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# STEALING THEIR PANTALOONS

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**"They Are Stealing Our Pantaloons: Women Journalists in the Civil War"**

The Civil War challenged the ideology of Victorian domesticity that had defined the lives of women in the antebellum era. It forced women into public life in ways they could scarcely have imagined a generation before. Some women took this as a sign to compete with the men of the press who cried, "they are stealing our pantaloons." This paper presents a typology of those women who decided to take their place in American journalism during the war, called "the crossroads of our being."

**"Stealing Their Pantaloons": Women Journalists in the Civil War**

**ABSTRACT**

In many ways, the coming of the Civil War challenged the ideology of Victorian domesticity that had defined the lives of women in the antebellum era. In the North and in the South, the Civil War forced women into public life in ways they could scarcely have imagined a generation before. In the years before the Civil War, the lives of American women were shaped by a set of ideals that historians call "the Cult of True Womanhood." "True woman" devoted their lives to creating a clean, comfortable, nurturing home for their husbands and children. The Civil War changed that as American women turned their attention to the world outside the home. Thousands of women in the North and South joined volunteer brigades and signed up to work outside the home—as nurses, spies and teachers. By the end of the war, these experiences had

expanded many Americans' definitions of "true womanhood." This was especially true for the North where the call for universal emancipation by politicians and some in the press was meant to redeem women as well as man from a servile to an equal condition. Some women took this as a sign to compete with the men of the press who cried, "they are stealing our pantaloons." This paper presents a typology of those women who decided to take their place in American journalism during the war, called "the crossroads of our being." For the women of the press, it was a transformative moment, a revolution in the understanding of woman herself.

### **"Stealing Their Pantaloons": Women Journalists in the Civil War**

The coming of the Civil War challenged the ideology of Victorian domesticity that had defined the lives of women in the antebellum era. In the North and in the South, the Civil War forced women into public life in ways they could scarcely have imagined a generation before.

In the years before the Civil War, the lives of American women were shaped by a set of ideals that historians call "the Cult of True Womanhood." As men's work moved away from the home and into shops, offices and factories, the household became a new kind of place; a private, feminized domestic sphere, a "haven in a heartless world." "True woman"

devoted their lives to creating a clean, comfortable, nurturing home for their husbands and children.

The Civil War dispelled the notion that middle-class women should focus their lives exclusively within the home. American women turned their attention to the world outside the home. Thousands of women in the North and South joined volunteer brigades and worked as nurses, spies, teachers, and some donned male military garb and joined the service—until they had to undergo a physical. A handful became journalists.

This paper is about that handful of women who from approximately 1850 to 1872 decided to compete with the men of the press, who became so distraught by their female competitors that they could be heard crying, “they are stealing our pantaloons.”

### **The Changing Winds of War on Women Journalists**

Civil War experiences expanded many Americans’ definitions of “true womanhood.” This was especially true in the North where politicians and some in the press advocated universal emancipation—including rights of women. For example, William Lloyd Garrison’s *The Liberator*, one of the most eloquent of the abolitionist organs, antagonized his critics by advocating the rights of women. He wrote, “As our object is universal emancipation—to redeem woman as well as man from a servile to an equal condition—we shall go for the RIGHTS OF WOMEN to their utmost extent.”<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, the Civil War had “created a revolution in woman herself, as important in its results as the changed conditions of the former slaves, and this silent influence is still busy,” according to the authors of the *History of Women’s Suffrage*. This revolution

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<sup>1</sup> *The Liberator*, May 31, 1844.

occurred after the men left for the battlefield, “when new channels of industry were opened to [women], the value and control of money learned, thought about political questions compelled, and a desire for their own personal, individual liberty intensified.”<sup>2</sup>

This revolution also created widows. The number of dead now stands at about 750,000. In the North alone, some 320,000 men were killed, and thousands more were maimed or died later from wounds or illnesses brought home from the battlefields. It was a country “dark with sorrowing woman”<sup>3</sup> because no woman was untouched by death, whether it be a relative, a friend, or an acquaintance.

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<sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Matilda Joslyn Gage, *History of Women's Suffrage*, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *Chapters from a Life*, p. 97.

This revolution also created few jobs to help them survive. This was no "earlier generation of "Rosie the Riveters" moving into new branches of heavy industry," writes historian J. Matthew Gallman.<sup>4</sup> Most jobs available were female defined and low paying, but desperate women were willing to take them. However, many women in the North saw their opportunities for work enlarge. Women left the confines of their homes to serve as nurses, soldiers, spies, organize relief activities, and teach the newly freed slaves. Approximately 4,000 women made up the backbone of the volunteer nursing corps that cared for wounded soldiers.

