

POLITICAL INFLUENCES, ACTIONS, AND EXPRESSIONS OF YOUNG, WHITE  
WOMEN IN CIVIL WAR KENTUCKY

by

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## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate my thesis to my husband, Colin. I would also like to thank him for his unwavering love and support throughout this entire process.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

During the American Civil War, Kentucky women were active participants and political actors in their communities, on the home front, as well as in their social circles. While women from all regions of the United States were affected by the war, as a border state Kentucky provided a particularly ripe environment for women to engage in debates surrounding the conflict. Kentucky was fixed directly between the North and the South where two main factions converged: those who supported the Confederacy, which supported secession, and those who sympathized with the Union in hopes the United States would remain united. This convergence created a combination or a mixture of opinions about the war in Kentucky. This study provides insights into the actions and opinions of white, Kentucky women during the Civil War by examining the diaries of two such women -- Josie Underwood and Frances Peter.<sup>1</sup> My analysis of their diaries provides an in-depth look at the views and actions of these women as well as the events they lived through and experienced. In my examination of them, I found that these diaries show that young women redefined gender roles and that they broke, recreated, and re-established physical and metaphysical spatial boundaries and definitions regarding their homes and communities. These women's personal accounts of their experiences on the home front during the war also indicate that they not only gained new freedoms but lost previous freedoms as well. Their lives were drastically changed, and understandably this influenced their opinions on the war and the respective actions they took as a result.

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<sup>1</sup> Josie Underwood, *Josie Underwood's Civil War Diary*, ed. Nancy Disher Baird (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2009); Frances Peter, *A Union Woman in Civil War Kentucky: The Diary of Frances Peter*, eds. William Cooper Jr. and John David Smith (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000).

The American Civil War (1861-1865) touched many states and lives; however, Kentucky was uniquely affected. Geographically situated between North (the Union) and South (the Confederacy), Kentucky experienced a distinctive mixture of varying opinions concerning the sectional crisis and the war itself. It was a slaveholding state that remained neutral at the start of the Civil War, and its residents held a range of political opinions. Many neighbors and family members disagreed with one another due to differing views and thus experienced strains on their relationships during the war. Fortunately, many women during this time documented their experiences, emotions, and the events taking place around them. Two border state women with Unionist views who faced challenges were Frances Dallam Peter and Josie Underwood. Frances was a young, middle-class, white woman who lived in Lexington, Kentucky and documented many events in and around Lexington from the start of the war to April 1864; while Josie, another young, middle-class, white woman, lived in Bowling Green, Kentucky and documented the happenings from the sectional conflict to September of 1862.

Confederate and Union troops regularly alternated occupation of Lexington, often fighting over the city throughout the war. Bowling Green, including the Underwood's estate, was occupied by Confederate troops. Because of Kentucky's location, directly between the predominantly Union North and the mainly Confederate South, there were a plethora of different views throughout the state, perhaps due to the uniqueness of Kentucky's geographical placement between the Union and the Confederacy. Kentuckians living in more rural areas were mostly farmers/planters and plantation owners. Many of them, therefore, were supporters of slavery due to most of their laborers being enslaved. Despite this, some rural Kentuckians were still not in support of secession, although they participated in slavery. The Underwoods, because of their



loyalty to the country and desire for the states to remain united, were among this group. On the other hand, most Kentuckians from urban areas, such as the Peters, supported the Union. Even so, there were a minority of rural Kentuckians who were Unionists and a similar minority of urban Kentuckians who were secessionists, such as John Hunt Morgan's family, who lived near the Peters in Lexington, Kentucky.

Lexington, Kentucky, located in the eastern part of the state, was a highly contested city, as it was part of a crucial railroad route where trade was booming due to its railroad connections between cities and major industrial facilities. Lexington also lay strategically between the North and the South. The population of Fayette County (where Lexington is located) in 1860 was 12,585 people (including enslaved persons, who numbered 10,148). Of that population 1,720 were enslavers and 685 were free Blacks.<sup>2</sup> By 1870, slavery had ended in Kentucky and the Fayette County population had increased to 26,736 people.<sup>3</sup> Lexington's economy in the nineteenth century increased greatly due to local hemp farms and the local manufacture of the crop into rope, which increased manufacturing in the area. This industrial growth led to the development of Lexington's commercial districts and the building of mansions for individuals such as John Wesley Hunt and his son, Francis Key Hunt. Lexington's society also grew, especially after Transylvania University and the surrounding Gratz Park Historic District was established.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "Fayette County (KY) Slaves, Free Blacks, and Free Mulattoes, 1850-1870," *Notable Kentucky African Americans Database*, accessed June 17, 2021, <https://nkaa.uky.edu/nkaa/items/show/2333>.

<sup>3</sup> "Fayette County (KY) Slaves, Free Blacks, and Free Mulattoes, 1850-1870," *Notable Kentucky African Americans Database*, accessed June 17, 2021, <https://nkaa.uky.edu/nkaa/items/show/2333>.

<sup>4</sup> "Lexington, Kentucky: The Athens of the West," *National Parks Service*, accessed June 17, 2021, <https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/lexington/text.htm>.

Conversely, Bowling Green, Kentucky, located in the southern part of the state, was a rural area and was occupied by Confederate troops throughout the war. In 1860, the population of Warren County (where Bowling Green is located) was 12,004 people (including enslaved persons, who numbered 4,961).<sup>5</sup> Of that population 882 were enslavers and 204 were free Blacks.<sup>6</sup> Due to the increase in steamboat commerce and railroad construction, Bowling Green was beginning to enter an economic boom in the nineteenth century. This growth caused Bowling Green to become a coveted area for Union and Confederate troops during the Civil War. The Confederacy eventually occupied the town and control of the Barren River, the Green River (a tributary/channel of the Ohio River), and the railroad systems. Bowling Green's commercial district prospered as they entered the Industrial Revolution, despite Confederate troops destruction of the area after their defeat at the hands of the Union army.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> “Warren County (KY) Slaves, Free Blacks, and Free Mulattoes, 1850-1870,” *Notable Kentucky African Americans Database*, accessed June 17, 2021, <https://nkaa.uky.edu/nkaa/items/show/2593>.

<sup>6</sup> “Warren County (KY) Slaves, Free Blacks, and Free Mulattoes, 1850-1870,” *Notable Kentucky African Americans Database*, accessed June 17, 2021, <https://nkaa.uky.edu/nkaa/items/show/2593>.

<sup>7</sup> “History of Bowling Green,” *Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce*, accessed June 17, 2021, <https://www.bgchamber.com/communityoverview/history-of-bowling-green/>.

## 2. HISTORIOGRAPHY

This study builds upon scholarship that the American Civil War presented arduous challenges for Kentucky women that immensely affected the Kentucky home front. My study accomplishes this by examining other analyses of this topic as well as comparative research on similar topics. The homefronts of the North and the South were not isolated from the events of the war, and this is especially true of the home fronts within the border states.<sup>8</sup> This study's methodology reflects the view that the border states should be studied separately and should not be considered part of the South or the North.<sup>9</sup> Historians studying the Civil War largely overlooked women's wartime experiences for many years. By the 1990s this began to change significantly with insightful research and works by historians such as Nina Silber, Drew Gilpin Faust, LeeAnn Whites, and others.<sup>10</sup> These historians demonstrate the ways in which women's Civil War experiences were unique and worth studying. Silber's work demonstrates, then analyzes, the connections between gender, society, and domesticity, specifically how those connections affected the sectional conflict and how the sectional conflict affected

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<sup>8</sup> Joan E. Cashin, *The War Was You and Me: Civilians in the American Civil War* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002); Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Lisa Tendrich Frank and LeeAnn Whites, *Household War: How Americans Lived and Fought the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2020); and Judith Giesberg, *Army at Home: Women and the Civil War on the Northern Home Front* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backward: The Civil War and the Remaking of the American Middle Border* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), xvii; Bridget Ford, *Bonds of Union: Religion, Race, and Politics in a Civil War Borderland* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), xi-xv; Aaron Astor, *Rebels on the Border: Civil War, Emancipation, and the Reconstruction of Kentucky and Missouri* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2012), 3-7; and Diane Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border: Missouri's Small-Slaveholding Households, 1815-1865* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2010), 58.

<sup>10</sup> Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996); and LeeAnn Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta, Georgia, 1860-1890* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995).

these aspects and their connectivity in return. Faust's research demonstrates the ways in which women in the slaveholding South were challenged by the hardships of the war and their resiliency in response. Whites' work also shows the ways in which the war first challenged, then created, a gender and identity crisis, which forced southerners, especially women, to re-establish and rebuild new identities and roles for themselves. The research of these historians show that women were very influential and involved in the home front as well as on the war front. These historians have provided other historians as well as the public with crucial analysis and insight into the influences and the unique experiences of women in the Civil War by demonstrating their actions, exercises in freedom, and independence in their households as well as their communities.

