Chapter One
Introduction

Minimum decet libere cui multum licet.
(One who has great power should use it lightly.)
-- Seneca, Troades, 336

People with power are ripe for the plucking by the historian. The researcher-writer opens up their life stories with a gusto, separating the public and private, the physical and mental, the rational and the emotional, in order to find an organizational theme to define the whole. Usually the historian is confident in the knowledge of who exercised power in the past--those holding political office, commanding battles, or controlling industry and commerce. These people obviously have power because they cajole or command others to do their will. Historians study what the powerful did and how their actions produced change. For example, the Caesars inevitably march in triumph through modern textbooks of ancient Roman history. But how did the pageantry of the Caesars’ power come to be constructed?

Look behind the glowing visage of a heroic political or military personage and find complex pathways by which power flows. The philosopher-teacher Seneca, author of the quotation above, was the inspiration for this study of power. The vagaries of power intrigued Seneca: he found fascinating the relationship between those who commanded and those who obeyed them and the interconnectedness of the physical and the psychological. He saw a Neo-Stoic solution to the problems of a rapidly changing world, and he urged those who had great power to use it “lightly.” This style of power
management would resolve the moral tension between human nobility (which he believed was inherent) and inevitable degradation from an overweening use of power.

Essentially conservative, Seneca wrote about leadership as manifested in Hesiod’s Age of Gold when the best members of society led the others and created harmony in a homogeneous society by serving the people. The exercise of power by the leaders in this Utopia was complex. They derived their power in this Golden Age not from the accumulation of private possessions but from a sense of responsibility to the whole. The conservative ideal functioned strictly within a prescribed set of societal orders and classes, and a sense of propriety adhered to the functionality of an hierarchical worldview. According to Seneca’s teachings, those who had power should not wield it indiscriminately and thoughtlessly, but should be ever watchful for ways to return to a Golden peace of mind or *claritas*. The powerful should be frugal, committed fully to what they are doing, independent, and in control of their passions. Not surprisingly, the writings of Seneca became popular again in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The educated elite of the Western world, caught in a whirlwind of radical change that shook the very foundations of traditional power structures, found that the conservative ideology of Seneca spoke to their fears of materialism and spiritual emptiness in the face of technological, economic, and political changes.

This monograph is a case study of those conservative values and the ways in which an individual life expressed them. Margaret Wickliffe Preston was not particularly famous by the usual standards. However, her elite status and careful documentation of her claims to that status give ample reason for focusing on her life story. She struggled
between \textit{de facto} and \textit{de jure} power in Victorian America, between the commercial progress of a border state and its moral principles, and between a vision of a harmonious society with all in proper place and a chaotic world of crass greed and brutal violence. Her values were conservative and as representative of conservativism in nineteenth century Kentucky as those of any politician or military leader.\textsuperscript{1} She was and saw herself part of a larger web of complex forces that helped create her world. As Seneca taught, she used her power lightly.

Her father, Robert Wickliffe, and her husband, William Preston, both lawyers and land speculators, carefully saved thousands of documents. Along with bank notes, legal briefs, sketches of real estate speculations, newspaper clippings, and household receipts, fragments of her voice still exist. Late in life, Margaret Wickliffe Preston destroyed her own collection of letters, but many documents of hers survive among the Wickliffe-Preston papers. Her words and those of the people in her life interweave both public and private worlds and become both autobiography and biography. This auto/biography of a woman has a politically charged context. When a woman writes and when others read her words, her and her reader’s gender, race, age, class, and sexual orientation provide multiple perspective points. Some of these perspectives operate more strongly than others at various times but they make problematic any generalization about women’s words or experiences and how the scholar analyzes them. Barbara W. Tuchman wrote, “If it takes two to make love or war or tennis, it likewise takes two to complete the function of the written word.”\textsuperscript{2} The twentieth century reader of a letter signed “MWPreston” hears a certain voice, a tone, or an underlying theme that may or may not
be consistent with what the letter’s writer intended or with what a nineteenth century reader of that same letter understood.

Any construction of “MW Preston,” then, is ephemeral. Judith Butler, a noted scholar in feminist theory, described a “slippage” between the concreteness of explaining any one perspective, whether race, class, or gender. She explored that theoretical moment when one uses language to “name” a particular characteristic of an individual under study and thereby orders a subject’s experiences into a narrative. The slippage appears from a range of “disobedience” when the disorderly subject fails to conform to the named identity or identities.\(^3\) History has shown that when gender overwhelms the humanizing elements in descriptions of women, the woman subject falls to a categorical level below that of a male subject. This process, naming the subject as woman or as man, became a precise science by the nineteenth century, and any study of a nineteenth century woman is problematical because she was writing and being written about in a peculiarly gendered way.\(^4\)

Race and class each function in the same way as gender by providing a measuring stick which precisely and hierarchically puts the woman subject in relationship to an idealized white man of ample leisure and income. By separating the elements of a person’s identity in the process of categorizing the subject, and in the attempt to find a universal theme, the researcher might assume that the reader agrees with a basic premise, such as the commonality of women’s experiences. Yet the differences in experiences due to a woman’s race or age are important. Any process of creating essentialized identities is highly unstable, posited Joan Wallach Scott, since attempts to create the illusion of
coherence and a common understanding of differentiation mislead both reader and writer: “Instead of a search for single origins, we [historians] have to conceive of processes so interconnected that they cannot be disentangled..... we must pursue not universal, general causality but meaningful explanation.”

As we read the words of MW Preston, we know that she, a white woman of means, wrote them in a different time. How can we presume that our positions of analysis are detached enough from our own times to interpret hers? As women in a multicultural world, we know there is more than one way to experience our gender. At the same time, “women” as a category still challenges the masculinized norm. Many of us still associate a “public sphere” with a male norm wherein men have the power or agency to determine their own fates and the “private sphere” with a female norm and of subjugation. In popular media women are not usually imbued with agency and therefore, they rarely are presented as heroic characters suitable for emulation. A woman’s life, especially one lived by a historical Kentuckian whom no one but descendants remembers, seems hardly worthy of scholarly study. MW Preston’s gender, race, class, era, and even region exercised restraints on the way her life evolved. So why tell her story? Why should we pay attention to this woman’s words and experiences?

This biography of MW Preston serves as a case study of power in a political sense. It is a reconstruction of how women’s lives and self-images changed within a politically charged environment. Stephanie McCurry took a similar approach in her study of the relations of power within the yeoman households of the South Carolina low country. By analyzing relationships in yeoman families and their interactions with planter families,
McCurry showed that the “boundaries of power” she found in yeoman lives were contours of a gendered political history of all lower class Southerners. The political behaviors she described were not those at the ballot box but those in the fields, not in the legislative halls but in the church meeting rooms or front porches. In the process, then, she intended to derail the canonical version of “political” history. Her writing was not just a presentation of information hitherto unknown about poor white Southerners, but a re-visioning of what once was “familiar” and what then became new vistas of analysis since the political systems were constructions within the minds of the historical subjects, their worlds, and their historians.9

Inspired by such multidimensional approaches, this study will examine a nineteenth century woman’s experiences and discuss political interpretations of those experiences. As Judith Butler reminded us so lyrically, even if one IS a woman, that is surely not ALL one is. Gender, then, becomes a part of the study and not an overwhelming standard by which her life is measured. MWPreston was a female member of the white elite in nineteenth century America so her class and race function at the same time as important indicators of her sense of self and worldview.

