disorder. For some time, Robert Allston had been demanding that his daughter Elizabeth sleep alone in her own room, instead of sharing a bed with her older sister Della. Trying to abide by her father’s wish, the girl was frightened by the chaos of the city at night:

It was spring and all the windows were open, and on the third night I was awakened by shrieks from Price’s Alley, which ran along beside our garden wall! Screams and cries for help and sounds of blows falling! It was just as distinct as if it had been in the next room... The next morning we heard it was a drunken man beating his wife; some Irish families occupied a house together there.⁶⁸

Although the strangers did not break into Elizabeth’s room, their screams did; their disorder thus dominated the soundscape. Even the governor of South Carolina could not entirely

⁶⁷ Maria Bryan Harford to Julia Ann Bryan Cumming, 29 March 1833, Carol Bleser, ed., *Tokens of Affection: The Letters of a Planter’s Daughter in the Old South*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996, 148.

⁶⁸ Elizabeth W. Allston Pringle, *Chronicles of Chicora Wood*, Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1940, 167.

shield his female dependents from the dangers of the city.⁶⁹ Therefore, noted Elizabeth in her memoirs, “it was the end of papa’s efforts to make me a self-respecting individual.” With noisy neighbors and sound asleep gentlemen, but without decent police forces, ladies were vulnerable even within the sanctity of their bedrooms.

Deeply attached to their class and race privileges, very few ladies challenged the feminine ideal of respectability and most sought to distance themselves from fallen women, loafers, and drunks. Consequently, when they believed that patriarchs failed at protecting their respectability, southern ladies took action. Under pseudonyms, they wrote to the newspapers. In the *Daily Picayune*, “Angelina” asked “young men to desist, who stand staring the ladies in the face on the steps of the Presbyterian Church, Lafayette Square, every Sunday...My maiden aunt Martha says that it prevents her from going to prayers.”⁷⁰ “Sophia” demanded that sidewalks be repaired, because their present condition prevented “her coming downtown to see the fashions,” while a beau “got stuck in the mud while endeavoring to work his passage to her residence.”⁷¹ The “Mother of a Family” complained in the *Louisiana Gazette* “of the behavior of free women of color” whose insolence “drove white women from the walkways,” and whose “sexual liaisons with white men threatened the racial purity of Louisiana’s best families.”⁷² Some of these appeals were heard; by 1828, for instance, quadroon balls were officially banned from the city, although in practice, they continued to be tolerated.⁷³ In 1859, the ladies of Mobile petitioned the city authorities “for permission to erect twelve gas lamps” in Bienville square “so that the whole park might be lit at night.” The female petitioners “promised to pay the cost of laying the pipes and raising the lamps if the city would buy the gas to light them.” Deemed appropriate by the *Mobile Register*, the ladies’ plan “would help to keep unrespectable women from assembling at the square after dark.”⁷⁴

⁶⁹ For a discussion of the criminal threat in eighteenth century Charleston, see John A. Hall, “Nefarious Wretches, Insidious Villains, and Evil-Minded Persons”: Urban Crime Reported in Charleston’s *City Gazette*, in 1788,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, vol.88, January 1987, 151-168.

⁷⁰ *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 22 September 1839, quoted in Sarnoff, op.cit., 178.

⁷¹ *New Orleans Daily Crescent*, 13 May 1853, quoted in ibid.

⁷² Caryn Cossé Bell, op.cit., 77.

⁷³ Roger A. Fischer, “Racial Segregation in Ante Bellum New Orleans,” *American Historical Review*, LXXIV February 1969, 935.

⁷⁴ Amos, op.cit., 165-166.

During the Civil War, southern ladies especially “mourned the loss of male protection – physical, emotional, and financial.”⁷⁵ Yet, they quickly learned how to defend themselves against the Yankee invaders in the absence of their men. Emma Holmes and her friends formed a “shooting club” in Charleston.⁷⁶ In Charleston, Mobile, and Savannah, groups of ladies raised funds for the purchase of gunboats to protect their cities, organizing gunboat societies, gunboat concerts, gunboat raffles, and gunboat fairs. Antebellum benevolent female societies, typically located in the urban South, became the nucleus of these wartime female organizations. Although these organizations were “intended to be conservative forces,” Drew Gilpin Faust remarks, “by their very existence [they] defined and empowered women as women, independent of men.”⁷⁷

Long before the Civil War, southern ladies had displayed a remarkable leadership in their quest to extirpate depravity from their cities, striving to inculcate moral ideals in the white poor. By themselves or under the guidance of gentlemen, ladies joined benevolent associations in Charleston, New Orleans, Richmond, Savannah, Mobile and Natchez that assisted the sick, the orphan, the drunk, the vagrant, or the fallen.⁷⁸ The mother of a white and black family in the Lowcountry, Harriot Horry was also a surrogate mother to Charleston’s white orphans, the offspring of beggars and prostitutes.⁷⁹ For several years, the rice planter was one of the superintending ladies of the Orphan House. Opened in 1792, the institution sheltered hundreds of children. When the male commissioners wanted to transform the garden adjoining the Orphan House into a cemetery in 1812, Horry and the other superintending ladies opposed the project, on grounds of “comfort, but of health also.”⁸⁰ The children’s diet, she pleaded, greatly benefitted from the vegetables cultivated in the garden. When she resigned from the organization in 1822, the chairman lauded her

⁷⁵ Faust, op.cit., 121.

⁷⁶ 5 September 1861, John F. Marszalek, ed. *The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes, 1861-1866*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979, 86-87.

⁷⁷ Faust, op.cit., 24.

⁷⁸ Patricia Ferguson Clement, “Children and Charity: Orphanage in New Orleans, 1817-1914,” *Louisiana History* 27 (1986), 337-351; Gail S. Muray, “Poverty and its Relief in the Antebellum South: Perceptions and Realities in Three Selected Cities: Charleston, Nashville, and New Orleans,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Memphis State University, 1992; Betty Wood, *Gender, Race, and Rank in a Revolutionary Age: the Georgia Lowcountry, 1750-1820*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000, 57-82; Cynthia A. Kierner, *Beyond the Household: Women’s Place in the Early South, 1700-1835*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998, 180-211; Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg*, New York: W.W. Norton, 1984, 195-236.

⁷⁹ For a study of the Orphan House, see Barbara L. Bellows, *Benevolence Among Slaveholders: Assisting the Poor in Charleston, 1670-1860*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993, 120-159.

⁸⁰ Superintendant Ladies to the Commissioners of the Orphan House, 7 July 1812, Harriot Horry Rutledge Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

“judgment, ardent zeale [*sic*], unwearied attention, kindness, & tenderness... invaluable to the children of infortune under her cares.”⁸¹ Horry had long been preoccupied with the need to reform the poor. While traveling north in 1793, she commented extensively on the “dirt, drinking, swearing, gaming, poverty and wretchedness” she encountered.⁸² With her friend Alice Izard, she visited the “Bettering house” in Philadelphia, where she admired the tulips in the gardens, but lamented the “great many poor invalids and foundlings which used to be maintained by the cloth &c spun and made in the house but now by a considerable tax on the inhabitants.”⁸³ In accordance with the ideas of her time, Horry believed that industriousness, religion, and a decent environment could prevent the fall of orphan children. As with her female counterparts, however, her work as a public servant remained in the shadow of the male commissioners. Once a year, these “saints of the civil religion of public service” were honoured as they paraded in the streets of Charleston in the company of the orphanage’s children, while ladies watched from piazzas and sidewalks.⁸⁴

Other benevolent women refused to be the auxiliaries of men. Under the auspices of the Ursuline nuns of New Orleans, a women’s confraternity known as the Children of Mary dedicated itself in the 1730s to the evangelization of children and slaves. Among its eighty members were poor widows, orphans, women of color, and plantation mistresses.⁸⁵ They succeeded at Christianizing the population, and thus helped in reducing female licentiousness in the city.⁸⁶ In the nineteenth century, *Les Dames de la Providence*, an association of “married

⁸¹ John Dawson to Harriot Horry, 28 November 1822, Harriot Horry Rutledge Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina. Horry might have decided to resign from her function at the Orphan house because “a severe hurricane in September 1822 killed fifty slaves at Hampton and destroyed large sections of the diking that had reclaimed marshy lands from the delta.” Constance B. Schulz, “Eliza Lucas Pinckney and Harriott Pinckney Horry: A South Carolina Revolutionary-Era Mother and Daughter,” Marjorie Julian Spruill, Valinda W. Littlefield, and Joan Marie Johnson, eds, *South Carolina Women: Their Lives and Times*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009, vol.1, 104.

⁸² Typescript of Harriot Horry Journal 1793-1794, 61, Pinckney-Lowdes Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

⁸³ Typescript of Harriot Horry Journal 1793-1794, 6, Pinckney-Lowdes Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

⁸⁴ Bellow, op.cit., 123. Historians have extensively written on women’s roles as spectators in civic ceremonies and parades in different towns and cities of the South. See Mary P. Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth Century*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997; Tolbert, op.cit., 73-78; Simon P. Newman, *Parades and the Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000.

⁸⁵ Emily Clark, “By all the Conduct of their Lives: A Laywomen’s Confraternity in New Orleans, 1730-1744,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 54, 1997, 769-794.

⁸⁶ Although, as Clark notes, “The Church was envisioned in the plans of the royal engineers of the 1720s as a place to contain and constrain the population, proclaiming and serving the colonial hierarchy of social class and race. It was instead made into a site of self-expression and self-constituted community by the people who used it,” most conspicuously the black women. *Idem*, loc.cit., 2005, 171-172.

ladies belonging to the most respectable class of [the] Creole population,” worked at the relief of the poor in the French Quarter, providing food, medicine, clothing, and kindness. They were especially active during the epidemics of yellow fever that regularly struck the southern necropolis in the summer, while most of their elite counterparts fled the city.⁸⁷ Benevolence was the chosen work in the lives of women who had few (if any) professional choices. As such, it was a labor of love. Mary Smith Grimké, wife of a planter and mother of the famed abolitionists, was a member of the Charleston Ladies’ Benevolent Society and served for twelve years as superintendent.⁸⁸ Founded in 1813, the society ran two charity schools, taught poor women to spin and supported domestic missions. Members such as Grimké dispensed alms to the poor, crossing class barriers on their round of visits.⁸⁹ Described by her daughters as a “very devout woman of rather narrow view,” “undemonstrative in her affections,” and “nervous, exhausted, and irritable,” Mary Smith Grimké was a distant mother, a failed housekeeper, and a cruel slave mistress.⁹⁰ Once a week, however, when she left her town house on Meeting Street to visit the sick and the sinful, Grimké became another woman - compassionate and “untiring.”⁹¹ She was one of the few “ladies of opulence and leisure” willing to do such visits.⁹² While the fashionable went to the theater or played whist, the religious escaped failure to achieve the ideal of southern womanhood through charitable work.⁹³ In 1829, the Female Benevolent Society of Mobile supported the erection of the “Widows’ Row,” a row of twelve houses built for “widows of good character.”⁹⁴ Sheltered in their semi-independent cottages, these impoverished women

⁸⁷ William L. Robinson, *The Diary of a Samaritan, By a Member of the Howard Association*, New York: Harper & Bros., 1860, quoted in Jo Ann Carrigan, *The Saffron Scourge: A History of Yellow Fever in Louisiana, 1796-1905*, Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1994, 346. During yellow fever epidemics, home visits were also made by the Ladies’ Benevolent Society and the Ladies’ Physiological Society.

⁸⁸ Gail S. Murray, “Charity Within the Bounds of Race and Class: Female Benevolence in the Old South,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 96, no.1, January 1995, 60.

⁸⁹ Harriot Horry Rutledge Ravenel, *Charleston: The Place and The People*, New York: MacMillan, 1906, 419.

⁹⁰ Catherine Birney, *The Grimké Sisters: Sarah and Angelina Grimké, the First American Women Advocates of Abolition and Woman’s Rights* Westport, Conn., 1977 (1885), 14-16, quoted in Bellow, op.cit., 46-47.

⁹¹ Ladies Benevolent Society Minutes, 29 July 1839, quoted in Bellow, op.cit., 49.

⁹² Christine Jacobson Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness: Unmarried Women in the Urban South, 1800-1865*, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2006, 130; On the demographic profile of the members of these benevolent organizations in Charleston, see Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, *Ladies, Women, and Wenches: Choices and Constraint in Antebellum Charleston*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990, 123.

⁹³ Although less radical than their northern counterparts, these women worked at redefining their role in a society that glorified their passivity. As such, notes Anya Jabour, female benevolence “constituted a form of resistance against prevailing definitions of southern womanhood.” Anya Jabour, *Scarlett’s Sisters: Young Women in the Old South*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007, 101-102.

⁹⁴ Quoted in Gould, op.cit., 91.

did not beg in the streets, nor fill the brothels of the Seventh Yard. Benevolent ladies thus imprinted their ideal of respectability on the visual landscape of the city.

Single women of the planting class also filled the ranks of these associations, finding in them opportunities for usefulness.⁹⁵ In Charleston, the unmarried Harriot Pinckney was known for “having an inexhaustible purse and deriving her chief source of happiness from acts of benevolence.”⁹⁶ She lived in *Castle Pinckney* (the dower house of her grandmother) with her sister Maria, also unmarried, and Miss Lucas Rutledge, a “special friend.”⁹⁷ A wealthy absentee planter, Pinckney was the niece of Harriot Horry and was raised by her aunt following the death of her mother. A vocal defender of state’s rights and a fierce patriot, Pinckney loved Charleston, “the healthiest town in the world!”⁹⁸ Through the choices she made, this unconventional lady repeatedly shunned patriarchal protection. Toward the end of her life, she even decided to rent a portion of the garden of her town house to finance a Home for Seamen. Reforming Jack Tar was the “supreme moral challenge to the benevolent women” remarks Barbara L. Bellows, providing “an irresistible conflation of moral reform, patriotism, and their traditional nurturing role.”⁹⁹ Hundreds of ladies throughout the urban South sought to domesticate sailors, sponsoring boardinghouses where gambling, womanizing, card playing, cursing, and drinking were forbidden. They were “refuge... from the temptations” for the thousand of sailors who patronized them.¹⁰⁰

As these elite women turned sailors away from barrooms and brothels, often without male leadership, they reshaped the gendered geography of the urban South. They sought to expand the zones of respectability, thus reducing zones of depravity from which they were excluded. Their philanthropy, in this light, appears highly pragmatic and self-interested. Benevolence, however, did not solve the conundrum of white poverty in the urban South. By the late antebellum period, city authorities multiplied the efforts to regulate the poor, notably

⁹⁵ Carter, op.cit., 118-149.

