

The South and Romance across the Color Line 1840-1870

by
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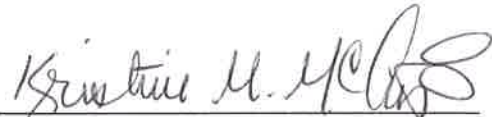
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Introduction

The contrast between southern blacks and whites in the Civil War era was stark, and romantic interracial relationships were uncommon. I had been taught since elementary school that blacks and whites did not have romantic relationships in the 1840s through 1870s, especially ones that resulted in love. However, the hidden secrets unveiled in research by historians provided evidence that not only were there interracial relationships, but also love between blacks and whites, especially black men and white women in an era where interracial love was dangerous. I wanted to create an account that presented potential for romance across the color line in a white paternalistic society. The diary is a fictional account of what life might have looked like if an interracial relationship between a southern white woman and free black man were carried out and how the primary sources, if they existed, were made to disappear to hide that relationship.

The first chapter sets up southern society before the Civil War and how it functioned. The belief systems of white and black southerners are laid out in the selected categories of race, class, marriage, and gender roles and how those categories defined the South before the war. The second chapter follows the categories set up in the first and expands on them as the war unfolds. Chapter two describes how the Civil War impacted race, class, marriage, and gender roles, and it introduces a new southern society where women become the breadwinners, color lines are crossed, and relationships are redefined. However, in order to understand how love across the color line impacted and challenged southern society, one must have a general concept of the societal views of the South, which I lay out in chapter one and expand on in chapter two.

Chapter three revisits the roles of white and black southerners while focusing more on relationships and marriage and how interracial liaisons and romance were viewed in southern society. While some white men used their authority to dominate black women, other white men had romantic relationships with black women and some even lived in family units for decades. White men were not the only ones who crossed the color line as white women also had liaisons and romantic relationships with black men. The chapter describes how southerners were more tolerant of liaisons and romance across the color line before the Civil War, but in the 1860s, white southerners' tolerance waned because interracial relationships, especially between white women and black men, began to challenge slavery and white patriarchy in the south.

The fourth chapter was written to bring to light how enslaved men and women obtained freedom, emancipation, and built successful careers in the South. The chapter focuses on the success stories of ex-slaves and free blacks in the antebellum and Civil War era. The true story of ex-slave James Thomas describes how he was bought out of slavery, emancipated by the court, and built a successful career as a barber. Besides Thomas, the chapter also focuses on the free blacks of Charleston, South Carolina. Although white men set up barriers, free black women were able to purchase property and build businesses in the city. Charleston was home to two very successful black female chefs, Eliza Seymour Lee and Susan Jackson. Despite the restrictions placed on blacks by white southerners, black southerners had opportunities to become wealthy and obtain elite social status. The life stories of these successful black entrepreneurs in the South provide a historical basis and serve as inspiration for the character Ezra Thomas in the creative diary.

The fifth chapter sets up the creative portion of the project and tells the importance of diaries to southern women before and during the Civil War. Southern white female diarists such as Sarah Morgan and Mary Boykin Chesnut provided insight of their lives in the south which helped influence the main character, Margaret Davis, of the creative diary. Like Chesnut, Davis concealed her diary from her family. Another writer who inspired Davis's character was Eunice Connolly whose letters to her mother described an interracial love between a white woman and black man. Eunice's story is especially important because many of her letters were purposely destroyed by her brother Henry Richardson to protect the family's social status and honor. With that in mind, many other diaries, journals, and letters could have been destroyed leaving evidence of interracial romance buried and hidden in the past. The creative diary carries out a fictional account of a romance between Margaret, a white southerner, and a free black man named Ezra Thomas. The account is based on research and evidence of other cases of interracial relationships in the antebellum through the Civil War era.

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Chapter 1: The South before the Civil War

The South before the Civil War was a paternalistic society that relied on slave labor and categorized its people based on characteristics defined by white men such as race, gender, and wealth. To understand how the war impacted southern society, one must first learn about the South before the Civil War. The South set itself apart from the rest of the Union in the Civil War era with the institution of slavery. Its economic and social order was built upon the slave system. Southern hierarchies ranged from the elite to the poor based on skin color, gender, and class. Those three classifications not only defined the identities of southerners, but also affected their aspirations and choices in life. When it came to relationships and marriage, white and black southerners chose friends and spouses within their level of the social ladder with few exceptions. Race and class were not the only methods the South used to set up a hierarchy of romantic choices; however, gender roles and responsibilities expanded social divisions from class and skin color to male and female. In the South, white slaveholding males and females ranked above the rest of society on the social ladder, but within the elite, white males dominated the household, creating a paternalistic society.¹ Thus, white men controlled the households, governments, and the slaves.