Worthy of public notice in her own time, she is ignored by most historians today. Political historians tend to focus on those powerful people whose names sound familiar: those on a list of presidents, cabinet members, or industrial giants. George E. Marcus, an anthropologist interested in elite theory, asserted that “it is probably the less-visible members who are most important to elite research.”10 These people provide essential information on how they demarcated socio-political boundaries and conventionalized
inter-relationships. Both kin and class established particular relationships that demanded
particular rituals or behaviors which reinforced a hierarchical configuration of society,
especially in the South. “The Southern tradition,” posited Eugene D. Genovese, and the
mainstream of the South’s cultural development was “quintessentially conservative.”

We can better understand, then, the conservative elite in nineteenth century American
history with more focused studies of Southern members of that elite. MW Preston’s status
sets the stage for this narrative of power relations, and her attitudes and experiences
expose indirect methods by which the American conservative elite controlled their own
lives and those of others.

Though not a hero by anyone’s measure, MW Preston could and did take charge of
her life. The sheer volume of her letters and recorded activities provides adequate proof
of her agency which merits analysis. Hers was a sort of personal feminism similar to that
described in Virginia Jeans Laas’ analysis of the marriage of the Washington belle, Violet
Blair: “Her experience is a story of shifting power and certain struggle, ending in a kind
of stasis in which both partners retained their autonomy while remaining dependent on
each other.” While MW Preston’s life would not be a good subject for an heroic
biography, her words and the various meanings associated with her life experiences are
indictative of important boundaries of power in the nineteenth century. We cannot expect
her story to compete with the hagiography of Robert E. Lee, nor will we see in the future
a term coined with her name that explains a political process such as “Grantism.” Instead
her words, ideas, and actions fuel an exploration of how power worked in all its
complexity.
This case study of MWPreston does not position her firmly within an elite sphere separated clearly from the non-elite, nor does it present her as clearly Southern in opposition to a Northern regional sphere. Her story does not flow in the center of a chronological current but exposes her interactions with a range of overlapping socio-political groups (rich/poor, white/black, male/female, old/young, free/enslaved, Northern/Southern) which flow in and out of linear periodizations. Her letters do not reveal a single reality but represent depictions of her life, her “self,” since conventions of private and public self(s) never remain in a binary formulaic structure. In examining the political networks of identification in nineteenth century America, this study recognizes what Leigh Gilmore calls “shifting sands of identity.”

MWPreston’s self-representation was and is a political discourse. Michel Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality* showed us how to question our sense of a “self” by exploring the role of the intellectual and the function of theory in understanding constructions of modern sexuality. He provided the feminist biographer with theoretical tools to examine the networks of power and to differentiate between power and domination. Foucault’s theory of power as a complex of forces works well in scenarios of women’s lives. It helps us avoid the uni-directional narrative which assumes a unitary self, a process that Liz Stanley warns “is like generalizing about icebergs from the bit that sticks up above water, which can be a very risky business.”

Margaret Wickliffe Preston signed her name at the end of personal letters, even those to her own children, in various ways, sometimes as “Margaret Wickliffe Preston” or “MWPreston,” but never as “Ma” and rarely as “Mag.” Was she using her “proper” or
a public name as she wrote what we might suppose were private letters because she did not envisage the public/private realms as we do today? She sometimes ended her letters to her children with “believe me / Your devoted / Mother,” but she more often signed her letters with an imperious flourish of surname formality. Perhaps this was a reminder to her intended reader and to those individuals with whom her reader shared the letter that she was not only the wife of William Preston, but also the heiress of Mary Owen Todd Russell Wickliffe and of Margaretta Howard Wickliffe. The usual interpretation of a nineteenth century author’s use of first two initials and a last name is that the author was a female venturing into the public realm of publishing without sacrificing the decorum associated with Victorian womanhood. Yet here in these private letters, preserved for their information by the lawyers who loved her--her father, Robert Wickliffe, and her husband, William Preston--she used that particular format.

Was she distancing herself from her intended reader and rendering her symbol of “I,” as Judith Butler described it? She was offering that symbol of a self which is laden with complexities of power and which may be examined by the curious reader. Foucault emphasized a subconscious transference of power evident in small expressions or behaviors. He equated these indirect methods of powerbrokerage to the anatomico-metaphysical process which Napoleon used to make his soldiers succeed so well on the battlefield. The soldiers’ “docile bodies” were “subjected and practiced” to the point that responses to constant social coercion were automatic, thus reflecting the mechanical aspects of power. The soldier in Napoleon’s army functioned both as an individual and as a member of the regiment; he acted and reacted so that the mechanics of power seemed
essentialized and created a norm. The individual’s “only truly important ceremony” was the “exercise” of that practiced part.\textsuperscript{17}

This political history of MW Preston will explore the “exercise” or trained movements of “docile bodies” through the complex network of political patronage and the social associations of political actors. “Docile bodies” reacted to both individual and family issues and crossed the boundaries of the “public sphere” into the private domain. The traditional political historian usually avoids this private world of power, except for an occasional humanistic touch in a portrait filled with election returns, diplomatic treaties and public opinion polls. Linda K. Kerber, a leading feminist historian, asserted: “If our predecessors were constrained by dualisms--home versus market, public versus private, household versus state--we need no longer be so constrained.”\textsuperscript{18} Margaret Wickliffe Preston flourished and exerted her influence in mostly indirect ways. In the Washington ballroom, the diplomatic reception at court, the parlor of a Virginia spa, her dining rooms in Kentucky, and in a clever letter to the powerful wife of an elected official, this Kentucky woman fully immersed herself in the international political society of the nineteenth century.

Many political historians describe women’s involvement in American politics as a contest between the domestic sphere and the public sphere: they craft a story in which American women, formerly without political power, took over the nineteenth century Jacksonian agenda with domestic reform issues such as temperance. In this way, the focus has been on individuals such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and on the ideological march from Seneca Falls in 1848 to the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in
Political history of women became a fertile field of study for those who experienced the women’s movement in the 1960s, and scholars described how women gained political skills, how they developed a sense of consciousness as separate from men, and how involvement in women’s organizations gave them feelings of self-worth. Women historians of the 1960s found paradoxes in gender norms of the nineteenth century and feminist activities which emphasized individualism and equality of opportunity regardless of sex.