Until recently, Civil War scholarship had rarely considered the border states as their own separate entity from the Unionist North and the Confederate South. Author and scholar Allison Dorothy Fredette describes in her book, *Marriage on the Border*, how many border state historians believe one of several views concerning the border states.<sup>11</sup> According to Fredette, border historians continue to debate the official designation and proportions of the area. Fredette claims that some historians consider the states located beside the Ohio and Missouri Rivers to the West of the Appalachian Mountains as well as South and East of Nebraska, Iowa, Wisconsin, and Michigan to be border states. These use the terms 'middle border' and 'West' to describe those areas. According to Fredette, those historians also claim, within that definition, a combination of free states as well as slave states. Fredette also claims that there are yet other historians who use the term 'Ohio-Kentucky borderland' to describe the imagined relationships that precariously held

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<sup>11</sup> Allison Dorothy Fredette, *Marriage on the Border: Love, Mutuality, and Divorce in the Upper South During the Civil War* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2020), 10-12.

that area together. According to Fredette, some historians use the terms ‘border’ and ‘border states’ throughout their research.<sup>12</sup> Throughout my analysis, I will use the terms ‘border’ and ‘border states’ interchangeably and as is appropriate. Fredette argues throughout her book that the border states should be considered their own separate entity from the North and the South. However, she immediately follows these statements with terminology referring to the border states as “the border South.”<sup>13</sup> All border historians agree that Kentucky is a Civil War border state. Fredette’s terminology of “the border South” does not mean that she is studying specifically southern portions of the border states because her study also includes northern portions of the region.<sup>14</sup> Fredette’s work is thorough, with strong analysis of the material and existing scholarship. On the other hand, her research does have some discrepancies throughout her terminology, and the central focus of Fredette’s research is how the unique characteristics of border communities shaped heterosexual relationships in specific ways. Overall, however, her research still provides excellent analysis into the personal, romantic relationships of border state couples leading up to, during, and following the Civil War.<sup>15</sup> My study relates more closely to her research than it does to other historians. Although Fredette’s research focuses on several border states, both she and I examine the lives of white women in Civil War Kentucky. Fredette’s study is the closest existing, comparative research to my own.

More recent Civil War scholarship, however, has begun to examine women’s political views and influences leading up to and during the war. In Fredette’s works, she

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<sup>12</sup> Fredette, *Marriage on the Border*, 10.

<sup>13</sup> Fredette, *Marriage on the Border*, 4.

<sup>14</sup> Fredette, *Marriage on the Border*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Fredette, *Marriage on the Border*, 10-12.

addresses their political action, demonstrating that men's absence from communities led to women taking on new roles and expressing more forms of independence, including political expression. This shift eventually led to an independence that some soldiers returning to the home front were at times unable to cope with, which then led to separations.<sup>16</sup> While Fredette's work mainly focuses on the impact of differing border cultures on heterosexual relationships, my study analyzes two diaries as well as secondary sources to examine the tensions created in various types of personal relationships (i.e., between neighbors, relatives, and friends). This information provided in my study is crucial to our understanding of the impact of Civil War events on people's everyday lives throughout the war as well as Reconstruction. Nina Silber also addresses these political actions in her book, *Gender and the Sectional Conflict*, by demonstrating that the sectional conflict and the Civil War brought changes in gender roles, including women's freedoms and abilities to exercise their own opinions on politics, and social matters.<sup>17</sup>

This study also builds on work by Christopher Phillips, Bridget Ford, Aaron Astor, and Diane Mutti Burke, who demonstrated that the border states were torn and divided by the Civil War.<sup>18</sup> My research utilizes the perspectives of these historians who explain how the border states were torn and divided by the Civil War, more so than other states, making the experiences of border state residents quite significant. It supports the

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<sup>16</sup> Fredette, *Marriage on the Border*, 34, 43, & 120.

<sup>17</sup> Nina Silber, *Gender and the Sectional Conflict* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 52, 64, & 65.

<sup>18</sup> Christopher Phillips, *The Rivers Ran Backward: The Civil War and the Remaking of the American Middle Border* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), xvii; Bridget Ford, *Bonds of Union: Religion, Race, and Politics in a Civil War Borderland* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), xi-xv; Aaron Astor, *Rebels on the Border: Civil War, Emancipation, and the Reconstruction of Kentucky and Missouri* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2012), 3-7; and Diane Mutti Burke, *On Slavery's Border: Missouri's Small-Slaveholding Households, 1815-1865* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2010), 58.

trope that the Civil War was a war between family – a war between brothers.<sup>19</sup> The unique perspectives that I am adding to the scholarship include the study and analysis of two Unionist women in Civil War Kentucky. I examine their political influences, the actions of these women in their families and their communities, and how the difference in opinions amongst their community and family challenged them and their relationships. I consider the border states to be a hybrid or combination of cultures from the North and South, which created a unique, separate border state culture. The nineteenth-century border state culture blended societal roles and standards from the North and South that coexisted with surprising fluidity. This study will also provide insight into the tensions between Unionists and Confederates in Kentucky. Kentucky possessed a distinctive border culture, and as a border state where white residents held a particularly wide range of political opinions, this diverse spectrum contributed to the politicization of young, white women. This analysis of Frances' and Josie's diaries demonstrates that white, Kentucky women freely expressed political opinions and that their experiences and perspectives during the Civil War were especially unique. Their perspectives are worth in-depth analysis, and they were influenced by a microcosm of views.

There are very few published diaries of Kentucky women, and there are a few historians that have analyzed these two diaries considered in this thesis, including Nancy Disher Baird, William Cooper Jr., John David Smith, Anne Marshall, and Andrea Watkins.<sup>20</sup> My comparative analysis provides a new perspective on the significance of

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<sup>19</sup> Fredette, *Marriage on the Border*, 18.

<sup>20</sup> Nancy Disher Baird, ed., and Josie Underwood, *Josie Underwood's Civil War Diary* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009); William Cooper Jr., ed., John David Smith, ed., and Frances Peter, *A Union Woman in Civil War Kentucky: The Diary of Frances Peter* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000); Anne E. Marshall, Anne E. "A 'Sister's War': Kentucky Women and Their Civil War Diaries," *Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, 2012, 481-502; and Andrea S. Watkins, "Josie Underwood and Frances Dallam Peter (1840-1923; 1843-1864): Two Union Women in Civil War

these diaries. It contributes to the historiography on women and the war by demonstrating the ways in which women were influenced politically by their surroundings and how they became more politically active and vocal among their relatives and in their communities. This research also contributes to the historiography on women and the war by adjusting the ways in which we and future generations perceive women's independence, voice, and actions then. These diaries and my analysis of them show the ways in which these Kentucky women were taking on new roles and exercising new freedoms and forms of independence through political expression.

The situation and conflict in the border states during the Civil War, specifically Kentucky for this study, was that it was a mixture of both northern and southern cultures. The sympathies exhibited in the diaries show this mixture. Also illustrated are those wishing to remain neutral due to the wide range of views in one area, even in one family. My analysis highlights the diversity of viewpoints, with several general examples and two specific examples, including Josie Underwood and Frances Peter. Both women were young, native Kentucky women who supported the Union. Josie, however, was from a more rural area and had a southern heritage, whereas Frances was from a more urban setting and had a northern heritage. Not only does my analysis provide further insight into their lives, but it highlights the nature of the border state situation and women's experiences in the Civil War. It thus contributes to the specific literature on Border State Women's experiences of the war.

My take on this research is different from other works that analyze these two specific diaries because my analysis highlights the ways in which these women were not

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Kentucky," In *Kentucky Women: Their Lives and Times*, by Thomas H. Appleton Jr., & Melissa A. McEuen, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2015), 99-118.



only similar and different from other border state women, but from one another as well. In comparison to other studies on the diaries of Josie and Frances, my research shows the ways in which these women were politically involved in the conflict. Though Josie Underwood and Frances Peter were both young, Unionist, native Kentucky women, they had differing views upon the matter of slavery. Josie did not disagree with slavery, nor did she agree with secession. Although she identifies as a southerner, throughout her account she repeatedly expressed that view. She did not feel that the matter of slavery should have divided the nation and viewed anyone that wished to secede or take up arms against the country as a traitor. On the other hand, Frances Peter was more subtle when sharing her views of slavery. Initially, though she identified as a northerner, she did not feel that President Lincoln and his administration should have become involved in the matter of slavery. As the conflict escalated and the war ensued, Frances's opinion began to change. She began to view Lincoln's actions as inevitable and ultimately well-intentioned. Her opinions on Black persons also changed as she went from distrusting them to supporting their cause. Like Josie, Frances viewed secessionists and Confederates as traitors to the nation. Neither woman completely agreed with the Union platform initially or even eventually. They both, however, remained loyal to the Union cause. They viewed secession as a slippery slope that would lead to the country's downfall in multiple ways, including financially and as a world power. Josie and her father saw what secession would mean for the southern states. Neither of the two women were in support of Lincoln. They both initially viewed him as being rash and involving himself in matters that he should not have.