Before the Civil War, some men stayed at home and ran the households on plantations and farms while others had public jobs such as lawyers, doctors, government officials, etc. Slave ownership placed the owners with larger numbers of slaves at the top of the social ladder, slaveholder households of three to nineteen second, and farmers or

¹ Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 35.

yeomen with three to zero slaves at the bottom.² However, that did not mean that a rich plantation owner could not move down the ladder and a small farm owner move up the ladder. Thus, the social ladder allowed for fluidity. However, gender hierarchy ranked men over women regardless of financial success.

White and black southerners created specific identities based on their gender roles and responsibilities. In *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South*, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese wrote, “slaveholders, slaves, and nonslaveholding whites—whatever their differences over specifics—shared an ideal of the universal division between women and men.” The South as a society protected masters’ rights of domination of slaves and white women. The ideal of male domination stemmed from southern ideology that white women were fragile, delicate beings who needed protection. Yeomen ran the farms and embraced gender division like plantation owners, but as Fox-Genovese wrote, “They could not readily forge alternate gender conventions, at least not in the great heartland dominated by the system of plantation households, whatever success they may have had in the yeoman-dominated upcountry.”³

The social order determined men’s and women’s positions on the social ladder and their expected roles and/or responsibilities. If the master had to leave the farm or plantation, then an overseer was next in command. The social ladder placed the mistress as the head of household while the master was absent, but the punishment, especially violent punishments, were left up to the masters or overseers. White men viewed violence

² Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 32.

³ Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 195.

as a “social empowerment” that kept order on the plantations.⁴ In some cases, the mistress was left in charge while a male neighbor or relative was present for protection and punishment for the slaves.

Women’s labor before the Civil War consisted of various roles that depended on their status as elite, yeomen, or slave. White women supervised the actions of the slaves within the household, even nursing slave children at times. The relationship between a mistress and servant could either result in a bonding friendship, or create an “imbalance” due to disagreements in the household. However, it was up to the mistress to ensure the household duties were performed and to delegate mild punishments when necessary.

Before the Civil War, many elite southern women did not have to experience labor like yeomen women. Most yeomen women did not have the resources, or servants, that the elite slaveholding women enjoyed. Yeomen women cooked their own meals, nursed their own children, prepared and preserved meats, vegetables, and fruits, and so on.⁵ Yeomen mistresses were ranked under the elite slaveholding mistresses, but above the poor white women and slaves on the social ladder. Although they ranked higher in society than slave women, they shared similar skill sets such as candle and soap making, cooking, nursing, weaving, spinning, among others.

Social hierarchy placed slaves at the bottom of the social ladder, yet slave labor was imperative to sustaining southern society. Slaves were viewed as property, not humans, so they could not exercise human rights. There were exceptions to the social system which will be revisited, but for now my focus is on slavery on the surface. Most

⁴ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 65.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 166.

of the slaves lived in a slave community that consisted of slave cabins or quarters either near the plantation home or in the distance. Cleaning and care for the slave cabins was not required solely for the slave women, making the care of the cabin a mutual role for the slave men and women.⁶ As 87-year-old ex-slave Mary Belle Dempsey recalled, “Each slave family had a house of their own and the women of each family prepared the meals, in their cabins. The cabins were in good shape. The master farmed his land and the men folks helped in the fields but women took care of their homes.” Enslaved men and women tended the fields and other hard labor. Slave men drove for their masters, butchered and prepared meat, cut wood for the smokehouse and fireplaces, worked on repairing and making roads, and the younger slave boys carried water to the fields for the older slaves.⁷ Not all slaves were confined to work within the slave community in the fields of the plantation home. Masters and mistresses gathered slave children to work within the household meaning the children no longer lived with their parents.

