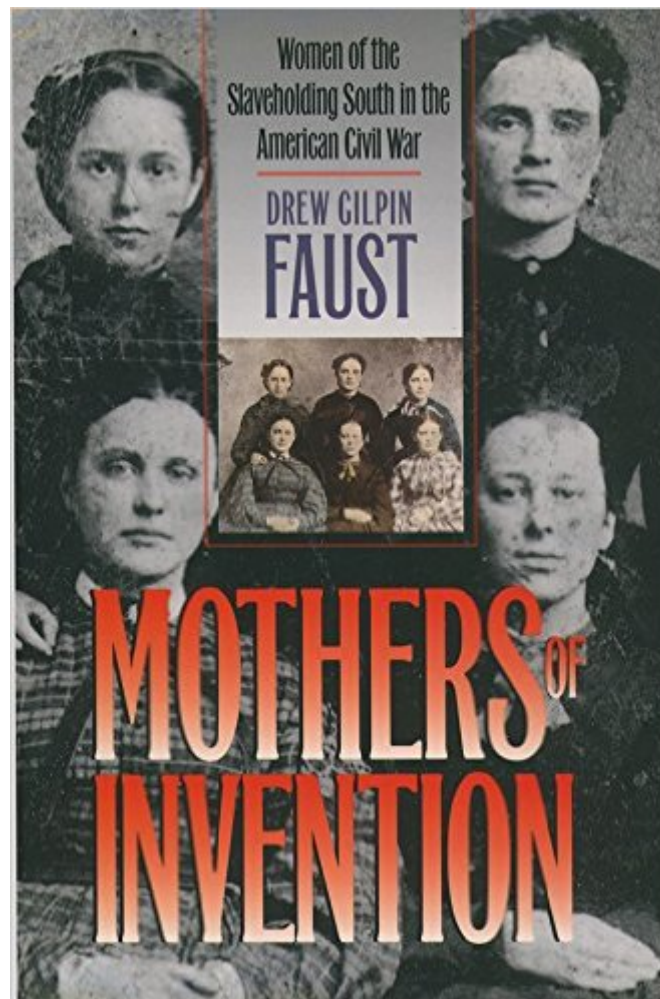


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Mothers Of Invention: Women Of The Slaveholding South In The American Civil War (Fred W. Morrison Series In Southern Studies)



Synopsis

When Confederate men marched off to battle, southern women struggled with the new responsibilities of directing farms and plantations, providing for families, and supervising increasingly restive slaves. Drew Faust offers a compelling picture of the more than half-million women who belonged to the slaveholding families of the Confederacy during this period of acute crisis, when every part of these women's lives became vexed and uncertain.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Starting with the haunting faces of the young women who are pictured on the cover, to the many illustrations through out, we learn of the thoughts and activities that occupied the daily lives of the women of the Confederacy. This book is filled with wonderful diary excerpts, parts of letters and interesting photographs. Through these means we are given an insightful look at the way Southern women lived during the most tragic of times, our American Civil War. I've read a great deal about this particular era, but learned so much from this book. For instance, I had no idea that many men wanted their wives to accompany them off to war. Some of these women did just that and lamented about leaving their children behind with relatives. One young woman said that her husband was "ordering me to Mississippi" in the summer of 1862, and how brokenhearted she was because she feared that her baby would forget her while she was away. Another interesting fact was that numerous ladies wrote personal letters to President Jefferson Davis and requested that their

husbands or sons be sent home because they were needed by their families. Other ladies wrote directly to their husbands and clearly told them they had given enough effort to the war, and it was time to come home. Some of the other information that is discussed is how women were often forced to move in with relatives and how their days were filled with unfamiliar work. They also were required, with very little experience, to manage their slave labor and operate plantations or farms. Some women seemed to enjoy the challenge, and for others the burden was too much. The blockade of goods going to the South was another problem to deal with because so many of the items of necessity were manufactured in the North.

In "Mothers of Invention," Drew Gilpin Faust explores the ways in which the Civil War transformed traditional gender roles among middle- and upper-class southern women. Gilpin theorizes that Confederate women certainly were aware of the effect that government policies had on their lives—even if the leaders, at times, were not—and that women's views on conscription, home defense, economic production and slavery influenced and, ultimately, undermined their support for the war. Her key point seems to be that the war overturned the "social contract" in which elite women accepted subordination and dependence for male protection and privilege. Although men were off protecting their homes in the abstract sense, women were left to deal with the day-to-day realities of food shortages and an invading army occupying their homes. Narrowing exceptions to the draft, the military's refusals to grant furloughs in times of great family need, and government policies regarding food requisitions especially galled women. Faust puts a particularly interesting gender perspective on the draft exemption for those owning 20+ slaves. Normally, this exemption is viewed solely in class terms: "Rich man's war, poor man's fight." Faust, however, brings attention to the fear that white women experienced being left alone to manage large slave populations without a man's help. Women feared murder and uprisings from a slave population that was growing increasingly rebellious. The priority ultimately given to equitably treating draft-age white men and the burden of managing slaves led to a decline in women's support for the slave system and for the Confederacy, she argues. In addition to slave management, Faust explores other ways in which the war caused elite white women to step into traditional male roles.

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