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**“Hunger maddened amazons’ or ‘Bread Rebels?’ Reframing Poor and
Working-Class Confederate, Female Rebellion, Reaction, and Rage During
the U.S. Civil War”**

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Honors Thesis

Fall 2020

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Introduction

The Richmond Bread Riot of 1863 was an event during the Civil War, which historians have used to propel conversations around gender and class for the last 25 years of scholarship. These histories are incredibly important, but many lack the essential point that the events of April 2, 1863 in Richmond occurred in the middle of two months of rioting led by women throughout the South. While Richmond's events were the most well-known, this rebellion was one in a series of at least nine other similar female-led demonstrations in Georgia, Virginia, North Carolina, and Alabama in the Spring of 1863. A timeline of demonstrations is as follows: Atlanta, Georgia on March 16; Salisbury, North Carolina on March 18; Mobile, Alabama on March 25; Petersburg, Virginia on April 1; Richmond, Virginia on April 2; Columbus, Georgia on April 11; Milledgeville, Georgia on April 14; Macon, Georgia in late April; Butts County, Georgia also in late April.¹ These demonstrations differed in size, some reporting a dozen women raiding small businesses and transports, while others were much larger and focused on major downtown districts. One aspect that remains constant throughout these various demonstrations is who stole, what they stole, and why. The poor and working-class white women of the Confederacy planned and enacted their vengeance on the Confederacy for price gauging, the inequality and disproportionate impact of the Confederate draft, and lack of governmental support towards Confederate citizens. These demonstrations were the most public and inflammatory expression of unprecedented political activism of poor and working-class white, Confederate women during the U.S. Civil War.

¹ Teresa Crisp and Davis Williams, "'The Women Rising': Cotton, Class, and Confederate Georgia's Rioting Women," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 86, no.1, (Spring 2002): 68-72. Michael B. Chesson, "Harlots or Heroines? A New Look at the Richmond Bread Riot," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 92, no. 2 (April 1984): 136.

These events fed off one another and allowed the expansion of white civil disobedience within the Confederate South. Smaller local histories of each state or town that had a demonstration tend to have the most information on these smaller demonstrations. According to Katherine Titus, "The *Richmond Enquirer's* favorable portrayal of the Salisbury rioters in March of 1863 may have contributed to the women's initiation of the Richmond Bread Riot."² The Confederate press coverage of these demonstrations was overwhelmingly negative; however, it spread the narrative that women all over the Confederacy were struggling and angry. The work connecting these events is new and is gaining popularity among Civil War historians, specifically with Drew Faust, Stephanie McCurry, Katherine R. Titus, Teresa Crisp, and Davis Williams in the forefront of the field.³ The connections between these events are profound and must be analyzed. These events were planned and executed to make a political statement, yet they are written off as spontaneous, disconnected riots fueled by angry women. While riots are historically significant, they tend to lack the notoriety and effectiveness of planned protests, which these events most certainly were. These demonstrations occurred all over the Confederacy in a span of two months; some only a short train ride away, and others were several day long

² Katherine R. Titus, "The Richmond Bread Riot of 1863: Class, Race, and Gender in the Urban Confederacy." *The Gettysburg College: Journal of the Civil War 2*, (2011): 133.

³ The following works have contributed massively to the study of gender, class, and race in the Civil War, as well as, providing information and analysis of the Confederate Food Riots in the Spring of 1863: Drew Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*. (Chapel Hill: The University Press of North Carolina Press, 1996); Alan Pell Crawford, "Richmond's Bread Riot." *American History 37*, no.2 (June 2002); Louis P. Masur, *The Civil War: A Concise History*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Crisp, "'The Women Rising': Cotton, Class, and Confederate Georgia's Rioting Women,"; Michael B. Chesson, "Harlots or Heroines? A New Look at the Richmond Bread Riot," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 92*, no. 2 (April 1984); Catherine Clinton *Tara Revisited: Women, War & the Plantation Legend*, (New York: Abbeville Press, 1995); Catherine Clinton, and Nina Silber, ed. *Battle Scars: Gender and Sexuality in the American Civil War*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Women in the Civil War*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994); Stephanie McCurry, "The Two Faces of Republicanism: Gender and Proslavery Politics in Antebellum South Carolina." *The Journal of American History 78*, no. 4, (March 1992): 1245-1264; Stephanie McCurry, "Women Numerous and Armed: The Confederate Food Riots in Historical Perspective." *OAH Magazine of History 27*, no. 2 (April 2013):35-39.; McCurry, Stephanie. *Women's War: Fighting and Surviving the American Civil War* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2019); Titus, "The Richmond Bread Riot of 1863.

journeys. The demonstrations increased Confederate, national, and then international awareness of the plight and activism of poor and working-class white southern women.

The carefully maintained balance of gender, class, and race which southern society had been built upon was uprooted during the Civil War. Faust explains the previous understandings of southern society were based on race, class, and gender, by stating,

White men and women of the antebellum South had defined and understood themselves in relation to a number of categories: race, which marked the difference between bound and free, superior and inferior; gender, which was designed to distinguish independent from dependent, patriarch from subordinate; and class, more subtle and hidden in a society that rested within a democratizing America but present nonetheless in distinctions of wealth, power, education, and refinement, in claims to honor and gentility.⁴

These strict rules of southern society were changed by the Confederate Conscription Act which forced many of the white, poor and working-class men into the army, thus removing many of the men who acted as patriarchs.⁵ Women then became independents who cared for their families in response to men's wartime departure. Women notoriously took on the roles of both patriarch and matriarch by becoming the breadwinner, homemaker, and caretaker in times of war.

Class relations were also dramatically changed during the war, as the poor became poorer and the elite planters struggled to find a new, preferably free, work force. After Black individuals were no longer enslaved after the Emancipation Proclamation was put into action, poor white people feared that they would replace formerly enslaved individuals as a workforce. This fear added to the hatred, racism, and white supremacy that was felt by those white Confederate citizens.⁶ Finally, the Emancipation Proclamation—which ended slavery in Confederate states on

⁴ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 3-4.

⁵ Titus, "The Richmond Bread Riot of 1863; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*; Crawford, "Richmond's Bread Riot"; Masur, *The Civil War*; Crisp, "The Women Rising"; Chesson, "Harlots or Heroines?"; Clinton, *Battle Scars*; Massey, *Women in the Civil War*; McCurry, "Women Numerous and Armed"; McCurry, *Women's War*".

⁶ Titus, "The Richmond Bread Riot of 1863; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*; Crawford, "Richmond's Bread Riot"; Masur, *The Civil War*; Crisp, "The Women Rising"; Chesson, "Harlots or Heroines?"; Clinton, *Battle Scars*; Massey, *Women in the Civil War*; McCurry, "Women Numerous and Armed"; McCurry, *Women's War*".

January 1, 1863—which worked to remove slavery from the South.⁷ Slavery was one of the pillars which Antebellum society was built upon and it was the largest remaining piece of the Old South’s identity in the year 1863. The Civil War stripped away Antebellum social ideals, such as gender, class, and race, until the large majority of the social laws of the South either adapted to the war or were removed to fit the needs of the war. The upheaval of the antebellum social standards and the resulting demonstrations are acutely connected through rage, discontent and rebellion against the changing social landscape.

The demonstrations of 1863 throughout the Confederacy tell a story of the growing discontent within the South and how that anger turned into an action that was shaped into headlines around the world. While the Richmond demonstration is the most well known in the series, it fits into a larger narrative of other protests throughout other major cities in the South. Historians rarely discuss these other demonstrations in the broader context of necessity-related demonstrations in the Confederacy, so intra-Confederate dissent, and therefore the connection to a more significant and widespread women-led rebellion has only recently been explored. This connection allows historians to see the power that white poor and working-class women wielded in a society where they held little power previously.

⁷ Titus, “The Richmond Bread Riot of 1863; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*; Crawford, “Richmond’s Bread Riot”; Masur, *The Civil War*; Crisp, “The Women Rising”; Chesson, “Harlots or Heroines?; Clinton, *Battle Scars*; Massey, *Women in the Civil War*; McCurry, “Women Numerous and Armed”; McCurry, *Women’s War*”.

Chapter One: Antebellum Poor and Working Class White Southern Womanhood and the Disruptions of the U.S. Civil War

The white South's gender, class, and racial norms and ideologies were rigid and unyielding in the antebellum period. When the Civil War began, those positions had to become more malleable and adjust to wartime needs and exigencies. Drew Gilpin Faust places the dramatic changes of the southern society into context by stating,

When the Civil War convulsed southern society, when it overthrew slavery and undermined the wealth and political power of the planter elite it necessarily threatened and transformed each of these interrelated hierarchies, instigating what one contemporary newspaper described as a “Stampede from the Patriarchal Relation” that had so firmly placed white men at the apex of the social pyramid.⁸

Before the war, this dichotomized gendered and racial culture of the Confederacy's slavocracy tended to be accepted by white men and women. For white community members, white privilege allowed even the lowest member of white society to sit above the enslaved people in the South. The idea that every single white member of society had more power than enslaved individuals created non-economic incentives to continue to perpetuate slavery and racism in all its forms throughout the South.⁹ Daniel Robinson Hundley, a Confederate soldier and later an attorney, argued that the slaveholding South had eight social classes. In his 1860 work *Social Relations in Our Southern States* using a quasi-social-scientific approach to the emerging field.¹⁰ Hundley was not a social scientist by today's standards; however, his work explaining the social rules of the “Old South,” referring to the time four or five decades before the Civil War, became

⁸ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 4.