⁹⁶ Alicia Hopton Middleton, *Life in Carolina and New England During the Nineteenth Century*, Bristol, R.I.: Privately Printed, 1929, 61-62, quoted in Carter, op.cit., 17.

⁹⁷ Carter, op.cit., 102.

⁹⁸ Mary Hering Middleton to Eliza Middleton Fisher, 15 April 1842, Eliza Cope Harrison, *Best Companions: Letters of Eliza Middleton Fisher and Her Mother, Mary Hering Middleton, from Charleston, Philadelphia, and Newport, 1839-1846*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001, 266.

⁹⁹ Bellows, op.cit., 115.

¹⁰⁰ Ladies’ Seamen’s Friends’ Society, “Annual Report,” *Charleston Courier*, 21 May 1845, quoted in Carter, op.cit., 134.

through laws, renovation of jails, and construction of workhouses.¹⁰¹ On the eve of the Civil War, Jack Tar and his fancy woman remained a threat to the southern lady. In spite of “unwelcoming streets, multiple exclusions, and rigid patriarchal structures,” plantation women - as with other ladies in the Western World – nonetheless revealed through the spatial practices of their everyday life an eagerness to experience the public spaces of the city.¹⁰²

“Each town is the centre of a circle which extends many miles around it into the country, and daily attracts all within its influence,” observed Joseph Holt Ingraham in the early 1830s.¹⁰³ What he called the “moving spectacle” in the streets of Natchez was profoundly gendered:

The ladies come in their carriages “to shop,” the gentlemen, on horseback, to do business with their commission merchants, visit the banks, hear the news, dine together at the hotels, and ride back in the evening. The southern town is properly the “Exchange” for the neighbouring planters, and the “Broadway” for their wives and daughters.¹⁰⁴

Plantation men and women did not come to town for the same purpose, they did not use the same means of mobility to get there, they did not visit the same number of places, nor did they stay for the same time. Women came to town in the morning, by carriage, to run errands, chat a few minutes with the acquaintances they encountered in the street, and then they usually returned home, although they might also have stopped at a friend’s house to pay a visit. Men also came in the morning, on horseback, but they stayed longer. After settling their businesses, they went to coffee-houses, eateries, and hotels where they socialized with other men and connected through newspapers with the world beyond Natchez. They

¹⁰¹ Gilles Vandal, “Le vagabondage et la loi : le contrôle des classes dangereuses à la Nouvelle-Orléans, 1850-1885,” *Canadian Review of American Studies*, Fall 1991, vol.22, no.2, 153-171.

¹⁰² Janet Wolfe, “Gender and the Haunting of Cities (or, the Retirement of the flâneur),” in *The Invisible flâneuse? Gender, Public Space, and Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, op.cit., 26.

¹⁰³ “At least a third of the persons who fill the streets are planters and their families from the country,” he noted. Joseph Holt Ingraham, *The South-West. By a Yankee*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835, vol.2, 36.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 206.

returned home at night, after spending the entire day out. Through their spatial practices, men and women experienced the southern city differently.¹⁰⁵

This experience significantly changed according to a woman's place in the life cycle. Unmarried women had the most time to go out, yet their bodies tended to be the most policed. Plantation girls often learned to navigate the cityscape during their sojourns in female academies, which were semi-cloistered environments. At Madame Togno's academy, Elizabeth Allston Pringle remembered, there was "a delightful big garden full of rose-bushes and violets – such a joy to us, for we could roam about it during recess and in the afternoon."¹⁰⁶ Usually once a day, boarders lined up by twos as they marched for exercise, a spectacle noticed by the young men of the town.¹⁰⁷ After school or the completion of their household duties, girls who were not boarders went walking by themselves, usually with their female friends.¹⁰⁸ Some were even allowed to promenade with young men, unsupervised by a chaperon.¹⁰⁹ In the urban setting, American girls enjoyed a freedom of movement that shocked the mother of Natalie Delage, a French aristocrat, whose daughter was living temporarily with her friend Theodosia Burr in Philadelphia in the 1790s:

[Monsieur Burr] élève sa fille comme un garçon lui fait apprendre à monter à cheval à faire des armes à danser de la musique et du dessin. Veut que la fille jouisse de liberté américaine en conséquence ces petites montent à cheval toutes les deux courent en voiture sans qu'aucunes [sic] femmes les accompagnent sont quelques fois trois ou quatre heures sortie sans que personne ne leur demande d'où elles viennent. Tout cela est dans les mœurs du pays mais à de grands [risques] surtout avec la extrêmement jolie figure de Nathalie et l'immoralité [sic] des hommes français qui sont dans ce pays là et qui sont là avec Monsieur Burr.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ For a differentiation between the concept of the city and urban practices, see Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

¹⁰⁶ Pringle, op.cit., 139.

¹⁰⁷ At Barhamville, on the outskirts of Columbia, students "were required to draw the blinds on weekends when young men from South Carolina College were in the habit of riding around and around the school in their carriages, tossing biscuits and messages to the students. They also like to serenade their favorites late at night. On one such occasion, Dr. Marks [the director of the academy] ran after the young man, shooting him with birdshot." Christie Anne Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South*, New York: New York University Press, 1994, 171. See also 126.

¹⁰⁸ Emmeline Colcock to Emmeline Colcock, 11 December 1857, Colcock Family Papers, 1785-1917, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁰⁹ Cornelius Colcock to Emmeline Colcock, 2 March 1860, Colcock Family Papers, 1785-1917, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana; 21 September 1801, Anna Wells Rutledge, ed., "Letters from Thomas Pinckney Jr. to Harriott Pinckney," *The South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, vol.XLI, no.3, July 1940, 100.

¹¹⁰ "Mister Burr raises his daughter like a boy. She learns horse back riding, fencing, to dance, to play music, and drawing. He wants his daughter to enjoy American liberty, and, as a result, these little girls ride on horse back, both ride a coach without a female chaperone and are sometimes three or four hours out without having any one asking where they have been. All this is in the mores of the country, but at great risks, especially with the

Like the freedom of movement enjoyed by Raven Vanderhost in Charleston fifty years later, this *liberté américaine* seemed acceptable to southerners too; both Natalie Delage and Theodosia Burr eventually married South Carolina planters.

On the other hand, Creole girls appear to have been comparatively much more constrained in their movements than their American counterparts.¹¹¹ The crescent city had the reputation of being a dangerous place, years before the great waves of immigration. “New Orleans is not considered as safe as Natchez,” a plantation woman declared in 1814.¹¹² The city was known, after all, as “the devil’s empire.”¹¹³ Most importantly, the Catholicism of the Creole population entailed a long tradition of veiling the heads of women and cloistering their bodies.¹¹⁴ Walking in New Orleans, Joseph Holt Ingraham noticed, “two or three duenna-like old ladies, remarkable for their “embonpoint” dimensions, preceded a bevy of fair girls, without that most hideous of all excrescences, with which women see fit to disfigure their heads, denominated a “bonnet” – their brown, raven or auburn hair floating in ringlets behind them.”¹¹⁵ Closely chaperoned as they walked the city, Creole girls were truly cloistered when they attended the Convent of the Ursulines. “The boarders are kept very rigidly. They are permitted to leave the convent, to visit friends in the city, if by permission of parents, but once a month,” Ingraham noted. “None are allowed to see them unless they first obtain written permission, from the parents or guardians of the young ladies.”¹¹⁶ Likewise, the Young Ladies Institute of Madame Desrayaux on the edge of the French Quarter publicized in the *Daily Picayune* its “large and well shaded garden” located “in the rear of the building” and “entirely secluded from public view.”¹¹⁷ Once married, “respectable

extremely pretty figure of Nathalie and the immorality of French men who are in that country and who are there with Mr. Burr.” Madame Delage to [her mother?], 15 July 1796, Sumter-Delage Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

¹¹¹ C.f. Dell Upton, *Another City: Urban Life and Urban Spaces in the New American Republic*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008, 322.

¹¹² Mary Farar to Benjamin Farar, 15 October 1814, Farar Papers, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹¹³ Dawdy, op.cit.

¹¹⁴ See for instance Elizabeth S. Cohen, “To Pray, to Work, to Hear, to Speak: Women in Roman Streets c.1600,” in *Cultural History of Early Modern European Streets*, edited by Riita Laitinen and Thomas V. Cohen, Brill: Boston, 2009, 107-108; Mary Laven, *Virgins of Venice. Enclosed Lives and Broken Vows in the Renaissance Convent*, New York: Penguin Books, 2002; Jutta Sperling, *Convents and the Body Politics in Late Renaissance Venice*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999; Nancy van Deusen, *Between the Sacred and the Worldly: The Institutional and Cultural Practice of Recogimiento in Colonial Lima*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001.

¹¹⁵ Ingraham, op.cit., vol.1, 89.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 193.

¹¹⁷ Quoted in Sarnoff, op.cit., 67-68.

women were reluctant to be seen, even veiled, in many public spaces.”¹¹⁸ When they went out, Creole women usually wore a veil.¹¹⁹ Long associated in Europe with aristocratic women, the veil was believed to sustain the health of ladies, in addition to protecting “the face from cold during the winter, and during the summer, keeps the eyes safe from dust and the too-strong rays of the sun.”¹²⁰ The veil also functioned metaphorically “as a visual and physical filter between the woman who wore it” and the city; it controlled “her exposure to the city, the male gaze, and even her sexuality.”¹²¹ The American girls of New Orleans were, relatively speaking, less contained. Annie Jeter walked alone in her neighbourhood and even took the omnibus. One day, as she went shopping on Canal St. with a friend, a gentleman followed them, the young women ran through the streets of the city to escape the stranger.¹²² Still, “it was not *comme il faut* for a young lady to be seen too frequently on the street or to make calls alone,” Eliza Ripley remembered. “Mother was an invalid and made no visits. Father accompanied sister on ceremonious occasions. I was pressed into service when no one else was available.”¹²³

Everywhere, motherhood meant a restricted freedom of movement. Not only were plantation women tied to the house by their household duties and the care of their children, they were limited by their pregnant bodies. Starting a pregnancy, Gertrude Clanton Thomas noted in her diary that her visits to Augusta would soon be scarce: “This spring I will be compelled to remain at home a good deal for I will not only be unrepresentable in the street but I will find being in town fatiguing and I am really anxious to be as particular as possible.”¹²⁴ As long as they were considered sexually desirable, ladies’ bodies were closely watched. Mary Chesnut, who was childless and thus enjoyed much more free time than most women of her age, was nonetheless hindered in her movements by the jealousy of her husband. Sojourning in Charleston in March 1861, she noted in her diary, “Went to walk with Robert Rutledge – but received orders that I was not to walk any more with men on the battery. Is not all this

¹¹⁸ Ingraham, op.cit.

¹¹⁹ Martineau, op.cit., 256.

¹²⁰ Emile Beaugrand, *L’Hygiène ou l’art de conserver la santé*, 1855, quoted in Marni Kessler, “Dusting the Surface, or the *bourgeoise*, the veil, and Haussmann’s Paris,” in *The Invisible flâneuse? Gender, Public Space, and Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, op.cit., 56.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹²² Annie Jeter Carmouche *Memoirs*, 23, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹²³ Eliza Ripley, *Social Life in Old New Orleans: Being Recollections of my Girlhood*, New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1912, 40-41.

¹²⁴ 20 February 1857, Virginia Ingraham Burr, ed. *The Secret Eye: The Journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 1848-1889*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990, 154-55.

too ridiculous at my time of life.”¹²⁵ Although the Battery was a totally respectable place for a lady, Chesnut’s husband was entitled - as her lord and master - to dictate when and with whom she could go out. In the following days, Mary Chesnut made sure that at least another lady accompanied her as she promenaded through Charleston. The body of a woman was desexualized as she aged, which concretely meant a formidable increase of her freedom of movement. If her health allowed, she could go almost anywhere along the country-and-city continuum, often becoming herself the chaperone of younger women.

“There are few families who do not keep a chaise or a coach, and ladies rarely set foot on the streets,” observed a traveler in Charleston.¹²⁶ Carriages were “gay vehicles,” strongly associated with ladies in the South.¹²⁷ “It is unusual to see a gentleman in a gig or carriage,” noted Ingraham in Natchez, “if his wife rides out, he attends her à cheval.”¹²⁸ Highly taxed, carriages could not be afforded by everyone. Just as it separated men and women, “the mobility of horseback riding and carriage driving helped separating the rich from the poor.”¹²⁹ It also separated whites from blacks. In most southern cities, blacks – free and enslaved – were forbid to drive, use or ride a coach, “unless in the capacity of a servant.”¹³⁰ Driven by liveried enslaved coachmen, sometimes embellished with coats of arms, carriages were important markers of social status. To plantation women, however, carriages meant more than increasing their social capital or distancing themselves from the poor and the free blacks. They were, primarily, a means of transportation. For those living in suburban villas or in the rural areas at the periphery of town, a carriage meant inclusion instead of isolation. Without a horse or a buggy, Fanny Smith would have been marginalized from the social life of Dallas. Daughter of a small planter, yet one of the wealthiest residents of a newly established Texan county, Smith regularly went to town unescorted. The carriage not only allowed her to travel longer distances; it acted as a shield, protecting her reputation. In town, Smith visited friends, shopped, attended religious services, or performed piano recitals at the

¹²⁵ C. Van Woodward and Elizabeth Muhlenfeld, *The Private Mary Chesnut: the Unpublished Civil War Diaries*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1984, 48.

¹²⁶ Duke de Liancourt, quoted in Ravenel, op.cit., 383.

¹²⁷ Ingraham, op.cit., vol.2, 206.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 35.

