

*Other Articles*

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The Rise and Fall of Womanhood:  
Ideal and Reality in Women's Status and Experience  
in the Colonial Low Country

Throughout the first half of the eighteenth century women in the colonial Low Country of South Carolina and Georgia traversed a path between an ideal of womanhood that insisted on their helplessness and dependency, as it simultaneously demanded their active contribution to the establishment and growth of the region. How Low Country women negotiated these dual and often contradictory expectations led them, at times, to conform to contemporary gendered ideals of femininity and, at other times, to challenge the socio-racial mores of Low Country society.

Historians of southern colonial women tend to categorize women's status and experience as either one of relative autonomy, compared to their counterparts elsewhere and women in the antebellum and early national eras, or as dependents circumscribed by law and social proscriptions (Dexter, 1931; Norton, 1988; Salmon, 1986). This study explores the ways in which women's lives in the Low Country, both in theory and in reality, belie such neat dichotomies. Indeed, as this study argues, Low Country women were often empowered and powerless, dependent and independent at one and the same time. The ideals of Low Country womanhood underscored the conflict and contradictions inherent in women's experience in the colonial era.

In their role as wives and mothers a host of essays, poems and stories, published in the gazettes and sold in the bookshops in Charles Town and Savannah, prioritized the cultivation and preservation of white women's

virtue in Low Country slave society. Writers and critics alike insisted that white women be pious, submissive and chaste in their relations with men, as they simultaneously insisted on the dependent and subordinate position of women within family and society; equally significant, they, too, politicized their arguments by asserting the positive good that white female virtue engendered, benefiting women because it symbolised rank and respectability, and benefiting society because it symbolised a civilised and harmonious order, despite or perhaps because of the threat throughout the first half of the eighteenth century of conflict and rebellion from an array of aggressors, enslaved, Indian and European.

In a society that was becoming increasingly populated with slaves and where women themselves owned slaves and managed plantations, preserving white women's "virtue" was perceived as critical. "In a biracial slave society where 'racial purity' was a defining characteristic of the master class, total control of the reproductive female was of paramount concern for elite males," argues Catherine Clinton (6). So important was the subject of white women's sexual and moral behavior that Low Country lawmakers were compelled to intervene to assuage an anxious white public.

As early as 1717, for instance, a law was passed in South Carolina to deter white women, servant or free, from voluntarily engaging in sexual relations with black men, slave or free. Women who strayed from the sexual code, and who found themselves pregnant, faced seven years of indentured labor: if they were already an indentured servant then their term was extended for another seven years; if their partner were a freeman, then he, too, became indentured. The offspring of these "unnatural" relations were to be kept in servitude until they had reached adulthood. The response of Low Country society was thus to match the punishment to the crime: for deliberately undermining the racial hierarchy and obviating the ideology of white racial superiority, white women were stripped of their freedom and relegated to semi-slave status (P. Wood 99).

Not all white women, however, adhered to the strict gendered-racial codes that informed the ideal of Low Country womanhood. Just as antebellum women in the slave South would discover that the social mores

that shaped the ideal of the Southern Lady were impossible to sustain, so, too, their colonial counterparts found that the ideals of the Southern Colonial Lady were replete with inconsistencies and, at times, also impossible to maintain (Kierner).

Female opposition to the ideal of the "colonial lady" was publicly articulated in the Low Country gazettes. According to one woman, who anonymously published her poem in the *South Carolina Gazette* (21 November 1743), all women were "*born to be controuled*." "HOW wretched is a *Woman's Fate*," she lamented, "Subject to Man in every State, How can she then be free from Woes?" As a child she is bound to her "*Father's stern Command*," whilst her brothers "keep her closer Captive still." Then "The tyrant *Husband* next appears" and thus "Her *Slave's* become her *Sov'reign* now." Cruel powers have so designed it, she admits, "That Man" *vain* Man! should bear the Sway." She concludes: "To a *slave's* Fetters add a *slavish* Mind, That I may cheerfully your Will obey." According to this author, all women could expect from life was to be subject to men, which, the author contends, only a "slavish Mind" could cheerfully endure. This early analogy between women's status and the condition of slavery offers a striking attack on the position of women in the colonial Low Country and highlights the hypocrisy of insisting on a racial distinction between women, white and black, and yet defining both, regardless of race or class, according to the dynamics of patriarchal power.