It is estimated that during the entire war some 750 women broke more drastically with convention and enlisted in the Union or Confederate armies. Although it was forbidden for women to serve in the military at the time, these women wore male disguises, used masculine names and were often only discovered by accident when being treated for injuries. One such female soldier was Mary Owens, who served under the alias of John Evans for 18 months and was discovered after receiving an arm injury.

Women also served as spies for both the Confederate and Union armies. Some of these spies gathered information by flirting with male soldiers during social gatherings and eavesdropping as they discussed important war information. These women often transported supplies, weapons and documents under their large hoop skirt. Some women served as "conductors" for the Underground Railroad. Harriet Tubman, an escaped slave, was hired as a scout spy and nurse for the Union war effort. As a "conductor" for the Underground Railroad, she made nineteen trips to the South, freeing

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<sup>4</sup> J. Matthew Gallman, *North Fights the Civil War: The Home Front*, p. 107, 105.

approximately 300 slaves. In addition, she used the cover of an aging and frail woman to gather intelligence about sectors under Confederate control. Tubman established citizen-based networks in different communities to supply union forces with information concerning troop placements, supply lines and fortifications. She also served as a guerrilla operative for the Union Army, leading successful raids behind enemy lines.<sup>5</sup>

Few, very few and almost exclusively in the North, tried their hand at journalism where they competed head on with the men of the press.

### **Women Journalists in the Civil War**

These women of the press, mostly from the North, were independent-minded women who were concerned about the abolition movement in addition to temperance and eliminating prostitution and gaining suffrage. They believed they had an acknowledged stake in a national ordeal of overwhelming importance, a personal stake in national politics.<sup>6</sup> Three types of women journalists emerge. They include: *The Passionate Journalists*, such as Jane Grey Swisshelm, Sara Clarke Lippincott, and Laura Catherine Redden; *The Compassionate Journalists*, such as Lida Dutton, Lizzie Dutton, and Sarah Steer; and *The Essayist/Novelist Journalists* such as Harriet Beecher Stowe.

Such typologies may seem a bit sexist in modern America, but these early Civil War journalists used their femininity to fight for freedoms they were denied since the founding of the country. *The Passionate Journalists* were on a mission and their successes may have opened the doors to the successful post-Civil War muckraking journalists Nellie Bly and Ida Tarbell. They sought immediate change in the status of

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<sup>5</sup> See National Women's History Museum website, [www.nwhm.org](http://www.nwhm.org)

<sup>6</sup> Lyde Cullen Sizer, *The Political Work of Northern Women Writers and the Civil War, 1850-1872*, p. 4.

women in a profession that shunned their presence. The talented Bly witnessed the same treatment when she went hunting for a job in journalism in the 1880s. She like most women at the time had to use a pen name when she fired a rebuttal to an aggressively misogynistic column in the *Pittsburgh Dispatch*. The editor was so impressed he asked the man who wrote the letter to join the paper. When he learned the man was Bly, he refused to give her the job. She was a good talker and persuaded him. It was more difficult for these Civil War journalists, who went into the job market twenty years before Bly.

*The Passionate Journalists* traded on the Victorian cultural mystique that held that women possessed higher sensibilities than men, which they claimed, gave them a right to speak out on moral issues. After the war, many of them wrote columns that sympathized with the newly freed black population. Others forged a new genre of society reporting as they chronicled the lavish entertainment of rich matrons whose wealth came from the industrial robber barons of post-Civil War America.<sup>7</sup>

*The Compassionate Journalists* had strong convictions about the future of the country and the role women would play once the fighting was over. However, they were not as political or as powerfully motivated as Swisshelm or Lippincott or Redden. Unlike *The Passionate Journalists*, they operated on the local level and their goals were to provide immediate relief and comfort to men of the military. They didn't think about any long-term impact they could have. They were like the women who plowed the field to feed the

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<sup>7</sup> Maurine H. Beasley and Sheila J. Gibbons, *Taking Their Place: A Documentary History of Women and Journalism*, p. 32.

troops. One of these young women put it this way: “I tell mother that as long as the country can’t get along without grain, nor the army fight without food, we’re serving the country just as much here in the harvest-field as our boys are on the battlefield—and sort o’ takes the edge off from this business of doing men’s work, you know.”<sup>8</sup>

Like the women in field, the intrepid couriers or the careful nurses, *The Essayist/Literary Journalists* believed women were affected deeply by the war’s social and political impacts and their stories had to be told. They wrote in literary magazines, political and religious newspapers, novels with an aim to change the way the nation saw the task it was undertaking. Two themes emerged in their writings: slavery and race and class and gender injustices.