⁹ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*; Crawford, “Richmond's Bread Riot”; Masur, *The Civil War*; Crisp, “The Women Rising”; Chesson, “Harlots or Heroines?”; Clinton *Tara Revisited*; Clinton, *Battle Scars*; Massey, *Women in the Civil War*; McCurry, “The Two Faces of Republicanism”; McCurry, “Women Numerous and Armed”; McCurry, *Women's War*”.

¹⁰ Benjamin Buford Williams, “Daniel Hundley,” *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, last modified November 22, 2016, <http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org/article/h-2549>.

influential after the Civil War due to its contention that was a large white middle-class of the South. He wrote this book in response to the Northern perception of Southern classes. Many Northerners believed that the South was divided into three classes, the planters, poor white people, and enslaved people. Hundley disagreed with this assessment and wrote *Social Relations in Our Southern States* to reveal his findings and thoughts on southern class. Hundley's work was not well-read at the time due to the focus on the brewing Civil War but has been used since to gather information on the antebellum middle class.¹¹

Hundley divides the South into eight distinct settings that defined social class; these are the: Southern Gentlemen, Middle Classes, Southern Yankee, Cotton Snob, Southern Yeoman, Southern Bully, Poor White Trash, and the Negro Slave.¹² Hundley writes a lengthy chapter about each social category and its place within Southern culture. With seven out of the eight categories referring to only white men, Hundley's perspective reveals how specifically white men dominated the South, excluding women from his conversation around class. Hundley dedicated only one social ranking for Black Americans; this was as an enslaved person. By leaving this single category for Black Americans, Hundley shows his support in pre-war times for slavery and the slavocracy. Though he did not fully support secession his support of slavery was unwavering.¹³ Hundley wanted to show his readers that Black American's single and only functioning role in society was to be owned, sold, and forced to work. Hundley also glorifies his own class, the Southern gentlemen, while degrading the other white classes that he discusses.¹⁴ Hundley's work provides a wealthy white elite man's perspective. His perspective on his status in society sheds light on the elite's dream for society. While Hundley's work only discusses the

¹¹ Williams, "Daniel Hundley."

¹² Daniel Robinson Hundley, *Social Relations in Our Southern States* (New York: Henry B. Price, 1860).

¹³ Williams, "Daniel Hundley."

¹⁴ Titus, "The Richmond Bread Williams, "Daniel Hundley." Riot of 1863," 91.

eight social classes for men, we can assume as readers that women's role in Hundley's view was to be a wife married to a man who took up the mantle of his respective class. Hundley clearly sees a world where women's central role in Southern society was to be a wife and mother, while men determined the family's class.

Alongside the strict roles that defined class and race in the South, gender roles were also significant. White women's role is to be "sensible and practical and should strive to be perfect wives, devoted mothers, and impeccable homemakers."¹⁵ The working-class women of the South were not seen as ladies but as farmwives. This title was not one of shame, but rather a show of a female character and strength.¹⁶ Ladies were meant to be beautiful, well dressed, and educated; however, they could not help run a farm.¹⁷ These farmwives were the women who eventually participated in the demonstrations in the Spring of 1863. Farmwives were not expected to play piano and become distinguished and educated young women then wives, instead they learned how to be useful on the farm and the household.¹⁸ Southern white women's roles were well defined in the antebellum period, and when the war began, these roles began to shift and upend.¹⁹

Disruption of War

When the war began, the Southern patriarchal society began to shift as men left their cities and homes for the war. Many places were left with few able-bodied men after the Confederate Conscription Act in April 1862 went into effect. Towns and many cities were left in

¹⁵ Harland Hagler, "The Ideal Woman in the Antebellum South: Lady or Farmwife?" *The Journal of Southern History* 46, No. 3 (Aug. 1980), 406.

¹⁶ Hagler, "The Ideal Woman in the Antebellum South," 411.

¹⁷ Hagler, "The Ideal Woman in the Antebellum South," 411.

¹⁸ Hagler, "The Ideal Woman in the Antebellum South," 407.

¹⁹ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*; Crawford, "Richmond's Bread Riot"; Masur, *The Civil War*; Crisp, "The Women Rising"; Chesson, "Harlots or Heroines?"; Clinton *Tara Revisited*; Clinton, *Battle Scars*; Massey, *Women in the Civil War*; McCurry, "The Two Faces of Republicanism"; McCurry, "Women Numerous and Armed"; McCurry, *Women's War*.

women's hands, rather than the young boys or elderly men who remained.²⁰ The Confederacy, in a matter of a few years, moved away from the society with the elite white planter, or "Southern Gentlemen," to one run by, who were not always wealthy white women. The elite women who could afford to often moved or sent their children away from the war where they were less likely to be injured by the path of the war.²¹ Some elite women took over their husbands' plantations and continued running the business while their husbands were at war.²² Others who could afford to follow their husbands to battle would. They stayed at safe lodgings along the way, stating that their husbands needed them more than their children.²³ While these changes were prevalent in elite women's lives, the working class and poor women were the most affected as many could not afford to escape the war. These women were faced with the challenge of their husbands, brothers, and children being conscripted into the army, many of whom became foot soldiers for the Confederate cause, as opposed to the elite men who joined voluntarily or were conscripted and rose in rank quickly. The middle classes were the most prevalent white group in the South and they played a large role in how Civil War's southern society was run. However, the middle-class white community of the South followed the rules set by the elite members of society, for the most part, until the Civil War drastically changed the foundations of southern society. These middle-class women did what was necessary for them and their families to survive, and this often included taking over their husbands' jobs, maintaining their own work, and raising their children, all the while facing the growing crisis of the U.S. Civil War.

As the war progressed, Confederate lives, cities, and families were shifting to fit the Confederacy's wartime needs. Each city faced its direct issues and fears as the war developed.

²⁰ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 30-52.

²¹ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 30-52.

²² Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 30-52.

²³ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 30-52.

While each city's predicament was unique, all faced the Confederate draft beginning on April 16, 1862.²⁴ The poor and working class men were targeted as the Confederacy's soldiers as wealthy men could pay for a draft substitute, and plantation owners who held twenty or more enslaved individuals were exempt.²⁵ To receive a draft substitute, men could pay a total of \$4000.00 to the Confederacy; in today's dollars, that would equate to roughly \$100,000.00.²⁶ The average poor and working-class family struggled to survive, even when all family members were home and working, therefore they could not afford the massive cost of a substitute. When men were inevitably drafted, these poor and lower-working families would not only lose their loved one, but much-needed income. This was incredibly hard for families who lost several of their men to the war, including fathers, sons, brothers, and uncles. The average white private in the Confederate army made \$11.00 a month, which in today's dollars would have the purchasing power of \$280.00. The tiny salary, paired with low-income families already in depressive conditions, left them struggling to survive. The poor and working-class working men had become the people who did not gain all too much from cession; however, they had to fight for it. These policies are just one example of how the Civil War was "[a] rich man's war, [a] poor man's fight, [and a] women's struggle to stay alive."²⁷

As the War continued to progress people's movements shifted accordingly, soldiers followed battles, wives and sex workers followed the soldiers, and some wives and children were

²⁴ McCurry, "Women Numerous and Armed," 36.

²⁵ Susanna Michele Lee, "Twenty Slave Law," *Encyclopedia Virginia: Virginia Humanities*, May 31, 2012, <https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/twenty-slave-law>

²⁶ Monthly wage of soldiers in the American Civil War from 1861 to 1865, by rank (in U.S. Dollars)," Statista, last modified December 9, 2019, accessed July 3, 2020, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1032399/wage-rank-american-civil-war-1861-1865/#:~:text=While%20white%20privates%20were%20paid,to%20pay%20for%20their%20clothing>

And <https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1862?amount=4000>

²⁷ McCurry, "Women Numerous and Armed," 35

moved away from the battles and the war as a whole.²⁸ Cities like Richmond grew while towns and rural areas became less populated. Citizens and soldiers began to flock to the capital and other major hubs during the war to find jobs, security, and safety. Richmond, Virginia, became the capital of the Confederacy, causing its dramatic increase in population. With its new status as capital, more people moved into the city, and it became a military and bureaucratic gathering space. Before the war began in 1860, Richmond's population was roughly 38,000; by 1864, the population had reached 128,000, more than tripling the population.²⁹ The city failed to develop the necessary infrastructure to support the rise in populations leading to high housing prices and left many people facing homelessness.

Political Mobilization: The Soldiers' Wives' Petitions to the Confederate Government

As the tensions within the South were growing, many white women were beginning to make demands of the Confederacy. Mary Jackson—the future leader of the Richmond demonstration—was a mother to a soldier and a working woman who helped her husband run their farm. Thus, Jackson was well connected in both the city and the rural areas of Richmond, Virginia. Her connectedness allowed her to work closely with women from both areas. As a huckster in Richmond's Second Meat market, she knew many people in the city and could navigate it well. As a farm wife, she knew many people in the rural areas of Richmond. When Jackson's son was drafted—most likely in 1862 after the Confederate Conscription Act was enacted—she and her family were likely one of the many families who could not produce enough food on their farm. She was also undoubtedly terrified that her child would die in a war that he had no choice in joining. Jackson's response was quick. Like many other women writing

²⁸ Clinton, *Battle Scars*.

²⁹ Alan Pell Crawford, "Richmond's Bread Riot." *American History* 37, no.2 (June 2002):22.

personal letters to the Confederate government, she began asking for boys and men whose labor was needed to be sent home and begging the government for aid and support. When these letters failed to receive an answer, Jackson became well acquainted with John Jones, the Richmond War Clerk, as she frequently petitioned for her son's discharge from military service so he could return home, be safe, and help his family by working and farming.³⁰ Jackson's demands continued to go unanswered. In response, her rage began to grow, as did that of many white female Confederate wives, mothers, and sisters struggling on the home front. While Mary Jackson is the face of this particular movement, her story is not unique. Thousands of women faced similar fates and wanted to have family members return from war. The women like Mary Jackson became known as the "soldiers' wives."