One critic responded to this poem by asserting the "paternal" not "patriarchal" nature of father and daughter, husband and wife relations in the Low Country ("How Happy"). But at least one young woman, "Carolina," remained unconvinced. Her poem was published in the *South Carolina Gazette* in 1747 and was inspired by her father's refusal to allow men, presumably those with amorous intentions, into his house. To make her case she drew on the ideals of male and female conduct, inferring that if men fulfilled the paternalist ideal, then women might stand a fighting chance of fulfilling their role, too. Contemporary perceptions of women, however, rendered this impossible, so she believed. When a daughter is in a state of "grief," then "The Heart parental, ought to plend Relief," she avowed. And if "Reason joins the

Daughter's side, The Father sure will walk by Reason's Guide" and "Divest his Thoughts of that false Prejudice, That *every Woman* must be giv'n to Vice." But, she concluded:

And must I then the *social Bliss* forgo?  
 Cause *Woman's frail*, or *Woman may* be so?  
 Must I obey? Decree too hard I find,  
 Must *Woman* live a-part from all *Mankind*?

...Freedom and "virtue" wither in one Hour,  
 There is no "virtue" when not in our Power...

Women are "giv'n to vice": their "frailty" and weakness justifies their submission to male authority, which is premised upon historical, religious, rational and perceived-biological arguments. To counteract their inherently sinful nature women are directed to be virtuous. But because they do not have the power to know their own minds and are incapable of making reasoned judgements, or in Carolina's words, to have "free-born Thought to form a Judgement clear, Know right from wrong, and what is bad to fear," society will teach these lessons to them. In short, the effect of perception and ideal is to render women incapable of moral judgement: they are powerless, and "reason" and "nature" support this. There is no mutual respect or reciprocity of obligations here. Rather than improve women's status, the ideal becomes a further justification for the gendered inequalities of power in the Low Country.

Whilst some women relied on penmanship and print to challenge the power of patriarchy, others confronted their fathers and husbands outright. Eliza Lucas (later Pinckney), for instance, refused to accept her father's choice of marriage partner for her: all "the riches of Peru and Chili [sic] if he had them put together could not purchase a sufficient Esteem for him to make him my husband," she declared in a letter to her father, Colonel George Lucas (Pinckney *Letterbook* 5). Other women married without their father's permission: Eleanor Austin Moultrie married against her father's wishes in 1769 the Charles Town merchant Henry

Laurens wrote to her father, George Austin, saying he was only too "glad to find my old Partner's heart relent towards his Daughter." George Austin had disapproved of the marriage because he believed his future son-in-law was a good-for-nothing. After the marriage, it seems he was proved right because as a result of his son-in-law's "indolence" his daughter had found herself "in want of the common necessities of Life" (Rogers Jr. et al. 6: 426).

The ideal of Low Country womanhood that insisted on female helplessness and dependency did not always work to women's detriment. For instance, women's perceived vulnerability and powerlessness influenced equity procedures that increased women's control over property, most especially from overbearing husbands. Before agreeing to marry, some Low Country women established separate estates or marriage settlements to protect the property they possessed, bequeathed to them by their fathers or previously deceased husbands. Under Common Law a wife's property automatically transferred to her husband, but by establishing a separate estate through equity procedures a woman ensured that the property remained within her control. According to Marylynn Salmon such settlements were not common, but those Low Country women who pursued this path discovered that this legal loop hole was a vital means to increase property rights in marriage that were otherwise denied to them in Common Law (*Women and Property* 238-68). Ironically, Low Country insistence on female helplessness served in law to expand women's economic power.