¹²⁹ Greg M. Thomas, “Women in Public in the Parks of Paris,” in *The Invisible flâneuse? Gender, Public Space, and Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, op.cit., 42.

¹³⁰ Minutes of the Common Council of Richmond, quoted in Wade, op.cit., 267.

Musical Association.¹³¹ Only the wealthiest could afford horses and carriages. In Charleston and New Orleans, ladies also took the mule-drawn omnibus, “The Temple of Equality,” used by everyone, but the blacks who were excluded by company policy.¹³² “The ladies of New-Orleans walk more than their country-women of other cities,” Harriet Martineau remarked, “from the streets being in such bad order as to make walking the safest mean of locomotion.”¹³³ Ladies actually walked in every city, when the temperature allowed. Mary Pringle, who owned one of the most elegant coaches in Charleston, regularly walked to church. She sometimes even made a detour on her way home, contemplating the urban life around her: “I go to church three times a week besides Sunday, and in this week, daily, true, I am tempted when once in the open air, to linger out, and find myself up King after service instead of at home, and when I do come home, I meet visitors and so the morning passes.”¹³⁴

Walking or riding a carriage, ladies went in the streets of the city to shop. In Natchez, Main Street was the retail center. Joseph Holt Ingraham described the ladies on their round of shopping:

Opposite to the auction store are a cluster of gay carriages, to and from which fair beings, not quite angels, are “ascending and descending,” to look over all the “pretty things” in the richly lined stores. Was there ever a fancy store that ladies were not hovering near? “A new store” – “new goods,” – “less than cost!” What magic words! What visions of silks and satins, gros de Swiss and gros de Naples, challis and shawls, Grecian laces and Paris gloves, with a thousand other charming etceteras, float before their delighted fancies, in every form of grace and ornament that the imagination can picture or a refined taste invent. Ladies are ladies all the world over; and where is the place in which they do not love “to shop?” In this far corner of the south and west, you are prepared to give fashion credit for but few devotees, and those only partial and half-souled worshippers. But you must not forget that these are southerners; and the southerner is never found unfashionable or deficient in taste.¹³⁵

Plantation women traveled dozens, even hundreds, of miles to purchase ball dresses, wedding trousseaux, or babies’ layette.¹³⁶ In his *Reminiscences*, Charles Fraser recalled that

¹³¹ Elizabeth Enstam York, *Women and the Creation of Urban Life: Dallas, Texas, 1843-1920*, College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1998, 28.

¹³² For a picayune (five cents), a lady could cross the city. Mary Cable, *Lost New Orleans*, New York: American Legacy Press, 1980, 94. Fischer, loc.cit., 932.

¹³³ Martineau, op.cit., 258.

¹³⁴ Richard N. Côté, *Mary’s World: Love, War, and Family Ties in Nineteenth-Century Charleston*, Mount Pleasant: Corinthian Books, 2004, 283.

¹³⁵ Ingraham, op.cit., vol.2, 32-33.

¹³⁶ John Q. Anderson, *Brokenburn: The Journal of Kate Stone, 1861-1868*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1972, 89.

during his youth in Charleston, “shopping amongst the ladies, in those days, was altogether a business matter.”¹³⁷ King Street was the retail center of Charleston. In the 1770s, it had replaced Bay Street and its environs, becoming home to more than one hundred artisans and tradesmen in large part because of its strategic location at the intersection of the most affluent neighborhoods. Several tailors, shoemakers, hatters, bakers, butchers, and hairdressers chose to establish their stores in proximity to their customers. Relocating shops and stores away from the agitation of the port implied that the respectability of their primary patrons, the elite women in charge of consumption in the genteel household were not threatened by the presence of improper people, such as vagrants and prostitutes who inhabited along the port. The moving of the retail district thus epitomized the reshaping of Charleston along the lines of greater gender segregation.¹³⁸

The Creole ladies of New Orleans, in contrast, rarely ventured into the streets to shop in the colonial period and in the decades following the Louisiana Purchase. “It was not then, nor it is now, the fashion for Ladies to go shopping,” Benjamin Latrobe noted in 1819. Instead, they shopped from the comfort (and containment) of their home. “In every street during the whole day women, chiefly black women, are met carrying baskets upon their head calling at the doors of houses,” Latrobe noted, intrigued by this “mode of retail trade.” Ladies could purchase from these peddlers fruits, but also expensive shawls. Although “the Creole families stick still to the pedlars,” things were changing, “many inducements are held out, by the better arrangement & exhibition of the shops, to the Ladies to buy, still – as in everything else – the old habit wears away very slowly.”¹³⁹ A decade later, things had definitely changed under the influence of the American population. Chartres Street was the “Broadway” of New Orleans, home to “the most fashionable, as well as greatest business street in the city.”¹⁴⁰ Along Chartres were “cafés, confectioners, fancy stores, millineries, parfumeurs, &c.& c.”¹⁴¹ Fashionable shops were also found one street up, on Royal, until the late antebellum period, when they “slipped away and spread out in Canal Street.”¹⁴² New

¹³⁷ Charles Fraser, *Reminiscence of My Life*, Charleston: John Russell, 1854, 13.

¹³⁸ Jeanne A. Calhoun, Martha A. Zierden, and Elizabeth A. Paysinger, “The Geographic Spread of Charleston Mercantile Community, 1732-1767,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, vol.86, no.3, 1985, 182-220.

¹³⁹ Benjamin H.B. Labrobe, *Impressions Respecting New Orleans: Diary and Sketches, 1818-1820*, edited by Samuel Wilson, Jr., New York: Columbia University Press, 1951, 101.

¹⁴⁰ Ingraham, op.cit., vol.2, 88.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁴² George W. Cable, *The Creoles of Louisiana*, with an introduction and notes by Arlin Turner, New York: Garrett Press, 1970 (1884), 224.

Orleans was Americanizing and even Creole ladies went shopping, usually wearing a green *barège* veil.¹⁴³ “This city is all in a bustle, with gaiety and business,” a plantation woman noted in December 1835, “ladies shopping from morning to night, Sundays included, the milliners and dressmakers crowded to death with business, and more insolent than ever.”¹⁴⁴

Next to these shopping ladies, visiting ladies also made a conspicuous spectacle in the streets of the southern city. While they were often heterosocial in the evening, visits were essentially the affair of women during the day.¹⁴⁵ “In the social economy of visiting,” Lisa Tolbert acutely remarks, “ladies “paid” their obligations, sometimes in marathon days, performing one social call after another.”¹⁴⁶ The “reciprocation of social kindnesses which is only a recreation to men, is to women in some sense a business,” Thomas R. Dew noted. “It is their field duty, from which household cares are their repose.”¹⁴⁷ Although ladies regularly found the round of visits burdensome, it is not clear how many would agree with Dew on the relaxing qualities of housekeeping. In any case, the social ritual was central to plantation women’s lives when in the city. Newly arrived in New Orleans, Maria Bryan Harford had left the family plantation in Georgia to follow her husband, an engineer in charge of constructing the Pontchartrain Canal. Marrying against her parents’ wishes in part to escape a dreaded plantation life, she experienced great solitude in the Crescent City. She confided to her sister:

I have little, very little, of Mr. Harford’s society for he is entirely engrossed in the most perplexing business, and even when I am with him, I have but little of his conversation, for while he is in the same room, or even walking in the street with me, he is calculating to himself or aloud, and I often perceive him knitting his brow, and saying, “The square root of so & so is so & so, or so many cubic feet make so many yards, miles,” or whatever it may be. Oh, if I could only live at home in Georgia!¹⁴⁸

“Like a bird in a cage,” Maria felt “as if no one cared for me in the world.”¹⁴⁹ The visits of her neighbors somewhat enlivened her solitude: “I have formed a number of acquaintances

¹⁴³ Ripley, op.cit., 61.

¹⁴⁴ Maria Bryan Harford to Julia Ann Bryan Cumming, 5 December 1835, Carol Bleser, ed. *Tokens of Affection: The Letters of a Planter’s Daughter in the Old South*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996, 178.

¹⁴⁵ MacDonald and Hansen defined visits as “occasions that involved interaction between at least two people who were acquainted but were not members of the same household.” Cameron Lynne MacDonald and Karen V. Hansen, “Sociability and Gendered Spheres: Visiting Patterns in Nineteenth-Century New England,” *Social Science History*, vol.25, no.4, winter 2001, 536.

¹⁴⁶ Tolbert, op.cit., 141.

¹⁴⁷ Thomas R. Dew, “Dissertation on the Characteristic Difference between the Sexes, and on the Position and Influence of Woman in Society,” *Southern Literary Messenger*, May-August 1835, 504.

¹⁴⁸ Maria Bryan Harford to Julia Ann Bryan Cumming, 20 March 1833, quoted in Bleser, op.cit., 144.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 12 August 1833 and 20 March 1833, 163, 144.

among the ladies, some quite pleasant, and what is a little singular, there are two French families who have been to see me, and I am extremely pleased with their manners and conversation.”¹⁵⁰ The superficiality of the ritual, however, heightened her feelings of loneliness:

The few acquaintances I have here are mostly fashionable people who, after paying me a call once a month, and perceiving little to attract them in my abode and much elsewhere, say adieu and, I presume, do not think of me again until they look over their visiting debts, or hear the bell ring at their own houses and, after rubbing their foreheads, perhaps remember who I am, and where they have seen me before.¹⁵¹

Starving for meaningful relationships, she tried to convince her beloved sister Julia to make a visit to “this far famed city.”¹⁵²

Eventually, Maria’s social circle enlarged. “You know the New Orleans Creole custom of never calling to see strangers but waiting until they visit first,” she wrote her sister, “this family have [*sic*] set aside that custom in our favour, and though we had no claims upon them by letter or in any other way, have treated with marked attention.” Her new Creole acquaintances were not only pleasant, they fulfilled Maria’s intellectual inclinations: “Mr. Pollock has an excellent library of Spanish, French and English books. This he presses us to use whenever we wish and retain any works as long as we choose.”¹⁵³ In the summer, as elite Orleanians fled the city, Maria again felt “lonely and forlorn” as “almost everybody” that she knew had “gone away.”¹⁵⁴ Soon enough, nonetheless, her integration into her new city was so complete, that her complaints changed diametrically: “One of my annoyances here is from the visits of the people in the neighbourhood. They come and sit and sit and have nothing to say, and I rack my brain to talk to them, and no matter what I am engaged about, all must be stopped when they come to entertain them.”¹⁵⁵ She was not isolated anymore in the Crescent City.

Like Mary Bryan Hartford, most elite women alternately enjoyed and loathed the rounds of visits. “Ladies are all too much afraid of a drop of rain, even to come out, unless it is beautiful weather,” Mary Wayne told her sister Ann Vanderhorst. Time-consuming, visiting tied ladies to their house:

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 26 January 1833, 141.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 20 March 1833, 144.

¹⁵² Ibid., 145.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 29 March 1833, 149.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 3 June 1833, 156.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 7 August 1834, 172.

I cannot give up every morn. to visitors, on to idle calls, & company; but their having it once in ten days, or so, in the country, & in the city it would be best to have it once a week; (this would be a good plan for you to addopt [*sic*] at your town house, & as you live so far up, that those who live in the lower end, may not have their ride up to your house for nothing; in spring, & summer, to fix up on 5 o'clock in the afternoon, of one day in the week; thus you will not be debar.^d from your drive on the battery, but one day in the week, & will have much pleasure in seeing your friends. If I lived in Charleston, or N York, I would addopt [*sic*] this plan.)¹⁵⁶

Visits primarily took place in the bedrooms, parlors and drawing rooms of town houses, yet it necessarily implied that at least one lady had circulated through the streets of the city to get there. When the temperature was clement, women often combined visiting and promenading. In Charleston, Julia Rutledge sent a note to a friend for a “walking date,” although her busy social schedule interfered: “I intended paying you a visit today, but I was prevented by the appearance of rain... It seems as though we are fated not to have a walk together; but I hope we may enjoy one. I am engaged for this and tomorrow afternoon, but you must go with me next week.”¹⁵⁷ In Augusta, a day in the life of Gertrude Clanton was a combination of visiting and walking as her diary reveals:

Thursday afternoon Mrs Phinizy called. While she was here Miss Singleton Mildred and Ginne Coombs called for me to walk. We went down to Bessman's garden. Then went up on Greene Street as far as the Jewish Synagogue. Turned into Broad street – came on down as far as Cook's Corner then crossed went up on the same street as far as the corner of Dunham's and Blakely's crossed came on down as far as Cook's corner and then turned into Greene Street and came home.¹⁵⁸

Far from being static and limited to the house, the ritual of visiting was inherently dynamic.

Ladies, young and old, also loved promenading in the city. Due to a lingering pain in one of her foot, the young Emma Holmes was deprived of her daily stroll in Charleston: “It seems as if it will never get well, and the weather is so beautiful and so inviting for a walk that it almost gives me the “blues” to have to stay in the house.”¹⁵⁹ Once her foot had improved, she declared, “it was quite a relief to go out.”¹⁶⁰ A walk or a ride in the afternoon enlivened the old age of Mellescent Colcock: “the oppression of breathing I suffer every morning still but after dinner and a nap, I am able to take a ride or a gossop [*sic*] in the

¹⁵⁶ Mary Morris Wayne to Ann Morris Vanderhorst, 26 January 1845, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

¹⁵⁷ Julia Rutledge to Emmeline Colcock, [no date, summer 1861], Colcock Family Papers, 1785-1917, Tulane University Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁵⁸ 23 February 1852, Burr, op.cit., 98.

¹⁵⁹ Marszalek, op.cit., 15.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 41.

neighborhood – for it has been made up of old acquaintances, and they have been very sociable.”¹⁶¹ Not having access to a carriage was experienced as a great privation by the granddaughter of Colcock who declared: “There is nothing that I feel the want of more than a carriage.”¹⁶² Walking or riding a carriage was often synonymous with “taking exercise” or “taking the air.”