### **The Passionate Journalists**

The most noted of these journalists was Jane Grey Swisshelm, who became the first Washington, D.C., women correspondent when Horace Greeley hired her for his *New York Tribune*. She was a feisty advocate of women’s rights and a passionate participant in the antislavery cause. As a girl, she gained the nickname Wax Doll, because of her slight build and delicate features. But later, as a journalist, her contemporaries would say, “Beware of Sister Jane!”

Her first vehement attack against slavery appeared in the *Louisville Journal* in 1842. She not only wrote but stumped whenever possible for the abolition of slavery and even became a member of the Underground Railroad. After a couple of years in Kentucky, she returned to Pittsburgh to aid her ailing mother. Now she set her pen to work. She wrote

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<sup>8</sup> Mary Livermore, *My Story of the War*, p. 148-149.

caustic pieces against slavery and for the rights of married women for the *Spirit of Liberty*, the *Pittsburgh Gazette*, and the *Daily Commercial Journal*.

When her mother died in 1847, she used whatever legacy she was left to start the *Pittsburg Saturday Visiter*. Her career as an editor began. It was an audacious little six-column sheet in which she advocated abolition, temperance, and woman suffrage, including property rights for women. She was sarcastic, spirited, convincing. And she certainly caught her male counterparts' attention.<sup>9</sup>

In her autobiography, *Half a Century*, published in 1880, she writes, "It appeared that on some inauspicious morning, each one of three-fourths of the secular editors from Maine to Georgia had gone to the office suspecting nothing, when from some corner of his exchange list there sprang upon him such a horror as he had little thought to see.

"A woman had started a political paper! A woman! Could he believe his eyes? A woman! Instantly he sprang to his feet and clutched his pantaloons, shouted to the assistant editor, when he, too, read and grasped frantically at his cassimeres, called to the reporters and pressmen and typos and devils, who all rushed in, heard the news, seized their nether garments and joined the general chorus, 'My breeches! Oh my breeches!' Here was a woman resolved to steal their pantaloons, their trousers.... The imminence of the peril called forth prompt action.

"Even the religious press could not get past the tailor shop, and 'pantaloons' was the watchword all along the line. George D. Prentiss took up the cry, and gave the world a two-third column leader on it, stating explicitly, 'She is a man all but the pantaloons.'"<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See Carolyn Johnson's America Media Profile on Jane Grey Cannon Swisshelm 1815-1884 in Anthony R. Fellow's *American Media History*, pp. 126-127.

<sup>10</sup> Jane Grey Swisshelm, *Half a Century*, pp. 105-115.

Swisshelm was particularly proud of an article she published in 1850 exposing the private life of Daniel Webster. She liked to believe that this ruined his chances of becoming president. It’s pretty obvious that she was a proponent of Lincoln, later becoming a personal friend of Mary Todd Lincoln.

Two years later after the start-up of the *Visiter*, she won the equal right to sit in the Senate press gallery on April 17, 1850, with men—despite Vice President Millard Fillmore’s warning that “the place would be very unpleasant for a lady.”<sup>11</sup>

Her marriage did not go well so she divorced her husband, and for no particular reason moved with her young daughter to St. Cloud, Minnesota, where she started the *St. Cloud Visiter* in 1857. However, her bold style was too much for those Midwesterners. When James C. Shepley, a Democratic Minnesota lawyer, gave a public lecture attacking “strong-minded women,” with Swisshelm the brunt of his attack, she retaliated. In her March 18, 1857 edition, she said Shepley had failed to mention one kind of strong-minded woman, “frontier belles who sat up all night playing poker with men.” He saw it as an undisguised attack on his wife. Her presses were smashed and the type thrown into the Mississippi River.<sup>12</sup>

Following the Civil War, she took a clerical position in the Andrew Johnson administration and also started another newspaper, the *Reconstructionist*. In it, she attacked Johnson so severely that he ousted her from his employ!