These women were poor and working-class white women who were directly affected by the wartime social changes. White women and their children filled many roles left vacant by the boys and men in their lives who had been drafted or voluntarily went into the Confederate army. Women took over their husbands', fathers', and brothers' labor and businesses.³¹ The soldiers' wives organized themselves, eventually demanding and causing change to Confederate politics, actions, and attitudes towards the war. According to Stephanie McCurry, this group mainly consisted of "southern white women, mostly from yeoman, poor white or urban laboring households."³² Many of these women and their families struggled before the Civil War, and the conflict only increased their struggle. Poor and working-class men were the first to be called to war by the draft. In response to their husband's subsequent deaths in battle, these women struggled financially and emotionally.

³⁰ McCurry, "Women Numerous and Armed," 39.

³¹ McCurry, "Women Numerous and Armed," 35

³² McCurry, "Women Numerous and Armed," 35

In these early letters, the soldiers' wives, like Jackson, called for government assistance and, most importantly, to bring their male relatives' home from war. According to McCurry, these women also began to petition the Confederate government for lowered food prices. One of these petitions ended with the signature of 23 women and was accompanied by their "identity in terms of the family relation to men in military service and the sacrifice they had made to the cause."³³ When their letters and then petitions went unanswered, these women saw no other choice but to rebel and take what their government was refusing them and demand to be heard. They were a considerable force within the Confederacy, pushing the government to lower food prices and bring the conflict to an end.³⁴

Food Shortage and Confederate Price Gauging during the War

In 1862 and 1863, a food shortage swept through the Confederacy. The Confederate Conscription Act forced many white men who owned and worked on farms that produced much needed food to join the military which then undermined food production.³⁵ The Union was also blockading the Confederacy to stop all outside food from entering or cotton from exiting.³⁶ This blockade began in 1861. Another contributing factor to the shortage of food was battlefield destruction of farmland, making the land useless for food production. As the Union armies made their way through the South, they also conducted raids on Southern yeoman's farms and land.

Another factor leading to the increase in food prices was the lack of flexibility on the part of farmers when replacing cash crops such as cotton and tobacco with edible crops. Had

³³ McCurry, "Women Numerous and Armed," 36.

³⁴ McCurry, "Women Numerous and Armed," 38.

³⁵ McCurry, "Women Numerous and Armed," 36.

³⁶ "The Blockade of Confederate Ports, 1861-1865," *U.S. Department of State: Office of the Historian*, Accessed November 18, 2020, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1861-1865/blockade>.

plantation owners pivoted to the Confederacy's needs, food prices may not have risen so drastically. And in the early Spring of 1863, weather conditions created a perfect storm: late snow delayed the growing season and was then followed by unseasonably warm weather, which left roads almost impossible to travel.³⁷ With the roads closed, the little food produced in the South could not reach urban centers, causing food prices to rise even further.³⁸ The Confederate government policies also played a role: it bought much of the food that was being produced to sell for a profit. The choice made by the government to sell food for a profit in early 1863, especially with a smaller food supply than a typical spring, meant food prices skyrocketed. This is demonstrated in Titus' chart below, which references the drastic change in prices from 1860 to 1863.³⁹

FIGURE 1:

Item	1860	1863	% Increase
Bacon, 10 lbs.	\$1.25	\$10.00	700%
Flours, 30 lbs.	\$1.50	\$3.75	150%
Sugar, 30 lbs.	\$0.40	\$0.75	88%
Coffee, 4lbs.	\$0.50	\$20.00	3900%
Green Tea, 1/2lbs.	\$0.50	\$8.00	1500%
Lard, 4lbs.	\$0.50	\$4.00	700%
Butter, 3 lbs.	\$0.75	\$5.25	600%
Meal, 1 peck	\$0.25	\$1.00	300%
Candles, 2 lbs.	\$0.30	\$2.50	733%

³⁷ Crawford, "Richmond's Bread Riot," 23.

³⁸ Crawford, "Richmond's Bread Riot," 23.

³⁹ Titus, "The Richmond Bread Riot of 1863," 137.

Instead of subsidizing food prices or aiding white families to purchase food, the Confederate government did not address the issues. The Confederate government's lack of support led to further anger and frustration from the soldiers' wives. These women had not only seen their entire society shift with their white privilege imperiled, they were now struggling to feed their children and themselves. As prices of food soared, wages did not increase. High food prices, unanswered appeals for help, and rapidly changing roles of class, gender, and race within the Confederacy led to the unstable conditions that inspired the Spring 1863 rebellions.

The Confederate media attempted to blame the food shortages and the high prices on Union raids. One report, found in Stephan Ambrose's paper on "Yeoman Discontent in the Confederacy," shared what was stolen by the Union,

1¼ million bushels of corn, a half million pounds of bacon, and large quantiles of wheat, oats, rye, and fodder carried off, every possible horse and mule, and thousands of cattle, sheep, and hogs confiscated, 1,500 slaves [enslaved people] released, and ten yards and flour mills destroyed. 'We left the country in such a devastated conditions,' he bragged, "that no crop can be raised during the year."⁴⁰

When one reads this closely, the claims of the amount of what was taken is absurd, given the logistics of how to move all of this cargo, let alone store it. There is evidence that farms were raided, food and supplies were taken from both the Union and Confederate sides; however, it is doubtful that the Confederacy would have the supplies that are being claimed as taken. This report shows how the Confederate media and leadership were attempting to shift the blame of the hunger that the people of the Confederacy were facing to the Union. Moreover, the cost of food in the South was controlled by the government and raised to gain money for the war.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Stephan E. Ambrose, "Yeoman Discontent in the Confederacy" *Civil War History*, 8, no.3 (September 1962): 264.

⁴¹ Titus, "The Richmond Bread Riot of 1863," 137.

Due to the drastic changes in food prices and societal upheaval, some white women led a rebellion against the government they deemed responsible for their suffering. White, poor and working-class women were angered by the increasingly difficult situation and their constantly changing roles. The demonstrations in Richmond and other surrounding cities show the white South's desperation and the anger and discontent surrounding Southern society's shifting roles.⁴² The dramatic changes occurring in the South led to the demonstration throughout the Confederacy in the Spring of 1863.

Late 1862: The Tide Turns

The war began to turn in favor of the Union in late 1862 due to the Confederacy's loss at the Battle of Antietam on September 17, 1862, and the subsequent announcement of the Emancipation Proclamation. Leading up to the President's historic announcement, Lincoln and his advisors worked from March of 1862 through January 1863 when the Emancipation Proclamation went into effect to dismantle slavery. Lincoln understood how massive an undertaking the removal of slavery and the aftermath was going to be, so he began to prepare his advisors and the nation as much as possible. Numerous historical accounts show that Lincoln's goal to end slavery was a strategic wartime measure, not an attempt to enact social and political equality.⁴³

Prior to Antietam, two significant changes happened within the leadership of both the Union and Confederate armies. Robert E. Lee was appointed to command the Army of Northern

⁴² "The Emancipation Proclamation," National Archives, Last Modified April 17, 2019, Accessed July 14, 2020, <https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured-documents/emancipation-proclamation#:~:text=President%20Abraham%20Lincoln%20issued%20the.and%20henceforward%20shall%20be%20free.%22>.

⁴³ Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000).

Virginia after Joseph E. Johnston was wounded in the Battle of Seven Pines.⁴⁴ On July 11, 1862, the second major change occurred when President Lincoln named "[Henry W.] Halleck general-in-chief of all land forces."⁴⁵ The new general was determined to make the Union army more aggressive, especially towards Confederate citizens. The war turned from "a war against his enemy to a war against a people in rebellion."⁴⁶ And the change in military tactics is one of the many reasons that the Union win at Antietam occurred and was monumentally important in plotting the ultimate course of the war.

The Emancipation Proclamation, announced on January 1, 1863, freed enslaved people in Confederate states not under the control of Union forces and allowed African American men to serve in the Union Army and Navy. As newly freed people, Black Americans fled their enslavers and headed North when it was feasible. That year, 1863, was a significant turning point in the Civil War and left the Confederacy weaker than ever. The societal shifts caused by the war disproportionately affected working- and middle-class white women who increasingly took over their husbands' occupations and duties when they left for war, cared for their children, mourned the losses of their family and community members to the war.

Black Americans' role in the white South underwent the most significant shift of all. The Emancipation Proclamation, January 1, 1863, freed all enslaved people in the Confederacy. The Emancipation Proclamation declared, "that all persons held as slaves' within the rebellious states 'are, and henceforward shall be free."⁴⁷ The Proclamation freed only the enslaved people of the non-occupied Confederacy and did not free the enslaved people within the Border States

⁴⁴ Masur, *The Civil War*, 39.

⁴⁵ Masur, *The Civil War*, 39.

⁴⁶ Masur, *The Civil War*, 39.

⁴⁷ "The Emancipation Proclamation," National Archives.

or the parts of the Confederacy that the Northern forces had already defeated and occupied.⁴⁸ The Emancipation Proclamation directly worked to disrupt the status quo. This was likely the tipping point in the growing white female rage and discontent which had been developing in 1862. Three months after the Emancipation Proclamation and when food prices were at their highest in the war, the demonstrations began in an outburst of rage.