A good example of this scholarship in Kentucky history is the biography of Laura Clay by Paul E. Fuller. Fuller measured Laura Clay’s politics by her actions in the formal organization of the Fayette County Equal Rights Association (ERA) and the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). Following Anne Firor Scott’s thesis about the “New Woman” in the New South, he asserted that Clay was not a typical southern lady since she inclined “away from the family context and toward service in a larger sphere.”

Although Laura Clay was the daughter of the fiercely enterprising Mary Jane Warfield Clay, she probably did not, however, behave in a manner too far removed from her peers. This can also be said of another nineteenth century Kentucky woman whom biographers placed in a category outside the Southern lady norm. Mary Todd was a fully grown woman of 18 when she left Lexington for Springfield, Illinois, well educated not only in music and French but also in political skills learned in the hometown of her hero, Henry Clay. Both women refused to be voiceless and powerless, were engaged in national politics, and knew their roles as political women very well.
In 1984 Paula Baker called for political historians to reject their reliance on the separate spheres metaphor and explore the ways in which male politicians coopted women’s organized political actions in the nineteenth century. She theorized that a “domestication” of American political society occurred when issues once deemed apolitical became political. For example, intensely private issues such as temperance and spousal abuse, contraception and abortion, education and ultimately child labor burst onto the political scene as issues of public concern. Social policy through special interest groups moved from women’s voluntary organizations to formal government, and in this process historians “could find new contexts in which to place their work.” Baker insisted that students of American politics and of American women’s experiences “need to go beyond the definition of ‘political’ offered by nineteenth-century men.”

If we use an enlarged definition of political activity to include both formal and informal means of influence, Laura Clay and Mary Todd Lincoln were powerful women who knew well how to navigate the mainstream Kentucky political ideology. They both were able voices for a culture that expected women to take part in the informal machinations of political power and expected them to use their influences on other people of power. Political power in Kentucky came from local meetings, drawing rooms, barbeques, and petitioning for special favors from the state and federal governments. Kentuckians frowned on federal mandates or state oversight. Though “nearly all Kentuckians were convinced that a democratic society was the ideal,” the disparity between rich and poor, white and black, women and men loomed large throughout her history. The elite few conferred and then made major political decisions behind closed
doors. These political actors best represented and preserved “the innate and indigenous conservatism of Kentuckians.” Rarely did those who threatened the social hierarchy of race and class acquire much political power in Kentucky. The elite quickly squelched abolitionism, born in the Kentucky backwoods churches; they crushed any resistance to slavery, post-bellum emancipation came only with a struggle, and the quest for social justice continues today. They only promulgated those women’s rights issues which protected patrimonial estates or maintained a hegemony already established. Only in Kentucky have women both gained and then lost the right to the franchise, both times due to the perceived political power of women who organized for that purpose. Laura Clay did not stop her political activities for women’s rights nor did she fade from the political scene in Kentucky.

By any traditional pattern of women’s political history, Margaret Wickliffe Preston deserves little study. She never made a “public” speech, lobbied a legislature, or led a street demonstration. Instead she worried about what clothes to wear when mingling with the elite of America and the royalty of Europe; and she acquiesced to her family’s demands not to sue for a divorce. The public record reveals a powerless woman situated on the margins of the elite hegemony of upper-class America. Nor do most historians consider the men in her immediate circle particularly important in a political sense. Her father, Robert Wickliffe, was an old fire-eater who never gained political office higher than county representative to the state legislature. Her husband, William Preston, was not particularly successful at his law practice nor was he really the “old hero of Chickamauga” as his contemporaries called him in their soliloquies of the Lost Cause.
He failed, as Buchanan’s minister to Spain, to annex Cuba and, as Davis’s minister to Mexico, to gain recognition of the Confederate States of America. His antebellum political career was fitful and often linked to the shifting fortunes of his kin: Congressman Thomas Hart Benton, Senator William C. Preston of South Carolina, Vice-President John C. Breckinridge, Governors Charles A. Wickliffe and John Floyd. After the war, he stayed in the background in politics and you can see him there in the political cartoons drawn by Thomas Nast for Harper’s Weekly.30

Wickliffe and Preston were known forces, however, as was their daughter and wife. They did not have a political force we can measure today by research of election ballots; instead, their influence on national political events is evidenced by letters they received from such notables as Varina Davis, Mary Lincoln, Carl Schurz, Winfield Scott, Wade Hampton, James Speed, and James Buchanan. As father and daughter and as husband and wife, they worked effectively in the political realm together, and they knew it. Their political success lay in their ability to project an elegantly sophisticated knowledge of the domestic and international politics of the day, within an elite socio-economic cast of players.

This case study of the female half of a political partnership cannot rely, then, on the clean images of “separate spheres.”31 The Wickliffe-Preston women did not merely reside in the domestic realm. Similarly defying the paradigm, Robert Wickliffe and William Preston took great interest in directing the everyday maintenance of their households from the production of dairy products to teaching the children how to keep their bedrooms neat as well as the re-designing of the physical structures.32 A “cult of
The socio-economic world of promissory notes, real estate, and the drawing up of deeds usually described the empire of men. Yet the Wickliffe-Preston women, married and unmarried, young and old, black and white, directed issues which often ended with a male’s legal signature. Their agency in the transaction was not lessened because of the final, legal niceties of a man’s name at the bottom of the document. The intricacies of their relationships can reveal the more complex picture of a woman’s life.

For example, what was Margaret Wickliffe Preston’s reaction when she read an accusing letter from Jane Giles, a black woman who freed herself by running away? Giles saw her former mistress as completely without humane feelings and contrasted MW Preston’s actions as slaveowner to those of William Preston. Could this white woman, legally without power over her own body, make decisions about those slaves who legally belonged to her husband? Or as another example, did the Preston parents react with bemused smiles or shocked anger when they read the letters of their son when he made fun of ex-Confederate General Lee and his daughter? Or, when William Preston relied on his wealthy sister in making decisions about his property and his children, how far could his wife go in refusing to give up control of her own family? Why would he have kept in his files the evidences of inter-family antagonism? Did the Prestons and Wickliffes see as unremarkable that women participated in the “public” realm of money and men in the “private” world of domesticity?

One’s sex was and is today an important definer in the experiences of the Wickliffe-Preston families. However, the metaphor of separate spheres in the historical
analysis of this wealthy Southern white woman’s life over-simplified a complex network that involves issues of race and class as well. When nineteenth century Americans used the term “woman’s sphere,” they denied the voices and experiences of black Americans, working-class women, and women of the elite. Charlotte Perkins Gilman complained at the turn of the century that women were “over-sexed” and that to understand the political roots and the socio-economic consequences of all women’s oppression we had to look at how women’s activities influenced men and visa versa. This case study is subtitled a “political history” for this very reason; and the political aspects to her experiences and worldview have far-reaching consequences.