My analysis highlights the ways in which these women were thinking politically and strategically, an area that is not commonly highlighted in the historiography of

women in Civil War Kentucky. Other works on these two diaries do not highlight the political involvement and knowledge that Josie and Frances possessed. My analysis demonstrates the ways in which these two women specifically were knowledgeable of and involved on a political level in the conflict and then the war. Josie and Frances were both vocal amongst their families and friends regarding politics. Therefore, my thesis provides a new perspective on the lives of Josie and Frances, most especially their political involvement.

### 3. INTRODUCTION TO FRANCES PETER

Frances Dallam Peter was a Lexington, Kentucky native, born to Dr. Robert Peter, a prominent doctor, and Frances Paca Dallam Peter on January 28, 1843. When the Civil War broke out, Frances was a Union sympathizer at eighteen years old. She recorded in her diary the events of the Civil War as she saw them from her home, adjacent to a lot where soldiers, both Confederate and Union, often camped depending on which army was in control of the city. The lot was known then as the “Little College Lot,” but is now the Gratz Park neighborhood, the original location of Transylvania University.<sup>21</sup>

Frances’ account covered the war from January 1862 to April 1864. Her diary provides a specific border state view and rare insight into the day-to-day life and the political views of a woman in Civil War Kentucky.<sup>22</sup> Frances wrote almost daily of what she saw and experienced, with each entry lasting a page to a page and a half. She seemed to be recording what she experienced as a historical account or possibly as a record for her to reflect on later. Her account is also exceptional because she suffered from epilepsy, thus providing historians with an account of what the war between the states was like for a woman with a debilitating disorder that kept her predominantly homebound. During the 1850s, medical professionals were beginning to study epilepsy. The public, however, was not widely educated on the discoveries being made regarding the disorder. Most people at that time believed that epilepsy was a result of “fright, masturbation, drunkenness, and other mental frailties.”<sup>23</sup> Due to her disorder, Frances was often unable to frequent as many events as most women her age. She did occasionally attend a concert or benefit,

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<sup>21</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, ix.

<sup>22</sup> Frances Peter’s diary is a part of the Evans Collection in the Special Collections and Archives at the University of Kentucky Libraries.

<sup>23</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, xiii.

such as amateur concerts thrown for the Soldiers' Aid Society. When she was unable to go out, her sisters reported back to her with all the happenings that they witnessed, of which Frances promptly recorded. Frances' diary provides historians with an interesting perspective of what day-to-day life was like for a white woman in Civil War Kentucky as well as her political views and influences.

#### 4. INTRODUCTION TO JOSIE UNDERWOOD

Johanna Louisa “Josie” Underwood was a Bowling Green, Kentucky native, born to Warner Underwood and Lucy Craig Henry Underwood in November of 1840. When the Civil War broke out, Josie was a Union sympathizer, but a staunch southerner at twenty-one years of age. She recorded in her diary the events of the Civil War as she saw them from her home, the Underwood Estate; known then as Mount Air. Josie’s account is particularly informative as the Underwood estate was where Confederate soldiers set up camp during their occupation of Bowling Green early in the war.

Josie’s account covered the war from December 1860 to September 1862. Her account offers a distinct border state standpoint and important understanding into the daily life and the partisan opinions of a woman in Civil War Kentucky.<sup>24</sup> Josie wrote in her diary about every other day, and each entry was a page to a page and a half long. She mentioned in her writing early on that her mother gifted the diary to her for her trip to visit her family in Tennessee so that she could record her experiences and could relay them back to her parents when she returned home. She was initially writing for her family to hear of her travels; yet, after she had returned home to Kentucky as the sectional tensions increased and the war broke-out she continued writing as if she felt compelled to document what she seemed to foresee as being an important event in time. Her account is also exceptional due to her home having been occupied by Confederate troops, thus providing historians with an account of what the Civil War was like for a woman living on Confederate-occupied land. Josie’s journal presents historians with a fascinating view of what daily life was like for a white woman in Civil War Kentucky as well as her

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<sup>24</sup> Josie Underwood’s diary is a part of the Evans Collection in the Special Collections and Archives at the University of Kentucky Libraries.

political stances and inspirations. From Frances' and Josie's diaries, we, as historians, can learn how the war shaped the minds and behaviors of these young, impressionable women, how it influenced their political opinions and actions, as well as how they perceived the war through their eyes.

## 5. ANALYSIS

At the onset of the war, many Kentuckians tried to remain neutral. Nevertheless, the state's location brought the war to them due to its border position and the many important railways that ran through the state. The citizens of Lexington seemed to take some care to maintain relationships, reputations/appearances, and to not offend those who took an opposing political stance. Frances demonstrated this in her diary, writing of her family's attempts to remain civil with their secessionist neighbors whom they had been friends with prior to the war, as well as remaining civil with their other neighbors to maintain their reputation in their community. The experiences detailed in another account of a woman's experiences of the war, *Mrs. Hill's Journal – Civil War Reminiscences*, supports this conclusion.<sup>25</sup>

In the nineteenth century, most women were discouraged from dabbling in politics and other such matters that were considered solely for men. Women and men, both domestically and socially, operated in line with Victorian gender roles. However, as the United States entered the sectional crisis and then the Civil War, white women began overcoming these barriers and took on new roles, not only in their homes, but in their communities. Women found ways to influence and express their political opinions through various forms of female agency, including practicing their political expression by listening to discussions between men regarding political and social matters, reading the news, and finding individual ways to be more involved in politics.<sup>26</sup> White women in

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<sup>25</sup> Sarah Jane Full Hill, *Mrs. Hill's Journal – Civil War Reminiscences*, edited by Mark M. Krug (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley & Sons Company, 1980), 211, 300-301, & 330.

<sup>26</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 58 & 64; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 116 & 146; Judith Giesberg, *Army at Home: Women and the Civil War on the Northern Home Front* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 28, 48, & 165; Lisa Tendrich Frank and LeeAnn Whites, *Household War: How Americans Lived and Fought the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2020), 88 & 110.

Kentucky were especially immersed in the issues of the sectional conflict and thus were extremely torn not only between the Union and Confederate causes but on issues within these two sides as well. Lexington women, including Frances, were neither isolated from nor uninterested in the events of the war.<sup>27</sup>

Northerners were more progressive towards employing women due to their more progressive views of female gender roles which were rooted in northern views of marriage (which were more egalitarian partnerships) and their views on women in the workplace. Southerners were less so. This was due to the religious backgrounds of the people that settled in the North and the South. Many immigrants that settled in the North were liberal Protestants and Catholics who viewed women as integral parts of contributing to the family's income.<sup>28</sup> In contrast many immigrants that settled in the South were more conservative Protestants, particularly those who became members of the Southern Baptist Church, who viewed women as belonging in the household as well as in a supportive role to their husbands.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, these views of gender and marital roles resulted in widely differing opinions in the North and South regarding female employment. Religion was not the only matter at play here, though. Economic and cultural differences were also contributing factors and influences on southern and northern views. Industrialization and the creation of public-school systems in northern states led to a demand for more teachers, which allowed northern women new

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<sup>27</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, xxv.

<sup>28</sup> James Howell Moorehead, "Religion in the Civil War: The Northern Perspective." *Divining America*, TeacherServe. National Humanities Center. July 2, 2021, <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nineteen/nkeyinfo/cwnorth.htm>.

<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988); and Harry S. Stout, "Religion in the Civil War: The Southern Perspective." *Divining America*, TeacherServe. National Humanities Center. July 2, 2021, <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/tserve/nineteen/nkeyinfo/cwsouth.htm>.



opportunities of employment. The southern states were still primarily agrarian, and as a result were not experiencing the same types of demand as northern states.<sup>30</sup>

Elizabeth Fox-Genovese provides a strong description of the distinct differences between the northern and southern households.<sup>31</sup> In the South, besides having distinctive gender roles, there were not the same rigidity in the idea of separate spheres for men and women within the household as there were in the North. The domestic and public/business spheres overlapped within the southern plantation and planter households, whereas the domestic and public spheres were kept separate in the North due to work being outside the home. Middle and upper-class women ran the household; it was their domain. This could be why Frances' mother felt so comfortable speaking from the doorstep of her house. She was in her element. Southern gender roles required women to be emotionally supportive of their husbands and fathers and to be reserved and genteel in public. Northern gender roles, on the other hand, were less strict and allowed women to be more outspoken in public and to have jobs outside the household. Husbands and wives in Northern marriages were thought of more as partnerships with slightly more egalitarian relationships. For slaveholding southerners, their households required stricter forms of patriarchy than northern households, because southerners believed that if they did not have a strong, male head of household, then the family structure would collapse and as a result, so too would the system of enslavement.<sup>32</sup>

The expectations surrounding family relationships influenced gender roles and vice versa for both the North and the South. In comparison, the gender roles of the border states were rather fluid and a combination of those common in both the North and the

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<sup>30</sup> Turner-Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood*, Ch. 5.