Those who worked in plantation houses were monitored by the mistress. Ex-slave Phoebe Banks explains her mother’s responsibilities as a house maid, “Mother was the house girl...cooking, waiting on the table, cleaning the house, spinning the yarn, knitting some of the winter clothes, taking care of the mistress girl, washing the clothes...yes, she was always busy and worked mighty hard all the time.” House slaves, if fortunate enough, were given a minor education at the request of a mistress. Banks received an education stating, “Lots of the slave owners didn’t want their slaves to learn reading and writing, but the Perrymans [Banks’s masters] didn’t care; they even helped the younger

⁶ Ibid., 201, 149, 151.

⁷ Mary Belle Dempsey, interview by Betty Lugabell, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 1931; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 114, 137, 156.

slaves with that stuff.” Phoebe Banks was not the only ex-slave to recall having an education. Reverend Williams of West Virginia and John Brown of Oklahoma both received an education from their mistresses.⁸

The slave house workers were considered higher up in the social hierarchy of the plantation. Ex-slave Isaac Adams recalled an instance when he was horseback riding with his mistress, “She never did go around the quarters, so I don’t know nothing much about the negroes Mr. Sack had for the fields.” Some house servants understood all too well their worth and value that made them higher on the social ladder, and they made their status known to others. Edward Pollard, a visitor to the plantation, observed a house servant named Aunt Dolly who was assertive in her position, “As an established mammy, Aunt Dolly had definite ideas about her position in the household...She called the other blacks, who in her opinion did not match her in respectability, “de nigger” and did not hesitate to whip the kitchen servants when she thought necessary.”⁹ In Aunt Dolly’s case, her social status permitted her to punish slaves within the household.

Social classifications and gender roles were not the only ways men and women were defined in the South. Marriage defined the position of couples in society by putting the bride’s wealth into the groom’s hands, which he used to reinforce his power via claiming the bride’s assets as his own. The husbands assumed all power of land, regardless if it was willed to the wife, political authority, and control over future inheritances. Besides the implicit responsibilities assumed by the husband, upholding the slave system was at the top of the list. Drew Gilpin Faust wrote, “The plantation

⁸ Banks, *Oklahoma Writers’ Project*, 1938; John Brown and Reverend Williams, interviews, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

⁹ Isaac Adams, *Oklahoma Writers’ Project*, Tennessee State Library and Archives; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 162.

embodied the hierarchal structures of southern paternalism. It functioned as the most important instrument of race control, and it similarly worked to institutionalize the subordination of white women, for the master was the designated head of what he frequently characterized as his (family white and black)."¹⁰ Marriage helped white plantation owners preserve their roles at the top of the social ladder.

Women in the era before the Civil War were submissive to their husbands, yet they embraced that submission and protected the institution of slavery because challenging it affected their social status and identity. In earlier times, marriage was based on financial success. Marriage for white southerners became more companionate in the latter part of the antebellum era. In *The Free Women of Petersburg*, Suzanne Lebstock wrote, "Marriage was as much a matter of financial calculation as of romance...Marriage was a routine and respectable way to improve one's financial condition, and this was true at the end of the antebellum period as it had been earlier." Although marriage remained a factor of social status, southerners' reasons for getting married began to alter in the nineteenth century with romantic love being key. Lebstock wrote, "but by the early nineteenth century, romantic love competed for first billing...With companionate marriage, in other words, emotion moved to the center; mutual affection and respect replaced the call of duty and pressure from the community as the main ties that year in and year out bound husbands and wives together."¹¹

Romance and marriage were not reserved for white people; however, marriage had a different effect on black slaves than on white southerners. Slave marriages were not

¹⁰ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 32.

¹¹ Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 197; Suzanne Lebstock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984), 15 and 20; Suzanne Lebstock, *The Free Women of Petersburg*, 16-17.

considered legal, so plantation owners took advantage of slave families to create another layer of control over them. Some owners granted slaves permission to live together and have a family, although legally the couple was not recognized. An ex-slave from North Carolina named William Williams recalled his parents' experience, "My father and mother were never married. They just had the permission of the two slave owners to live together and I become the property of my father's master, John Jefferson until I was sold." Not only did some masters grant slaves the permission to live together, but some also encouraged slave families. The offspring of the couple then were owned by the master, thus increasing his property, and in some cases, social status. As Anthony Kay wrote, "Accommodating spouses was a powerful tool in the ongoing struggle for control over space, more reliable than the pass system, less trouble than the whip. If it flattered master's self-image of benevolent paternalism, so much the better."¹²

Social order did not stop at the surface level of society, and it divided whites as well as blacks from free to slave. Social order divided the people living on plantations by placing house servants over workers, elite southern men and women over yeomen men and women that owned slaves. Accompanying social order in dividing the people of the South were gender roles. Masters were the dominant forces in a paternalistic society who had control over not only their slaves, but also their families. White men thrived in a paternalistic society in which they had complete power over social order, gender roles, and marriage. Only one event could challenge their power and their beloved slave system, and that was the pending Civil War.