If power means the ability to impose one’s will, then MW Preston had plenty in political and economic realms. However, Foucault suggested that the mechanisms of power and forms of domination are not dualistic but a whole complex of forces by which a close study of a woman like MW Preston might expose. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese wrote in the 1980s about the problems inherent in asserting the primacy of either class or gender as an explanation for socio-political domination in American history. She was responding to two important movements in historiography: Eugene Genovese’s concept of Southern patriarchy and feminist interpretations of the plantation mistress’s alienation and domination as based primarily on gender differences. Reminding both Foucault and Genovese that gender played an important differentiating role in the history of sexuality and of the political economy of the South, Fox-Genovese insisted on including descriptions of the roles of women within the historical narrative. “But adding women to history is not the same as adding women’s history.” She warned against
efforts to create a separate history, thereby barricading historical discourse along gender lines.

Catherine Clinton, an important leader in Southern women’s history, convincingly portrayed the planter society’s typical white wife as a hard working, alienated manager. Clinton’s plantation mistress played a key role in creating a self-sufficient base which provided her husband and eldest son the leisure time to frolic in the public and private realms of fraternal organizations including legislative politics. However, Clinton’s depiction of the elite rural woman as a “slave of slaves,” Fox-Genovese argued, was unsupportable since race and class were as central to her identity and behavior as her gender role. The elite white Southern woman conjoined with her male kin when she deemed it necessary to maintain the racial hierarchy or to assert her position within the antebellum planter society.

During her long and luxuriant gaze Within the Plantation Household (1988), Fox-Genovese saw plantation mistresses as relatively happy in their dependency and complicity in a paterfamilias Southern-style. She used elite white women’s writings to reveal their whining petulance, especially when they were complaining of onerous duties and remembering the relative freedom of their days as belles. Fox-Genovese poignantly ended her gendered version of the pre-bourgeois Southern patriarchy by demonstrating the importance of race and differentiating among Southern women’s experiences. She wrote of Harriet Jacobs’ life story: a slave caught between the gender conventions of southern white society and gender relations of the urban slave community. Fox-Genovese concluded that southern white women were rarely abolitionists in any
form and that female house servants could not rely on white maternal conventions nor on black husbands to protect them from oppression. At the same time, the white slaveowning patriarchal household permitted white and black women to express their cooperation in a unique and personal way. While caught within a patriarchal institution, the conservative white woman of means was both victim and victimizer. Her sense of order complemented that of her male kin, and the tone of her history shifted from one of powerlessness to one of power.44

Family history portrayed this complex interaction between elite men and women by focusing on a early nineteenth century construction of a “woman’s sphere.” Daniel Blake Smith posited that Inside the Great House (1980) since the 1750s in the Chesapeake area Southern privatism enabled white mothers to gain more maternal influence while an ever-closing nuclear family propelled the elder male into greater domination over sons as well as wives and daughters.45 Joan E. Cashin expanded this idea in A Family Venture (1991). She traced the changes in families over space and time, and she paid particular attention to how the southeastern sons migrating in the 1820-30s were escaping their pre-modern, hierarchical and deferential societies and their prescribed status within a rigid kin network. She found a more modern attitude in the newly organized planter communities of the states and territories west of the Alabama-Georgia state line as well as the frontier areas in Tennessee, Kentucky and Florida: capitalistic instead of pre-bourgeois in world view, violently racist instead of mildly paternalistic toward slaves, and nuclear rather than extended in family organization. For Southern women, this “modernization” process was horrifying, and Cashin asserted that
the newly domesticated woman on the frontier chose not to rebel against her husband, a “fighting cock.”⁴⁶ Even as the migrant white woman became more dependent on her husband, she used her reciprocity principles taught within the kin network back east with her new neighbors and congregation to begin replicating standards set by eastern middle-class white women’s activism.

Jan Lewis also showed a turning point for elite Southerners, but in her book, The Pursuit of Happiness (1983), the rise of a securely ordered domestic world took place in Virginia and grew out of the religious impulses of the First Great Awakening. She described the old values associated with death, success, and love that began to break apart with the new expressions of sentiment. Sons of the political gentry broke away psychically, not geographically, in order “to serve their families first and only, a tradition was broken, a way of life itself profoundly changed.”⁴⁷ Similarly, Jean E. Friedman focused on six North Carolina and Georgia church populations and found a Genovesian pre-modern personality reinforced by kinship ties and boosted by church-directed evangelicalism in The Enclosed Garden (1985). For white women in these studies, happiness came with submission of self, and unlike the black community, no sisterhood extended across the bounds of the isolated nuclear family. The conservatism of religious fundamentalism served to bolster male power rather than encourage any female independence such as had been found in the northeast.⁴⁸ This study of MW Preston will show a very different portrayal of womanhood; and her conservative efforts to maintain what she had stemmed more from a strong sense of kinship with her extended family in Virginia and South Carolina and a consistent refusal to submit to overt male domination.
Less convincing than either Lewis or Friedman in describing the roots of Southern white women’s conservatism, George C. Rable portrayed the rural isolation of drudges that guaranteed that white southern women “never examined or seriously questioned” their own values. They never really knew they were victims, and so they never rebelled from patriarchal norms. According to Rable’s Civil Wars (1989), Southern white women accepted, even longed for a Lost Cause before the Civil War happened. John Brown’s raid and the secession crisis of 1860 prompted white women to speak out publicly for the first time. The Civil War disrupted their traditional roles, provoked patronage letter-writing campaigns to governors, and exposed the fact that they were “politically immature.” This immaturity derived from southern women’s fundamental conservatism, says Rable, “often based more on habit than on ideology.”

Long descriptions of political events and major political players fill MW Preston’s letters. Her activities, though rarely overt in a traditionally political sense, reveal a complex and sophisticated worldview. She succeeded in each of her patronage letter-writing campaigns because she was a member of an elite that went across state boundaries, and the mechanisms of her power subtly and carefully remained within the bounds of her social standing.

In contrast to Rable, Claudia Koonz’s work on anti-feminist women in Nazi Germany, Bonnie G. Smith’s analysis of the reactionary tactics of French women, and Kathy Blee’s history of twentieth century American women in the Ku Klux Klan, assumed their subjects’ political maturity. These scholars have written of the historically conservative women’s mechanisms for attaining power in order to understand today how the oppressed can be a vital part of the system of domination. Politically active herself,
the historian Gerda Lerner asserted in *The Creation of Patriarchy* that acknowledging a system of male dominance of women and children in the family and society, “does not imply that women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence, and resources.” A generation earlier, Mary R. Beard said, “the dogma of woman’s complete historic subjection to man must be rated as one of the most fantastic myths ever created by the human mind.” We should not assume that Southern women in general were peculiarly ignorant because of their geographical location – any more than white women in Maine, western Pennsylvania, Illinois, Kansas or Utah were. Nor should we expect them to act like Northern middle-class white women and imagine that they were asleep ideologically, awaiting the kiss of the liberating Northern soldier in order finally to take their role in an “upward spiral to freedom.”