<sup>31</sup> Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 66-68.

<sup>32</sup> Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 47 & 63.

South. The gender roles of the border states depended highly on the influences of the community, the financial situation of the persons, and their social status.

Frances Peter

Frances Peter and her sisters were raised in a rather progressive home. Their parents were supporters of women's education, and so the Peter daughters were encouraged to educate themselves on current events, politics, and various fields of academia. Prior to the Civil War, many northern women had already taken on more roles in academia, but it was not until the end of the Civil War that many southern women began to take on such roles as well. Women viewed involvement in education as a small practice of independence as well a way to provide for themselves and their families. Northern families and society were far more accepting of these new roles and practices in independence. Northerners were more supportive of female education and female teachers than southerners, who were more reserved and unsure when it came to such practices. As the war raged on and southern families struggled to maintain steady forms of income, many southern families, especially those with children, began to allow southern women to become tutors, teachers, and even clerks. At the beginning of the transition, southern parents and guardians seemed to be of the understanding that southern women would return to their former roles when the war ended, but as the war dragged on it became apparent to southerners that these changes were irrevocable. The border states seemed to have a middling view on white women in jobs. Those border state citizens that identified as "northerners" were more accepting of such practices, whereas

those border state citizens that viewed themselves as “southerners” were still somewhat reserved on the matter and were mostly against it.<sup>33</sup>

Frances and her immediate family identified as northerners and thus were far more accepting of women practicing independence in public positions. Frances’ mother was instrumental in educating her daughters in politics, economic and social policies, as well as other matters. Mrs. Peter’s comments and political views as well as her opinions on women’s roles influenced Frances and her sisters’ ideas of womanhood. These influences were evident, for example, when a rebel soldier passed by the front doorstep of her house, she spoke of what she considered the loyalty of Unionists and lack thereof regarding the Confederates. On Monday March 31, 1862, rebel soldiers were marching past the Peters’ house. Mrs. Underwood was talking to her husband and as a soldier passed by, she said “I shall always say ‘down with secession,’” which caused the soldier to stare.<sup>34</sup> This likely caused the rebel soldier to stare because he may not have been used to women speaking so openly about, or even holding, political opinions. Southern women were expected to remain silent or at the very least, reserved, on political and war matters. The exception to the rule, though, was that southern women could express their support for the Confederacy, which was viewed as an act of patriotism and thus acceptable.<sup>35</sup>

On several occasions, Frances' mother spoke out against the Confederacy and their mistreatment of their common soldiers.<sup>36</sup> On one of these occasions when Frances’

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<sup>33</sup> Jane Turner-Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood (1865-1895)* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 154, 235, & 258; Amy Feely Morsman, *The Big House After Slavery: Virginia Plantation Families and Their Postbellum Domestic Experiment* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 37, 42, 64, 108, & 241; and Victoria E. Ott, *Confederate Daughters: Coming of Age During the Civil War* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 11, 95, & 167.

<sup>34</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, 14.

<sup>35</sup> Frank and Whites, *Household War*, 12, 168, 173, & 269.

<sup>36</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, 36.

mother did speak out, a Confederate soldier that she had assisted warned her of an order out to arrest anyone who spoke out against the Confederacy. He told her this because he did not want her to be arrested, especially after she had been so kind to him.<sup>37</sup>

Interactions between soldiers and women in occupied areas, such as these, were frequent and complex.

Frances Peter's family lived in an urban area and viewed themselves as northerners. Due to their identification as northerners, the Peters had very progressive views regarding female involvement and freedom, as they allowed and encouraged their daughters to educate themselves on current events and policies. Due to Frances' condition of epilepsy, however, she was unable to take on new roles in public as some of the other women in her community were.<sup>38</sup> Her eldest sister provided nursing assistance in one of the military hospitals in Lexington. Prior to the Civil War, the field of nursing was largely filled by males. Many women implored the Union and the Confederacy to employ them as nurses in the field. However, there had been such an overwhelming response of support that both armies quickly ran short on funds and positions of employment. Women were informed that they were more than welcome to volunteer their services in support of their respective causes, or aid in areas that were vacated by men joining the military.<sup>39</sup> According to William Cooper Jr. and John David Smith, "Frances never had the opportunity to engage in activities that tested her assumptions about the place of women in society," but she did note "the assertiveness and empowerment of

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<sup>37</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, 36.

<sup>38</sup> Silber, *Gender and the Sectional Conflict*, xii, xiii, xvii, & 64.

<sup>39</sup> Frank and Whites, *Household War*, 109, 114, & 270.

women necessitated by wartime conditions,” as well as the significance and influence of women in new positions.<sup>40</sup>

When the war began, Frances and her immediate family were essentially Unionists. Frances did not initially agree completely with the Union cause, but as the war continued, she began to view herself as a staunch Unionist. Frances did not mention in her diary whether her family were slave-owners, but according to the United States Census slave schedule from 1860, the Underwoods owned several enslaved laborers.<sup>41</sup> Frances often discussed how she and her immediate family supported the reunification of the country, yet she also mentioned that not all her family supported the Union cause. There were several relatives who were supporters of the Confederacy, or “secesh,” as Frances often referred to secessionists.<sup>42</sup>

Many families in the nation, especially the border states, were torn by their loyalties to the Confederacy and the Union, thus why the Civil War is known in popular parlance as a “war between brothers.”<sup>43</sup> Frances had little to no patience, nor tolerance, for Confederate sympathizers. To her, it mattered not whether they were her neighbors or even her family.<sup>44</sup> Frances even mentioned how her uncle, William N. Robb (married to Letitia Preston Dallam, the sister of Frances’s mother) was a secessionist: “My hopeful secesh uncle-in-law Mr. Robb who lives near Georgetown on the Cincinnati road is also gone to the Southern part of the state ostensibly to buy cattle but I would not be surprised if it was to help the rebels.”<sup>45</sup> Mr. Robb had even helped General Preston and worked his

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<sup>40</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, xiii.

<sup>41</sup> 1860 Slave Schedule, United States Census, Ancestry.com.

<sup>42</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, xiii & 202.

<sup>43</sup> Amy Murrell Taylor, *The Divided Family in Civil War America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 3, 123, 198, 218, & 219.

<sup>44</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, 202.

<sup>45</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, 202.

way from Lexington to sign up with the Confederate army.<sup>46</sup> These actions did not gain any respect or admiration from his young niece, who was a staunch Unionist.

Frances experienced the war from her family's estate in the Gratz Park community. Her community included many secessionist families, the most notable of which was John Hunt Morgan's family. John Hunt Morgan was born on June 1, 1825, in Huntsville, Alabama and died September 4, 1864, in Greeneville, Tennessee.<sup>47</sup> Prior to his role as the Confederate Brigadier General of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kentucky Cavalry Regiment, John had served in the Mexican American War and afterwards created the Lexington Rifles, a militia company. During his service in the Civil War, Morgan was notorious for his lack of compassion towards civilians, his complete disregard for consequences, and his inability to follow orders. Morgan was beloved by rebel women for his charismatic nature and southern charm. The soldiers and officers that fought alongside him as well as Union civilians, however, very much loathed him and most especially when he would visit his mother and siblings in Lexington. Frances never mentioned directly interacting with John Hunt Morgan but did mention several times that John's mother had a few interactions with France's mother prior to and throughout the war. John's connection to Frances was that their families lived in the same neighborhood, right down the street from each other. Throughout the war, Frances documented the actions of the Morgan family.<sup>48</sup> For example, Frances wrote on Sunday October 5, 1862, that "Mrs. Morgan & various others are getting ready to leave [Lexington]" due to the encroaching Union

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<sup>46</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, 202.

<sup>47</sup> "Civil War Biography: John Hunt Morgan," American Battlefield Trust, accessed December 2020, <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/john-hunt-morgan>; and Peter, *A Union Woman*, 4, 8, 12, 38, 39.