Meta Morris Grimball cherished her afternoon promenades in Charleston. Having a carriage was actually one of the few privileges of her class that she truly relished. In one of her sketches, she described how during these afternoons, she indulged in these urban *flâneries*.¹⁶³ Meta was the opposite of the self-indulging woman. A model of piety, frugality, and self-denial, the plantation mistress repeatedly shunned her own needs and desires for the welfare of her family. But as she aged, all those sacrifices started to weigh heavy on her. One summer, her husband returned home from a northern trip with an outrageously expensive dress. Meta was very unhappy with Mr. Grimball’s gift. For that summer, she had relinquished her carriage in town to meet the budgetary demands of her husband. This was a great sacrifice indeed. In her diary, Meta expressed mixed feelings of anger, guilt, and powerlessness over a useless dress that cost her an entire summer of privations. Although they had just moved into a large town house, Meta felt trapped. In October 1859, she noted in her diary:

I have felt in a very perverse spirit for several days: - the weather has been so rainy I have not been able to take exercise and Mr. Grimball is of necessity [*sic*] always at home. It seems the summer here like a long sea voyage of 7 months together & my temper not being angelic tires of always the same [appreciation]; if he would only go out some times or if I could I might come back refreshed; and in better humor: but I think now after 30 years experience of this life it is very trying. A man who is in business is the best for a husband. Just now every one is out & I breathe freer.¹⁶⁴

Weary of being confined to her town house, Meta started planning the following year a trip to the Virginia Springs, a trip to be taken without her husband and to be paid with money

¹⁶¹ Melliscent Colcock to Mary Colcock, 3 November 1825, Colcock Family Papers, 1785-1917, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁶² Emmeline Colcock to Anna Maria Huguenin, 5 mai 1850, Colcock Family Papers, 1785-1917, Tulane Special Collections, New Orleans, Louisiana.

¹⁶³ Meta Morris Grimball, “Five afternoons,” Sketches, 1856, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston.

¹⁶⁴ Meta Morris Grimball, 6 October 1859, Diary June 1859-September 1860, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

she had just inherited.¹⁶⁵ The political crisis that was raging in 1860 however impinged on her plans of escaping the presence of her husband for a season. Ironically, if Meta did enjoy a few rides that summer, it was because her generous aunt, Ann Vanderhorst, had provided her with her carriage.¹⁶⁶

Walking or riding in the streets of the city was one of the few things ladies could do outside of their homes. The young Harriet Dawson faced the dearth of respectable public spaces in Charleston, especially when the gay season was over:

The city is very dull. Balls are out of season, and they [*sic*] are no public amusements of any kind except the Theatre which is miserably attended, ten or twenty persons generally in the house, even Clara Fisher and Kean have failed in drawing crowded houses except on their benefit nights. Miss Jane Ourang Outang under the skillful attendance of two physicians has so far recovered her health as to leave the city...The wax figures which were worth seeing have also taken their departure to that there is absolutely nothing new to amuse one in the city but a walk in King Street and that tires repeated more than three or four times.¹⁶⁷

Eliza Ripley remembered in her memoirs how acutely she felt the need for respectable public spaces in antebellum New Orleans:

There were no restaurants, no lunch counters, no tea rooms, and (bless their dear hearts, who started it!) no woman's exchange, no place in the whole city where a lady could drop in after all this round of shopping, take a comfortable seat and order even a sandwich, or any kind of refreshment. One could take an éclair at Vincent's, corner of Royal and Orléans, but éclairs have no satisfying quality.¹⁶⁸

While commercial entrepreneurs started providing northern ladies with such respectable public places in the 1840s and 1850s as they built their shopping palaces, their southern counterparts would have to wait a few more decades.¹⁶⁹ In the meantime, ladies had to be contented with éclairs, ice cream gardens and soda fountains, the fare of children.

In contrast, public spaces where gentlemen "could drop in" were plentiful in the southern city: coffee-houses, taverns, hotels, private clubs, or restaurants. In New Orleans,

¹⁶⁵ Meta Morris Grimball Diary, 10 December 1860, Documenting the American South Project at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

¹⁶⁶ Meta Morris Grimball, October 1859, Diary June 1859-September 1860, Margaret Ann Morris Grimball Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina. She also sometimes hired a carriage. Meta Morris Grimball Diary 24 August 1860, Documenting the American South Project at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

¹⁶⁷ Harriet Dawson to Ann Vanderhorst, [c.1839], Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

¹⁶⁸ Ripley, *op.cit.*, 62-63.

¹⁶⁹ According to Mary Ryan, "The creation of the urban habitat designed especially for the ladies was not the work of journalists, writers, or reformers but of businessmen. Commercial entrepreneurs, ever eager to reap wealth in the urban marketplace, were the most energetic providers of urban public space especially for women." Ryan, *op.cit.*, 1990, 76.

men met at the French Exchange, located at the corner of Chartres and St. Louis Streets. In the basement of the building, Ingraham observed “two or three hundred loud-talking, noisy gentlemen, who were promenading and vehemently gesticulating, in all directions, through the spacious room.”¹⁷⁰ In 1836, when a new Merchants’ Exchange was built in Royal Street, it included a bookshop, two reading rooms, and a free library, where men went talking, smoking, and playing chess.¹⁷¹ The building also housed the post office, with a separated entrance for “letters in the foreign languages and for the ladies.”¹⁷² Charleston also counted several places of masculine sociability. While women constituted some of the most active borrowers of the Charleston Library Society, they seldom visited the library itself. Instead, they generally sent a slave or a male relation to pick up the novels and travel diaries they devoured.¹⁷³ Located on Bay Street until 1792, the library was transferred to the upper floor of the State House, an inherently masculine space. Soon, however, it moved onto King Street, the retail district of the city, where ladies were daily encountered. Theoretically accessible to women, the Charleston Library Society was, in practice, a place where only men stayed to gossip and exchange ideas.¹⁷⁴ In the summer, the husband of Meta Morris Grimball was an habitu . ¹⁷⁵ Even in small towns such as Edgefield in the Carolina Upcountry, men could go to three “anti-family groceries each with a billiard table,” four hotels, one restaurant or cellar, and one barber shop.¹⁷⁶

Plantation women went out of their town houses to run errands, socialize, seek admiration, or even find solitude. There were as many motivations for being in the street of the city as there were women. While going to church, shopping, visiting, and exercising were understood as legitimate activities that warranted the presence of ladies in the streets, idle promenading, on the other hand, remained a controversial activity. Seemingly purposeless, it was especially condemned on Sunday in Charleston. A plantation mistress lamented that “going out in the city on Sunday is associated with rambling in the streets, and persons have

¹⁷⁰ Ingraham, op.cit., 93.

¹⁷¹ Cable, *Lost New Orleans*, op.cit., 45-46.

¹⁷² Benjamin Norman, *New Orleans and Environs*, 1845, quoted in *Ibid.*, 45-46.

¹⁷³ Interestingly, James Raven entirely ignores female readers of the library society in his study. James Raven, *London Booksellers and American Customers: Transatlantic Literary Community and the Charleston Library Society, 1748-1811*, University of South Carolina Press: Charleston, 2002, 69.

¹⁷⁴ Martineau, op.cit., 229.

¹⁷⁵ Michael O’Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004, vol.1, 509.

¹⁷⁶ *Edgefield Advertiser*, 13 March 1851, quoted in Orville Vernon Burton, *In My Father’s House are Many Mansions: Family and Community in Edgefield, South Carolina*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985, 29.

come to consider that all walking is sinful except to Church. They forget that Our Lord almost lived out of doors.”¹⁷⁷ In New Orleans, too, Protestants condemned the Catholic fondness for Sunday’s promenades.¹⁷⁸ In spite of persistent criticism over the depravity of women seen in the streets, ladies were an integral part of the “moving spectacle.” As they walked or drove their carriages, they felt independent, in control of their movement, asserting themselves in the theatre of the city.

Returning “quite late” from a friend’s house on a “brilliant moonlight” night in January 1862, Emma Holmes encountered a Confederate officer who “looked like a gentleman.” “His manner throughout being most respectful,” she accepted to be escorted home. Afraid of being confused with a public woman, she told him: “I am not at all surprised you think it late for ladies to be out, it is much later than I intended.” His reply, according to Emma’s diary, was “that he did not think it very late,” but she “said it was later, however, than the ladies were accustomed to walk.” After guessing that “he was an up country man,” she asked the beautiful stranger “if he had been on the Battery.” As he answered no, Emma exclaimed: “it is our pride & where the ladies walk a great deal in summer, especially on moonlight nights.”¹⁷⁹ Narrating her “curious adventure” in her diary, Emma Holmes drew the mental map separating the respectable and the unrespectable. Walking in the street at night, she could expect to be mistaken for a fallen woman. On the other hand, if she had been walking on the Battery, even at night, there would have been no ambiguity regarding her identity. In Charleston, the Battery belonged to the ladies.

In towns and cities of the slaveholding South, promenades and parks functioned as liminal spaces, where “women could be seen without being categorized as fallen and sexualized, where they could inscribe alternate interpretations of femininity.”¹⁸⁰ Ladies laid

¹⁷⁷ She added, with nostalgia, “In old times when Charleston was a colony, the houses had little porticos on the pavement and the good citizens of Charleston took their tea under them in the street. You will find on East Bay under those porticoes marble squares of different colours or two colours, which a gentleman once suggested was for playing backgammon.” M.C. Townsend to Phoebe Townsend, [c.1856-57], Townsend Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

¹⁷⁸ Sandra Margaret Frink, “Spectacles of the Street: Performance, Power, and Public Space in Antebellum New Orleans,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 2004, 254.

¹⁷⁹ 9 January 1862, Marszalek, op.cit., 118-119.

¹⁸⁰ Thomas, loc.cit., 34.

equal claims as gentlemen to these public spaces, where they promenaded, socialized, played with their children, or attended concerts. In the antebellum period, municipal governments made significant efforts to embellish their cities, notably through the beautification of promenades, cemeteries, parks, and squares. These efforts were not unique to the South, nor to the United States for that matter. The liberal forces shaping the Western World at the turn of the nineteenth century understood the city “simultaneously as a public asset, an aesthetic object, and...an extension of the home.”¹⁸¹ Yet these renovated spaces were not for everyone; they became spaces of polite sociability and leisure from which the wealthier repeatedly strove to exclude the poor and the enslaved.¹⁸² Parks and promenades were not democratic spaces, but domesticated spaces, mediations between public and private, town and country, male and female. “Urban life included original mediations between town, country, and nature,” Henri Lefebvre remarks, such as “parks, gardens, channeled waters.”¹⁸³ Visitors to the South, especially Europeans, were enthralled by the overflowing presence of nature in Charleston and New Orleans. Trees, flowers and shrubberies grew everywhere in this sub-tropical climate, particularly in the private gardens surrounding the great town houses and suburban villas of the planting elite. Often planted by women, these gardens were already understood as a female domain in the colonial period. Public gardens, on the other hand, took longer to appear in the Urban South, but when they did, they feminized the cityscape.¹⁸⁴

There were no public parks in colonial Charleston. Since ladies were discouraged from promenading along the Bay and its wharves, they were directed to the periphery of town, toward the Orange Gardens.¹⁸⁵ There, in accordance with the European fashion of private pleasure gardens, commercial entrepreneurs soon organized concerts, “public breakfasting,” and afternoon tea.¹⁸⁶ A Vauxhall was also opened in 1767, where concerts

¹⁸¹ Maria Helena Barreiros, “Urban Landscapes: Houses, Streets, and Squares of 18th Century Lisbon,” Riita Laitinen and Thomas V. Cohen, eds, *Cultural History of Early Modern European Streets*, Brill: Boston, 2009, 36.

¹⁸² A classic study that examines this theme is Roy Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and the People: A History of Central Park*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992.

¹⁸³ Henri Lefebvre, “Town and Country,” in *Writings on Cities*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, 119.

¹⁸⁴ Although, acutely remarks Richardson, gardens and parks are “as a material stage... nature carefully manicured into submission.” Miles Richardson, “Culture and the Urban Stage: The Nexus of Setting, Behavior, and Image in Urban Places,” Irwin Altman, Amos Rapoport, and Joachim F. Wohlwill, eds, *Human Behavior and the Environment*, vol.4, 1980, 223.

¹⁸⁵ Eola Willis, *The Charleston Stage in the XVIII Century: With Social Settings of the Time*, New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968, 48.

¹⁸⁶ Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt: Urban Life in America, 1743-1776*, New York : Alfred A Knopf, 1955, 360.

were given three times a week, in addition to dancing and refreshment.¹⁸⁷ Although they met with a certain success, both places were only in operation for a few years, being located too far from the center of town, and thus not easily frequented without a carriage.¹⁸⁸ After the Revolution, Harriot Horry was involved in the establishment of a new “Vauxhall or garden of recreation” in Charleston.¹⁸⁹ When her husband was alive, she used to have her urban residence on Broad Street. Her mother, Eliza Lucas Pinckney had even planted there, with the help of slaves, a large garden that well-provided her table and most likely also served as a source of income, the surplus probably being sold in the city market.¹⁹⁰ When she became a widow, Horry moved to Tradd Street, while keeping the property on Broad Street for the garden, the coach house, and the lodging facilities for her enslaved servants. In 1795, she decided to rent her property to the Sieurs La Valette and Bullit for the establishment of a pleasure garden. The contract reveals that in addition to paying the yearly rent of one hundred pounds (a modest price considering that it included the lot and the enslaved gardener), the lessees were charged with supplying Mrs. Horry “from time to time and at all times for her family use with the best fruits, grapes and vegetables at the said Garden shall produce.”¹⁹¹ She also retained the use of the coach house and of the slave quarters. Centrally located, the new Vauxhall had more chance to succeed than its colonial predecessors. Publicized as a pleasure ground for entertainment and plays, it became one of the main attractions of the city during the summer, offering French music, Chinese fireworks, monkeys, and pantomime performances.¹⁹²

Aside from the financial and material gains she obtained, the involvement of the female planter in the Vauxhall must be understood as a form of patronage. Twice in the indenture, it was stated that her lot was leased for “a public, but decent and reputable place

¹⁸⁷ Julia Cherry Spruill, *Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1938, 100.

¹⁸⁸ “Pleasure gardens were privately operated suburban entertainment resorts which combined tree-lined allées for promenading with ornate, often temporary structures in which to drink, dance, eat, view paintings and watch short dramatic or acrobatic performances. Pleasure gardens usually opened only in summer, on nights when the weather was fine.” Jonathan Conlin, “Vauxhall on the Boulevard: Pleasure Gardens in London and Paris, 1764-1784,” *Urban History*, May 2008, vol.35, no.12, 25.