Southern ideology was tradition-based and images of any radical reform, especially regarding Southern female conditions, do not hold true over time. In describing *The Free Women of Petersburg*, Suzanne Lebsock reminded us of Genovese’s landmark book by entitling a chapter “The Political Economy of Marriage.” She found that Carl Degler’s theory of the antebellum period’s new concept of companionate marriage with a unique emphasis on spousal shared activities and joint decision making did not work in her study of Petersburg between 1784-1860. Instead marriage was “fundamentally asymmetrical,” and marriage patterns for urban Virginian women suggested that economic motives, not romantic love, were central. Lebsock’s exhaustive use of the public record was combined with a sophisticated sense of what freedom meant to Southern women, both black and white. More problematic was Lebsock’s definition
of a woman’s culture, one of “personalism” that formed the basis of their political ideology. Lebsock found that the women in her study seemed to rely on their intuitive sense of equity and reacted to a sexist society in small personal ways. They spoke out and acted for themselves as individuals and as kin and rarely called for universal equality. The type of political problem-solving she saw women doing in Petersburg was indirect and rarely confrontational. Southern women could acquire or maintain power only if it was not obvious or general: “For women the distinctiveness of the South lay in the breadth of the gap between private power and public display.”

MW Preston’s private power often relied on public displays, however, those displays were not the same as those sought by northern middle-class women activists. MW Preston’s public displays of power might be overlooked by some observers and indistinct for the historian who relies on traditional resources.

Lebsock’s generalizations came from an examination of the public records of Petersburg. This case study of a Kentucky white woman plumbs letters, diaries, maps, and account ledgers to explore personal discourse, geo-political loci, and rituals of the body. Work has just begun on analyzing how certain groups of Southerners--in this case wealthy, white, Kentuckians--made meaning for themselves. Steven M. Stowe suggested that the multiplicity of the Southern experience allows us historians freedom from the necessity to portray Southern culture as separate from others around it. This stance contradicts the *sui generis* premise of the Genovese and Fox-Genovese framework of the Southern *mentalité*, but offers a less restricted analysis of Southerners. The Wickliffe-Preston families were firmly located within a Southern culture, but most of
them, particularly MW Preston and her husband, continually interacted with and relied on their socio-economic ties with non-Southern elites.

MW Preston was clear about her social status in her own right, separate from her husband. How did she see herself, and how much did she rely on her identity as a woman—as a white woman—as a white woman of means? This is a political question since MW Preston was intimately involved in the informal processes of state, national, and even international politics. Unlike the ladies described by Anne F. Scott and more like Louisa McCord, so sure of the positive role of slavery and domesticated white women in the free-trade principles she found in Southern markets, MW Preston easily transferred slaves from one family setting to another, from one region to another, without considering their own sense of belonging and pocketed the profits as her own. How could she reconcile slavery and entrepreneurial schemes with her ennobled vision of freedom and landed gentry? This too is a political question since she functioned as an important decision-maker in the economic well-being of her immediate family, and for the social standing of her ancestors and her descendants. When Jacquelyn Dowd Hall described how Jessie Ames became a New Woman in the New South, she made assumptions about Ames’ personal development which relied on Anne Firor Scott’s theory about the Southern lady’s powerlessness on her rhetorical pedestal. MW Preston did not change in any radical way but she used her firmly rooted skills in increasingly more sophisticated ways as she gained physical separation from her husband and focused on the maintenance of her landed patrimony for her descendants. Why did she maintain
her hegemony as an heiress and yet remain aloof from the women’s rights struggle even though it was clear she agreed with most of its tenets?

These questions can be answered by exploring the personal and political—the language and the actions—the values and the valuables—of the highly literate and self-documented Wickliffe-Preston family. Gilmore said that reading words written long ago “provokes fantasies of the real.” To maintain a critical detachment was difficult as I read the eloquent prose of these long and interesting letters between members of the elite. My readers could misconstrue my empathy, however, as ideological sympathy. So, what is a historian, asked Bonnie G. Smith? “Until now a historian has been the embodiment of universal truth, who, constructed from bits of psychological detail and having passed through the purifying trials dealt by the contingencies of daily life, human passion, and devouring women, emerges a genderless genius with a name that radiates extraordinary power in the profession and in the mind of the individual practitioner.”

Barbara Tuchman, a master of historical biography, described the historian’s role as a prism refracting the light from a historical document and creating a spectrum that makes the historian’s craft accessible to all the different readers who look for connections in their lives and times to those people, events, and ideas being portrayed. Virginia Woolf defended “The New Biography” as early as 1927 as a medium where the reader can best see the rainbow-like personality of the human being under study. She insisted that the Victorian historians’ use of granite-like facts was problematic. Celebrating our human subjectivity, she exposed the falsity of claims that there was a definitive list of facts about humans. Instead she told of those unpredictable “moments of being” where
the observer (whether the subject of the biography, the writer of it, or the reader) realizes the interconnectedness of everything.\textsuperscript{62} And thus the feminist biographer makes problematic that which is accepted as simple and true, and attempts to be honest about the ever-changing subjectivity involved in the interconnectedness of subject and object, of observer and observed.

Since I am a white woman feminist, one might be tempted to ask me why research the life experiences of an elite white woman of the nineteenth century when so much has yet to be told about the groups of people she commanded or avoided? One answer is that the words and actions of MW Preston reveal the conservative mind of her era, and our better understanding of that which holds us back from a more egalitarian society is important. The Wickliffe-Preston belief that freedom and property are inseparable maintains today the hateful boundaries of racism and poverty. Furthermore, her conviction that inequalities were best ordered by class and race was representative of her social peers, and we live today with the horrific consequences of that worldview. An analysis of the key stages in her life presents a portrait to be placed in a gallery of the powerful.
Footnotes: Chapter One

1 Kirk Russell described six canons of conservative thought that were first evidenced by the conscious conservatism of Edmund Burke. See Kirk Russell, The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot, 7th revised ed. (Washington DC: Regnery Publishing Inc., 1985), pp. 8-9. Peculiar to Southern conservatives, especially in the Southern politicians John Randolph and John C. Calhoun, Russell suggested four characteristics of conservatism. This set of commonly held assumptions in Southern conservative thinkers was: (1) a predilection for slow processes of change over time rather than an immediate reaction to innovation; (2) agrarian-centered worldview and a contempt for trade or industry; (3) an assertive individualism, social and political (p. 154)” which pulled people of power to the local or state level of politics for strategies and solutions; and (4) “an uneasy awareness--sometimes bursting into defiance, sometimes rocked into somnolence--of the immense problem which must exist whenever two races occupy the same territory (ibid.).” Russell emphasized the anxiety that Southern conservatives must have felt in their assumed need for a slave caste and their conviction that those enslaved people, inherently immoral and violent, were ready to destroy the established society at any time.