<sup>48</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, 3-4, 6, 8-9, 11-12, 18, 20-22, 25-26, 30-34, 38-39, 42-46, 49, 51-52, 55-56, 63-64, 66-68, 70-72, 74, 79-80, 83, 85-89, 92, 94, 97-102, 104, 113, 115-117, 127-129, 134, 137-143, 145, 148, 151, 160-161, 168-169, 174, 179, 185-188, 191, 197, & 203.

troops.<sup>49</sup> Morgan's family assisted the Confederates in multiple ways. His family not only hosted him and his friends, but often had many other well-known Confederate sympathizers as visitors."<sup>50</sup>

Frances frequently expressed her negative view of secessionists, referring to them as lazy, needy, and dependent upon the enslaved. Frances had a very clear opinion of those that assisted the Rebels: they were "traitors" in her eyes, and she wholeheartedly gave her support to those (including Colonel Mundy) who did not stand for such treason.<sup>51</sup> As the war continued, her distaste and disgust for secessionists, Confederate officers, and southern 'nobility' grew. Secessionist women in Lexington expressed their political support and 'patriotism' by wearing and waving Confederate "stars and bars" as well as "streamers of red [,] white [,] & red on their dresses and bonnets."<sup>52</sup> However, when it came to assisting the common soldier, Frances noted that the secessionist women in her town were absent in providing nursing and aid to the men of their cause. Though Frances was a staunch Unionist and showed clear disdain towards secessionists, she did seem to show sympathy, or more aptly, pity, towards the average Confederate soldiers. By October of 1862, she saw them in their threadbare clothing, half-starved, sickly, and barefoot while their generals and "supporters" were plump and flaunted their wealth and resources. She clearly pitied "such a state of wretchedness and degradation... even though [... they had been...] brought to it by their own folly and ignorance."<sup>53</sup> In her opinion, any decent human with a good conscience would be compelled to feel sorry for such a ragged, battered, and sickly group. Frances argued that the common southerner

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<sup>49</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, 52.

<sup>50</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, xvii.

<sup>51</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, 4.

<sup>52</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, 30.

<sup>53</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, 53.

had been led astray by the lies and deceit of wealthy southerners who were using them to fight their battles but failing to provide the proper provisions for their army. The Confederacy seemed disorganized and faulty in the eyes of Frances.<sup>54</sup>

Frances believed that secessionists would fail to believe in any reports of Union successes in the war.<sup>55</sup> She did not often say what her parents' thoughts were on southerners' disbelief. There were untrue rumors and false statements circling the Lexington community regarding the events of the war, manipulated to benefit various causes. Frances stated that "of all the news we hear how much is true. Heaven only knows!"<sup>56</sup> This is an example of how soldiers and civilians twisted stories and relayed unfounded stories throughout the communities. Frances reported that she and other Unionists had been extremely limited in their speech as they were surrounded by rebel troops. The rebels seemed to be getting spooked by their dwindling numbers and the large numbers of the encroaching Union forces. "They won't allow us to say anything presently...."<sup>57</sup> Frances also reported that many civilians and soldiers, when told or asked about events that had occurred, would often twist the stories to make the news fit their agenda. Frances wrote on multiple occasions of being told news, only to later see a report telling the opposite. This was something that also changed the way that women lived during the war. They were forced to question every bit of information they received. There were few avenues from which to receive information, one of those being the *Kentucky Statesman* newspaper, which was apparently questionable at times, depending on who was editing it.<sup>58</sup> The other source of news was through word of mouth and

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<sup>54</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, 51.

<sup>55</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, 5.

<sup>56</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, 45.

<sup>57</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, 44.

<sup>58</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, 15 & 34.



gossip. Frances reported that during Lexington's occupation by Confederate troops, people were forbidden to read northern papers and were threatened with arrest if found guilty. Frances was quite aware of the credibility and lack thereof regarding various sources, as she claimed that there were false reports and rumors being spread. This shows that Frances was not shielded from talk of the war and events of the time.

Though Frances was a Unionist, she did not support President Abraham Lincoln, his administration, or its policies. At the start of the war, Frances felt that Lincoln and his cabinet were far too radical. Although the government's methods did not always align with her beliefs, she continued to believe in reuniting the country. She felt that even though one does not always agree with those in power, one should remain loyal to one's country. By seceding, the Confederates had crossed a line by giving up on the United States of America. Frances often expressed that President Lincoln, and his administration were sometimes too involved in certain matters. She felt that the actions of Lincoln and his administration sometimes complicated matters and made life more difficult for the Unionists on the home front. For example, Frances wrote in her diary on March 31, 1863, "I have noticed that since Mr Lincolns January proclamation, and since they [Blacks] have found out that the soldiers make them work just as hard if not harder than their masters they dont take half as much interest in them and are not near as willing to do things for them, as when the army first came here."<sup>59</sup> She also felt that Lincoln and his administration were pushing others further away from the Union cause with their actions. People who were forced to support the Union cause by building structures and nursing soldiers were resentful. The Union's mandates did not garner feelings of respect and

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<sup>59</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, 118.

loyalty to the United States amongst those that were on the fence or were trying to remain neutral. Those that were secessionists but were trying to keep up relations with their Unionist neighbors seemed to have been off put by these orders as well.<sup>60</sup>

Frances' political views seemed to be mostly her own, developed by her own research and knowledge of politics, as well as economic and social policies, but her views may have been slightly influenced by her parents, both staunch Unionists. Like them, Frances did not believe in freeing all enslaved persons, but unlike them she believed that slavery should not spread. Like Lincoln's initial position, she also did not believe slavery should be abolished completely but that it should be allowed to remain in states where it already existed. Abolitionists were far too radical for Frances' taste. She expressed that she did not feel all slaves should be free, and on several occasions, she seemed to distrust African Americans, even those serving the Union cause. On February 4, 1863, upon learning of the Union's plans to arm Black soldiers and allow them to fight in the war, Frances wrote in her diary, "From all I have observed of the negro he is much too averse to work, too timid to make a good soldier, and has got it into his head that liberty means doing nothing. I think it is acting against the Constitution to make soldiers of the blacks, and however much the abolitionists may say to the contrary, they will find in the end that this arming & equipping of negro regiments is a mere waste of time and money."<sup>61</sup> Another entry in her diary agreed with a preacher's sermon that she had heard, and she stated that "the negroes throughout the country are no longer the humble servants that they used to be. They are restless, impertinent and discontented, neglect their work, and

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<sup>60</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, 27.

<sup>61</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, 96.

run off in great numbers.”<sup>62</sup> Unjustly and unfairly, Frances did not trust African Americans and held very low expectations of them.

As the war continued Frances’ opinions on abolition began to change, and by October of 1863, she expressed agreement that the only solution to the war’s end and the reunification of the country was to abolish slavery completely.<sup>63</sup> Frances supported Lincoln more and more as time went on. Unfortunately for historians, her diary entries ended on April 4, 1864, and Frances died on August 5, 1864, from an epileptic seizure. Therefore, there is no way of knowing what Frances’ political opinions would have been by the war’s end.

Although Frances’ life was cut short by her disorder, she left behind her insightful diary providing an important source for the study of women in Civil War Kentucky. Her documentation of the events around her provide unparalleled understanding of Kentucky women’s daily lives throughout the war. Though they faced many challenges, such as shortages in supplies, stolen and destroyed property, and violence, Kentucky women persevered and made do with what little they had to provide for their families. Kentucky women, specifically Lexingtonians, were left vulnerable due to the multiple reoccupations of Confederate and Union troops throughout the war. The experiences exhibited in Frances’ account demonstrate the unique and arduous challenges that the Civil War presented to some women on the Lexington, Kentucky home front. Frances’ diary provides insight into one woman’s experiences of the tensions between Unionists and Confederates within Kentucky, exhibiting how the Kentucky home front was often not isolated from the events of the war. The Peters experienced theft and damage of their

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<sup>62</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, 187.

<sup>63</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, 167-168.

property as well as verbal abuse from occupying Confederate troops who objected to the Peters' Unionist views. Due to the occupation of both Confederate and Union troops in the Peters' neighborhood and the fighting of the two sides to occupy the city, Frances' diary, and this analysis of it demonstrate that Frances' experiences, during the Civil War were distinctive from other Kentucky and other border state home fronts.

Josie Underwood

At the onset of the war, Kentuckians tried to remain neutral, but the war was brought to them because of their geography. Bowling Green is especially indicative of the importance of the location as it was in the southern portion of Kentucky, about 66 miles from Nashville, Tennessee. This close to the Union/Confederate border of the time, there seemed to be some care taken towards not offending those on the opposing side of the war and maintaining relationships and reputations/appearances. Both Frances and Josie detailed such sentiments in their diaries, discussing how they tried to maintain friendships with their Confederate acquaintances/neighbors.