¹² William Williams, *WPA Slave Narratives*, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 1937; Anthony E. Kaye, *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 62.

Chapter 2: Impact of War

The impact of war on southern society created an atmosphere of change. The Civil War impacted southern households by placing more responsibilities in the hands of white and black southern women, meaning white men were no longer in charge of women daily. With the war demanding more aid, color lines were blurred to provide all the assistance possible to support the Confederate Army. The war also affected southerners' relationships by bringing to the surface thoughts and feelings, written in letters between couples, that men and women once suppressed resulting in more romantic relationships. The Civil War created a new southern society in which females became the breadwinners of their families, color lines were crossed, and couples' relationships became more romantic than before the war.

The United States began to crack at its foundation with the institution of slavery in the South was being challenged by the North. Tensions had been rising since the 1820s and increased toward the 1860 election. Abraham Lincoln's inauguration in 1861 pushed Southern states to consider disunion. With the secession of the Confederacy from the Union, war was looming on the horizon. As a result of rising tensions between the North and South, the Confederacy attacked Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, which marked the beginning of the Civil War. The South was hit the hardest by the war, affecting the front lines and impacting social hierarchies, gender roles, and marriage on the home front. The social hierarchy that once defined southern society and its slave institution were disrupted by war.¹

¹ Martha Hodes, *The Sea Captain's Wife: A True Story of Love, Race, and War in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 99.

That disruption became clear as tensions between the North and South increased in the late 1850s between abolitionists and pro-slavery advocates. The South defended its right to the slave institution, but the Northerners and abolitionists hastily attacked the system. Although the abolitionists lived primarily in the northern regions of the United States, all northerners were not abolitionists. Abolitionists and anti-slavery activists shared the view that slavery needed to end; however, the groups had two different reasons for dismantling the South's slave institution. Abolitionists viewed slavery as degrading, immoral, and a challenge to individualism. Anti-slavery activists opposed slavery because it "debased the dignity of workers by cheapening work itself." On the battle field, Union soldiers harbored their own opinions of what they were fighting for in the war. In *The Sea Captain's Wife*, Martha Hodes writes, "Henry [Union soldier] and most of his fellow [Union] soldiers were not fighting for the rights of African Americans, yet at the very start of their military service, their enemies [Confederacy] disturbingly blurred the lines between Union soldiers and black people."²

On the surface, the anti-slavery activists seemed to have good intentions when advocating for the end of slavery, but they failed to realize the irony in their cause. In *Abolitionists*, Merton L. Dillon explained the fault in the anti-slavery view as the following:

In the South, popular will generally supported slavery; in the North, it tolerated the debasement of the free negro. For those reasons, the growth of political democracy damaged the anti-slavery cause rather than aided it...Northern involvement was primarily economic. Much of the profit of Northern business derived from the Southern trade and hence ultimately from slavery...Much of the same thing was true in the border areas of the new Northwestern states, where businessmen soon developed lucrative trade relations with the South. The

² Hodes, *The Sea Captain's Wife*, 58; Ibid., 106.

economic welfare of the entire nation, in a sense, became tied to slavery...Further, quite apart from their economic interest in slavery, a majority of Northerners were as intent as any Southerner to maintain white supremacy. Slavery kept most Negroes securely in the South. Its abolition presumably would leave them free to move to the North, a prospect that much of the Northern population dreaded.³

The North wanted slaves to have a role in society, yet that role was based on labor rather than the demoralization of slavery. The North relied on the South not only for business and trade, but also to maintain nationwide white supremacy, and freeing slaves would challenge both labor and supremacy in the North.