¹⁸⁹ As a child, Harriot Horry spent five years with her parents in England, living twenty miles from London. She might have visited the Vauxhall with her mother, who was a great amateur of the theatre. Schulz, loc.cit., 91.

¹⁹⁰ Anne Firor Scott, “Self-Portraits: Three Women,” in Richard Bushman et al., eds, *Uprooted Americans: Essays to Honor Oscar Handlin*, Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1979, 69.

¹⁹¹ Indenture between Harriot Horry and the Sieurs Lavalette and Bullit, 24 February 1795 for the creation of Vauxhall Gardens, Pinckney Family Documents, B.H. Rutledge Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina.

¹⁹² Willis, op.cit., 290.

of entertainment.” She sought to offer a family-oriented public space to Charlestonians that comforted her vision of an orderly society in which ladies and children shared respectable amusements with gentlemen. As such, it was an extension of her reform work at the Orphan House, although it targeted the members of her own class. Her family regularly went to the Vauxhall on Broad Street, where they encountered other planting families, such as the Izards and the Manigaults. Arguably, Horry had an indirect influence on the creation of “that delightful scene of Charleston festivity.”¹⁹³ Without her contribution, though, the ladies would have had even fewer respectable places to go to in Charleston, especially in the summer when the theaters were closed.¹⁹⁴

Harriot Horry was also a great admirer of the Battery in New York, “the pleasantest walk I know and is much frequented.”¹⁹⁵ She must have been pleased when, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the city authority constructed a similar promenade in Charleston. Also called “the Battery,” it was built at the south end of East Bay Street, at a distance from the wharves and the sailors. “A spacious street” of 400 yards, “enclosed by a balustrade” the Battery offered a view “peculiarly grand and interesting,” according to Robert Mills:

The sea opens before you, and constitutes a back ground to the harbor. Sullivan’s Island appears like a city, floating upon the bosom of the wide waters, and glittering in the sun beams. The forts, islands, and forests of masts on either hand, the vessels in full sail, entering and departing the harbor, the numerous sail boats, fishing canoes, and the rich planters’ barges, handsomely painted and canvassed over, present a picture which can rarely be surpassed.¹⁹⁶

The Battery quickly became the most important site of public spectacle in Charleston. In the company of Harriot Rutledge Holbrook (the granddaughter of Harriot Horry), the Swedish traveler Fredrika Bremer drove to “the fashionable promenade of the city.” She described it as, “a bald enclosure along the beach, where people walk round and round in circle, so that they see again and again all those they know, and all those they do not know, who are promenading there...the people of the New World, in general, are fond of being in

¹⁹³ Henry Izard to Margaret Izard Manigault, 14 August 1808, Manigault Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, Columbia, South Carolina.

¹⁹⁴ Jonathan Conlin notes in his study of European pleasure gardens that they were understood by some authors as a tool to reform society, they were “quasi-utopian spaces in which to envisage a whole society at play, yet under control.” Conlin, *loc.cit.*, 44.

¹⁹⁵ Typescript of Harriot Horry Journal 1793-1794, July 1793, Pinckney-Lowndes Papers, South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston, South Carolina. On Battery Park in New York see David Scobey, “Anatomy of the Promenade: the Politics of Bourgeois Sociability in 19th century New York,” *Social History*, 17, May 1992, 207.

¹⁹⁶ Robert Mills, *Statistics of South Carolina, including a View of its Natural, Civil, and Military History, General and Particular*, Charleston: Hurlbut and Lloyd, 1826 (The Reprint Company, Spartanburg, 1972), 425.

company, are fond of a crowd.¹⁹⁷ The Battery was conceived as a space of flow, where people were endlessly moving. To be able to pause, sit, and play, ladies and children had to wait until the inauguration of White Point Gardens in 1838. In this “place inviting and agreeable,” ladies were to be protected from the blacks – free and enslaved - and from the poor. In Charleston as in most cities of the South, municipal authorities systematically tried to exclude blacks, either free or enslaved, from these liminal spaces of elite sociability. The exclusion of blacks was a necessary condition for making these spaces appropriate venues for respectable women. It was not the condition of slavery, but race that was the object of control in most southern cities.¹⁹⁸ In Savannah, an 1827 ordinance excluded “negroes, mullatoes, or other colored persons” from “the public promenade in South Broad street, or on that leading from thence to the Hospital.”¹⁹⁹ At the gates of a Richmond Park, Fredrika Bremer discovered, “on the pillars of the gate” an “announcement in large letters, declaring that any slave who ventures within these gates shall be liable to a punishment of thirty-nine lashes!”²⁰⁰ The preserve of “respectable citizens” during the week, the Battery and its adjacent gardens was relinquished to the other inhabitants of the city on Sunday. “Before the war my father never let us walk on the Battery on Sunday afternoon, for he said it was only fair for the darkies to have it that evening,” Elizabeth Allston Pringle remembered.²⁰¹

During the Civil War, the habitual rhythm of the Battery was interrupted. “Sunday afternoon I went on the Battery which was more crowded than ever,” Emma Holmes noted in April 1861. “The cadets had a dress parade at sunset and the harbor was gay with steamers with flags flying from every point. It did not seem at all like Sunday.”²⁰² White Point Gardens was turned into a soldiers’ camping ground, the sight of which delighted Pauline DeCaradeuc: “Twas [sic] beautiful to see it there in such a lovely spot.”²⁰³ Emma Holmes did not share her enthusiasm. “Indeed soldiers are encamped all over the city,” she observed,

¹⁹⁷ Fredrika Bremer, *The Homes of the New World; Impressions of America*, New York : Harper & Brothers, 1854, vol.1, 271.

¹⁹⁸ Wade, op.cit., 266. Although, “the fact that so many slaves were arrested for being on the Battery indicates that despite regulations, whites were unsuccessful in creating a separate segregated urban space.” Maurie D. McInnis, op.cit., 85-86.

¹⁹⁹ Savannah, Ordinances, 2 August 1827, quoted in Wade, op.cit., 267.

²⁰⁰ Bremer, op.cit., 505.

²⁰¹ Pringle, op.cit., 321. The same phenomenon existed in other cities. In Paris, for instance, the lower class took over the Bois de Boulogne on Sunday, “but the rest of the week it remained the reserve of the wealthy.” Thomas, loc.cit., 43.

²⁰² 14 April 1861, Marszalek, op.cit., 30.

²⁰³ 19 November 1863, Mary D. Robertson, ed., *A Confederate Lady Comes of Age: The Journal of Pauline DeCaradeuc Heyward, 1863-1888*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992, 26-27.

“martial law keeps them quiet and orderly as every soldier found in the street without a permit and furlough is imprisoned.”²⁰⁴ However, it was not the Confederate soldiers that bothered the most Emma Holmes as she returned to Charleston in 1863 after a year-long exile in the upcountry; it was the omnipresence of poor whites. First, in the cars that brought her from Camden to Charleston, “most of the passengers [were] of the “democracy.””²⁰⁵ Then, as she eagerly returned to the Battery, she “met very few acquaintances – [she] felt quite a stranger – “country come to town.””²⁰⁶ A few days later, as Emma walked again on the Battery “for exercises” with a female friend, she was appalled:

To view “mobocracy” which turned out in great strength, utterly regardless of taste & expense. We were almost ashamed to be seen in such a common crowd, but after a while met two or three acquaintances to keep us in countenance. Really, we could not imagine where such people came from; such never used to be seen on the battery.²⁰⁷

The young woman was not disturbed by blacks (free or enslaved), but by whites. She despised nothing more than a “white female...who was trying to pass herself off for a *fine* lady, I found to be the daughter of some woman who used to keep an eating house in the city and is an inveterate opium eater.”²⁰⁸ Holmes’ diary reveals how class had been a powerful organizing category of Charleston’s cityscape before the Civil War. Before returning to Camden, Holmes was nonetheless “determined to enjoy a last walk on the Battery, & with Miss Ellen Ford, promenaded till dark, watching the beautiful effect of the broad flashes of light at every discharge, which illuminated the sky.”²⁰⁹ From now on, ladies and gentlemen would have to share the stunning beauty of the harbor with both the poor whites and the blacks. “After the war,” Elizabeth Allston Pringle recalled, “no one walked there [on Sunday] afternoon, for it was thronged with Negroes.”²¹⁰

Historians have documented the highly formalized ritual of the promenade, which served to reinforce the social order.²¹¹ Yet parks and promenades were also sites of informal behavior and private experiences. At times, ladies sought to escape the crowd and its oppressive gaze. “This afternoon after our reading club, we nine girls... went to walk, but commenced & ended it by a race, down the broad gravel walk of Flinn’s Church Square,

²⁰⁴ 17 May 1861, Marszalek, op.cit., 163.

²⁰⁵ 1 July 1863, ibid., 273.

²⁰⁶ 4 July 1863, ibid., 275.

²⁰⁷ 11 July 1863, ibid., 280-281.

²⁰⁸ 9 July 1864, ibid., 360.

²⁰⁹ 18 July 1863, ibid., 284.

²¹⁰ Pringle, op.cit., 321.

²¹¹ Scobey, loc.cit.

which we all enjoyed very much,” Emma Holmes wrote in her diary. “It is so quiet & secluded there among the beautiful mock oranges. We felt almost as free as if in the country. Our walk was only around the Citadel Square, but I told the girls I felt quite reconciled to living up town, if we could enjoy such freedom and frolics.”²¹² “For the male flâneur, walking down the street involved watching others; for the [respectable] woman, it meant watching herself,” Elizabeth Munson remarks.²¹³ The country was thus associated, in Holmes’s imagination, with a greater liberty. Ladies in quest of solitude often rode their carriage at the periphery of the city. Meta Morris Grimball, for instance, often drifted toward Magnolia Cemetery, situated by the sea in Charleston’s neck.²¹⁴ In Savannah, ladies went to Bonaventura, both a park and a cemetery. Although an enchanting place, it was less frequented in the summer. “Ladies of delicate complexions become flushed, and suffer from riding through the woods at this season,” Fredrika Bremer explained, “the flowers operate upon them like poison. To me they appeared suffocating.”²¹⁵ In New Orleans, the French cemeteries “seem more like miniature cities built for the accommodation of the living, than receptacles for the dead,” a traveler noted. “The animated groups of promenaders in them, at all times and seasons, serve to heighten this impression...the aspect of the place is cheerful, rather than sad.”²¹⁶ Within the antebellum southern city, cemeteries – less crowded than promenades and central squares – were therefore also understood as liminal spaces, where ladies could be seen without endangering their reputation.

In New Orleans, the equivalent of the Battery was the Levée, the street along the Mississippi River, where orange trees were planted.²¹⁷ At the beginning of the nineteenth century, a traveler who lamented the absence of public gardens in the city, nonetheless enjoyed the Levée, which, “after sunset is crowded with company, who having been confined all the day to their home, seldom miss this favourable opportunity of breathing a little fresh

²¹² 24 February 1862, Marszalek, op.cit., 126.

²¹³ Elizabeth Munson, “Walking on the Periphery: Gender and the Discourse of Modernization,” *Journal of Social History*, vol.36, no.1, Autumn 2002, 67.

²¹⁴ Bremer, op.cit., 500

²¹⁵ Ibid., 355-356.

²¹⁶ Mrs. C.F. Windle, “The French Graveyards at New Orleans,” *Sartain’s Union Magazine* 9, December 1851, 432-35, Eugene L. Schwaab, ed. *Travels in the Old South: Selected from Periodicals of the Times*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1973, vol.2, 463.

²¹⁷ C.f. William W. Freehling, “Charleston’s Battery and New Orleans’s Jackson Square,” William E. Leuchtenburg, ed., *American Places, Encounters with History: A Celebration of Sheldon Meyer*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, 145-155.

air.”²¹⁸ On Sunday evening, Joseph Holt Ingraham observed in the 1830s, “the whole city may be found promenading on the Levée.”²¹⁹ During the day, however, it was mostly a masculine territory. “The number of promenaders increased, but scarcely a lady was now to be seen,” Ingraham remarked as he walked on the street. “Every other gentleman we met was enveloped in a cloud, not of bacchanalian, but tobacconian incense, which gave a peculiar atmosphere to the Levée.”²²⁰ It was also crowded with poor men, mostly immigrants, who flocked the city in the antebellum period:

They are easily distinguished by their shabby appearance, language, and foreign way of wearing their apparel. In groups – promenading, lounging, and sleeping upon the seats along the Levée – we passed several hundred of this *canaille* of Orleans...They are mostly Spaniards and Portuguese, though they are among them representatives from all the unlucky families which, at the building of Babel, were dispersed over the earth.²²¹

Contrary to the Battery in Charleston, where city ordinances regulated the presence of blacks, the Levée was accessible to everyone, a traveler observed: “All shades, from deepest black to purest white, are here so mixed and jumbled together, and pass in such close and rapid succession... Jews and Gentiles, the Frenchmen, Italian, Spaniard, German and American of all conditions and occupations, with their wives, or daughters, or mistresses.”²²² In 1816, the City Council at least managed to regulate the bathing of people in the river along the Levée.²²³

Opening on the Levée was the Place d’Armes, the public square facing the Mississippi. Used for public executions until 1821, this fenced plaza was not truly a garden with its dull sycamore trees. Repeatedly, the city council contemplated the idea of transforming the Place d’Armes into “a neat and agreeable resort for the public,” yet its efforts were uneven and, usually, unachieved.²²⁴ Joseph Pilié, the city engineer and father of Céline Roman, supervised

²¹⁸ Charles Schultz, *Travels on an Inland Voyage through the States of New-York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Ohio, Kentucky and Tennessee and through the Territories of Indiana, Louisiana, Mississippi and New-Orleans, performed in the years 1807 and 1808, including a Tour of nearly six thousand miles*, New York : Isaac Riley, 1810, vol.2, 75.

²¹⁹ Ingraham, op.cit., 189.

²²⁰ Ibid., 89.

²²¹ Ibid., 90.