The growing discontent within the Confederacy was beginning to come to a head. The demonstrations occurred after months of price gauging, the Confederate Conscription Act earlier in April of 1862, which drafted more men into the Confederate army, and the widespread fear of the Civil War descending upon and destroying the South.⁴⁹ The anger that drove these women to lead a demonstration against the Confederate government was not a feminist rebellion, nor a demonstration to gain equal rights for these white women. It was a call to strengthen and revive the pre-war gender and racial status quo.⁵⁰ The anger surrounding this event and others like it was driven by three categories of rage: class rage, white rage, and women's rage. As Carol Anderson argues, "The trigger for white rage, inevitably, is black advancement. It is not the mere presence of black people that is the problem; rather, it is blackness with ambition, with drive, with purpose, with aspirations, and with demands for full and equal citizenship."⁵¹ The other social trigger, which I have labeled women's rage, stemmed from the massive amount of social change, the supposed threat of starvation and death, and financial instability. In the context of various demonstrations throughout the South, white women's rage can be understood as a reason

⁴⁸ "The Emancipation Proclamation," National Archives.

⁴⁹ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*.

⁵⁰ "The Emancipation Proclamation," National Archives.

⁵¹ Carol Anderson, *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide*, (Bloomsbury: Bloomsbury Publishing Place, 2016), 3.

or cause for the protests.⁵² These reasons include women becoming the family's breadwinner, women filling in for both mother and father to their children and becoming widows. These women felt rage because the positions of life that Southern society's social contract promised them were broken, and women were left in poverty. White women's rage, similar to white rage, is seen when a preconceived social structure is broken, changed, or deemed racist or sexist. The white, poor and working-class women who took part in this event were angered by the dramatic life-altering changes they had to make to survive the war.

⁵² I state “the supposed threat of starvation and death” as I have yet to find any direct evidence which shows that the women of the South were facing starvation. As I have neither proved, nor disproved that the people of the South were starving in actuality, it is being addresses in a less formal matter. The lack of evidence showing the actual starvation of the South is minimal, if it truly exists; however, I highly suspect that the hunger aspect of these women’s rallying cries was to gain sympathy, not because they were starving in actuality.

Chapter Two: Unrest in the Spring of 1863 Through the Eyes of the Press

The demonstrations which riddled the Confederacy began in early March and continued through late April and left substantial impacts on the South for years to come. These demonstrations were spread throughout major urban centers and rural areas. Some of these demonstrations were violent with calls of "Bread or Blood," while others were non-violent or stopped by police before they could reach a point of violence. While these events occurred across the Confederacy in diverse settings, these events' causes and media coverage connect them. Poor and working-class white womens' unrest had been growing since cession, which finally burst onto the streets of the Confederacy after months of price gauging by the government, drafts which affected the majority of poor and working-class families, and the denial of aid for the soldiers' wives who demanded it.

In the weeks leading up to the demonstrations, a group of women from Bladen, North Carolina banded together and called themselves the "Regulators."⁵³ These women explicitly claimed the mantle of the Carolina Regulators of the American Revolutionary period. The Revolutionary-era Regulators were class warriors and Patriots challenging what they saw as corrupt, elite, British leadership, so invoking this rhetoric and persona challenged the legitimacy of Confederate leadership and, by extension, the entire cause.⁵⁴ As a group, these women declared in an anonymous letter to North Carolina governor Zebulon B. Vance, "The time has come that we the com[m]on people has to hav[e] bread or blood and we are bound both men and

⁵³ Danielle Ingalls, "Letters of Audacity: North Carolinian Women and Their Desperate Plea for State Support During the Civil War."

⁵⁴ Marjoleine Kars, *Breaking Loose Together: The Regulator Rebellion in Pre-Revolutionary North Carolina*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.)

women to hav[e] it or die in the attempt.”⁵⁵ The chant of “Bread or Blood” became popular for the movement. These women planned and were prepared for violence, if necessary, to complete their cause. The Carolina Regulators are just one example of how women mobilized in preparation for the demonstrations to begin.

The poor and working-class women who participated in the demonstrations made public statements about their living conditions and the improvements they wanted the Confederate government to make. The rage that these women experienced and displayed at the various demonstrations was threatening to Confederate leadership, order, and morale and, therefore, was systematically discredited. As historians do work on events that include “female rage,” we must remember that “the stereotypes whereby femininity demands the suppression of anger while masculinity rewards its expression, and whereby angry women are hysterical harpies but angry men—white men, at any rate—are heroes.”⁵⁶ The language that surrounds the various demonstrations reveals these gendered assumptions and stereotypes. The women who planned and subsequently led the South demonstrations were labeled “hunger maddened amazons,” prostitutes, “Yankee hags,” and other insults, leveled primarily by the Confederate papers.⁵⁷ These demeaning comments were specifically gendered to display how when women display their rage their grievances are illegitimate. Men in power were with faced streets filled with thousands of angry, armed women. These same men sought to delegitimize their protests using attacks upon their appearances, personhood, and sexuality, rather than by the merit of their statements.

⁵⁵ North Carolina Digital Collections, “Letter: Salisbury Women to Zebulon B. Vance,” March 21, 1863. Accessed November 1, 2020, <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/digital/collection/p15012coll8/id/11531>.

⁵⁶ Casey Cep, “The Perils and Possibilities of Anger,” *The New Yorker*, October 8, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/10/15/the-perils-and-possibilities-of-anger>.

⁵⁷ “Bread Riots in the South,” *Buffalo Weekly Express*, April 14, 1863., “Outrageous Proceedings in Richmond,” *Staunton Spectator*, April 7, 1863.

The Early Demonstrations

Atlanta, Georgia became the first city to have reported civil disobedience related to food prices, price gauging, and rage on March 16, 1863. The group leader, who goes unnamed in reports, responded to extremely high food prices by demanding lower prices and threatening violence. This demonstration was reported to consist of roughly a dozen women, only one of whom was armed, who eventually stole almost two hundred dollars' worth of bacon.⁵⁸ While taking place in only one store on White Hall Street, this event made a statement that the Confederacy's poor and working-class women were no longer going to stand for the dramatically increased food prices.⁵⁹

Two days after the March 16 demonstration in Atlanta, Georgia, a similar event occurred in Salisbury, North Carolina on March 18. This riot is said to have contained forty to fifty women who went from store-to-store threatening violence if the store owners did not lower their pricing.⁶⁰ These women were overwhelmingly successful in their efforts having a combined loot of "twenty-three barrels of flour, a barrel of molasses, two sacks of salt, and twenty dollars."⁶¹ The women split the bounty equally between them and dispersed. When all was done, the women went home with no issue; none were arrested or prosecuted for the theft.

On April 1, 1863, the *Montgomery Daily Mail* states, "another female food riot took place in Salisbury, N.C., on the 18th. The women involved compelled the merchants to share their stock of flour with them and robbed several families of the stock laid in for home use."⁶² The periodical was not overly critical in the discussion of the actions of the women who rioted.

⁵⁸ Crisp, "'The Women Rising': Cotton, Class, and Confederate Georgia's Rioting Women," 70.

⁵⁹ Crisp, "'The Women Rising': Cotton, Class, and Confederate Georgia's Rioting Women," 70.

⁶⁰ Crisp, "'The Women Rising': Cotton, Class, and Confederate Georgia's Rioting Women," 70.

⁶¹ Crisp, "'The Women Rising': Cotton, Class, and Confederate Georgia's Rioting Women," 70.

⁶² *Montgomery Daily Mail*, April 1, 1863.

The rhetoric which the author used when they talk about how store owners were "compelled" to "share" their stock of food rather than words like "pillaged," "stole," or "robbed." The choice of the words seems to show the quiet support of the demonstration by the newspaper. The periodical does look down on the demonstrators' actions when it comes to how they robbed families. The framing of the demonstrations reveals a quiet resistance building against the Confederacy.

Mobile, Alabama, was home to the next demonstration on March 25.⁶³ The women of Mobile organized and marched on Spring Hill Road heavily armed with hatchets, knives, and most likely pistols.⁶⁴ They carried signs that read "'Bread or Blood' on one side and 'Bread or Peace.'"⁶⁵ The chant of "Bread or Blood" had become a battle cry for the growing discontent, while this statement shows only the fear of starvation, it also shows how far the women of the Confederacy were willing to go in order to achieve their goal. The demonstration in Mobile has far less reporting on the event; however, it seems to be similar to the others occurring in March and April of 1863.

As the anger and frustration surrounding the drafts, deaths, and rising prices of necessities, the South's white poor and working-class women continued to band together and began to demand change. The poem "The Widow's Appeal" was published in at least two newspapers, and likely throughout the whole Confederacy; *the Winchester Daily Bulletin* published the poem on March 29, 1863. Moreover, *The Athens Southern Watchmen* published the same work on April 3, 1863—the day after Richmond's events. This poem expressed dissent

⁶³ Crisp, "'The Women Rising': Cotton, Class, and Confederate Georgia's Rioting Women," 70.

⁶⁴ "100 Years Ago: Bread Riots in Mobile," *The Mobile Journal*, Mobile, Alabama, September 6, 1963. While this article states that the dates of the demonstration were in the month of September, every other source I have found points to this event occurring in late March, most likely on March 25. The other details of this article point to this event being a part of the larger movement in the Spring of 1863.

⁶⁵ "100 Years Ago: Bread Riots in Mobile," *The Mobile Journal*, September 6, 1963.

against the Confederate Government. The unnamed author writes from a sympathetic female perspective about hunger, fear that her child will die and discusses her husband's death. In the antebellum period, women's role was to be protected and cared for; however, as the war's devastation grew, the soldiers' wives faced the death of their loved ones by war or starvation and became their own caretakers.