Married women also augmented the scope of their economic activity by appropriating *feme sole* trader status. As long as she had the permission of her husband, a married woman could trade and work as a *feme sole* in the Low Country, enabling her to shed the economic restrictions of marriage and make binding contracts, as well as purchase and sell goods and property in her own right. Gertrude Bolzius, for example, wife of the Salzburger Pastor John Martin Bolzius, was an active *feme sole* trader who had acquired her husband's consent to her activities. In his will he noted that his wife had bought a five hundred acre plantation in Joseph Town, "for which She with my approbation some years ago for her own money

gained by her raising cattle." In the final paragraph of his will, Bolzius hoped his wife would enjoy her inheritance and the plantation that she had bought "with her own money" (Georgia Wills 155-60). Gertrude Bolzius was one of many women whose entrepreneurial activities continued throughout her life as a married woman, despite Common Law restrictions and the patriarchal ideals embedded in the image of Low Country womanhood that insisted on female dependence and submission.

Low Country women also defied perceptions of female powerlessness when they chose to leave their husbands. Notices of wives "eloping" or leaving their husbands' "bed and board" periodically surfaced in the columns of the South Carolina and Georgia newspapers. In early February, 1750, William Savage, a Charles Town mariner, placed a notice in the *South Carolina Gazette* warning the public not to "trust, or deal with" his wife, Patience, for she had eloped from him. The first year that the *Georgia Gazette* was printed (1763), William Ashford also informed the public that his wife, Elizabeth, had eloped and that he would not foot the bill for "any debt contracted by her." Like all of the advertisements informing the public of their wives' departure, neither of these men publicly disclosed the reason for the breakdown of their marriages.

Infidelity, however, may well have been one factor that influenced some women's decision to end their marriages. Sexual relations, voluntary or coerced, between masters and female slaves occupy a visible place in the historiography of antebellum slavery but are less well documented in studies of the colonial era (Wiener, 1998; Morgan, 2004). That miscegenation took place is nonetheless confirmed by numerous contemporary references to the practice. For instance, the Petticoat Club, a group of Charles Town women, publicly criticised their male counterparts in 1749 in the *South Carolina Gazette* for seeking to "replenish it [society] with such an illegitimate tawny Race . . . which oftentimes they are ashamed to own." Another woman's letter to the *South Carolina Gazette*, published in 1747, offers further insight into the shame and humiliation felt by slaveholding wives. The anonymous woman explained that, while at a friend's house, she had read a story published in the *Universal Spectator*. "The Case of the Lady who wrote it being exactly mine," she said, "I beg

you'll insert it in your next, and perhaps you may be a Means of reclaiming mine and some other Husbands." Entitled *The Treacherous Husband*, the story was written neither by nor for the Low Country public, but it mirrored one Low Country woman's experience and, she believed, would perhaps assist others in a similar position to herself.

"I have a Complaint to make of a Wrong," the author wrote. "It is the perfidy of a Husband who abuses my Bed, but in such a Manner that my Life is grown a Burthen, and I am become the most miserable of Women." She felt confident, she said, that no loving wife would accuse her husband of "Falsehood" if she did not have "undoubted Proofs of his Treachery." *"Intrigue and the Pursuit of Women, either in an equal Station as myself, or even of an equal Beauty, with reluctance,"* she explained, "I would attribute to the *Mode of the Age.*" But, she charged, "how can I account for his abusing me with my own *Servant-Maids* but by the *natural viciousness of his Temper?*" She could not bring a single servant woman into the house without her husband frightening them away, attempting to "ruin them" or keeping them as his mistress, "under my nose," she explained. Her servants abused her, refused to follow her orders, and informed her husband that she treated them badly.

The author of this story found it more acceptable for her husband to engage in sexual relations with those of her own rank than with servant girls or slaves. What offended the author, and perhaps the Low Country woman who requested that it be printed in the gazette, was, in fact, that her husband had turned to women who, she felt, were beneath her. Class and race differences, therefore, underscored the extent to which a husband's sexual behaviour deserved to be condoned or condemned. Significantly, neither the author's remarks nor those of her Low Country counterpart suggest any compassion or consideration for the women, servant or enslaved, who may have been forced into sexual relations with their husbands. In the Low Country sexual virtue was as gendered as it was infused by race and class prejudice.