Sara Clarke Lippincott, whose pseudonym was “Grace Greenwood,” became the second Washington, D.C., woman correspondent who also argued for the reform of women’s roles and rights. While junior editor of *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, Clarke

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<sup>11</sup> Jane Grey Swisshelm, *Half a Century*, p. 130.

<sup>12</sup> Madelon Golden Schlipp and Sharon M. Murphy, *Great Women of the Press*, p. 80

contributed articles to the abolitionist paper the *National Era*. Godey’s editors thought her stories offended Southern readers and promptly fired her. The *National Era* immediately hired her as its Washington, D.C., correspondent. She also edited the serialized original version of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, as well as wrote columns, travel letters and articles. Nathaniel Hawthorne criticized her travel letters calling her an “ink-stained woman” and claimed he could do as well.<sup>13</sup>

She also wrote for the *Saturday Evening Post* of Philadelphia. In addition, she became a successful post-Civil War author of children’s books and a popular lecturer on patriotic themes before joining the *New York Times*, which sent her to Europe for an assignment in 1852. She was a columnist from 1873 to 1878, and she wrote about corruption, about the cause of women government workers, and against Hayes’ administration policies that permitted the return of white supremacy in the South.<sup>14</sup> Her articles also focused on women’s issues, such as advocating for rights of well-known British Shakespearean actress Fanny Kemble to wear trousers, Susan B. Anthony’s right to vote, and for women to receive equal pay for equal work.

These issues take up a good portion of her personal letters. In a Sept. 22, 1851 letter, to her friend, a Dr. Bailey, she told him how impressed he would be with the women of the Western Reserve by their mental and moral culture, by their individuality and entire independence. She wrote: “You hear them, among themselves, discussing not the fit of a dress, the fashion of a bonnet, or the latest pattern of a sack, but all the most important, agitating, or novel questions of the time—Anti-Slavery, Woman’s Rights,

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<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.geni.com/people/Sara-Jane-Lippincott-aka-Grace-Greenwood/6000000018067115008>

<sup>14</sup> Maurine H. Beasley and Sheila J. Gibbons, *Taking Their Place: A Documentary History of Women and Journalism*, p. 50.

Spiritual Philosophy, the New Costume.” Speaking of the new costume, she couldn’t help tell Dr. Bailey about a story of a distinguished judge who having a young law student under examination solemnly put to him a question about the new Bloomer dress. Journalist Amelia Bloomer had defended in *The Lily* at this time the right of women to appear in full pantaloons under short skirts as an alternative to the heavy constricting costumes fashionable in the mid-nineteenth century. She adopted the controversial garb herself, which drew criticisms from clergy and editors who accused women of wanting to wear “the pants in the family.”<sup>15</sup>

She told him, “As a costume for the parlor, or as a common street dress, I surely could not advocate it. But I do advocate the right of every woman to dress as she pleases—to make herself beautiful or hideous, as suits her fancy—provided no just law of delicacy is violated. The cry of immodesty, raised against the new costume, is, it seems to me, most unfounded and senseless.

“Still more ridiculous is the accusation, that the Bloomers have unlawfully appropriated the sign and symbol of masculine dignity and dominion. If, in truth, they had robbed you of your heavy, ungrateful ‘bifurcated garments,’ you ought to be inexpressibly relieved.”

Catherine Redden, who wrote under the pen name of “Howard Glyndon,” was the third Washington woman correspondent. She was stricken at an early age by spinal meningitis, a disease that made her deaf and impaired her speech. She was sent by the *St. Louis Republican* to Washington, D.C., to cover and document the American Civil War. She did that from the Senate press gallery. She was a pro-Union loyalist and wrote

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<sup>15</sup> Susan J. Kleinberg, “Introduction to the Paperback Edition,” in Dexter C. Bloomer, *Life and Writings of Amelia Bloomer*, p. xii.

poems about the experiences and human interests of the battlefield in addition to her more serious articles. During this time, she interviewed President Abraham Lincoln and became personal friends of both Lincoln and Ulysses S. Grant, who accompanied her on a tour of the battlefields, a place in which women usually weren't allowed.

Her fellow reporters knew she was a woman, but none of them was aware she also was deaf. She is thought to be the first deaf woman to succeed in the field of journalism and literature.