The effects of the war on Southern society began with the changes in social order, gender roles, and relationships. With men off to war, women were left to run the plantations, farms, stores, and nearly every other aspect of Southern society. Lines between the elite, yeomen, and slaves began to blur, beginning with the production of goods for the Confederate soldiers. Women formed organizations that met to knit and sew uniforms, collect donations for Bibles, utensils, Confederate Flags, and whatever else soldiers may have needed, and so on.⁴

Not only did southern women have to take to physical labor to provide for the soldiers, but also had to assume control of the plantations and farms in the absence of their men. To ensure property protection for women, most states enacted laws by 1861 that granted them property rights. Having property rights temporarily placed the control of the plantations and farms in the hands of Southern women and granted them power over the slaves. In *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South*, Anthony Kaye

³ Merton L. Dillon, *Abolitionists: The Growth of a Dissenting Minority* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1974), 56.

⁴ Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 25.

wrote, “The war also changed long-standing relations of labor in short order in 1861-1862. Slaves confronted new figures at the point of production, as enlistment and conscription removed owners and overseers from many plantations. The management of field labor fell suddenly to plantation mistresses, elderly men, or boys on the cusp of manhood.”⁵ The paternalistic social order that dictated the South pre-Civil War was endangered by the absence of men who once served as the head of society.

As the war continued, it put an economic strain on the Confederacy that required even the most elite southern women to find work outside of the plantation. Women of all classes either fled to the cities for work or remained in the South and took on new responsibilities. One of the most common responsibilities taken on was weaving. Southern women wove their own clothing as well as clothing for their slaves. With elite southern women taking on work such as textiles and weaving that used to be reserved for the yeomen women and slaves, soldiers in the war began to take notice and voice their disapproval. A Confederate soldier named Will Neblett wrote to his wife Lizzie who had taken up weaving, “I do not like the idea of your weaving. It is mortifying to me. I wish you not to do it.” Textile work not only concerned the soldiers because of its demanding physical labor for women, but also because it “blurred all the important lines of differentiation between them and their female slaves.”⁶

The Civil War impacted the labor force due to conscription laws and required women to accept jobs that used to be reserved for men. One of those jobs was nursing. Women entered nursing with influence from Florence Nightingale’s *Notes on Nursing*. At

⁵ Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Women in the Civil War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 21; Anthony E. Kaye, *Joining Places: Slave Neighborhoods in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 187.

⁶ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 47; Ibid.

first the men disapproved of women becoming nurses due to the exposure to all classes of men, but in 1861, an elite southern woman named Ella King Newsom spent nearly her entire fortune on patients which made nursing more respectable in the eyes of the conservative men.⁷ Newsome's sacrifice inspired a change in attitudes about women who became nurses. Like property rights and textiles, nursing began to blur the lines of social order. As numbers of injured men in the Civil War continued to increase, the South was running short on medical care on the battlefields. With nurses in high demand, Confederate Brigadier General J. B. Magruder petitioned the Secretary of War to permit black women to be hired as nurses.⁸ The military needed all abled bodies, black and white, to serve as nurses in the war due to the number of casualties.

Women's labor was not the only part of southern society that was affected by the Civil War. In the late antebellum era, reasons for marriage transitioned from social status to romantic love. In *The Sea Captain's Wife*, Martha Hodes wrote, "Ideals of romantic love had begun to take hold in American culture by the 1840s, displacing the once-common wisdom that amorous affection paved the way for misfortune or resulted only from the foolishness of youth...The sharing of one's soul and self, a love that conquered all obstacles, a companionship unparalleled, a union of spirits: These became the model foundations of Victorian marriage."⁹ With men at war, women were left at home starving for affection and the attention of their husbands. So, in an unconventional manner, women stopped suppressing their feelings and wrote their men in the army letters, filled with love and longing for their return.

⁷ Ibid., 92; Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Women in the Civil War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 48.

⁸ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 96.

⁹ Hodes, *the Sea Captain's Wife*, 196.

The Civil War heightened the romance between couples because it not only separated them for extended periods of time, but also influenced couples to be more open with each other about their feelings. With this new step in their relationships and the war dragging on, men began to encourage their wives to take control and become the head of household in their absences versus the beginning of the Civil War when men disapproved of their labor.¹⁰ The irony of romance escalating meant that many women had to swallow a bitter pill when delivered the news about a deceased husband. In *The Mothers of Invention*, Drew Gilpin Faust wrote, “The crisis of civil war, its transformations of southern life, and its challenge to traditional understandings of femininity made such issues all the more acutely felt at the same time that it introduced considerable pain and suffering into women’s lives.”¹¹ Widows mourned the loss of their husbands and grew weary of the ongoing conflict. Visions of the old southern society faded as a new south was emerging due to prolonged exposure to war.