4 Denise Riley asserted that the concept of “women” as a category for analysis came into full bloom between the Age of Enlightenment and the Victorian Age, forming a kind of continuum of [female] sociality against which the [male] political was set. It was, much like today, a time “in which the understandings of gender both re-order and are themselves re-ordered (p.29).” See Riley, “Does A Sex Have a History?” pp. 17-33 in Feminism and History, edited by Joan Wallach Scott. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

5 Joan Wallach Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis” in Feminism and History, pp. 166-167. See also Butler, Bodies, p. 16. Patricia Hill Collins relied on Alice Walker’s term “womanist” to describe her emphasis on the interconnectedness of the human experience (p. 37). Rather than search for some essentialized differences between us, Collins urged a more open dialog which acknowledges the difference yet searches for a human element that speaks across time. Women, as women, experience their lives differently than do men; and racial and ethnic groups experience their lives differently. Therefore, black women, for example, would experience their lives differently from black men and from white women--self-awareness of these differences across race and gender is the key to the beginning of a constructive search for the story of our human history. Collins developed an Afrocentric feminist epistemology because she found her traditional training as a social scientist inadequate for studying the “subjugated knowledge of a Black women’s standpoint (p. 202).” Her
description of a new perspective for scholars, a way of knowing, helps free us all from
the clutches of positivism because it forces us to admit to co-existing multiple points of
perspective. It “calls into question the content of what currently passes as truth and
simultaneously challenges the process of arriving at that truth (p. 219).” See Collins,
Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment

6 “Before 1900, women in Kentucky were almost invisible. At least that is the
impression one gains from reading Kentucky history books (p. viii).” See Eugenia K.
Potter, “Introduction,” Kentucky Women: Two Centuries of Indomitable Spirit and
Vision, Eugenia K. Potter, ed. ([Louisville, Ky.]: Big Tree Press, 1997). Potter’s
inspiration for gathering this compendium of biographical essays and images (“designed
like a scrapbook”) was her frustration as an elementary school librarian at the lack of
historical materials available about women in Kentucky. She wanted her patrons to be
able to see Kentucky history from various perspectives. “Until the concept of cultural
context, most historians believed that women never had enough power to be influential
and make substantive contributions, so they just ignored them (p. ix).”

7 Jacquelyn Dowd Hall admitted that a sense of justice was one of the reasons she
chose to write the biography that catapulted Jessie Daniel Ames, the great anti-lynching
and suffrage activist, back into the limelight. See her essay “Lives through Time: Second
Thoughts on Jessie Daniel Ames” in The Challenge of Feminist Biography: Writing the
Lives of Modern American Women, Sara Alpern, et al., eds. (Urbana and Chicago:
University of Illinois Press, 1992), p. 144. Hall felt that Ames was a famous woman left
out on the margins of our history who deserved to be brought back into the mainstream.
I, on the other hand, never imagined Margaret Wickliffe Preston part of the usual story of
the usual American--people of her class and status lived in a closed, elite circle.

8 Stephanie McCurry, Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender
Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country
(New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. Another recent analysis of Southern women’s
experiences in the nineteenth century is Marli F. Weiner’s Mistresses and Slaves:
Plantation Women in South Carolina, 1830-80 (Urbana: University of Illinois Press,
1998). Weiner emphasized a gender identification reaching across race in rural South
Carolina and looked in particular at how black and white women worked together as
domestic producers.

9 Using feminist critical theory “defamiliarizes” approaches to reading and writing
and so changes how we express identity. See Laura Marcus, Auto/biographical
Discourses: Theory, Criticism, Practice (Manchester: Manchester University Press,
1994), pp. 218-23. See also Sara Alpern, et al., “Introduction” in Feminist Biography:
she and several other women biographers found that over time their research and writing
about women changed. They realized that their work during the 1970s had not only
enlarged the public perception of its historical record (by adding women’s experiences to
the mainstream narrative) but had also changed the very questions we ask when we study
our past (p. 7). The feminist biographer, said Alpern, is willing to recognize and even
seem to reject the standard of objective truth. She admits her “attachments and detachments even while maintaining a critical, scholarly stance (p. 11).

10 George E. Marcus, “‘Elite’ as a Concept, Theory, and Research Tradition,” Elites: Ethnographic Issues, George E. Marcus, ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983), p. 20. This essay opened a book of seminar papers by anthropologists who had gathered for the School of American Research advanced seminar. Marcus complained that the major emphasis of elite theory and research had not in the past been on the biographical details of the lives of the elite but rather on the “empirical elaboration of the organization inherent in the concept (p. 9).” He called for studies that would view elites in relation to the institutions that mediate between them and the general population, and to steer away from the dualistic (and so less complex) analysis of the face-to-face relations of elites vs. non-elites. Any simple dichotomy in analysis of elites glosses over the largely hidden processes in which elites relate to general populations in indirect ways. American researchers in particular, said Marcus, tend to view elites (an academic term which is rarely used as a self-referent) as conspirators against the public good. At the time of this writing, a new splinter group from the two national historical organizations of American historians has formed and thus exposed the ideologically polemical atmosphere in which we work. The Historical Society (see their website <http://home.nycap.rr.com/history/>) decried what they saw as an overt political bias of their anti-elitist colleagues who ignored or scoffed at what they (as standard-bearers of American conservative thought) considered worthy topics. In the resulting controversy, the Historical Society has been accused of being a haven for elitists. Marcus wrote his essay for anthropologists, but his call to deal directly with normative judgments about what elites ought to be doing (p. 24) could be addressed to historians as well.

11 Eugene D. Genovese, The Southern Tradition: The Achievement and Limitations of an American Conservatism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 1. Genovese was at the center of the controversy regarding the founding of the Historical Society (see footnote above), and in particular he decried a “neglect of, or contempt for, the history of southern whites (p. xi).” Genovese wrote that the end of the Civil War “promoted a contemptuous dismissal of all things southern as nasty, racist, immoral, and intellectually inferior…. In consequence, from that day to this, the southern-conservative critique of modern gnosticism [of Northern institutions and intentions] has been wrongly equated with racism and white supremacy (ibid.).” While I agree with Genovese that a strong sense of conservatism is key to understanding Southern history, my intention is to draw upon feminist critical theory (traditionally anti-conservative) to keep my senses sharp.