After the war, Redden became a European correspondent for *The New York Times*. By 1870 she returned to New York and Boston and was a staff writer for the *New York Evening Mail* and contributed to *Galaxy*, *Harper's Magazine* and the *New York Tribune*. Redden also studied articulation with Alexander Graham Bell, who taught her to speak again.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Compassionate Journalist**

In the first three years of the Civil War, Lida Dutton and her sister Lizzie and cousin Sarah Steer cared for wounded Union soldiers, as many women did,<sup>17</sup> hid them from marauding Rebel troops, and managed to hold together the farms and businesses their fathers and brothers had left behind in order to avoid being forced into the ranks of the

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<sup>16</sup> Ishbel Ross, *Ladies of the Press: The Story of Women in Journalism by an Insider* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1936), p. 332.

<sup>17</sup> Waterford Perspectives, Education Committee of The Waterford Foundation, Waterford Foundation Archives.

Confederacy. By spring of 1864, though, these three young women decided they could do more, and that nothing--not the lack of goods nor the abundance of Confederate soldiers--could thwart efforts. Within a year, they would write and publish at least eight issues of *The Waterford News*, a newspaper for Union soldiers. In each edition's four, small pages the soldiers found a tidy sampling of patriotic editorials, poetry, riddles, local news and humor:

*WANTED: A few stores... with Dry-Goods, Molasses Candy and other stationery, suited to the tastes of the community. Young and handsome Clerks not objectionable.*<sup>18</sup>

The Union soldiers ate it up which gratified the writers, as evident by their statement in their January 28, 1865 edition: "*We are gratified to receive the repeated assurance from the soldiers, for whose amusement our little paper was intended, that our efforts have not proven unavailing, but that it is a welcome visitor to their camp.*"

The *Waterford News* even passed the eyes of President Abraham Lincoln. A soldier of the 11th Rgt., Maryland Volunteers sent a letter to the President with this introduction, "To His Excellency Abraham Lincoln. Will your excellency please accept the two enclosed copies of '*Waterford News*' and excuse me for taking the liberty of sending them

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<sup>18</sup> The *Waterford News*, Vol. 1, No.'s (copies in "Civil War File" of The Thomas Balch Library, Leesburg, VA and The Waterford Foundation Archives.

to you... You will see by the Sending, the intention of the Fair Editresses in editing the Paper under the difficulties which they do. 'Tis for to aid the 'Sanitary Commission.' They have already made up nearly 1000\$ [sic] for the same purpose!”<sup>19</sup>

### **The Essayist/Literary Journalists**

The most noted female *Essayist/Literary Journalist* at the time was Harriet Beecher Stowe. When President Lincoln greeted Stowe at the White House in 1862, he said: “So you’re the little woman who wrote the book that started this great war.”<sup>20</sup> By the time of their meeting, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the book Lincoln said started the Civil War, was an international best seller.

Charles Francis Adams, the American minister to Britain during the war, argued later that, her work had a “dramatic world-influence than any other book ever printed.”<sup>21</sup> Tolstoy called the novel, which eventually sold three million copies worldwide and was translated into thirty-seven languages, a great work of literature “flowing from the love of God and man.” Alfred Kazin called it “the most powerful and most enduring work of art ever written about American slavery.”

Congressional passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and a personal tragedy drove Stowe to write her novel. The act granted Southerners the right to pursue fugitive slaves into Free States and made it illegal to assist an escaped slave. Such inhumanity

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<sup>19</sup> “Robert Todd Lincoln” papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (referred to in Oct. 6, 1955 article from *The Blue Ridge Herald*, “Lincoln Papers Reveal Waterford Had Newspaper During Civil War”; copy in Civil War File, Thomas Balch Library).

<sup>20</sup> David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln*, p. 542.

<sup>21</sup> Charles Francis Adams, *Trans-Atlantic Historical Solidarity: Lectures Delivered before the University of Oxford in Easter and Trinity Terms, 1913*. 1913. p. 79

moved Stowe to tears. She further understood the horror of being separated from family following the death of her infant son from cholera.

Her book pushed the antislavery movement. Frederick Douglass praised the book for its "keen and quiet wit, power of argumentation, exalted sense of justice, and enlightened and comprehensive philosophy."

Stowe's book also made her one of America's best-paid and most famous writers and a celebrity in America and Europe, where she spoke out against slavery. She refuted those who were leery of the authenticity of her work and who dismissed her work as abolitionist propaganda in a second book, *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Here she documented many of the stories, including those she heard from fugitive slaves with whom she came into contact. From them she learned about life in the South and the cruelty of slavery.