The Widow's Appeal

*Stranger, have you corn?
Can you my wants supply?
My infant, early-born,
Needs succor, else 'twill die.*

*At Crampton, where the skies
With bullets were o' ercast—
There my loved Charlie lies,
And sadly, he breathed his last.*

*I cannot, will not steal,
Me loved one to supply.
Will you, my sorrows heal?
Refuse me, and I die.*

*These days are sad and drear,
Since Charlie left me alone,
I'm a stranger, pilgrim here,
To Heaven, I make my moan⁶⁶*

The intriguing aspect of this poem, which does not fit with the overall narrative of the many demonstrations made over the South, is the line referring to this woman's choice not to steal. The poem implied that some valorized the widow's sacrifice, all while exposing the widow's lack of options and the need for action. Many women in the war-torn South chose to steal and feed their families rather than keep their status as demure and proper ladies. It seems that the poem's main character is fearful of seeming unkempt to society, she instead chooses to beg the government for aid. She is prepared to starve before she steals. This female character is struggling to survive at

⁶⁶ *Americus Sumter Republican in Athens Southern Watchman*, April 3, 1863.

the hands of the Confederacy, and while she seemingly disapproves of the methods used in the various women's rebellions, she also supports their cause. The widow in the poem was desperately struggling to survive and keep her child alive. Even though the woman in the poem would not resort to stealing, she rebukes the government and their lackluster support of the soldiers' wives. This poem uses public perception of a starving widow with a premature infant to attempt to force the Confederate government's hand to end the war, or at the very least, to lower food prices and better support the soldiers' wives' and widows.

The article which accompanies the poem in *The Winchester Daily Bulletin* glorifies "The Press of the South," by calling them the "life and breath of the Revolution."⁶⁷ The article begins by disgracing the politicians who manipulate and interfere with the press. The author also uses the poem above to show one of the many ways that the Confederacy's politicians and government were destroying peoples' livelihoods and families. The article supports the Southern press and the freedom of said press. The paper does seem to support the revolution brewing beneath the surface of the Confederacy while also supporting the Confederate war effort. The dueling support of the cession and the Confederate government's growing white poor discontent is shown by both the article and the poem. The "life and breath of the Revolution" refers to the Civil War and possibly the demonstrations.⁶⁸ The poem, followed by the biting criticism, displays the growing dissent among the women and men of the non-governing classes.

The next demonstration occurred in Petersburg, Virginia, on April 1, the day before Richmond. In a *Weekly Express* report from Buffalo, New York, "a similar outbreak at Petersburg, attended, like that at Richmond, with such acts of boldness and violence as the timid

⁶⁷ "The Press," in the *Winchester Daily Bulletin*, March 29, 1863.

⁶⁸ "The Press," in the *Winchester Daily Bulletin*, March 29, 1863.

sex could be impelled to by desperation.”⁶⁹ This periodical seems to be surprised by how effective the rebelling women are, and how their actions are opposite the expectation for a lady of the antebellum period. The periodical describes the participants’ motivations and the power possessed by these women who chose to rebel against the Confederate government. Even though they are seen as the "timid sex," they still have the power to organize and implement a series of demonstrations to show their discontent publicly.

April 2, 1863: Demonstration in Richmond, Virginia

The demonstration on the morning of April 2 in Richmond, Virginia, occurred in the middle of two months of demonstrations, but as this protest occurred in the Confederacy’s capital and is considered one of the largest in the series of demonstrations, it received the most press coverage. The events in Richmond were spearheaded by two women but were aided by roughly 300 others. Mary Jackson, described as a "soldier's mother, farm wife, and huckster in meat in Richmond's Second Market," is responsible for what many consider the largest and most impactful Confederate civilian demonstration during the war.⁷⁰ Minerva Meredith was the other known organizer of the demonstration in Richmond. Mary Jackson, Minerva Meredith, and their team of women organized the Richmond demonstration over ten days and were reported to have held several, largely female-only meetings in the days leading up to the event. Due to Jackson's connections in the rural farming community and the urban meat market, she pulled a following from both sides of the city, leading to an incredibly successful event.⁷¹ Jackson created a public relations strategy to have control over the narrative of the demonstration. A witness to one of the

⁶⁹ “Bread Riots in the South,” *Weekly Express*, Buffalo, New York, April 12, 1863.

⁷⁰ McCurry, “Women Numerous and Armed,” 39.

⁷¹ McCurry, “Women Numerous and Armed,” 39.

planning meetings stated, “she didn’t want the women to go along the streets like a parcel of heathens, but to go quietly to the stores and demand goods at government prices and if the merchants didn’t grant their demand to break open the stores and take the goods.”⁷² Jackson wanted to give the store merchants and, by extension, the Confederate Government a way out by explicitly giving their demands and allowing them comply and avoid disorder an opportunity to fulfill their request. Jackson suspected that the merchants would refuse and that the demonstration would turn to violence since the beginning and in the same meeting from the night before the demonstration told the women present, “to meet the next morning at nine a.m. to leave the children at home, and to come armed.”⁷³ For a woman like Jackson to incite violence shows the lengths that she and others like her were willing to go to enact change within the Confederacy. Jackson and other female leaders chose to use many of the tactics designed by abolitionists in the North, which were used to push Lincoln to the Emancipation Proclamation. The poor and working-working class women used these tactics against their government to create change.

On April 2, 1863, poor and working-class women gathered in the streets of Richmond, Virginia, congregating outside of the governor’s mansion. They had followed Mary Jackson's orders and came armed with pistols, knives, hatchets, and any other weapon that could be found during a war. The crowd of women came prepared to take what they needed, if and when the governor refused to lower food prices to the government price. Jackson used her soldiers' mother's status to gain sympathy for her cause and met with the governor before the demonstration to give the Confederacy a calculated chance to avoid violence. When Virginia

⁷² *Richmond Daily Examiner*, April 4, 1863.

⁷³ McCurry, “Women Numerous and Armed,” 39.

Governor Letcher refused them, women like Mary Jackson began the protest.⁷⁴ The demonstration lasted for about two hours before the violence came to a stop. Women were focused on taking bread and ingredients to make bread, clothing, shoes, and other necessities for survival in wartime Southern society. The theft of clothing was not only for warmth but also necessary to be seen as a respectable woman. As these poor and working-class women took what they needed to feed their families, they also placed clothing and looking respectable in nearly as high regard. Some aspects of antebellum society and respectability remains and is seen in the evidence of what these women stole.

Richmond became the center of the conversation around these demonstrations occurring all over the South, not only because it was likely the biggest, but also because of its extensive press coverage and because it occurred in the Confederate center of government. These women used the riot's location to make a statement about living conditions and power. The choice to demonstrate and steal from both government and non-governmental stores and storehouses shows the sheer amount of power and force the white, poor, and working-class women of Richmond possessed in 1863 and their recognition of said power.

Historians, press, protest members, and the Confederate government debated the crowd's size. Contemporaneous accounts provide very different numbers from those of the 1860s that historians continue to debate. This drastic difference in numbers ranges from 100 foreigners to a crowd of 20,000 Confederate citizens.⁷⁵ Such disparity is due to many contributing factors, such as: press, bias, politics, lack of records, and guesswork by historians and others. The Confederate

⁷⁴ In some narratives of this event, Governor Letcher refuses to meet with the demonstration leaders completely; in others, he meets with them and refuses to make a deal with them. In both tellings, the event's leaders expected the response and had planned violent actions in response.

⁷⁵ "Outrageous Proceedings in Richmond," *Staunton Spectator*, April 7, 1863; Titus. "The Richmond Bread Riot of 1863," 114.

government's estimates ranged from 100 up to 800 people as participants, while Union sources estimate 3,000. Women who were at the event reported up to 20,000 participants. Each of these parties had a vested interest in how the rebellion was interpreted and came to be understood. Historians have reported and tracked these numbers throughout the work on this topic; like McCurry, other historians estimate that 300 women led the event, but she did not discuss the number of participants, just leaders. The Confederacy's motivations were to report lower numbers, while the Union's motivations were to raise the numbers. The likely number of participants is somewhere between 1,000 to 2,000 for the Richmond protest.⁷⁶

Confederate versions of the protest ranged from quiet support of the demonstrations to stories of foreigners invading Southern cities. The Confederate press reports put forward a story of 100 to 150 foreign people wreaking havoc on Richmond's city.⁷⁷ The Southern government specifically manipulated the media to spin the conflict into something that did not show the numerous cracks in the Confederacy's support and unity. For example, William Walter Cleary, a Confederate government member, said that the crowd consisted of 700-800 women.⁷⁸ On the other hand, the rest of the country heard a version of the demonstration as told by captured Union Col. Stewart where 3,000 poor and middle-class white Confederate women protested and stole from local businesses and government storehouses. We also see people like Catherine Ann Devereaux—a woman who took part in the protest—who stated that there were 20,000 people present.⁷⁹ It is easy to surmise that her motive is to show how impressive this event was and show its impact on the Confederacy. Her large numbers show another way that the number of

⁷⁶ This is my estimation based on the average of numbers that were shared by the various newspapers and works on the subject. I have also taken into account the motivations of the Confederate press' numbers and the Union press' numbers.

⁷⁷ "Outrageous Proceedings in Richmond," *Staunton Spectator*, April 7, 1863.

⁷⁸ Titus, "The Richmond Bread Riot of 1863," 114.

⁷⁹ Titus, "The Richmond Bread Riot of 1863," 114.

participants can be manipulated to ascertain an event's success or failure. Historians also debate the number of participants due to the significant disparities across the primary sources. Some historians, like Titus, say that 5,500 participants were in the crowd. Others like Robert M. Dunkerly and Ashley Whitehead Luskey state in their article that there were "300 armed women" in the crowd.⁸⁰ The crowd's size and participation are challenging to track and must be questioned because of the misinformation that developed after this event.