12 Virginia Jeans Laas, Love and Power in the Nineteenth Century: The Marriage of Violet Blair (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1998), p. xiii. Violet Blair was “always a belle (p. xi),” said Laas, in that she was insistent on her right to exercise authority and demand equality during her fifty-four year marriage with Albert Janin. Blair was like MW Preston: a conservative, traditional-minded woman who was at the
same time psychologically and economically independent. See also Joyce Antler, “Feminism as Life-Process: The Life and Career of Lucy Sprague Mitchell,” Feminist Studies, vol. 7, no. 1 (Spring 1981): pp. 134-57. Antler described a variant of feminism she said represented “a single individual’s struggle for autonomy, rather than a self-conscious, political strategy for altering the social order. It is a personal, rather than a collective, set of processes taking place over an individual’s life course by which women have sought to mold their destinies in the world and confront, at each stage of their life cycle, the gender-defined issues that have traditionally limited female opportunities (p. 134).” See also Antler’s interestingly personal reflections on her theory in her essay, “Having It All, Almost: Confronting the Legacy of Lucy Sprague Mitchell,” pp. 97-115 in Feminist Biography.


14 A summary of feminists’ use of Foucault’s theories is Jana Sawicki’s, “Foucault, Feminism and Questions of Identity, pp. 286-313 in The Cambridge Companion to Foucault, Gary Gutting, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). She showed how Foucault’s critique of Western humanism and subjectivity aligned with and then was used by feminist theorists as they broke away from the use of liberalism and Marxism. She explained also how differently many feminist theorists used Foucaultian philosophy, from Susan Bordo and Judith Butler to Nancy Hartsock and Donna Haraway.


16 Butler, Bodies that Matter, p. 123.


movement in the United States (p. 15)” which began in a self-conscious way in 1848, she disagreed with O’Neill who she said downplayed the radical quality of the ideology of Stanton and Anthony. She asserted that indeed the suffragists’ split had a positive effect on making the woman suffrage movement become more “coherent (p. 179)” and its radical push for equality in the “public sphere” was not realized in the 1870s only due to the overall failure of Reconstruction (p. 200).

20 See Nancy F. Cott, The Grounding of Modern Feminism (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987). Cott refused the periodization of 1920 as a cutting off point, or a sum of women’s political activity, and refers to that conservative era around World War I as affecting women in more ways than feminist leaders could counter – leading not to great opportunities for women, and so “grounding” the feminists’ movement. She saw, however, that the 1920s was a time when the framework is laid for the 1960s, when women’s liberation is given a positive concept of women as a “sex-class” and feminisms were (in a positive way) growing “toward the plural (p. 283).” For recent general works on women’s political participation in the nineteenth century, see Mary R. Ryan, Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880 (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Glenna Matthews, The Rise of Public Woman: Woman’s Power and Woman’s Place in the United States, 1630-1970 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); and Rebecca Edwards, Angels in the Machinery: Gender in American Party Politics from the Civil War to the Progressive Era (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).


22 Ibid., p. 11. In her 1962 essay about postbellum Southern women’s history in the South Atlantic Quarterly, Anne Firor Scott delineated the downfall of “woman’s sphere.” Her hugely influential book, The Southern Lady: from Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970) clinched her thesis that not until after the Civil War did Southern women begin to create a public record (p. xii).

23 The most recent and best analysis of Todd’s Kentucky background was Jean Baker’s Mary Todd Lincoln: A Biography (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1987). For a Kentucky woman’s perspective on her, see Katherine Helm, The True Story of Mary, Wife of Lincoln (New York: Harper, 1928).

24 Paula Baker, “The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920,” American Historical Review 89 (June 1984): p. 647. The main problem with this wonderful essay is that she used 1920 as the convenient ending point for periodization. I would prefer a rougher edge to the end of her treatise. She could have referred, for example, to the continuing saga of abortion politics – a hot debate during the time she was writing and poignantly divided over issues of gender, race and class. An exciting thesis on the historical reasons for our modern debate over abortion is Ricki Solinger’s Wake up Little Susie: Single Pregnancy and Race before Roe v. Wade (New York: Routledge, 1992).


28 In an effort to expand the local tax base in 1838, Kentucky was the first state to give women the right to vote in school board elections—though only the property-owning *feme sole* was eligible: only widows or unmarried women over 21 who paid taxes in the district could vote. Then in 1894 the Ky. Equal Rights Association succeeded with their
petitions from Lexington, Covington and Newport to persuade the legislature to pass a school suffrage law, though its final wording limited the franchise to those women in the areas which had petitioned for it. During the Lexington school board elections of 1901 there was a swell of political activity by black women who were supporting the Republican Party. Even though the Democrats won that local election, the fear of organized women’s political power caused the unprecedented repeal of women’s suffrage in 1902. See Claudia Knott, “The Woman Suffrage Movement In Kentucky, 1879-1920” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kentucky, 1989).


walrus mustache) among the other Lilliputians and firmly clutching the nose of the
topped General Winfield Scott Hancock in the cartoon entitled “General Hancock
Gulliver, How do you like it as far as you’ve got?” Harper’s Weekly, 24 (July 31, 1880):
p. 484.

31 Besides Scott’s Southern Lady, the defining boundaries of separate spheres had
already been explored in 1977 by Nancy F. Cott in The Bonds of Womanhood: Woman’s
went further than Scott in describing a psychological consciousness of womanhood when
she emphasized the economic changes in the Industrial Age and the change in gender
roles that it fueled. This unfortunate formula has been used ever since to explain why
Southern women’s reform efforts were either non-existent or weak compared to Northern
women’s benevolence. This will be discussed at greater length below. Carl N. Degler
broadened the scope of Cott’s socio-economic framework to include all of America, and
relied on Daniel Scott Smith’s “domestic feminism” to describe how women were able to
gain an increasing amount of power over time within the “woman’s sphere.” The main
paradox (when wondering why women in the 1970s were still without political and
economic equity), he found, was that in the history of the American family a sense of
anti-individualism has remained constant even while the husband and wife’s relationship
transformed in the nineteenth century from a patriarchal hierarchical one to a
companionate one – thus causing a tension between individual rights for women and the
anti-individual rights for the family. See his At Odds: Women and the Family in
America from the Revolution to the Present (New York and Oxford: Oxford University

32 Jane Turner Censer’s analysis of North Carolina families showed that there was
great cohesion and even affection in households that by Degler’s standards would be
fractured and tenuous. Male relatives took on quasi-paternal roles, and large families
treasured their children (not, as Anne F. Scott asserted, only because they had seen so
many of them die). Censer saw her Upper South farm families creating patterns that
resembled genteel urban Northerners. See Censer, North Carolina Planters and Their

33 Two books published in the same year well described the “cult of domesticity”
model of nineteenth century women’s lives: Nancy F. Cott’s The Bonds of Womanhood:
“Woman’s Sphere” in New England, 1780-1835 (New Haven: Yale University Press,
1977); and Ann Douglas’s The Feminization of American Culture (New York: Knopf,
1977). Other important books with this model were Mary P. Ryan’s Cradle of the Middle
Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865 (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 1981); Barbara Leslie Epstein’s The Politics of Domesticity: Women,
Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America (Conn.: Wesleyan
University Press, 1981); and Caroll Smith-Rosenberg’s Disorderly Conduct: Visions of
Gender in Victorian America (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985). Unfortunately, the
great numbers of history books on nineteenth century American women rely on these
classic statements which based their research on white middle-class Northern women.
The latest survey text on Southern women’s history relies on this Northern-based model without comment or much evidence of research of Southern middle-class women: see Margaret Ripley Wolfe, Daughters of Canaan: A Saga of Southern Women (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), ch. 3.