Nevertheless women, too, challenged the sexual-racial mores of Low Country society. Despite legal measures discouraging women's sexual relations with black men, there are surviving records to suggest that on

occasion it did occur. Pastor John Martin Bolzius of Georgia, for instance, was dismayed to discover that "2 white women, one French and one German, have secretly disgraced themselves with Negroes and have borne black children" (Leowald et al. 235). Bolzius does not reveal if these women faced legal punishment. Examples of voluntary interracial relations between white women and black men are not plentiful in the colonial records, but they are evidence that even the most taboo sexual practice was, on occasion, undertaken by white women despite severe socio-racial codes that condemned such relationships (Hodes 28; Lockley 52-54).

In myriad ways, then, Low Country white women confronted, negotiated and sometimes challenged the gendered ideal of womanhood that prevailed in Low Country society, articulated in magazines, sermons, newspaper columns and advice manuals. In so doing they insisted on reformulating the dynamics of patriarchal power, carving out arenas in which they could assert, and even demand, economic and social autonomy separate from their husbands and fathers. Elisabeth Anthony Dexter's portrait of colonial women highlights the visibility and economic activity of women in this era, in contrast to antebellum women who were circumscribed and restricted to the household by an ideology of domesticity and separate spheres (180-194). More recently, historians have challenged Dexter's insistence on the relative autonomy of colonial women, instead they have emphasized the legal impediments married women experienced in regards to their property rights, as well as the loss of their inheritance over the course of the eighteenth century (Norton 284-310; Smith 45-66; Shammas et al., 1987).

Focusing on those Low Country women who deviated from the patriarchal ideals of their society cautions against deterministic conclusions regarding women's experience of social and economic independence in this era. Few women experienced full independence from men or were entirely free from the import of patriarchal ideology; but many women nonetheless experienced frequent *instances* of autonomy and control over their own socio-economic destiny. Some used the newspapers to publicly attack the gendered hierarchy that elevated the status of men as it simultaneously degraded women, whilst others terminated their marriages and



left their husbands; some challenged the acceptance of white men's relations with servants and bondswomen, whilst others strayed from the sexual-racial mores of Low Country society altogether and formed bonds with black men. These examples, though few and far between, nonetheless indicate that Low Country women did on occasion willingly transgress the gendered ideal that governed white women's behavior. Moreover, even though some of their actions elicited shock and rebuke, many, it seems, like Eliza Lucas, were not at all condemned or cast out from society for their challenging conduct. Indeed, even though the legislature hotly debated married women's trading activities in Georgia, few contemporaries publicly challenged their economic activities (Marsh 156-58). Nor did they publicly condemn wives who left their husbands. In their behavior these women countered a patriarchal image and ideal that insisted on their dependency and powerlessness. Why this failed to provoke widespread concern or condemnation from their male peers may be understood by an analysis of the role and activities of Low Country widows.

It was in widowhood that Low Country women appeared to challenge patriarchal prescriptions that defined women's status in terms of submission and helplessness. As a consequence of high mortality rates, which secured the region the appellation of "graveyard," widowhood, experienced by both women and men, was a brutal but common fact of life. Without public assistance, widows had to rely on a generous inheritance; and when Low Country husbands wrote their wills and bequeathed their widows property they obliged and handed them substantial bequests, especially compared to male testators elsewhere in British America in the mid-eighteenth century (Crowley 35-57; Dornan, ch.S),

By providing generously for their wives, Low Country testators disclosed the crucial role that widows were expected to perform: to maintain their property in the absence of male heirs and to provide for and raise their children. As historians have observed, however, high mortality rates elsewhere did not necessarily induce generosity on the part of husbands (Burnard 93-114). What differed in the Low Country was an ideology of womanhood that, at the same time as it insisted on woman's helplessness,

also provided a role for women, in widowhood, that empowered them to perform duties and obligations customarily reserved for men. Indeed, since the early decades of settlement Low Country society had envisaged that women's activities would not simply revolve around their reproductive labor. It was hoped that they would also engage in the cultivation of silk, as well as grow and preserve foodstuffs, and make clothes. From the early decades of settlement, Low Country women labored to clear land, build their homes and establish crops. Widow Harris, who cleared and planted her own five acre plot and supplied milk to families nearby, in Georgia, was noted to be "one of the most valuable Inhabitants amongst us, remarkable for Industry" (qtd. in Marsh 122). The Georgia Trustees insisted that women's labor, productive and reproductive, were vital to their plans for the colony. This perception of women's role in the Low Country, too, shaped ideals of womanhood; but instead of emphasising women's dependency, this pioneer ideology encouraged and supported women in their economic and often independent business activities.