²²² Henry Didimus, *New Orleans as I Found It*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1845, 28-9, quoted in Frink, op.cit., 72. The difference between New Orleans and most southern cities might be explained by their distinct metropolitan influences. Paris was in its public spaces much more inclusive than London in the nineteenth century. See Donald J. Olsen, *The City as a Work of Art: London, Paris, Vienna*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986, 204-205.

²²³ Frink, op.cit., 178.

²²⁴ Council Minutes, First Municipality, quoted in Christina Vella, *Intimate Enemies: The Two Worlds of the Baroness de Pontalba*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997, 267.

in the early twenties the installation of an iron fence and Benjamin Latrobe even designed a fountain, which inexplicably disappeared from the square.²²⁵ In 1840, a cornerstone for a monument to Andrew Jackson was laid out in the presence of the General, yet the equestrian statue was still not installed in the square a decade later. A reporter from the *Daily Picayune* described the desolated Place d'Armes in November 1848 as having "a queer, ancient, foreign look":

Where are its trim, well-kept walks, where its neat benches on which many a lover has uttered his devotion to his mistress and received from her lips his judgment? Where those gay promenaders, full of life and hope, uttering soft nothings and prattling in foreign tongues of *la belle France*, or of deeds in old Spain!... Where is the little fountain that spouted so gaily in the center of the Square?²²⁶

Drawings from the period reveal that a few ladies strolled in the plaza, yet it remained an unwelcoming and neglected space. In the American part of New Orleans, Lafayette Square was "the handsomest promenade in the city."²²⁷ Renovated by the Second municipality in the late 1830s, it was much frequented by gentlemen and ladies.²²⁸

A Creole woman, as wealthy, enterprising and urbane as Harriot Horry, became the impetus for the transformation of the shabby Place d'Armes into the beautiful park that would be known, after 1851, as Jackson Square. Micaela Almonester de Pontalba inherited from her father - a Spanish colonial official, large slaveholder, and philanthropist - a series of tenements that framed the plaza on two sides. After her marriage to a fellow Orleanian in 1811, she left Louisiana and moved to France, where she chose to live in Paris. In 1831, she returned to New Orleans, discovering that her tenements on the square were run-down and had become a poor source of income. Estranged from her husband, Micaela nonetheless went back to France where, in 1834, her father-in-law attempted to murder her. The old man had long been obsessed with the control of her fortune. Still, less than two years after having her chest riddled with bullets, the Baronne was making plans to beautify her native city. She decided to tear down her tenements to create, right in the middle of New Orleans, a paraphrase of the Palais Royal. The oldest public square of Paris, it was framed with red-

²²⁵ Upton, op.cit., 331.

²²⁶ *Daily Picayune*, 26 November 1848, quoted in Leonard V. Huber and Samuel Wilson, Jr., *Baroness Pontalba's Buildings: Their Site and the Remarkable Woman who Built Them*, New Orleans: Louisiana Landmarks Society, 1966, 34.

²²⁷ *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 24 March 1840, quoted in Frink, op.cit., 185.

²²⁸ At the limits of the French Quarter was the Place Publique, also known as Congo Square, where the Blacks gathered on Sunday for market and dancing. For most of the nineteenth century, it was considered an unrespectable place of the city, although a circus attracted ladies and gentlemen there for a few years. Frink, op.cit., 160-169.

brick buildings and vaulted arcades.²²⁹ In August 1836, the newspaper *L'Abeille de la Nouvelle-Orléans* publicized the project:

It is the intention of Madame de Pontalba to erect blocks of buildings that will bear comparison with any in this country, and challenge rivalry from abroad. In order to accomplish her design, the lots being so small in depth, it makes it necessary to ask the First Municipality to relinquish the sidewalk to Madame de Pontalba for the purpose of erecting colonnades; the design being upon the plan of the Palais Royal of Paris. This important improvement, when carried into execution, will render that portion of our city one of the most beautiful and pleasant for residence at all seasons of the year, that can be found in our metropolis. The Council of the First Municipality cannot, in our view, hesitate a moment about the request of Madame de Pontalba when they take into consideration the beauty and importance of the project.²³⁰

As she developed on and off her project in the following decade, Micaela also decided that the plaza which separated her buildings needed to be revamped. Through her Orleanian agent, she submitted to the city council in August 1846 a plan for “the useful improvements that might be made to the Place d’Armes.”²³¹ The Baronne was willing to finance the transformation of the plaza into “a garden smiling with verdure during the entire year,” in exchange for a tax break on her buildings.²³²

The improvements proposed by the Baronne - a female outsider - met with a fair share of resistance within Creole circles. Her philanthropy was notably ridiculed in *Le Taenarion*, a satiric journal:

Almonester! Death did not end your generosity;
Your daughter extends it with luminosity.
In the midst of her celebrations
She has noticed our vexations
And abandons her security
To battle our impurity.
She comes, that apparition,
To better our condition,
Our squalor to abate
And a philanthropist to reincarnate.²³³

Painted as a petty socialite who had the pretence of purifying New Orleans of its immorality, the Baronne was received with contempt. She also had her supporters, however, notably within the American commercial circles of the city. A writer for the *Daily Delta* described

²²⁹ Today known as Place des Vosges, Place Royale was inaugurated in 1612 and became the prototype of residential square in European cities. For the biography of the Baronne, see Vella, op.cit.

²³⁰ *L'Abeille de la Nouvelle-Orléans*, 15 August 1836, quoted in Huber, op.cit., 30.

²³¹ Quoted in Vella, op.cit., 273.

²³² Council Minutes, First Municipality, 14 October 1850, in *ibid.*, 273.

²³³ Félix de Courmont, *Le Taenarion : Satires Périodiques*, New Orleans, 1846, quoted in Vella, op.cit., 273-274.

Micaela as “a fine-looking, middle-aged lady, with a bright eye, intelligent expression, vivacious manners, and energetic movements...declaring her determination to devote the rest of her life to the improvement and advancement of her native city.”²³⁴ Although the First Municipality approved at first of the plan for the plaza, before long it reneged on the deal: there would be no tax break for the Baronne. She therefore did not finance the renovation of the plaza. Between 1849 and 1851, Micaela returned to New Orleans, where she closely supervised the construction of two rows of red-brick buildings in the Georgian style, adorned with cast-iron lace galleries, not yet in common use in the visual landscape of the French Quarter. In the end, the City Council went on with the beautification of the square, which was transformed in 1851 into the garden envisioned by the Baronne.

Historians usually interpret the transformation of the Place d’Armes into Jackson Square as the main product of the ethnic rivalries that divided Creole and Americans in the antebellum period.²³⁵ Beyond local politics (from which the Baronne was much removed), few have speculated over her motivations in creating this unique space.²³⁶ As an absentee landlord, she definitely sought to reap financial benefits from the enterprise. Her “philanthropy” to her native city was undeniably self-interested. Still, evidence clearly suggests that she sought to recreate Parisian fashionable life in the centre of New Orleans. A great urbanite who dreaded country life, Micaela was a Parisian at heart. When in the French Capital, she often promenaded along the Champs d’Élysée and in the Bois de Boulogne. In the first part of the nineteenth century, the Palais Royal was the *centre du plaisir*, “the concentration of fashion and intellect in Paris.”²³⁷ “A natural development” of the pleasure gardens of the previous decades, it was an enclosed environment, where ladies and

²³⁴ *Daily Delta*, 8 December 1850, quoted in *ibid.*, 275. Once the buildings were completed, the *Daily Delta* encouraged their readers “to take their Sunday walk in that direction to see the great improvement which our city has undergone by the zealous efforts and self-sacrifice of our fair fellow citizen. Seldom do we see members, however rich, of our community tax their fortunes to such a degree for the probable benefit which may accrue to the place of their nativity, and when such generosity is evinced, it is worth noticing, as encouragement to other wealthy individuals.” *Daily Delta*, 3 January 1851, quoted in Huber, *op.cit.*, 45.

²³⁵ Lawrence N. Powell, ed. *The New Orleans of George Washington Cable: The 1887 Census Office Report*, Baton Rouge : Louisiana State University Press, 2008, 11-12.

²³⁶ The Baronne was opposed to the division of the city in three municipalities, according to the article published in the *Daily Delta* in December 1850, which suggest that ethnic rivalries were probably not one of her motivations. Mary Ryan, for her part, interprets the renovation of the Place d’Armes by the Baronne uniquely for aesthetic reasons, contrasting her work with “another class of women” who “remodeled the built environment of the North, but for more than aesthetic reasons.” Ryan, *op.cit.*, 1990, 62. Evidences gathered here refute this argument.

²³⁷ Olsen, *op.cit.*, 225.

gentlemen came to shop, promenade, and socialize.²³⁸ During the day, ladies could have a drink or a small meal in one the sumptuously decorated cafés where the company in attendance was mixed. At night, they could go with their families in one of the respectable restaurants at a *prix-fixe*.²³⁹ In New Orleans, needless to say, cafés and restaurants were off limits for the virtuous woman. The objective of the Baronne was not only to create a visual replica of the Palais Royal, but also a functional one. The lower floors of her buildings were designed for “fancy dry goods merchants” and the upper floors for “the elite of our society.” The renovated plaza was designed as to become a “seat of fashion,” that presented “a view as beautiful as that of the Boulevards of Paris, possessing much of their appearance withal.”²⁴⁰ Micaela fashioned in the midst of New Orleans an agreeable and respectable public space, fenced and guarded, where strolling ladies and gentlemen could sit on one of the long circular benches after a little shopping or watched their children play, protected from vagrants and women of ill-repute.²⁴¹ The Baronne de Pontalba thus imprinted on her native city her civic identity as a fashionable woman. The primary beneficiaries of these improvements would be, in the decades to come, the ladies of the French Quarter.

For most of the Civil War, New Orleans was an occupied city. Yet ladies proved remarkably unwilling to be contained by the Yankees. After taking the city in April 1862, the Union army faced a major problem: rebellious confederate women who used the streets to manifest their discontent against the occupation troops. To prevent a revolt of prisoners, Major General Benjamin Butler issued the General Order No. 28, on May 15:

As the officers and soldiers of the United States have been subjected to repeated insults from the women (calling themselves ladies) of New Orleans, in return for the most scrupulous noninterference and courtesy on our part, it is ordered that hereafter when any female shall, by word, gesture, or movement, insult or show contempt for any officer or soldier of the United States, she shall be regarded and held liable to be treated as a woman of the town plying her avocation.

The menace effectively silenced the troublesome ladies of New Orleans who, henceforth, policed their own behavior. “Beast Butler” scandalized the elites of the Western World, yet manipulated with great political flair the long-standing divide between respectable and

²³⁸ Conlin, loc.cit., 46.

²³⁹ The English traveler Mrs. Trollope who had a delicious dinner in a restaurant of the Palais Royal in 1835, noted, “What an singular mode of existence is this, and how utterly inconceivable to English feelings!” Mrs. Trollope, *Paris and the Parisians in 1835*, 246-47, quoted in Olsen, op.cit., 215.

²⁴⁰ *Daily Delta*, 3 January 1851, quoted in Huber, op.cit., 46.

²⁴¹ Vella, op.cit., 274-75. On the gentrification of the Place d’Armes, see also Dell Upton, “The Master Street of the World: The Levee,” Zeynep Celik, Diane Favro, and Richard Ingersoll, eds, *Streets: Critical Perspectives on Public Space*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, 277-288.

unrespectable women in the southern city, and thus effectively contained the ladies of New Orleans.²⁴² In October 1862, an English traveler noted:

Ladies ventured out as little as possible; and the half-empty streets were left to Federal officers and soldiers, negroes, curious nurse-girls, dogs, and mosquitoes. By eight P.M. the city seemed fast asleep; not twenty people apparently being abroad after that hour. By ten P.M. even the few bar-rooms and billiards saloons which had been open would be deserted and closed; no theatre, opera, or social gathering could be sustained; people seemed pleased another day was gone; and New Orleans, in October 1862, exceeded in dullness any little country-town I ever saw the day after market-day.²⁴³

When Butler was replaced by the conciliatory Nathaniel Banks in December, the ladies resumed their demonstrations of confederate patriotism. Something had changed, however. Unwilling to be confused with the “women of the town,” they now chose more carefully how and where they would express their political resistance. In February 1863, thousands of ladies gathered on the Levée, the fashionable promenade of the city. “There were quite a number of prisoners to be taken in a gun boat up the Mississippi River to be exchanged,” Annie Jeter Carmouche remembered. Armed with handkerchiefs and parasols, the distinctive accessories of ladyhood, they cheered the departing officers and refused to disband. When the ladies finally dispersed, “many lost slippers, handkerchiefs, parasols and fans, as well as small flags, all of which were sent North as trophies.”²⁴⁴ A number of women were slightly injured in the confusion.²⁴⁵ Proud of the countenance of her female counterparts, Carmouche glued a poem dedicated to *La Bataille des Mouchoirs* into her scrapbook.²⁴⁶

It was not the first time that southern ladies manifested their political opinions in a liminal space of the city. As early as the 1840s, they started to attend political rallies in the parks and squares of the urban South.²⁴⁷ Gertrude Clanton Thomas went to her first political

²⁴² Historians have extensively written about the reaction of New Orleans’s women. According to Drew Gilpin Faust, “Confederate women fled from the responsibility of empowerment into the reassuring safety of traditions protective shelter.” Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, op.cit., p.211. Catherine Clinton insists instead on the limited possibilities of contestations available to women. “Public Women’ and Sexual Politics in the American Civil War,” Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, eds, *Battle Scars: Gender and Sexuality in the American Civil War*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006, 61-77. See also Crystal N. Feimster, “General Benjamin Butler & the Threat of Sexual Violence during the American Civil War,” *Daedalus*, Spring 2009, vol.138, no.2, 126-134; Jacqueline G. Campbell, “There is No Difference between a He and a She Adder in Their Venom: Benjamin F. Butler, William T. Sherman, and Confederate Women,” *Louisiana History*, winter 2009, vol.50, no.1, 5-24.

²⁴³ W.C. Corsan, *Two Months in the Confederate States: An Englishman’s Travels Through the South*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996, 18.