In his informative account of the writing, reception and modern reputation of Stowe's work, author David Reynolds celebrates Stowe as a colossal writer who mobilized public opinion against slavery, and proved, against long odds, "a white woman's capacity to enter the subjectivity of black people." In *Mightier than Sword*, he says she "paved the way" for Lincoln's election, but after her death she may have helped Lenin, who admired her novel, evade the czar's agents by escaping from Finland over "the breaking ice of the moderately frozen Orfjorden Sound." Through stage versions of the novel, he writes, she helped Henry James develop a sense of "human feelings as performative and theatrical." Through Chinese Portuguese translations, she inspired anti-colonialism in China and emancipation in Brazil, and she taught the advertising

firm J. Walter Thompson how “great masses of people can be influence through their emotions.”<sup>22</sup>

Others *Essayist/Journalists*, such as Lydia Maria Child, Fanny Fern, Mrs. E.D. E.N. Southworth, Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, Gail Hamilton, Louisa May Alcott, Rebecca Harding Davis, and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, contributed greatly to making sense of the war, womanhood, Union, slavery, republicanism, heroism, and death. Their writings appeared in sentimental novels, short stories, essays, poetry, and letters to the editor.

Perhaps the most consistent position emerging after the Civil War from these writers was an insistence on woman’s right to a voice in politics. For most this meant suffrage, perhaps not a surprising development considering the attention drawn to the issue with the proposing and passing of the Fifteenth Amendment. In a July 1868 letter to her former student Fanny Fern, Stowe wrote: “Yes, I do believe in Female Suffrage—The more I think of it the more absurd this whole government of man over woman looks.”<sup>23</sup>

## **Conclusion**

What isn’t included here are many stories about the women of the press in the South. It is unlikely male Confederate editors and publishers ever worried about women “stealing their pantaloons.” Few women wrote for the eighty newspapers published in the Confederacy at the start of the war. As a matter of fact, the Southern press had few war correspondents, let alone female reporters. They had about 100 male correspondents

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<sup>22</sup> See David S. Reynold, *Mightier than the Sword* and Andrew Delbanco’s “The Impact of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*” at <http://civilwartalk.com/threads/the-impact-of-uncle-toms-cabin.24941>

<sup>23</sup> Lyde Cullen Sizer, *The Political Work of Northern Women Writers and the Civil War, 1850-1872*, p. 249.

altogether.<sup>24</sup> In some parts of the Confederacy the press depended exclusively on volunteer correspondents and the telegraph for coverage of military operations.

Eventually some slaves were trained to print newspapers as the labor force dwindled.

Also not found here are many other voices of female journalists, such as Sarah J. Hale, who edited the most influential women's publication, *Godey's Lady's Book*. Unlike the journalists in this paper, she did not favor women's rights and never touched the subject of slavery in her magazine because she did not want to offend Southern readers.<sup>25</sup>

What is written here are some of the stories of heroic women. It wasn't easy for a woman to become politically involved at midcentury. Stowe remarked in 1850, "[n]othing but deadly determination enables me ever to write; it is rowing against wind and tide."<sup>26</sup>

Robert Penn Warren called the Civil War "the greatest single event in American history."<sup>27</sup> "It made us an is," historian Shelby Foote said, and suggested in Ken Burns's documentary film series *The Civil War*, that the great war was "the crossroads of our being."<sup>28</sup> Their writings provide a snapshot of the road that needed to be taken. For the women of press, the Civil War was a transformative moment, a revolution in the understanding of woman herself.<sup>29</sup>

Through their writings they framed their moral message for the future and placed women in the national past, to make history a province of women as well as men. They

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<sup>24</sup> Frank Luther Mott, *American Journalism: A History: 1690-1960* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1962), p. 363.

<sup>25</sup> Maurine H. Beasley and Sheila J. Gibbons, *Taking Their Place: A Documentary History of Women and Journalism*, p. 31.

<sup>26</sup> Annie Fields, ed., *Life and Letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe*, 128.

<sup>27</sup> Robert Penn Warren, *The Legacy of the Civil War*, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Geoffrey C. Ward, *The Civil War, An Illustrated History*, p. 273.

<sup>29</sup> Lyde Cullen Sizer, *The Political Works of Northern Writers and the Civil War, 1850-1872*, p 11.

wrote about women's rights, about slavery, about the battlefields, and about corruption in Washington. They touched the public's hearts, as Oliver Wendell Holmes put it, "with fire."<sup>30</sup> As a result, they "stole the men's pantaloons" and eventually won the freedoms and the rights they had previously been denied.

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<sup>30</sup> James M. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction*, p. 477.

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