Low Country male testators thus gave generously to their wives not simply because they had to, but because, as their wills make clear, they *wanted to*. In transferring property to their wives, Low Country testators were acknowledging that their wives, too, had played as much a role in building the family's wealth as they themselves. Low Country society thus endorsed in practice what it did not necessarily wish to endorse in theory: white women's scope of economic influence and power was, and had to be, far more extensive than patriarchal ideology customarily prescribed.

Despite generous bequests to wives in the will making practices of Low Country husbands, not all men wrote a will or had sufficient wealth to guarantee their wives' support in widowhood. Whilst those wives who were well provided for were left to manage estates with land and slaves, the latter group of women, who could not rely on land or a plentiful supply of slaves to support them and their children, had little choice but to pursue other money-making ventures, such as taking in lodgers, establishing schools for young children, selling goods and provisions from their gardens, or, as a great many women chose to do, opening a tavern

and hiring out one or two slaves (Spruill 232-313). The multitude of advertisements in the South Carolina and Georgia newspapers testify to the numerous and varied activities of those widows who did not stand shoulder to shoulder with the likes of Eliza Lucas Pinckney and her wealthy female slaveowning peers.

Regardless of status, many widows, in myriad ways, embraced the social and economic autonomy that derived from working for themselves and managing their own businesses. Some, for instance, actively worked to improve on the estate that had been left in their guardianship and bought additional slaves, plots of land and town houses (Caldwell 183-98). Some established partnerships, like Katherine Lind and Sarah Minors, who with Henry Laurens' advice and encouragement set up their own millinery business (Rogers Jr. et al. 8: 131-32). Anna Salter and her daughter Ann Harris also entered into business together, running a saw mill in Frederica (Beckemeyer 58-63). Propertied women like these demonstrated the value they attached to their status and the extent to which they would not allow it to become jeopardized or undermined. In their activities and behaviour they conformed to Low Country expectations that, when husbands were absent, women stepped in to support and maintain their families, just as the early colonists had hoped. From advertising for the public's support in their businesses, the capture of runaway slaves, the repayment of debts owed to them, and calling for the public not to lead their slaves astray, widowed property owners and businesswomen demonstrated the vital role that their economic activities played in supporting themselves and their families and in raising their social and economic status in society. Moreover, in their actions to challenge and preserve their property rights they disclosed, once again, the limits of patriarchal power: mastery and authority were not entirely the preserve of white men.

But not all Low Country women embraced or even desired independent economic activity. Widow Kraft, for instance, preferred not to engage in the Low Country world of business and slave trading. Pastor John Martin Bolzius observed, "she is thoroughly tired of trading and its prolixity." Indeed it seems that wealth was not enough to guarantee the

widow Kraft an easy life and instead, as Bolzius explained, "God has heard her sighs and freed her unexpectedly from trading and other difficult matters" through her marriage to Mr. Rabenhorst (Uralsperger 3: 38). When faced with the difficulty of managing their family and their affairs alone, some widows preferred to return to the married state rather than undergo the trials and uncertainties of widowhood. For these women, dependency and submission in marriage were not negative states to be scoffed at or challenged; instead they were positive, underscoring the comfort, security and socio-economic protection that marriage offered.