²⁴⁴ Annie Jeter Carmouche Memoirs, 36, Tulane Special Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

²⁴⁵ Faust, op.cit., 213; see also Leonard V. Huber, “The Battle of the Handkerchiefs,” *Civil War History*, March 1962, vol.8, no.1, 48-53.

²⁴⁶ Annie J. Carmouche, Scrapbook, 1866, 4, Tulane Special Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

²⁴⁷ Mary Kelley, *Learning to Stand & Speak : Women, Education, and Public Life in America’s Republic*, Chapel Hill : Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, University of North Carolina Press, 2006, 28-29.

meeting in Augusta in 1855. “Never having attended a meeting of the kind” she “was quite pleased”:

The day before I was in town to hear Stephens. He spoke against “the know nothings” at the City Hall Park in a speech of two hours length. A free dinner had been provided at the Waynesboro depot to which the ladies were invited. I with my usual curiosity wished to go but was afraid I would meet no one else there... I afterwards saw Mrs Fanning and she wished to go with Alphonso Walton as our escort and Sis Anne we rode round. Found at the Ladies Depot only a small crowd. As a matter of course Mrs William Eve was there with Eva (who is home during vacation from [then she names several ladies] We had a very plain cold substantial dinner – Having an excellent appetite I did justice to all I could get. After dinner Stephens was toasted and rising at the close of a few remarks.²⁴⁸

In an Augusta park the first seeds that would lead Gertrude Clanton Thomas - the daughter and wife of cotton planters - to become a leading woman suffragist in the South were planted.

Ladies envisioned promenades and parks as their own respectable spaces within the southern city and they demanded that they be kept clean, safe, and orderly. Long before the Civil War, “women played an active role in creating the urban spaces they occupied.”²⁴⁹ Being able to influence the production of space is an important means to augment social power in any society. Women such as Harriot Horry, Micaela Almonester de Pontalba, and the female petitioners of Mobile were determined ‘to redesign the city for their own purpose.’²⁵⁰ Their efforts were largely successful because they conformed to the patriarchal ideology that called for a separation of ladies from the depraved elements of the slaveholding society. Yet, parks and promenades were fundamentally hybrid social spaces, where ladies, although on formal display, were able to assert themselves publicly and politically. As such, these elite women became agents of social transformation in a profoundly conservative society.

²⁴⁸Alexander Hamilton Stephens was a U.S. congressman who would become the vice-president of the Confederacy. 19 August 1855, Burr, op.cit., 132-33.

²⁴⁹ Most historians located this transformation at the end of the nineteenth century. Daphne Spain, *How Women Saved the City*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001, 3.

²⁵⁰ Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, 284.

The spatial practices of plantation women when they spent a season in town cannot be reduced to a series of exclusions, since the southern city was not a male public space. As the historian follows ladies as they shopped, visited, and promenaded in Charleston and New Orleans, he or she needs, Georgina Hickey explains, “to understand urban development outside the economic realms and get at issues of respectability, morality, and social order.”²⁵¹ While most elite women were afraid of being associated with the depraved, they nonetheless refused to be confined to domestic spaces. They left their home to pray, socialize, shop, exercise, gossip, do charity work, flirt, or even to be alone. To channel these respectable ladies, municipal authorities became, in the nineteenth century, providers of “places inviting and agreeable to ladies.” Elite women, themselves, actively sought to expand respectable public spaces. With their gardens, parks, petitions, and benevolent associations, they became the housekeepers of their city.²⁵² The spatial gains they made, however, came at the exclusion of other urbanites, black and white, free and enslaved, male and female. Privileged by their racial and class identities, ladies were nonetheless disadvantaged by their gender. Venturing beyond the respectable geography of the city was enough to endanger one’s ladyhood.

While Jack Tar and his fancy woman long incarnated depravity in the slaveholding city, it took a new shape after the Civil War. When the black man no longer belonged to the family of the white, he became the main threat, the planter and politician Wade Hampton claimed:

Why, even now that the result of the elections is revealed, the City of Charleston resembles a Dahomey town, or camp, rather than a Christian city in a Christian land! Ladies dare not leave their home after nightfall, and hardly in the daytime, for fear of being maltreated by Negro ruffians in the street; - the very schoolgirls going to and coming from school are liable to the grossest personal insult; while Negro policemen have not hesitated to shoot down quiet citizens, walking towards their offices of business, upon the first indications of a row precipitated by roughs and villains of their own color.²⁵³

Once more, white women’s bodies were emblems of southern masculinity, political objects to be protected. The aging Mary Pringle, who had long walked unescorted in Charleston, was

²⁵¹ Georgina Hickey, *Hope and Danger in the New South City: Working-Class Women and Urban Development in Atlanta, 1890-1940*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003, 3.

²⁵² By “providing food, clothing, shelter, and medical care to the poor and unfortunate” these female organizations “obviously resembled homemaking and thus constituted a “natural” female task,” Elizabeth Enstam York notes. *Women and the Creation of Urban Life: Dallas, Texas, 1843-1920*, College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1998, 51. See also Maureen A. Flanagan, *Seeing with their Hearts: Chicago Women and the Vision of the Good City, 1871-1933*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002, 87.

²⁵³ Wade Hampton, quoted in Margaret Hayne Harrison, *A Charleston Album*, Rindge, New Hampshire: Richard R. Smith Publisher, 1953, 97.

now afraid to go out alone, disturbed by “the conversation of two tipsy negro men.”²⁵⁴ The military forces in charge of reconstructing the southern city, however, sought to reassure the ladies. Emulating antebellum municipal governments, they became providers of respectable amusements, thus asserting their authority and their ability to protect ladies. For instance, when the Aldermen of Mobile had sponsored a public concert in Bienville Square in 1859, the *Mobile Register* enthusiastically stated: “The City Fathers... planned this nice little entertainment for their grateful children.”²⁵⁵ The same logic underlay the concerts sponsored by the military governor in postbellum Charleston. “How are the Military Satraps behaving in Charleston? Or, rather, the King of the Two Carolinas, as they call Sickles in some of the Newspapers” Mary Wayne asked her sister Ann Vanderhorst in September 1867. “I hear, he drives a splendid carriage & out riders, & quite in a Kingly style; as the former British Governors used to do, when S.C. was a Provenge [*sic*] to the Crown of England; - & that he sends his fine Band of music, every Wednesday afternoon to play at the Charleston Hotel; - do you attend its sometimes? - & how often does he have it to play on the battery for the ladies?”²⁵⁶ Writing from the north, Mary Wayne was still much interested in what was happening in her native city.

“Charleston looks very dull after leaving the gay and busy New York,” Ann Vanderhorst had declared twenty years earlier.²⁵⁷ By the time her daughter Raven reached adulthood, she also thought that Charleston was “such a dull city.”²⁵⁸ Compared with New York, Philadelphia, Paris or London, southern cities were indeed small and provincial. Once she completed her buildings on Jackson Square, the Baronne de Pontalba eagerly returned to Paris, where she died in 1874. Still, to many well-traveled plantation women, the southern city remained a special place. To Eliza Middleton Fisher, even after she moved to

²⁵⁴ Richard N. Côté, *Mary's World: Love, War, and Family Ties in Nineteenth-century Charleston*, Mount Pleasant, S.C.: Corinthian Books, 28. Elite women's fear of African-American men was also a new and growing phenomenon in the country. See Jane Turner Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood, 1865-1895*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2003, 144.

²⁵⁵ *Mobile Register*, 2 September 1859, quoted in Harriet E. Amos, *Cotton City: Urban Development in Antebellum Mobile*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1985, 165-166.

²⁵⁶ Mary Morris Wayne to Ann Morris Vanderhorst, 3 September 1867, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston, South Carolina.

²⁵⁷ Ann Vanderhorst to John Vanderhorst, 31 October 1847, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston, South Carolina.

²⁵⁸ Raven Vanderhorst Lewis to John Vanderhorst, 17 September 1858, Vanderhorst Family Papers, South Carolina Historical Association, Charleston, South Carolina.

Philadelphia, Charleston remained her “dear dull dirty native city.”²⁵⁹ Like many plantation women, the southern city was the place where she first discovered the bustle of urban life, with its perils, pleasures, and opportunities.

²⁵⁹ Eliza Cope Harrison, *Best Companions: Letters of Eliza Middleton Fisher and Her Mother, Mary Hering Middleton, from Charleston, Philadelphia, and Newport, 1839-1846*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001, 23.

Epilogue
Lives offered “on the Altar of the Country”

New Orleans is, among cities, the most feminine of women, always using the old standard of feminine distinction.

Were she in reality the woman she is figuratively, should we not say that she is neither tall nor short, fair nor brown, neither grave nor gay? But is she not in truth more gay than grave? Has she not been called frivolous? It is so easy nowadays to call a woman frivolous. In consequence the wholesome gayety of the past seems almost in danger of being reproached out of sight, if not out of existence. It is true, New Orleans laughs a great deal. And although every household prefers at its head a woman who can laugh, every household, ruled by a woman who cannot laugh, asperses the laugh as frivolous.

Cities and women are forgetting how to laugh.

- Grace King, *New Orleans: The Place and the People*, 1895

In February 1861, Mary Chesnut was very unhappy to return to *Mulberry*, the family plantation in South Carolina. After spending two years in Washington as the wife of a senator, she felt that, “going back to Mulberry to live was indeed offering up my life on the altar of country.”¹ Having divided the last two decades between the country seat of her in-laws, a summer residence called *Sandy Hill*, and a town house in provincial Camden, she felt at ease in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the Capital.² Returning to *Mulberry* after this urban interlude placed a great stress on her marriage. “We had some terrible matrimonial squalls last night,” she confided in her diary, “being away in the woods does not bring *peace*.”³ Ironically, war brought some of the most fulfilling years in Mary Chesnut’s life. As she followed her husband to Charleston, Montgomery, Richmond, and Columbia, Chesnut thrived, fully engaged in the social life of the Confederacy.⁴ The “rebel born” liked every second of it: people, parties, animation, political intrigues, and even the soundscape of Richmond. “I am reveling in the noise of city life that I so dearly love...Nothing more cheering than the cry of the poor whippoorwill will break the silence at *Sandy Hill*. Except, as

¹ C. Van Woodward and Elizabeth Muhlenfeld, eds, *The Private Mary Chesnut: The Unpublished Civil War Diaries*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1984, 5.

² C. Vann Woodward, ed., *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981, xxxvii.

³ Idem, op.cit., 1984, 8.

⁴ Idem, op.cit., 1981, 4.

night draws in, the screech owl will add his moanful note. The streets here are gay with soldiers.”⁵

As Sherman’s army marched to the sea, however, Chesnut started reconsidering her dislike of plantation life. “Took a sad farewell look at Mulberry – that I have always hated,” she noted in December 1864. “Now I think, perhaps I may have been mistaken. It is a magnificent old country seat. Old oaks, green lawns, and all...once so hated, now so beloved.”⁶ Long experienced as a dull and frustrating place, the plantation nonetheless represented the wealth, security, and privileges that were now fading away. When her husband inherited *Mulberry* after the war, Mary Chesnut finally became the plantation mistress she had never been before.⁷ Her body more than ever tied to the country now, her soul lingered in the city. Until her death in 1886, she dedicated most of her free time to writing about the years spent in the cities of the Old South, either as a southern belle or as the wife of a politician.⁸ A subtle mix of the serious and the frivolous, Mary Chesnut’s work is an ode to a time when cities and women used to laugh.

In the plantation mythology that emerged after the Civil War, there was no room for restless, urbane, and ambitious women. Even less was it so for women such as Mary Chesnut who depicted slavery as a “monstrous system.”⁹ From Virginia to Texas, the descendants of the great planting families actively worked at creating the mythology of “a harmonious and hierarchical society of pure, self-sacrificing women; elegant, noble, and brilliant cavaliers; and grateful, docile slaves.”¹⁰ The Lost Cause was, in sum, the “remembrance of things imagined.”¹¹ Through organizations, historical societies, genealogies, memoirs, novels, paintings, and poems, these mythmakers reinvented the past.¹² In their idealized South, masters lived year-round on their plantations, in close physical and emotional proximity with

⁵ Ibid, 183.

⁶ Ibid., 696-97.

⁷ Elisabeth Showalter Mulhenfeld, “Mary Boykin Chesnut: Civil War Redux,” Marjorie Julian Spruill, Valinda W. Littlefield, and Joan Marie Johnson, eds, *South Carolina Women: Their Lives and Times*, vol.1, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009, 241.

⁸ Mary Boykin Chesnut, *Two Novels*, edited by Elisabeth Mulhenfeld and with an introduction by Elizabeth Hanson, Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002.

⁹ Chesnut, quoted in Mulhenfeld, loc.cit., 250.

¹⁰ Frederic Cople Jaher, *The Urban Establishment: Upper Strata in Boston, New York, Charleston, Chicago, and Los Angeles*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 416.

¹¹ Caroline Clinton, “Southern Women and the Civil War,” *Journal of Women’s History*, vol.8, no.3, fall 1996, 167.

¹² Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1987; Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920*, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980; Karen L. Cox, *Dixie’s Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003.

their slaves. Portrayed as the conscience of the region, the plantation mistress was celebrated as the mother of a white and black family. The Lost Cause, however, was primarily a rehabilitation of southern masculinity. At a collective level, Drew Gilpin Faust writes, “it was intended to rehabilitate the larger system of patriarchy as well as the egos of individual southern men.”¹³ Since cities had long been presented as emasculating, they needed to vanish from the world the slaveholders made. Seasonal migrations, town houses, and urban pleasures thus faded from the memory of the Old South. In *Plantation Parades* (1945), the journalist Harnett Kane lauded Aglaé Bringier as a plantation mistress, who “made The Hermitage an abode of rest and careful order. The family tells how at one time she had fifty overnight guests – with fifty separate breakfasts ready for the serving whenever they came down the next morning, two or three at a time, or one trailing after the other from the crowded halls and bedrooms and side buildings.”¹⁴ Never does Kane (nor “the family”) mention Aglaé’s life in New Orleans, surrounded at *Melpomene* by her children and grandchildren. Some of the suburban villas of the planting elite were eventually converted into house-museums, still presented today to thousands of visitors as plantation houses which would have been, once upon a time, surrounded by neat rows of slave cabins and fertile cotton fields.¹⁵ Plantation memory was thus superimposed on the urban landscape.