The end of the event has also become a point of contention between historians. The Union-supported version is one that the *New York Times* and other Northern papers put forward. The *New York Times* stated that "the militia were ordered out to check the riot but failed to do so. Jeff. Davis and other high officials then made speeches to the infuriated women and told them they should have what they need."⁸¹ This newspaper article exposed problems and made the Confederacy appear weaker. The very idea that the President would lower himself to give in to these women and tell them that they "should have what they need" was not included in the story to make President Davis look merciful. Instead, it was to show his weakness. Another aspect of this particular story was that the Public Guard was called to end the demonstration but could not. Again, this shows the weakness of the Confederacy. If the guard could not end a riot against women armed with knives, stones, and some even with guns, how could they even stand a chance against Union forces? This article and others like it were written to profoundly affect their readers' perception of the South and reinforce flagging support for the war effort.

The Southern-promoted conclusion to the Richmond protest offered two versions with differing outcomes. In one version of this narrative, President Davis descended into Richmond's

⁸⁰ Titus, "The Richmond Bread Riot of 1863," 114.; Luskey, "From Women's History to Gender History," 153.

⁸¹ "Bread Riot in Richmond: Three Thousand Hungry Women Raging in the Streets: Government and Private Store Broken Open," *New York Times*, April 8, 1863.

streets from the governor's mansion.⁸² According to Varina Davis' memoir, her husband threw money into the crowd to appease the rioters; however, this did not work.⁸³ After Davis' failed attempts to appease the crowd, he resorted to threatening violence. According to historian Alan Pell Crawford, President Davis stated, "We do not desire to injure anyone... but this lawlessness must stop... I will give you five minutes to disperse, otherwise you will be fired upon."⁸⁴ The rioters resisted this order to disperse until the Public Guard commander, Lieutenant Edward Scott Gay Jr., ordered his men to load their weapons and prepare to fire. Other versions of this story were told with the Mayor of Richmond—Mayor Mayo—or Virginia Governor Letcher ordering the Public Guard to fire on the crowd. The most plausible outcome was that a government official, whether it be Mayor Mayo, Governor Letcher, or President Davis, ordered the Public Guard to fire upon the crowd if they refused to disperse. The crowd suspected of over 1,000 angry people most likely would not have dispersed their violation. Clearly, Richmond's protest was large enough and significant enough to require official intervention and troubling enough to be subject to very different interpretations by various parties.

Of the nine known demonstrations, Richmond resulted in the largest number of arrests. After the Richmond riot ended, the public guard began to arrest some of the participants later on April 2. Authorities ended up arresting 73 people, 41 of whom were women. Historians report that young, beautiful women were treated far more leniently than men or older women.⁸⁵ Of the 41 women arrested, among them Mary Jackson and Minerva Meredith, twelve of those women

⁸² Crawford. "Richmond's Bread Riot," 24.

Crawford's footnotes are not attached to the available article, so I could not double-check all of his sources to ensure his claims' validity. I think this interpretation of the end of the Richmond Bread Riots was incredibly interesting and deserved discussion.

⁸³ Crawford. "Richmond's Bread Riot," 24.

⁸⁴ Crawford. "Richmond's Bread Riot," 24.

⁸⁵ Ashley Whitehead Luskey and Robert M. Dunkerly. "From Women's History to Gender History: Revamping Interpretive Programming at Richmond National Battlefield Park," *Civil War History* 62, no.2 (June 2016): 158.

were convicted, only one of whom received a felony. Mary Jackson was arrested on her way home at First and Broad.⁸⁶ Her husband, Elisha Jackson, bailed her out of jail, and she was charged with a misdemeanor, as the court could not prove that she had stolen anything.⁸⁷

Minerva Meredith was also arrested, charged with a misdemeanor, and released on bail. Then she was charged with six months in jail. Michael B. Chesson states that, "Judge John A. Meredith gave Minerva Meredith only half the permissible sentence, six months in jail, perhaps because her petition for a pardon from the governor had been endorsed by Mayor Mayo."⁸⁸ Meredith's punishment seems to be for her role as leader of the event, her theft of beef, and "for being a conspicuous individual."⁸⁹

Many of the women who were arrested and charged played on the courts' respect for their femininity to receive the courts' sympathy; women who dressed well were quiet and demure ladies, who showed respect for the court were often given lesser sentences or whose cases were dismissed altogether. An example of this was of Laura Gordon,

A lady of some means and neat dress was initially found guilty in circuit court and fined \$25 and given thirty days in jail; however, after she deliberately took an overdose of laudanum and collapsed in a fit of tears on the courtroom floor, the judge took pity on her 'feminine weakness' and reduced her sentence to a mere four hours of jail time.⁹⁰

On the other side, women who did not conform to traditional beauty standards or who were poor faced harsher punishments. Mary Johnson—not to be confused with Mary Jackson—a sixty-year-old woman who was described as a "toothless hag" faced a five-year sentence in the Virginia state penitentiary.⁹¹ While Johnson participated in the demonstration and most likely stole supplies, she was not responsible for planning the demonstration. The women who planned

⁸⁶ Chesson, "Harlots or Heroine?" 153.

⁸⁷ Chesson, "Harlots or Heroine?" 158.

⁸⁸ Chesson, "Harlots or Heroine?" 155.

⁸⁹ Chesson, "Harlots or Heroine?" 155.

⁹⁰ Luskey, "From Women's History to Gender History," 158.

⁹¹ Luskey, "From Women's History to Gender History," 159.

these events often fit the societal standards for the most part and were thus given a lighter sentence, even with their larger role in the event. Women like Johnson, who did not fit into the traditional roles for women, were easier to blame for the event than the women who fit into white, Southern society well. The role of the so-called, “toothless hag” added to the Confederate narrative that the demonstration was not led by the ladies of the Confederacy, rather by, Yankee or in this case toothless hags. It also seems that the few men who participated and were later arrested faced longer and more severe charges. Looking at who was arrested, charged, and served time shows how the Confederacy's incredibly gendered world remained even in wartime. The punishments for women were often small or non-existent aside from a few exceptions of women who did not conform to the social standards of the time when presenting themselves in court. All of the female participants were dramatically bending the gender roles of the times when they participated in the event. However, the court quickly forgave the discretion when the women dressed up in their best and acted as proper Southern women.

In another paper, the *Weekly Express* from Buffalo, New York, described on April 12, 1863, the Richmond and Salisbury protests. When describing the demonstration in Richmond, specifically the women, the author states, “[they were] so formidable that the chief of the rebellion was forced to appear in person and satisfy the hunger-maddened Amazons by a promise of government rations.”⁹² The “chief of the rebellion,” refers to President Jefferson Davis, as this paper is from the Union side.⁹³ This ensures that their political take on the war is straightforward, that the Confederacy is a group of insurgents who had no claim to the Confederacy. After setting up the *Weekly Express's* view of the Confederacy, they turn to the events of the Richmond

⁹² “Bread Riots in the South,” *Weekly Express*, Buffalo, New York, April 12, 1863.

⁹³ “Bread Riots in the South,” *Weekly Express*, Buffalo, New York, April 12, 1863.

demonstration.⁹⁴ The report's goal is to show the weakness and discontent brewing within the Confederacy. The women of the demonstration were "so formidable," a word that would not have been used to usually describe women, that the leader of the Confederacy himself needed to appease them with rations. This narrative shows how the Confederacy was not taking care of their women and children.

After the Richmond action, the Confederacy attempted to cast blame on other forces outside of the white women of the Confederacy. If newspapers reported that the Confederacy's poor and working-class white women were rioting because they lacked proper access to food, clothing, and other essentials, that story could reveal the continued weakening of the Confederacy. The *Abingdon Virginian*, April 17, 1863—states that "as we expected the enemy at the North are trying to make capital out of the so-called "bread riot" in Richmond. They say we are at the "point of starvation."⁹⁵ These two sentences attempt to discredit anything that is printed by the North. However, the Confederacy's attempts to keep the demonstrations away from the press was a failure. The Civil War was fought on both the battlefield and within the press on either side of the war.

Ultimately, the story of the conflict in Richmond and other similar demonstrations throughout the South were published worldwide from *The Sacramento Bee* to the *New York Times* to *The Weekly Standard* in Raleigh, North Carolina. The *New York Times* asserts in an April 8, 1863 article that the Confederacy has become a weakened state. The *New York Times* published an article featuring a Union Colonel Stewart, who supposedly watched the Richmond Demonstration events out of a prison cell window. In the article, "Bread Riot in Richmond:

⁹⁴ "Bread Riots in the South," *Weekly Express*, Buffalo, New York, April 12, 1863.

⁹⁵ *The Abingdon Virginian*, April 17, 1863.

Three Thousand Hungry Women Raging in the Streets: Government and Private Store Broken Open,” he states:

About three-thousand women were engaged, armed with clubs, guns, and stones. They broke open the Government stores and took bread, clothing, and whatever else they wanted. The militia was ordered out to check the riot but failed to do so. Jeff. Davis and other high officials then made speeches to the infuriated women and told them they should have what they need.⁹⁶

The *New York Times* showed their readers that the Confederacy had many weaknesses, including their own women "rioting" against them. The shocking story of thousands of white women violently rioting in the capital of the Confederacy was fascinating and somewhat scandalous. The Union Col. Stewart's story reveals the desperation and rage that was fueled by the Confederate Government's incompetence. The fact that this occurred in cities all over the white South showed Union readers the fractures occurring within Confederate society.