For the wealthy few, remarriage was not necessary in order to avoid the rigors of business and plantation management. Henry Laurens, for instance, recounted that Mrs. McQueen refused to manage her husband's plantation, Horse Savannah, as he had requested in his will and instead preferred to support herself by leasing or selling the plantation (Rogers Jr. et al. 4: 626-27). Mrs. Sarah Allen, after several years managing her plantation on the Cape Fear River, was also, Laurens learned, eager to sell up and remove herself from the planting business (Rogers Jr. et al. 1: 173-74). In the expectations and behaviour of these women, and the several others who advertised the sale and termination of their business affairs, the contradictions in Low Country gender ideals is hypervisible. In order to relinquish their duties as planters, these women defied their husbands' decision and authority, thus violating notions of wifely submission and obedience. However, by retreating from the world of business affairs, they conformed to contemporary ideals of womanhood that characterized women as pious and frail rather than masterful and strong. Their position vis a vis the ideal and reality of womanhood was further complicated because, by refusing to manage their husbands' estates, they also refused to accept that part of the ideal of womanhood that demanded they contribute to the maintenance and growth of the colony and, most particularly, to their family's wealth. The contradictions in the ideal of Low Country womanhood thus placed these women in an awkward position.

The contradictions in the ideal of Low Country womanhood that, on one hand emphasized female dependency and weakness in relations with

men, and, on the other, independence and strength as productive and reproductive labourers, is most evident in women's relationship with their slaves and the institution of slavery.

By the mid-eighteenth century some Low Country women began to present themselves as "maternalist" slaveowners. Eliza Lucas Pinckney, for instance, privately vowed:

To make a good Mistress to my Servants, to treat them with humanity and good nature; to given them sufficient and comfortable clothing and Provisions, and all things necessary for them. To be careful and tender of them in their sickness, to reprove them for the faults, to Encourage them when they do well, and pass over small faults; not to be tyrannical peavish or impatient towards them, but to make their lives as comfortable as I can. (Ravenel 118)

Mrs Pinckney acknowledged her slaves' humanity by wishing to "treat them with humanity and good nature." She perceived herself as their guardian, an overseer of their wellbeing and moral development.

On at least one occasion she ensured that two of her slaves were well looked after during their illness, according to the above "resolution." When Sibby became ill with rheumatic fever, Mrs Pinckney brought her into the house and made sure that she was "well nursed." If Sibby had not recovered, she explained, "it would have distressed me a good deal to have left her so ill." At the same time that Sibby was unwell, Little Dick was also "extremely ill." "I was afraid we should have lost him also," she wrote, "I believe taking him in the house and good nursing was a means of saving him" (Pinckney, *Letters* 153-55).

Other women slaveholders, too, displayed a degree of compassion towards their slaves. When Mary Simmons's slave ran away she made the following statement in the *South Carolina Gazette* (17 December 1771): "If she returns of her own accord, she shall be forgiven."

An analysis of the colonial newspapers 'also suggests that Low Country female slaveholders were reluctant to brand or admit to branding their initials on their slaves. Several advertisements for runaway slaves by male slaveowners described that their initials were scorched into their

slaves' backs or legs; only one woman, Eleanor Mortimer, informed the public in the *South Carolina Gazette* (October 1742) that her slave was branded, not with her own initials, but "G. Cook." Perhaps the socio-sexual mores that informed white women's virtue prevented them from commenting on or even inspecting the initials inscribed on their slaves' bodies. Perhaps branding was considered too masculine and brutish for a slaveholding woman of the elite to admit to. In either case, slaveholding women did not publish knowledge of slave branding, as male slaveholders chose to do (Anzilotti 59).

Although not common, some widows also chose to manumit their slave(s) upon their death. Elizabeth Jehne, for instance, developed an unusually close bond with her "mulatto boy," William Phillips. Since her husband had died Elizabeth Jehne had provided for and educated William and had developed a clear "affection and kindness for him." At her death she was therefore eager to "promote his welfare and interest" and thus confirmed his manumission. However, she went much further than simply bequeathing her slave his freedom: she also gave him the largest share of her estate. He received her plantation, as well as four slaves, "intended and designed for his use occupation and benefit." In addition, she gave him "the bed which I usually lie on and all the furniture of the said bed with five pairs of my best sheets." Her trustees were ordered to ensure that he continue with his education and at fourteen would become an apprentice until he was of age to inherit her estate. Her final wish was that her trustees "be indulgent and kind to the said Molatto" (Charleston Wills QQ: 586-87). Elizabeth Jehne was one of a tiny minority of sixteen women in the Low Country who freed a slave in her will.