With her chronicles of plantation life, Elizabeth Allston Pringle became one of these great mythmakers.¹⁶ At the death of her mother in 1896, she decided to purchase *Chicora Wood*, her father’s main plantation, “and devote the rest of my life to keeping it in the family.”¹⁷ Although she knew it “would condemn me to a very isolated existence, with much hard work and anxiety,” she never regretted her decision. “With my horses, my dogs, my books, and piano, my life has been a very full one.”¹⁸ A childless widow, she is presented by her biographer as “the indestructible woman,” a protofeminist figure “succeeding in a man’s world, imposing control over men and events and establishing for herself a new order of

¹³ Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996, 252-253.

¹⁴ Harnett T. Kane, *Plantation Parade: The Grand Manner in Louisiana*, New York: William Morrow and Company, 1945, 78.

¹⁵ Randolph Delehanty and Van Jones Martin, *Classic Natchez*, Savannah & New Orleans: Martin-St. Martin, foreword by Wendell Garrett, 1996, 26; Lisa C. Tolbert, *Constructing Townscapes: Space and Society in Antebellum Tennessee*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999, 226.

¹⁶ Patience Pennington [Elizabeth W.A. Pringle], *A Woman Rice Planter*. New York: MacMillan, 1913.

¹⁷ Pringle, quoted in Charles Joyner, “Elizabeth Allston Pringle: A Woman Rice Planter,” *South Carolina Women: Their Lives and Times*, op.cit., 198.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

financial security and personal happiness.”¹⁹ All things considered, however, Pringle appears as anything but a subversive woman. She willingly chose to offer her life on the altar of the country. As such, she was the ultimate self-sacrificial woman, pursuing the patriarchal ideal of agrarian independence at a time when there was neither wealth nor power to be derived from planting.

Pringle was especially critical of women who refused to make the same sacrifice. In her *Chronicles of Chicora Wood*, she blamed the financial demise of her family on the selfish desire of her aunt Ann to live in the city:

Just before the war my mother’s brother, Captain Tom Petigru, of the navy, died, leaving a childless widow. She lived in Charleston, in her beautiful home with large yard and garden, at the corner of Bull and Rutledge Streets, and was a rich woman, as riches were counted in those days – owning a large farm in Abbeville County... and also a rice-plantation, “Pipe Down,” on Sandy Island on the Waccamaw, not far from my father’s estates, also one hundred Negroes. As soon as Uncle Tom died, Aunt Ann wrote to my father, asking him as a great favor to buy her plantation and Negroes, as she felt quite unequal to the management and care of them. My father replied immediately that it was impossible for him to comply with her request, that he had his hands full managing his own property, and that he specially felt that he had already more Negroes than he desired. Aunt Ann continued her entreaties. Then the Negroes from Pipe Down began to send deputations over to beg my father to buy them... At last my father yielded.²⁰

It was not the splendid town house purchased during the same period, nor the Grand Tour in Europe, nor the end of slavery that caused in Pringle’s view the ruin of the Allston family: “this debt it was which rendered my father’s estate insolvent at the end of the war, for he died in 1864.”²¹ Pringle forgot to tell in her memoirs that the “childless widow” was in fact a mother who had buried her own children and endured a troubled marriage. Captain Tom had been an alcoholic and abusive husband who forced his wife to live in the same house with his enslaved mistress and their mulatto child.²² What the extended family had understood before the war as a meager compensation for a devoted and charitable life became, in Pringle’s narrative, the selfish urban aspirations of a spoiled woman.

¹⁹ Ibid., 206.

²⁰ Elizabeth W. Allston Pringle, *Chronicles of Chicora Wood*, Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1940, 9-10.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, *A Family of Women: The Carolina Petigrus in Peace and War*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999, 84-85.

As an apologist for country life, Pringle's contribution was nonetheless important. In reconstructing the antebellum plantation, most mythmakers of the Lost Cause presented women, "at most as ornaments and minor characters rather than owners and managers."²³ In contrast, Pringle placed herself (and to a lesser extent her mother Adèle) at the center of the plantation world. She "subverted conventional literary discourse by creating a female active voice within the patriarchal tradition," Charles Joyner writes, "removing woman from the passive role."²⁴ Like Pringle, historians have usually ignored the urban life of elite white women, yet they have extensively documented their rural life, showing their key contribution to the plantation economy. Considering the extensive scholarship on southern white women, their invisibility in recent studies is puzzling. In *The Sugar Masters* (2005), for instance, Richard Follett discards the idea that Louisiana planters might have been absentees, insisting that they were residential landlords.²⁵ Then the historian goes on to describe a plantation world in which there are plenty of women, yet they are overwhelmingly blacks and enslaved. White women do not figure in his story. Perhaps the daughters, wives, and mothers of these planters were all gone for a season in town? Or perhaps elite white women are still lost in an epistemological limbo, somewhere along the city-and-country continuum?

In any case, at the very moment the Lost Cause movement celebrated the old plantation, elite southerners resolutely turned their back on rural life. Numerous southern women encouraged fathers, husbands, and sons to embrace a modern life in the city. The New South would be established on new men and new cities.²⁶ More openly than ever, elite white women expressed contempt for rural life. While her husband tried unsuccessfully to turn a profit out of a plantation worked by freedpeople, a young woman refused to permanently settle with him in the country. In February 1869, she told her mother:

We have not the means, and no longer wish to live in the country. I was not born to a country life, and will not consent to have our children become country men. My whole nature abhors this. As to planting cotton in the middle country, the suggestion horrifies me. I consented to live on the Santee only because I knew it was something transient; but to settle down to a country life in the South, or indeed anywhere except very near a city, I will never agree to. If [my husband] gives up these plantations I hope

²³ Jane Turner Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood, 1865-1895*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003, 151.

²⁴ Joyner, loc.cit., 206.

²⁵ Richard Follett, *The Sugar Masters: Planters and Slaves in Louisiana's Cane World, 1820-1860*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005.

²⁶ Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990.

he will be able to invest the little money he has in Charleston, as we can afford to go nowhere else.²⁷

In her study of the reconstruction of white womanhood in the upper South, Jane Turner Censer remarks, “in this depressed era, women would be in vanguard of hostility to plantation living and agricultural pursuits.”²⁸ Women now voiced feelings they had previously felt unable to express.

Following the civil war, some women were constrained to resume a rural life they had long loathed, primarily for economic reasons. In times of scarcity, even the most urban appreciated the simplicity and self-sufficiency of the country. The plantation also sheltered these proud women from the scrutinizing eyes of the town. In May 1869, Gertrude Clanton Thomas noted in her diary: “I shrink from going in town – I am glad that the children having measles will be a good excuse to account for my absence...I am so proud I would dislike for anyone to suspect how much my pride has been mortified.”²⁹ Used to define herself through the wealth of her family, Thomas suffered because she was not able to afford elegant dresses or new carpets for her parlor.³⁰ In due time, however, many of these plantation women adjusted to new realities and reinvented themselves. In the last decades of her life, Thomas became a schoolteacher, a suffragist, and a member of the Daughters of the Confederacy. She also moved to Atlanta, to be near her children. There, she perhaps met Rebecca Felton Latimer, the young girl from Macon who “loved to dance like [she] loved candy,” who was also a suffragist, and later became the first female senator in the history of the United States.³¹ A white supremacist, Latimer was nonetheless a great critic of the peculiar institution. “If there had been no slaves there would have been no war,” she stated in her memoirs. “To fight for the perpetuation of domestic slavery was a mistake. The time had come in the United States to wipe out this evil.”³² The emancipation of southern white women from dependency and submission to patriarchal authority would arise in the towns and cities of the region.

²⁷ Richard N. Côté, *Mary's World: Love, War, and Family Ties in Nineteenth-Century Charleston*, Mount Pleasant: Corinthian Books, 2004, 318.

²⁸ Censer, *op.cit.*, 140.

²⁹ Virginia Ingraham Burr, ed., *The Secret Eye: The Journal of Ella Gertrude Clanton Thomas, 1848-1889*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990, 314-15.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

³¹ Rebecca Latimer Felton, *Country Life in Georgia in the Days of My Youth*, New York: Arno Press, 1980 (1919), 61.

³² *Ibid.*, 87. Few of her contemporaries acknowledged the centrality of slavery to the Civil War. See David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001.

In *The Awakening* (1899), Kate Chopin tells the story of an elite southern woman's emancipation.³³ Married to a Creole businessman and the mother of two sons, Edna Pontellier struggles with what her husband – and society – expects of her. In the winter, she lives in an elegant town house in New Orleans, where she plays the perfect hostess to her husband's business relations. In the summer, she migrates to Grand Isle, a summer resort on the Gulf Coast, inhabited during the week by mothers, children, and black nannies who await the fathers' return on Fridays. In the background, there is also the old family plantation in Iberville Parish. As Edna rejects the ideal of domesticity and awakens to her own desires, her mobility expands. For hours, she perambulates in the streets of the city, becoming a “*flâneuse* – an urban woman, free, confident, in charge of her life, striding or strolling down the avenues, an observer and constructor of public life.”³⁴ Deciding to earn a living from selling her paintings, she moves out of the family mansion into a small cottage nearby, a room of her own. She also crosses the frontier between respectability and unrespectability by having an affair with another man. For Chopin, the emancipation of Edna cannot be the mimicking of masculine ideals of power and success. Neither can it be the embracing of feminine ideals of interdependence. Edna awakens as she pursues her own desires, and thus neglects the desires of others, starting with those of her husband and children. Such radical female emancipation remained impossible at the turn of the twentieth century, condemning Edna to a tragic death. A controversial novel at the time of its publication, *The Awakening* reminds us that the body, the home, and the street have long been important arenas of conflict for women. In the South, they were political territories, as were the plantation and the ballot box.

What did the city mean for plantation women? The individual stories of Harriot Horry, Alice Izard, Meta Morris Grimball, Louisa St. Martin, Aglaé Bringier, Raven Vanderhorst, and Mary Chesnut reveal that cities occupied an important place in the life of these women. Many of them appreciated rural life in small doses, yet they preferred urban life. In the country, women experienced greater isolation and containment. By comparison, the city offered proximity to social networks and a greater freedom of movement. Charleston

³³ Kate Chopin, *The Awakening and Other Stories*, edited by Pamela Knights, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

³⁴ Linda Nochlin, “Afterword,” Aruna D’Souza and Tom McDonough, eds, *The Invisible flâneuse? Gender, Public Space, and Visual Culture in Nineteenth-Century Paris*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008 (2006), 173. See also Helen Taylor, “Walking through New Orleans: Kate Chopin and the Female Flâneur,” *Southern Quarterly*, vol.37, nos 3-4, spring-summer 1999, 21-29.

and New Orleans meant refinement, pleasure, society, promenades, intellectual stimulation, autonomy, and self-assertion. Even though a number of plantation women – especially the religious - were somewhat ambivalent about the moral and sexual dangers of the city, fearing the frivolity that “effeminates the mind,” they still prized the accessibility of churches and the opportunities for benevolence. In all cases, however, their enjoyment of the city was based on the exploitation of the enslaved, either in the cotton fields or the urban household. Men and women of the planting elite shared many benefits of their class and race. In this profoundly patriarchal society, though, women remained subordinated by their gender. Many planters were aware that their wives and daughters loved urban life. Patriarchs, therefore, asserted their authority over their female dependents by giving them a season of gaiety or a dower house in town. Rewards reinforced the dependency relations between men and women, as they did between masters and slaves. When plantation women rejected rural life altogether, as some did, their actions had the potential to destabilize a society founded on the agricultural pursuits of independent men. In the Old South, the city appeared to many plantation women as an emancipatory space. Whether they were young belles, middle aged matrons or older widows, they overwhelmingly took pleasure in a season in town, which alleviated their gender oppression. We must remember that cities and women used to laugh.

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Sodders, Richard L. "The Theatre Management of Alexandre Placide in Charleston, 1794-1812," Ph.D. Dissertation, Louisiana State University, 1983.

Curriculum Vitae

MARISE BACHAND

Post-Secondary Education and Degrees

University of Western Ontario
Ph.D. History (2002-11)

Université du Québec à Montréal
M.A. History, minor in Feminist Studies (2002)

Université du Québec À Montréal
B.A. History, minor in Feminist Studies (1998)

Honours and Awards

Post-Doctoral Fellowship, Université de Montréal/ French Atlantic History Group
Fonds Québécois de recherche sur la société et la culture (2011-13)

Dianne Woest Fellowship
The New Orleans Historical Collection (2008)

Doctoral Fellowship
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (2002-07)

Institute for Southern Studies Travel Grant
University of South Carolina (2006)

President's Scholarship for Graduate Study
University of Western Ontario (2002)

Graduate Tuition Scholarship
University of Western Ontario (2002-07)

Mention d'honneur – Maîtrise en histoire
Faculté des Sciences humaines, Université du Québec à Montréal (2003)

Bourse du département d'histoire
Fondation de l'Université du Québec à Montréal (1998)

Bourse Anita Caron, Études féministes
Fondation de l'Université du Québec à Montréal (1998)

Bourse PAFARC Recherche et création
Fondation de l'Université du Québec à Montréal (1998-99)

Mention d'honneur – Baccalauréat en histoire
Faculté des sciences humaines, Université du Québec à Montréal (1998)

Bourse d'entrée, Faculté des Sciences humaines
Fondation de l'Université du Québec à Montréal (1995)

Related Work Experience

Instructor
Université du Québec à Montréal (2005, 2009-11)

Instructor
Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières (2008, 2011)

Instructor
Université d'Ottawa (2008)

Instructor
Université du Québec à Rimouski (2007)

Teaching and Research Assistant
University of Western Ontario (2002-07, 2009-10)

Teaching and Research Assistant
Université du Québec à Montréal (1998-2002)

Publications

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“The Belle is in Town: or, Space as a Category of Analysis to Reconsider the History of Women in the Slaveholding South,” *McCaffrey Memorial Lecture Series*, University of Western Ontario, London, 2006.

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