In the nineteenth century, most women were discouraged from involving themselves in politics and other such matters that were considered solely for men, especially southerners. Those who sympathized with the Confederacy, both women and men, followed Victorian gender roles in Kentucky as America faced a sectional crisis and then a civil war. White women, including Josie, began challenging these ideals as they filled new positions, not only in their households, but in their neighborhoods as well. As such, Josie began to question the limited roles deemed appropriate for women in southern society. Josie and other women found ways to influence and show their political opinions through various expressions of female agency, including listening to debates between men concerning political and societal matters, articulating their own political views,

reading the news, and individually learning how to express themselves politically.<sup>64</sup> Josie like other white women in Kentucky, was particularly absorbed in the sectional conflict and expressed views not only in her preference between the Union and Confederate causes but on issues debated on each of these two sides of the war. Many women in Bowling Green, such as Josie Underwood, were neither removed from nor indifferent towards the events of the war.<sup>65</sup> Josie agreed with her father's statement that if Kentucky entered the war that the state "would be rebaptized" in blood.<sup>66</sup> What they meant by this was that Kentucky's land would be covered in the blood of their citizens and soldiers who died during war.

The Underwoods owned a rather large estate in Bowling Green, Kentucky. On their estate they produced crops and raised livestock. Josie Underwood and her family most assuredly considered themselves southerners. Though southerners and slaveowners, they were Unionists, but they were not supporters of Lincoln. Josie referred to her mother as "the most intense patriot I ever knew," indicating that her mother clearly expressed her political views and leanings, which must have influenced Josie in expressing hers as well.<sup>67</sup> Josie also stated that her mother was "the most intense Southerner" she had ever known. She was a woman who vehemently loathed abolitionists, viewing them as meddling in affairs that were none of their business, and she attributed their views to envy.<sup>68</sup> Even so, Josie expressed that her mother was staunchly in favor of remaining a united country since their ancestors fought and bled for this country. Mrs. Underwood viewed those who wished to dissolve the nation as foolish. She was both frustrated with

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<sup>64</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 30, 31, 34, 35, 58, 62, 64, 82, 84, 89, 91, 96, 101, 102, 103, 106, & 112.

<sup>65</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, xxv.

<sup>66</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 58.

<sup>67</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 58.

<sup>68</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 59.

the North for “meddling” in the matters of the South and with the South for being hot-headed and trying to leave the Union.<sup>69</sup> In addition, Mrs. Underwood felt similarly to Frances’ concern that Lincoln was alienating people and that the rash decisions and actions of the South were providing northerners more of an advantage with their “fanatics.”<sup>70</sup>

Josie expressed that her father, though he was a true southerner and was very much against the election of Abraham Lincoln, did not let those in power prevent him from supporting his country. He was loyal to the country, not to a political party. Political parties, he claimed, are temporarily in power, but the country is forever. Even though Josie’s father did not agree with Lincoln’s “radical” views and did not want him elected, Mr. Underwood still felt that Lincoln was “honest in his convictions and his desire to do what [was] right.”<sup>71</sup> From her comments, it appears that Josie thoroughly agreed. She learned quickly that not all the men in her life supported the Union. Some of the young men she was acquainted with were once Unionists, but they then joined the rebellion, convincing Josie that “something Lincoln did turned [them].”<sup>72</sup> She viewed her father’s independence and ability to remain true to his convictions as an act of bravery and wisdom. Josie pointed out that many young men were not as strong as her father and were not able to support the country and government while also being opposed to Lincoln.<sup>73</sup>

Though young, white women in Civil War Kentucky most certainly had thoughts and minds of their own, many agreed with and were influenced by their parents’ political

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<sup>69</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 78.

<sup>70</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 78.

<sup>71</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 76.

<sup>72</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 88.

<sup>73</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 78 & 88.

views. This was most undoubtedly not the case for all and was surely not common among many young, white *men* in Civil War Kentucky. There were those who adamantly disagreed with their elders' political views. Many in the younger generation in the southern portion of the country and rural areas of Kentucky wished to secede and fight, whereas members of older generations leaned more toward compromise, wishing the country would remain united. These elders wanted to pay tribute to how hard their ancestors had fought for their independence during the American Revolution.<sup>74</sup> The younger generations felt differently and argued that it was that very fight that led them to believe they should secede because they did not feel the government should control certain aspects of their lives; their claims were that they feared tyranny.<sup>75</sup> Josie and her father felt these views dangerous and foolish, adamantly arguing against them. Josie alluded to a division of opinions between her own generation and the men that were her father's age as well as older. Her elders supported the Union and thought rationally about the implications of secession. Those men's sons, Josie claimed, were "reckless," "unthinking," and "inexperienced," and wished to secede without a thought to the implications of such a decision.<sup>76</sup> Josie's father was very practical and intuitive as he expressed to Josie and others that if Kentucky were to lose its neutrality and secede, Kentucky would be "rebaptized" in the blood of war and the state and its residents would be wrecked. These statements demonstrate that Mr. Underwood spoke openly about politics to his daughter, and she clearly listened intently, absorbing his words.<sup>77</sup> He

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<sup>74</sup> Joan E. Cashin, *The War Was You and Me: Civilians in the American Civil War* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2002); and Allison Dorothy Fredette, *Marriage on the Border: Love, Mutuality, and Divorce in the Upper South During the Civil War* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2020), 33.

<sup>75</sup> Cashin, *The War Was You and Me*, 318, 320, & 369.

<sup>76</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 61.

<sup>77</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 58.

expressed to her that if the nation would separate, they would be less powerful and influential in the world and would become “insignificant provinces.”<sup>78</sup>

These views were challenged repeatedly by companions while visiting her sister and brother-in-law in Memphis, Tennessee. Therefore, not only did Josie Underwood experience the sectional conflict from Bowling Green, Kentucky, but she also experienced it from Tennessee, a Confederate hotbed. Before she left for her trip, her mother gave her a diary to document her experiences and what she thought of the people she met along the way, so that when she returned home her mother could read back on the events that took place. This was a common practice for women in the mid-nineteenth century when they travelled, according to Elizabeth Fox-Genovese. In her book, *Within the Plantation Household*, Fox-Genovese recounted how another young woman, “Gertrude Clanton began her journal when she was fourteen and on a trip. After a month she had ‘been writing pretty regularly ever since.’”<sup>79</sup> The events of the time were so important and were so thought and emotion-provoking that Josie must have felt compelled to continue journaling even after she returned home from Tennessee. She often wrote as if she were living in a Jane Austen novel, relating the discussions that were had during her social outings in Memphis. Josie also recorded many political arguments and discussions during her time there.<sup>80</sup>

At one point the wife of an acquaintance of theirs discouraged her husband from discussing politics around the three women (herself, Josie, and Josie’s sister) as the wife said it would spoil their visit. They never came to agreements on politics anyway. This occurred multiple times during the visit. Throughout all the disagreements, Josie said that

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<sup>78</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 60.

<sup>79</sup> Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 249.

<sup>80</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 23.



it became rather impossible to remain quiet. She loved her country and refused to stand by and allow it to be dragged through the mud. Josie even went so far as to study her father's partisan speeches for valid arguments to help back up the claims she made whilst visiting in Tennessee. In these arguments, Josie said, "I drew on Pa—Gen. Rousseau and Attorney Gen-eral Jo[seph] Holt—for all the fine arguments and bright things I could remember from their speeches, getting very enthusiastic not to say excited in defending the Union."<sup>81</sup> These political arguments regarding secession even occurred at balls and parties, resulting in many uproars and even talk of a duel at one point. Josie viewed those who wished to secede as "hotheads" and continued to refer to them as "unthinking hot-heads and blatherskites" throughout her diary.<sup>82</sup>

Josie frequently expressed her frustrations with secessionists and Confederates. Although she stated at the beginning of one of her diary entries that these frustrations were her own, at the end of the entry she stated that "these are Pa's arguments of course and I am sure they are good ones" as if she was only repeating her father's views.<sup>83</sup> Although his influence is clear, she seemed to convey them regularly without such a disclaimer, so it is difficult to decipher whether she was simply trying not to overstep and implicate herself somehow for having her own political opinions or if she was providing such a disclaimer because she did not want to come across as foolish. It is unclear as to why she put that disclaimer at the end of the entry when she stated at the beginning that she was expressing her own opinions. Perhaps there was a fine line regarding just how much young women could express political opinions without seeming improper.

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<sup>81</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 34.

<sup>82</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 58-59.

<sup>83</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 79.

Josie had clearly studied the speeches of strong Unionists, including her father, and used them to argue her points. On one occasion, several of her father's friends overheard an argument and even cut in to back Josie and her support of the Union.<sup>84</sup> During her time in Tennessee, Josie went so far as to show her support for the Union cause by riding in a Union parade procession. Even though she supported the country remaining united and was quite pleased at an acquaintance's Union support, she did not agree with one of her companions having a flag that said "Union Forever" draped atop his horse, as she felt that it was in poor taste.<sup>85</sup> Josie was quite impassioned when supporting the Union, yet she felt that if one were too adamant and too aggressive with one's points, this could be off-putting to some. Frances Peter expressed similar sentiments in her diary. Nevertheless, Josie stated that every so often she let her temper get the best of her and thus let her opinions on political matters out in an angry way. By August of 1861, it had become impossible for her "to not get too excited and say things that offend and hurt" when the topic of the sectional conflict arose in conversation.<sup>86</sup>

According to Josie's account, her secessionist acquaintances associated Lincoln with the abolitionist movement, even though Lincoln was not expressly an abolitionist prior to and at the beginning of the Civil War. Lincoln and his cabinet were initially supporters of the free-soil movement which wanted any new states admitted into the United States to be states free of slavery. This was different from the abolitionist movement, which wanted an immediate, unconditional end to slavery in all the United States. Unionists differed in their opinions on the matter. Some Unionists were abolitionists, some were free-soil supporters, some did not have a preference either way,

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<sup>84</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 34.