These examples hint that women slaveholders adopted a different attitude towards their slaves than male slaveholders. It is clear that these women did indeed feel genuine sympathy and concern for their slaves' wellbeing. However, the Low Country women described above simultaneously displayed affection towards some slaves whilst they demonstrated total indifference and neglect to their other bondsmen and women (Anzilotti 53-61).

Eliza Lucas Pinckney may well have felt concern for the fate of Sibby and Little Dick but she did not feel the same degree of care towards one of her carpenters, who died during a smallpox epidemic. Recounting this incident to a friend, she observed: I "lost only one [slave] — a valuable Carpenter who took it the natural way" (Pinckney, *Letterbook* 153). Her choice of phrase is devoid of emotion and grief; the sense of loss is, if anything, an economic one.

Similarly, although she manumitted William Phillips, and attempted to free another slave, Elizabeth Jehne had twenty-eight other slaves working on her plantation at the time of her death; only three of the twenty-eight slaves, it seems, would be kept together as a result of her bequests. She was thus concerned for William Phillips's welfare but not that of the husbands, wives and children who would be divided and separated as a result of her will (Charleston Wills QQ: 586-87).

That women slaveholders betrayed conflicting and contradictory attitudes towards their slaves is underscored by their advertisements for the capture of runaways. Despite the shared burden of patriarchy, Low Country women slaveholders exhibited no felt sense of common ground or bond between themselves and their enslaved female counterparts: their racist and derogatory assumptions regarding enslaved women's femininity and sexuality was firmly cemented in their description of female runaways as "wenches" "lusty" and "likely" (deceitful) (B.Wood 55).

Moreover, although women slaveholders failed to disclose signs of branding their slaves in their advertisements for the capture of runaways, they did reveal symptoms of ill-treatment. In the *Georgia Gazette* Elizabeth Deveaux observed that her runaway slave carried a scar of an old burn on her arm and temple, as well as the marks of a whip on her right arm (July 1774). In the *South Carolina Gazette* Mrs. Croll noted that her slave was scarred by whip marks on his back (September 1765). Eleanor Nelrne's slave had burn marks on her fingers (February 1753). And Mary Myer's slave bore "the Marks, of being gored by a cow" (October 1769). These examples differ little from those of male slaveholders; indeed they are indications that women slaveholders did little to ameliorate or improve the working conditions of slaves in the colonial Low Country.

In their treatment and relations with their slaves, Low Country women thus revealed how contradictions in the ideals of womanhood, too, shaped the ways in which they perceived their bondsmen and women and the institution of slavery. On one hand, it demanded the cultivation of a "maternalist" ethos: inspired by women's perceived-natural piety and religiosity, a woman like Eliza Lucas Pinckney believed it to be part of her identity as an elite Low Country woman to treat her slaves with humanity. On the other hand, as Eliza Lucas Pinckney also unwittingly demonstrated, women's duty to contribute to the improvement of the Low Country placed limits on their maternalism; their slaves and the business of plantation management were the socio-economic foundation both of their family and white society as a whole. The central role that women were expected to perform in the establishment of the colonies of Georgia and South Carolina thus ultimately constructed an ideal of womanhood that, as slaveholders, simultaneously insisted on their compassion as it also demanded their indifference to their slaves' humanity.

Low Country ideals of womanhood thus provided women with a contradictory status in colonial South Carolina and Georgia. They were perceived to be frail, vulnerable and dependent on men, but were also expected to work alongside men to assist in the improvement of their respective colony. In this latter role, women found themselves clearing land, buying slaves and land, and setting up businesses, sometimes as married women and at other times as widows. Contemporaries fully supported and congratulated those women, like Widow Harris, who exhibited "remarkable Industry." The ideal and reality of womanhood in the Low Country thus shifted rather awkwardly between raising women's socio-economic status and, in contrast, retreating from the full implications of this by insisting on feminine codes of conduct and behavior that limited their scope of influence and power. By embracing women's active role in the family and market economy, however, Low Country society disclosed the limits of patriarchal ideology in maintaining women's powerlessness and dependency.



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