34 I transcribed and posted this letter on the World Wide Web. It can be viewed at <http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Exhibit/9539/scraps/giles.html> for at least five more years since I plan using it in my history courses as a resource.

35 This letter is also posted on the Web at <http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Exhibit/9539/scraps/lee.html>.

36 Kerber, “Separate Spheres,” p. 17. Kerber dates this concern to a 1980 issue of Feminist Studies in which she along with three other historians discussed the problem of using the terms “women’s sphere” (oppressive) or “women’s culture” (liberating) to delimited and make peculiar the history of women’s experiences in the course of human events. She posits that thereafter began a “third stage” in the use of the separate sphere metaphor in which historians analyze how women’s culture is “socially constructed both for and by women” (p. 18) at various times in history and in various places of the world. Thus we see in the 1990s a push for women’s historians to look not just across time but also across boundaries of sexual orientation, class, race, ethnicity, and nation. This is a large order for people who still need to worry about getting tenured and promoted in a particular discipline by proving expertise in a traditionally prescribed sub-field.


38 For example, see Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “Gender, Class and Power: Some Theoretical Considerations,” The History Teacher 15 (February 1982): 255-276; and “Placing Women’s History in History,” New Left Review 133 (May-June 1982): 5-29. These essays are examples of the beginning of her journey out of the faculty ranks of women’s studies and into the anti-feminist groups which blossomed in the early 1990s. From there she produced her fierce diatribe, “Feminism is Not the Story of My Life”: How Today’s Feminist Elite Has Lost Touch with the Real Concerns of Women (New York: Nan A. Talese, 1996). Theorists Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham and Elsa Barkley Brown further explored this point regarding the simultaneity of race, class, and gender. Brown protested that we have yet to acknowledge in any consistent or systematic way that a woman is tied to also to her race, class, time, and place. She wrote that “all women do not have the same gender.” See Brown, “‘What Has Happened Here’: The Politics of Difference in Women’s History and Feminist Politics,” Feminist Studies 18 (Summer 1992): p. 300; and Higginbotham, “African-American Women’s History and the Metalanguage of Race,” Signs 17 (Winter 1992): pp. 251-74.

39 Eugene Genovese first introduced his thesis on the patriarchal system of the pre-capitalist and pre-bourgeois Old South in Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South (New York: Pantheon, 1965). He elaborated his ideas more fully in Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made (New
York: Vintage Books, ©1972, 1974). An interesting three-way debate that shows how his work fit into and departed from the mainstream Southern and Black history at that time is in a special issue of Studies on the Left (vol. 6, no. 6) where he, Herbert Aptheker, and C. Vann Woodward wrote about “The Legacy of Slavery and the Roots of Black Nationalism” (November-December 1966). His ideas of Southern culture expanded even further with his working partnership with Elizabeth Fox-Genovese. At this time, the husband-wife team are at work on a large and all-encompassing monograph on the “Mind of the Master Class” of the South.


41 Fox-Genovese, “Placing Women’s History in History,” p. 6. For a recent survey of the different kinds of work being done now in southern women’s history, see Half Sisters of History: Southern Women and the American Past, Catherine Clinton, ed. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994).


43 See also Drew Gilpin Faust, Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). The major difference between these portraits of rather slimy spoiled brats is that Faust is sure the Civil War brought about great change in the psychological make-up of this group of women. Fox-Genovese looks at the parochial nature of rural women in the South today as different from Northern rural women -- one that keeps them firmly within a conservative mindset rooted in a patriarchy and unswayed by northeastern-based feminism. A more recent study of independent men and dependent, loving, vulnerable women is by Lee Ann Whites, The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta, Georgia, 1860-1890 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995). Her thesis is also that white women identified with their radical men, especially emphasizing the primacy of race and class in their identities. However, with the collapse of the Confederacy, these women were able to demand economic rights, and then, corresponding with the legend of Jeff Davis caught wearing his wife’s dress, domesticating the Reconstruction of Southern white men, serving “to turn women’s gendered roles inside out (p. 135).” With the un-manning of the Southerners, their gendered relations could then allow for an expansion in women’s identities as active agents.

44 See Bertram Wyatt-Brown’s review of her Household in “Matrons and Mammies,” Reviews in American History 17 (June 1989), esp. p. 222, for an example of the uneasiness with which her colleagues greeted this shift in the study of elite Southern women.
Daniel Blake Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1980). Smith used modernization theory to show how the Chesapeake women and men came to value the nuclear family and companionate marriages flourished, and was careful to differentiate between the male and female experiences of that more modern institution: "husbands instructed and led; wives complied and followed (p.160)."

Joan Cashin, *A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier* (New York: Oxford University, 1991). Chapter 5 entitled "To Live Like Fighting Cocks" is devoted to the description of sex roles as the younger generation breaks the pact of paternalism once held by their forefathers with both white and black families. It is not in the province of this research project to disprove what Cashin found in her women’s words, however, I question whether I could draw such a clear geographical and generational gap in the values held by wealthy white women of Virginia and their descendents in Kentucky. In my research, I found more of an overarching and willfully maintained commonality based on their sense of their rightful place in society as elites.

Jan Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson’s Virginia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). The nineteenth century diarist, in her view, was using a form of self-therapy "to expose and soothe" her feelings (p. 214) within the restrictions of a newly minted domination by elite white men over their private families rather than the public arena since the rise of a post-revolutionary democracy. The letters and diaries function then more as catharses, in almost a pathological way, and the writers are left with a sense of happy fulfillment -- as if they just finished a course of powerful purgatives.


*Ibid.*, pp. xi, 44, 50, and 145. This stance is in direct contrast to Genovese’s *The Slaveholders’ Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820-1860* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992). He emphasized the role of Southern intellectuals’ historicism and constant references to ideological arguments for their worldview in opposition to the universal truths proposed by their Northern counterparts such as Thoreau or Melville. See for example the social and political essays by Louisa McCord, a reluctant belle and exuberant fire-eating pro-slavery advocate. Rable has it right, however, when he states that historians have exaggerated the conservatism of Southern property law, and he encouraged new studies of Southern
women to watch for their systems of strength rather than be swayed by the rhetoric of paternalism so popular in Victorian America. See *ibid.*, pp. xii and 24.


58 See Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, pp. 281-289.


60 Leigh Gilmore, *Autobiographies*, p. 16.

61 Bonnie G. Smith, “The Case of the Abusive Widow,” *Feminism and History*, p. 564. Smith insisted that it was time to begin thinking about how we have masculinized the historian, and to start looking for the role of women even in ways we construct the evidence for an historical narrative.