The white southern media framed the food riots as the illegal actions of outside agitators. The Confederate reports on the Richmond Demonstration and other food riots in the Confederacy were quite different from the *New York Times* and other Union papers. Two reports from Virginia during April of 1863 tell a different story which supported the Confederate cause. The *Staunton Spectator*, published in Staunton, Virginia—108 miles away from Richmond, published an article just four days after Richmond's events.⁹⁷ The article details that there were 100 to 150 people at the Richmond demonstration, with both men and women present, who began to loot stores in broad daylight.⁹⁸ The article also made Hon. John B. Baldwin, a member of the Confederate House of Representatives, the hero of the story. The article details that he led a band of gentlemen to arrest some of the riot leaders. The article portrays the speeches made by

⁹⁶ “Bread Riot in Richmond: Three Thousand Hungry Women Raging in the Streets: Government and Private Store Broken Open,” *New York Times*, April 8, 1863.

⁹⁷ “Outrageous Proceedings in Richmond,” *Staunton Spectator*, April 7, 1863.

⁹⁸ “Outrageous Proceedings in Richmond,” *Staunton Spectator*, April 7, 1863.

"Col. Munford, Mayor Mayo, Governor Letcher, and President Davis" in a favorable light.⁹⁹ In these speeches, the Confederate leaders reassure the public that "these robbers were not in need of food, as they pretended, for they stole everything they could lay their hands upon."¹⁰⁰ After reassuring the public that there was indeed enough food, the article reports that "it is quite probable that it [the riot] was instigated by the enemies of the South, with the view of encouraging the North to prosecute the war by making the impression that the South is approaching a starving condition."¹⁰¹ Baldwin also spoke to the rioting crowd and got them to disperse.¹⁰² *The Spectator* reported that "a handful of prostitutes, professional thieves, Irish and Yankee hags, gallow-birds from all lands but our own, congregated in Richmond, with a woman huckster at their head."¹⁰³ This paper is showing their audience that perpetrators of this demonstration—or in the author's mind, riot—could not have been the women of the Confederacy; instead, they were, "...prostitutes, professional thieves, Irish and Yankee hags, gallow-birds from all lands but our own."¹⁰⁴ The article concluded that the thieves who stole from the shops in the name of starvation had thrown rice and flour given to them by the government in the mud.¹⁰⁵ By adding this statement at the end of the article, the author leaves the readers to think of the kindness and wealth of the Confederacy, to give rice and flour to the starving people demanding it, and the disregard and absurdity of the thieves who threw it in the mud to spite the Confederacy. This article's language reveals how the article is a propaganda piece designed to limit the amount of information that Stanton people receive and manipulate

⁹⁹ "Outrageous Proceedings in Richmond," *Staunton Spectator*, April 7, 1863.

¹⁰⁰ "Outrageous Proceedings in Richmond," *Staunton Spectator*, April 7, 1863.

¹⁰¹ "Outrageous Proceedings in Richmond," *Staunton Spectator*, April 7, 1863.

¹⁰² Scott Hampton Harris, "John Brown Baldwin (1820-1873)," *Encyclopedia Virginia: Virginia Humanities* February 23, 2017, https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/Baldwin_John_Brown_1820-1873#start_entry

¹⁰³ Harris, "John Brown Baldwin (1820-1873).

¹⁰⁴ Harris, "John Brown Baldwin (1820-1873).

¹⁰⁵ "Outrageous Proceedings in Richmond," *Staunton Spectator*, April 7, 1863.

their perspective to support the Southern war effort. Such media coverage attempted to obscure the Confederacy's instability by making the Southern people distrust any person who is not actively working to continue an economy driven by Black people's enslavement and the Confederacy's betterment.

Demonstrations Continue

On April 10, women began a non-violent demonstration near Augusta's Upper Market in Augusta, Georgia.¹⁰⁶ Once gathered, the women inquired about the prices of shoes, clothing, and food. "The proprietor sensed mischief afoot, so he closed his store due to "pressing business" elsewhere. The women moved to another store, but nothing was taken, and the crowds dispersed after authorities came on the scene."¹⁰⁷ The Augusta demonstration was one of few which did not turn into a so-called riot, although it was often described as such in the newspapers, one labeling the demonstrators as "Amazonian warriors."¹⁰⁸ Although this demonstration was not violent, the women did not take anything from the shops it impacted Augusta and the surrounding community.

The very next day, on April 11, another demonstration occurred in Columbus, Georgia. This time the around sixty-five women arrived at Broad Street and Franklin armed and ready for violence.¹⁰⁹ The women entered George A. Norris's goods store and began to loot the store. The women took what they wanted and needed; however, they were stopped by the police before they were able to move on to other stores. Crisp asserts that, "Seven months later, Columbus women warned Governor Brown by letter that they would again organize a mob to procure provisions if

¹⁰⁶ Crisp, "The Women Rising': Cotton, Class, and Confederate Georgia's Rioting Women," 70.

¹⁰⁷ Crisp, "The Women Rising': Cotton, Class, and Confederate Georgia's Rioting Women," 70.

¹⁰⁸ Crisp, "The Women Rising': Cotton, Class, and Confederate Georgia's Rioting Women," 70.

¹⁰⁹ Crisp, "The Women Rising': Cotton, Class, and Confederate Georgia's Rioting Women," 72.

they received no relief.”¹¹⁰ The women’s threat to mobilize again if they did not receive more aid shows the power that these women wielded in their first demonstration. While the changes that were demanded in the first demonstration were answered and attended to, those changes did not last, and soon the women who had originally rioted were facing higher food costs than before, so the threat of demonstrations began again, although no demonstration have been reported to have occurred. The threat alone pushed lawmakers to begin to take action in order to appease these women.

The next event that occurred in this series of protests was located in Milledgeville on April 14. A group of women raided a dry good store for necessary items to make bread and eat.¹¹¹ The group’s events ended when “Judge L. Harris promised that if they would end their march and return the goods, they would get immediate relief. The women did as Harris asked, and received funds from the city treasury.”¹¹² This demonstration's ending is particularly interesting because they were rewarded for returning the goods they stole, then returned. This action by Judge L Harris shows how these demonstrations across the Confederacy were effective. The women who led this particular demonstration were raiding the dry goods store out of a combination of rage towards the deplorable conditions they were living in the Confederacy's cause; white rage stemming from the fear of white privilege being revoked and the radical changes to the social, gendered, and racial status quo; and the immense price gauging of food also run by the government. The dry-goods store, most likely not owned by the government, became an unwilling pawn in the poor white Confederate women's statement to the larger Confederate government. The judge must have understood this fact and gave the participants

¹¹⁰ Crisp, “‘The Women Rising’: Cotton, Class, and Confederate Georgia’s Rioting Women,” 72.

¹¹¹ Crisp, “‘The Women Rising’: Cotton, Class, and Confederate Georgia’s Rioting Women,” 72.

¹¹² Crisp, “‘The Women Rising’: Cotton, Class, and Confederate Georgia’s Rioting Women,” 72.

financial relief to have the government take responsibility for their mistakes, which ultimately led to the various demonstrations, rather than the storeowner suffering for something that was not under their control. Had more city legislatures and judges followed Judge L. Harris' example, there could have been less violence and ultimately fewer demonstrations.

The city of Macon, Georgia, also was home to a demonstration in late April. This event was centered around the "Rosenwald & Bro." store located on Second Street in Macon.¹¹³ Similar to Richmond, the women arrived at the store armed and ready to take what they needed. Of the women involved, only one was stopped by the store's owner, while others got away. The news coverage of this event was empowering, "one editor called [the event], 'The Women Rising.'"¹¹⁴ This title alone demonstrates the growing power that these women were gaining with each event throughout the Confederacy. The events in Macon, Georgia, occurred later in the month and towards the Confederacy's protests. The white poor and working-class women's near-constant demonstrating, letters, and petitions were beginning to take its toll on the Confederate government. Being the second to last major demonstration in the Spring of 1863, the events in Macon were enough to force the Confederate government to find a better solution to slow the growing discontent within the Confederacy.

The last demonstration that is thought to have occurred was in late April in Butts County, Georgia. Rather than robbing a government storehouse or personal business, twenty-eight women robbed a freight wagon headed from a factory Butts County to the rail depot at Forsyth.¹¹⁵ These women were armed with guns and knives like at the many other events

¹¹³ Crisp, "The Women Rising': Cotton, Class, and Confederate Georgia's Rioting Women," 72.

¹¹⁴ Crisp, "The Women Rising': Cotton, Class, and Confederate Georgia's Rioting Women," 72.

¹¹⁵ Crisp, "The Women Rising': Cotton, Class, and Confederate Georgia's Rioting Women," 72.

throughout the Confederacy. In “‘The Women Rising’: Cotton, Class, and Confederate Georgia’s Rioting Women,” Crisp explains the class response to this event,

Sensing class animosities reflected in this and similar incidents, the editor emphasized that private property protection for both elites and commoners was at stake. "The rich can better afford to be robbed than the poor and when that game is set afoot the poor will be the greatest sufferers." However, from the plain folk's perspective, the rich had robbed them through speculation and impressment. They saw themselves as taking back only what was, in a general sense, theirs by right.¹¹⁶

Crisp adeptly explains how many of the women committing these crimes feel and how they justify their actions. Many of the suffering women see the wealthy and, therefore, those in power as their oppressors. The women who choose to riot felt that it is their only option to survive and instead feel guilt around committing violence, robbery, and property damage. These women felt a sense of vindication in restoring what they felt was owed to them as Confederate citizens. As these events occur throughout the Confederacy, they inspire one another and lead to an eventual change in Confederate policy.