<sup>85</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 35.

<sup>86</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 89.

and an array of various other opinions existed on the matter. However, many secessionists, southerners, and Confederates associated all Union supporters with the abolitionist movement. Josie discussed how, because of this wrongful association, she and other Unionists were constantly teased by secessionists for Lincoln's "radical" views, and thus they, the Unionists, were left to fight Lincoln's "extreme views as well as the secessionists."<sup>87</sup>

Josie seemed to hold her own when goaded by men who thought her simple, unintelligent, or speaking out of place for a woman. She frequently mentioned that an acquaintance of her brother-in-law's, Mr. Grafton, made her feel little. When he was around, she felt unsatisfied with herself. Throughout her diary, Josie frequently expressed her reluctance to spend time with him, but it seems that social graces dictated that she must. Josie was a very clever woman, very witty and quick on her feet. As time went on, her feelings towards Mr. Grafton seemed to change. However, she could not tell if what she felt was love for him. As her visit went on, Josie had come to like him, even though she was offput by his secessionist ideas, which left her wishing that he were a Unionist.

Josie was part of a generation during the mid-nineteenth century that was beginning to make matches based upon love and not upon social status or convenience, which is why she was discouraged by the men that had pursued her thus far.<sup>88</sup> According to Josie, she would rather spend her life alone than with someone she did not love. This had become a common sentiment amongst young persons by the mid-nineteenth century, especially in the North and in the border states. Young people sought more companionate and somewhat egalitarian marriages or partnerships, instead of marrying based upon

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<sup>87</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 51.

<sup>88</sup> Fredette, *Marriage on the Border*, 8, 33, 34, 85, 194, & 205.

social and financial status. Young men began to seek women who would fulfill their basic wifely roles, but who were also intellectuals as well. Young women sought men that would view them as more equal companions and would value their intellect as well. Josie's diary and other diaries or accounts from the time, make it clear that this also included women's opinions on politics, finance, and policies.<sup>89</sup> These concepts were quite foreign to their parents and older generations, who worried that these new marital ideals would not result in lasting unions. Allison Dorothy Fredette's research shows that there was an increase in divorces and separations by the second half of the nineteenth century. Her analysis also explains that these were not related to the newer marital ideals but were instead related to increased acts and practices of independence by women due to the changes brought by the Civil War.<sup>90</sup> Women sought lifelong partners that would value and respect their work and their minds, and if men did not fulfill these expectations and promises women were more willing to seek divorces and separations than previous generations. Newer legislation also allowed for this more than it had prior to the war. Some women, like Josie, felt it better to spend their lives in solitude than to settle with the hopes of men fulfilling these new marital ideals. Not all parents were supportive of this, but Josie's father seemed to back his daughter's decision on the matter. Mr. Underwood was overall very supportive of his daughter's opinions and ideas.<sup>91</sup>

Josie's father was not the only man in her life who encouraged her to read up on politics, policies, and current events. Some of the men in her life sent her articles with her father's speeches in support of the Union for her to read. Her cousin, a major in the army, confided in her regarding his distaste for secession despite his love for a prominent

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<sup>89</sup> Fredette, *Marriage on the Border*, 34, 43, & 120.

<sup>90</sup> Fredette, *Marriage on the Border*, 120, 149, 177, & 233.

<sup>91</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 38.

secessionist. The most prominent man in Josie's life, her father, did not discourage her from talking politics or expressing hers and her father's views, far from it. He did, however, discourage her from losing her temper in such discussions and reminded her to remain in control and keep calm.<sup>92</sup> Josie's diary also mentioned that she, her sister, and one of her acquaintances were strong Unionists, which meant that even though they considered themselves southern belles, they still had, at some point, mentioned and/or discussed their political leanings with one another. Josie frequently wrote that her father recommended she avoid talk of politics, if possible, but she struggled with remaining quiet. Her father seemed to have been supportive of the women in his family having views and thoughts of their own. Josie and her mother participated in political discussions in their home, at least between their family and extended family. Josie stated that everyone in her family expressed their opinions "on every subject that [came] up."<sup>93</sup>

There were still, certain situations and matters in which women in the Underwood family did not participate, however, instead remaining quiet and sticking to their expected gender roles. For example, on April 13, 1861, Josie's father, brothers, and uncles were discussing whether Kentucky would remain neutral. Josie wrote that she, her mother, her sisters, and her aunts went about their "feminine duties."<sup>94</sup> On another occasion, September 20, 1861, Josie wrote that the men went to town where there was a large commotion. Josie wrote "I long[ed] to go with them— but we did not know what soldiers would do and it was best for Ma and me to stay at home as women must—*wait*."<sup>95</sup> This

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<sup>92</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 38.

<sup>93</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 74.

<sup>94</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 75.

<sup>95</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 100.

shows Josie and her mother's understanding of their expected roles per their gender for their family and community; not necessarily that they accepted these roles and positions.

Mr. Underwood believed that secession would be the ruin of the South, and he fully understood that if there was a war that “the border states” would “have to bear the brunt of it.”<sup>96</sup> He also foresaw that the war would be fought in the South, the land there would be laid to waste, and that slavery would end. Josie had clearly given the matter much thought as she expanded on these truths throughout her diary.<sup>97</sup>

Her family and friends were very divided on the matter of secession, and Josie recorded that she began to experience strains in her friendships with her female friends as the sectional crisis intensified. This demonstrates that young ladies in Bowling Green, Kentucky were very much invested and involved in the sectional conflict. They had political opinions of their own and expressed them, at least among other female acquaintances. Even though some of Josie's friends had not openly stated at this point whether they were still Unionists or if they had become secessionists, she stated that she could “feel a difference” when she was with them, at least those that still came around.<sup>98</sup> Josie eventually decided that she would no longer visit her southern friends in Tennessee, as they were ardent secessionists, and she was an avid Unionist. Her decision indicates that the tensions of the conflict and the war were causing deep tensions within her relationships. Josie stated that she could no longer remain quiet when hateful comments were made about Unionist Kentuckians. She felt that it was quite easy for one to side with everyone else around them, but it was very difficult and noble to side with your

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<sup>96</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 77.

<sup>97</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 30, 58, & 61.

<sup>98</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 89.

country over your community, when it was for the good and righteous, as her father has done.<sup>99</sup>

When Josie visited her aunt and uncle in Russellville, her uncle was adamant about having no political discussions or talk of news of the current conflict. He urged this not just for the women, but also for the men. He claimed that talking can be dangerous and that it was better not to discuss matters. Josie seemed to disagree with this, although she did agree with him when it came to visiting her former school friends whilst there. Most of them were secessionists and she a Unionist, and it would have only made their time together “disagreeable.”<sup>100</sup> But they did, once or twice, let their discussion slip into what their political views were, as Josie stated they were dying to know one another's opinions.<sup>101</sup>

Although Josie's life was drastically affected by the war, she persevered through the hardships and had the foresight to leave behind her extremely perceptive diary offering a valuable resource for the research of women in Civil War Kentucky. Her documentation of her experiences provides unrivaled insight into a Kentucky woman's daily life throughout the war. She faced unequalled and complicated difficulties, such as supply shortages, stolen and destroyed property, as well as violence and a loss of friendships, this Kentucky woman persisted and made do with what little she had to provide for her family. Kentucky women, specifically Josie in this instance, were left susceptible owing to the occupation of Confederate troops on her family's estate during the war. The encounters displayed in Josie's testimony reveal the distinctive and difficult hardships that the Civil War submitted some women to on the Bowling Green, Kentucky

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<sup>99</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 96.

<sup>100</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 84.

<sup>101</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 84.

home front. Josie's diary offers understanding into one woman's encounters with the strains between Unionists and Confederates within Kentucky displaying how the Kentucky home front was frequently subjected to the events of the war. The Underwoods faced their property being stolen and damaged, as well as verbal abuse from occupying Confederate troops for the Underwoods' Unionist beliefs. Owing to the occupation of Confederate troops on the Underwoods' estate, Josie's diary, and this assessment of it reveal that Josie's encounters, during the Civil War were distinctive from other Kentucky and other border state home fronts.



## 6. COMPARISON

Frances Peter and Josie Underwood had many things in common with one another. Both women came from affluent families who owned land, and both women had family members who were Unionists and others who were secessionists. Their families and friends were very divided on the matter of secession.<sup>102</sup> Both the Underwood and the Peter families were against emancipation at the beginning of the war and both families owned slaves according to Josie's diary and the 1860 slave schedules from the United States Census.<sup>103</sup> The Underwood family were Unionists, but were not fans of Lincoln, much the same as the Peter family.<sup>104</sup> Despite this, both Josie and Frances wrote that many people associated all Unionists with Lincoln and with the abolitionist movement, even though Lincoln only supported free soil policies and had not yet expressed support of the abolitionist movement by the start of the Civil War.<sup>105</sup>

Josie Underwood, Frances Peter, and other Kentucky women encountered peoples of opposing views daily. Despite their differing political opinions, they attempted to remain civil with their community members. Nevertheless, tensions increased and both women (Josie and Frances), as well as the women in their families, felt they had to be more outspoken about their positions. Josie wrote of how she and other Unionists were teased mercilessly by secessionists due to Lincoln's "radical" views, and thus Unionists like herself who were not supporters of the new president, were left to fight Lincoln's extreme views as well as the secessionists.<sup>106</sup> In their diaries, both Frances and Josie expressed that Lincoln's and his party's policies were too extreme. The Underwoods and

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<sup>102</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 60.

<sup>103</sup> Ancestry.com

<sup>104</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 23.

<sup>105</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 38.

<sup>106</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 51.

the Peters felt that Lincoln's extreme views would push the undecided people over to the Confederacy and the secessionists. Although the Underwoods and the Peters were not in support of the new president and emancipation initially, they had even lower opinions of Confederate sympathizers and secessionists. They often referred to the actions of secessionists as treasonous to the nation and to the efforts of their ancestors that had fought for independence.

Frances Peter's family lived in an urban area and viewed themselves as northerners, whereas Josie Underwood's family lived in a rural area and viewed themselves as southerners. Due to their identification as northerners, the Peters had very progressive views regarding female involvement and freedom, as they allowed and encouraged their daughters to educate themselves on current events and policies. On the other hand, due to their identification as southerners, the Underwoods were more conservative in their views regarding female involvement and freedoms. Her parents allowed their daughters to read the newspapers and to educate themselves on current events.<sup>107</sup> They encouraged their daughters to be well educated and cultured, although they felt that women should remain reserved for the most part. Overall, Frances Peter's and Josie Underwood's diaries are reflections of these influences and opinions.

While historians have documented the ways in which many pro-secession/pro-Confederate women were openly political in rebelling against Union occupation and showing disdain for Union officers and troops, similar behavior by Unionist southern women has received less attention. My analysis Josie's and Frances' mothers' behaviors provides examples of Unionist women's views.<sup>108</sup> Both Josie's mother and Frances'

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<sup>107</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, xvii.

<sup>108</sup> Frank and Whites, *Household War*.

mother were quite outspoken when speaking to Confederates, often freely and confidently voicing their opinions no matter the opposition or backlash. Mrs. Peter was far less reserved and did not hold back when speaking with Confederate soldiers. Frances made little reference as to her mother's dealings with Confederate supporters/civilians. Mrs. Underwood was outspoken towards Confederate soldiers as well, especially when they began invading her home and personal space.<sup>109</sup> For example, while Josie's father declined discussing the conflict with a secessionist visiting their home, Josie's mother could take the man's insistence no longer and spoke up. She told him that she could not stand to spend any more time with him and that he was not welcome back due to his sympathies and inability to let the subject drop.<sup>110</sup> However, overall, she remained somewhat reserved, and the Confederate occupation seemed to take a much greater toll on her mental health than that of Mrs. Peter's. This could very well be due to the Confederate occupation of the Underwood land, whereas the Confederates had only occupied the lot across from the Peters. Since the Peter family seemed to have taken on more of a northern household structure, the contrast between the Peter family and the Underwood family exhibit how gender roles in the border states were a bit more fluid than the gender roles of the North and the South.<sup>111</sup>

Mr. Underwood and Dr. Peter were also both very influential in their daughters' political opinions and views. Though they were not fans of Lincoln, both Mr. Underwood and Dr. Peter remained loyal to their country.<sup>112</sup> Even though Josie's father did not agree with Lincoln's "radical" views and did not want him elected, Josie's father still felt that

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<sup>109</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 58 & 59.

<sup>110</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 66.

<sup>111</sup> Peter, *A Union Woman*, xxi.

<sup>112</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 38 & 88.

Lincoln was “honest in his convictions and his desire to do what is right.”<sup>113</sup> Mr.

Underwood refused to “accept secession and no force” could have made “him disloyal to his country.”<sup>114</sup> Frances and Josie often referenced their fathers’ words and statements on the crisis throughout their diaries. On several occasions Josie not only referenced her father’s speeches and sentiments in her diary, but she also expressed such opinions and views to her companions when the situation arose. Overall, Josie and Frances shared many similarities in their lives and views.

On the other hand, the two women had a great many differences from one another as well. Josie lived in a rural area, whilst Frances lived in an urban setting. Frances’ city was occupied by Union and Confederate troops who abused her family’s separate properties, whereas the Underwood estate, including their own house, were invaded by Confederate troops who set up camp on their land. The troops camped out on their land showed no respect for the Underwoods, and one of the officers claimed it was difficult for his men to respect a southerner with Unionist sympathies.<sup>115</sup> Throughout Frances’ and Josie’s diaries, there were several occasions of soldiers occupying the area not respecting personal boundaries and property. According to a diary entry from Josie on a Sunday in October of 1861, she wrote that her family had an issue with soldiers trying to barge through the door and into their house.<sup>116</sup> This must have left a huge mental mark on Josie and her family as the war barged its way into their personal, household sphere. The war was no longer just at their door, but forcing its way into their home, blurring the boundaries between the homefront and the warfront.

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<sup>113</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 76.

<sup>114</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 101.

<sup>115</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 106.

<sup>116</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 110.

One of the significant differences between Josie and Frances was how they identified themselves during the war. Though a Unionist, Josie identified as a southerner, whereas Frances, also a Unionist, instead identified as a northerner. The two women only lived about 161 miles away from one another and in the same state; however, even though one identified as a northerner and the other as a southerner, neither considered themselves hybrids or border state citizens. Their views highlight the fact that the term ‘border states’ was only used as a geographic identifier during the Civil War, not as a term for a personal identifier. Although, as Allison Fredette pointed out in her book, *Marriage on the Border*, the border state residents’ identities were fluid during the mid-nineteenth century, especially throughout the war. This fluidity of borders and identities “shaped the political, religious, and economic attitudes of their citizens, directly influencing the path of” the Civil War.<sup>117</sup>

There was also a significant difference between the two women’s accounts of the war. Frances’ account was more matter of fact, documenting the events around Lexington, as the country, while Josie’s account included more of her personal opinions, and description of her life amid the conflict and war. Josie’s diary entries contained more of her sentiments and feelings than Frances’ diary.<sup>118</sup> Josie seemed to be trying to maintain a social life and some sense of normalcy amidst the war, whereas Frances seemed somewhat fascinated and seemed to almost welcome the change in scenery and excitement brought to her life by the conflict. Unlike Frances, Josie did have personal connections in the fight. She feared her brother, Warner, would join the war and that she

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<sup>117</sup> Fredette, *Marriage on the Border*, 4.

<sup>118</sup> Underwood, *Civil War Diary*, 105.

might never see him again if he did. Her family friend, Mr. Grider, took her brother under his wing in his own company to protect him.

Throughout her account, Frances never mentions any romantic entrapments or interests, whereas Josie details the frequent proposals and romantic pursuits for her hand in marriage. This could be due to the slight difference in ages for the two women or it could be due to Frances' epilepsy.

Overall, the most prominent commonality between these Kentucky women was their involvement in the political discussions of their time, a fact that has been largely understated in the previous, limited historiography of women in Civil War Kentucky. Previous scholarship has failed to fully address the ways which women such as Josie and Frances voiced and expressed their views on politics and policies of the time. This is likely because few diaries of the women in Civil War Kentucky have been published and documented. It is my hope that surviving works be published soon to shed light on the daily lives and opinions of these women.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Josie Underwood's and Frances Peter's diaries provide evidence that white, Kentucky women had political opinions during the Civil War and at times their views were influenced by the influential male figures in their lives. This study of these two diaries and the research on diaries from other border states supply should lay the basis for further research on the topic of white women having and expressing political opinions during the Civil War. This research provides evidence that these young, white, Kentucky women were political actors in their communities, utilizing the methods that were acceptable for the women of their time. The diaries of Frances Peter and Josie Underwood, as well as the accounts of other white, Kentucky women demonstrate the various ways in which these border state women practiced and voiced their political opinions and views during the Civil War.

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