Media coverage of these protests, mainly focused on Richmond, reached England and Scotland in late April. The nations were both invested because Great Britain required cotton from the South; they desired to stay neutral in the conflict. The reporting of the various demonstrations; however, these articles tended to side with the Northern telling of the demonstration, some even sharing the same narrative from Union Colonel Stewart. After discussing various other details of the war, such as recent battles and blockade. The author calls into question the availability of food, “It is difficult to believe that great distress can exist in a large fertile country like the Confederacy, but concurrent testimony seems to establish the fact. The real causes lie probably in the difficulties of transport and the want of that foreign market for

¹¹⁶ Crisp, “‘The Women Rising’: Cotton, Class, and Confederate Georgia’s Rioting Women,” 72.

the great staple on which the South depended.”¹¹⁷ This article discusses both the validity and questionability of the Colonel's story of the demonstration. The author also questions the South's ability to be living in starving conditions while the land is fertile and used for farming. These questions are valid, especially when coming from Glasgow, and raise the question: why was the South starving? The reporting from a different country which is less far less biased than the papers which were written in the United States. The Glasgow Herald's article questioning is unique because of the distance they hold, and this shows how the outside world was distrustful of the story that was being shared of the plight Confederacy.

The demonstrations in the Spring of 1863 were expansive throughout the South. Their prominence grew to the point where reports on them were seen in England and Scotland. While these papers only discuss Richmond, rather than the widespread demonstrations. This could be because Richmond was the Confederacy's capital. After all, Richmond was the largest demonstration, or because the other food demonstrations were better hidden by the Confederacy, or some combination of the three. Whatever the reasoning, the sole featuring Richmond in these articles seems to be one of the factors of why the Richmond Bread Riot is the most widely studied food riot in the Spring of 1863.¹¹⁸

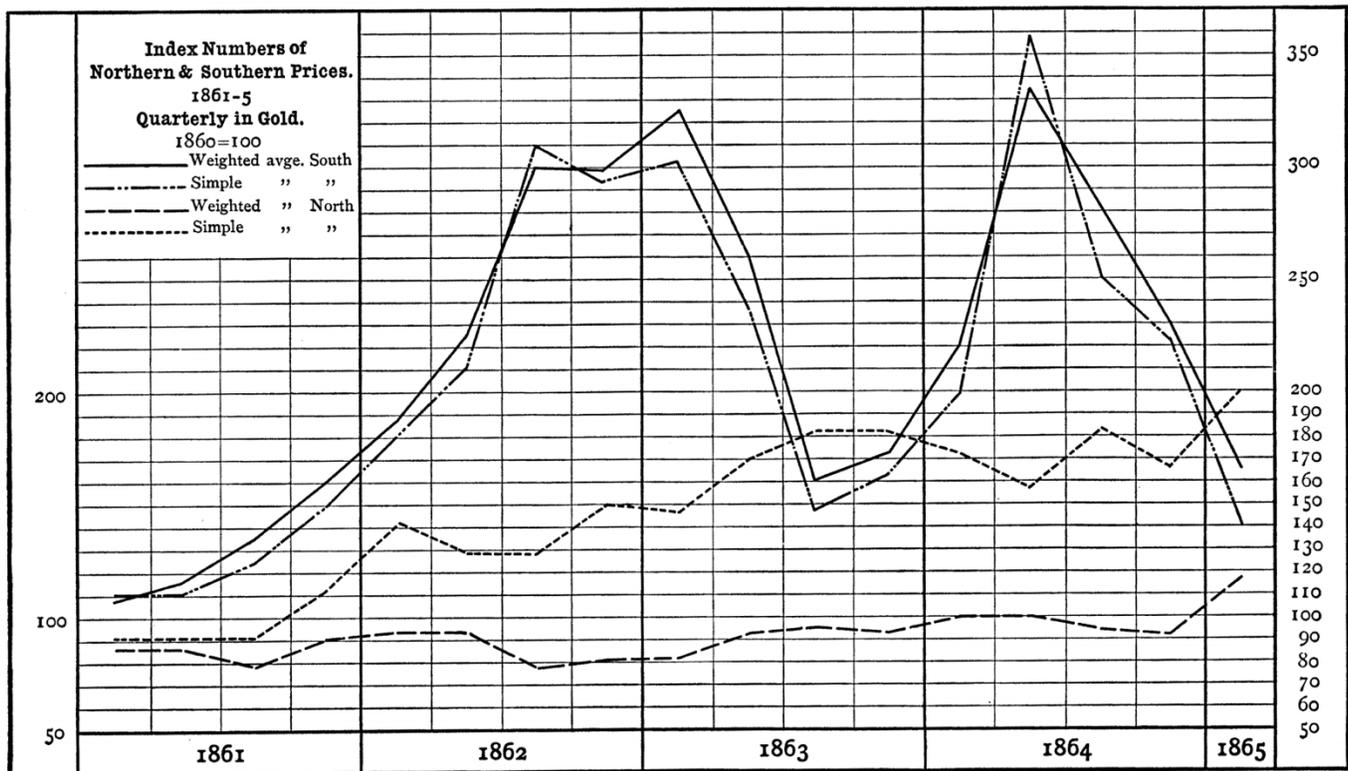
¹¹⁷ “How the American War Progresses (From the Globe.)” *Glasgow Herald*, Glasgow, Scotland, April 22, 1863.

¹¹⁸ I highly suspect that the reason that only Richmond is discussed by these newspapers from abroad is due to several factors. The drama of sharing a story about a riot lead by white women in the heart of the Confederacy drew in readers, it was a somewhat scandalous event that was easily covered up by Confederate press. The story of the Richmond Bread Riot was shared and discussed more than other events was most likely due to some combination of the various reasons listed in the paragraph above, as well as the idea that scandal sells. Newspapers wanted to print a story that would sell, the Richmond Bread Riot certainly did that.

Epilogue

These demonstrations occurred in reaction to the Confederacy's lack of necessities and the massive social changes that were occurring during 1863. As the demonstrations continued through March and then April, the Confederate government realized that they needed to respond to the growing crisis powered by female discontent and rage. The Confederate Congress responded after May 1, 1863, by giving "Confederate officials another means to alleviate individual cases of poverty."¹¹⁹ This policy change allowed more men to stay home from war, if necessary, for a family's survival.¹²⁰ While this policy was helpful for many poor families in desperate need of additional labor and income to survive the war, many of these families remained angry. The Confederacy's poor and working-class people had spent the previous years' suffering, protecting their families, and surviving the U.S. Civil War.

FIGURE 2 ¹²¹



The prices in the Confederacy hit an all-time high in the middle of the first quarter in 1863, right as the demonstrations began (see Fig. 2). The prices then began to fall dramatically, most likely in response to the demonstrations, the better growing and planting conditions, and the policy which allowed men to remain at home rather than fight. The prices hit a low point for the war in the middle of the third quarter of 1863. However, these low prices did not last long. By the middle of the second quarter of 1864, the prices had skyrocketed to a new all-time high. The demonstrations which occurred in the Spring of 1863 were at least in part responsible for the falling prices of food. The working-class white women of the South held enough political power to force the Confederate government to respond to their crisis and make changes that eventually soothed the discontent. The Spring of 1863 became the catalyst for the outburst of rage that is now known as the Confederate Food Riots.

The significant disparities in the contemporaneous national media narratives around the Spring of 1863 protests speaks to the extent to which this female unrest challenged the status quo and was subsequently featured, dismissed, and demonized. And historians continue to work to understand the motivations, acts, and repercussions of these events. The language surrounding these events has been used to demean the actions of the women who participated. Using the terminology of riot has worked to diminish the actions that these women took against their government, firstly in letters and petitions, and ending in violent demonstrations. When these women took up arms against the Confederacy, the southern press, which favored the government, actively tried to prove that the rebellions were not coming from the Confederacy's women but from outside invaders. Some Confederate newspapers worked to purposely degrade the women who planned and led these demonstrations throughout the Confederacy. These papers worked to minimize the event while also demeaning the women who participated. Other papers

reported dutifully because they could not ignore the events of the demonstrations. The rage that these women experienced and displayed at the various demonstrations was threatening to the men in governmental office, and the wider society, therefore, was discredited; some papers going as far to call the events "outrageous." The women who planned and subsequently led the demonstrations throughout the South were labeled as "hunger maddened amazons," "prostitutes," "Yankee hags," and other insults.¹²² The specifically gendered insults were used by elite men and women to "deny the complicity of any 'true' Richmond ladies in such 'base' activities."¹²³ The language surrounding this event and its participants in both current articles and the historic press has affected how it was studied and written about.

Race, racism, and the Emancipation Proclamation also played a role in the accumulation of rage that these women felt when they began to protest. While not many historians are connecting the events of the demonstrations to racism, it is hard to ignore the white supremacist roots of the Confederacy and its citizens. The structure of Southern society was built upon race, class, and gender. When the war began, both the gender and class rules of the white South dissolved. This left race. The Emancipation Proclamation worked to remove the very last social standard of the Old South. The rage that was already prevalent and growing in the poor and lower-working class was exuberated by the Emancipation Proclamation and eventually led to the outburst of rage that was the demonstrations in the Spring of 1863.

The Spring of 1863 was the response to the shifts in Confederate culture, life, and social structure that the U.S. Civil War caused. This event was far more than a few skirmishes over the prices of food. It was an organized movement fueled by white-female rage that led to political

¹²² "Bread Riots in the South," *Buffalo Weekly Express*, April 14, 1863., "Outrageous Proceedings in Richmond," *Staunton Spectator*, April 7, 1863.

¹²³ Luskey, "From Women's History to Gender History," 157.

change. The time for the Richmond Bread Riot story as a stand-alone event and a footnote to the U.S. Civil War has passed; the history of white poor and working-class female rebellion has replaced it. The demonstrations shaped the course of the war by demanding the change, which brought more foot soldiers home and lowered the Confederate Government's ability to profit from the sale of necessities. The women of the demonstrations were neither "hunger-maddened Amazon's" nor "Bread Rebels," they were intellectual women who implemented protest strategies, planned, and executed a series of demonstrations that continue to show the power that white, poor, and working-class women wielded within the Confederacy.

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