Widows and single women alike grew weary of the impact this war made on their lives. They missed the affection, protection, and wanted help monitoring the slaves. Southern women had lost everything that had defined their identities, so they were forced to create a new one. In the words of Faust, “For southern women, necessity, not choice, would prove to be the source of change— what they would have called the (mother of invention).” Self-desire overcame widows and single women alike with the fear of being alone forever due to the arduous war that plagued the South. In response to southern women’s changes, Faust wrote, “Their expectations for male protection had all but disappeared; their new sense of themselves, born in necessity rather than opportunity,

¹⁰ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 123.

¹¹ Ibid, 154.

made them sharply aware of both the dangers of dependence and the daunting demands of autonomy.”¹² Autonomy from male influence proved to be one of the greatest casualties of the Civil War for the paternalistic southern society for white Confederate men were fighting.

The war managed to destroy social order, gender roles, marriages, and created a new Southern society. Women became the heads of their households, and were granted property rights. All classes of southern women were brought together to support the war by making necessities for the soldiers and joining together in hospitals and on the battle fields as nurses. The war simultaneously created a new era of romance between husbands and wives and an era of unimaginable pain and suffering from losing their men to battles. Pain, loneliness, and poverty plagued southern women as they grew weary of the war. The Civil War began with the intention to protect the southern slave institution, but in the end, it caused an upheaval of Southern society unrecognizable to its past.

¹² Ibid., 195; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 247.

Chapter 3: Liaisons and Romance across the Color Line

The South had divided its society by race, social order, marriage, and gender from colonization throughout the Civil War. Those divisions were set in place to hold southern society to certain standards and virtues. White and black southerners challenged social order, marriage, and gender expectations by forming sexual liaisons and romantic relationships across the color line. Sex and romance across the color line defied all the divisions set forth by southern society, yet society formed a certain toleration for the behavior until the end of the Civil War.¹ White men had liaisons and romance with black women, and white women had liaisons and romance with black men. Although southern society tolerated the encounters, white and black southerners alike still opposed liaisons and romance across the color line because they challenged the virtues of men and women, slavery, and white male dominance.

White men had ultimate authority over their property which included female slaves. Since slaves were property in the eyes of the law, female slaves had no protection from slave men against white men. Although white women were offered protection, that protection was limited when it came to protection from a husband, meaning white women were also at the submission of the master. In *Within the Plantation Household*, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese wrote, "The temptation to demystify the figure of the lady has proved almost irresistible. It has even been argued that the plantation mistress closely resembled slave women in being the victim of the double burden of patriarchy and slavery."²

¹ Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 3.

² Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 47.

Before the Civil War to ensure order and control over the slaves, masters abused their authority over slave women by demanding sexual favors. One of the most renowned cases of a white master taking advantage a black female slave was told by the woman herself, Harriet Jacobs. Jacobs was owned by Dr. Flint who continuously forced himself onto Jacobs and refused to sell her. His power over Jacobs left her defenseless on the plantation. Jacobs wrote, "My master met me at every turn, reminding me that I belonged to him, and swearing by heaven and earth that he would compel me to submit to him. If I went out for a breath of fresh air, after a day of unwearied toil, his footsteps dogged me." With that in mind, white southern brides were aware of their husbands' infidelity, and although women were not pleased upon learning about their husbands' infidelity, it was understood that the men were the authority and the infidelity had to be contained from society to ensure social status and honor.³ By containing the information, white women showed toleration toward their husbands crossing the color line.

However, not all liaisons between white men and black women were about domination and control. Sometimes white men had sexual relationships with black women that resulted in romantic love. In *Notorious in the Neighborhood*, Joshua D. Rothman wrote about a case in the early nineteenth century in which a white man by the name of David Isaacs maintained a familial relationship with a black woman named Nancy West. The couple maintained their family in Charlottesville, Virginia, for over forty years and had seven children together. Both were successful business owners, and Nancy West became one of the wealthiest black women in Virginia. Their sexual relationship was not illegal, but marriage was which made the couple fornicators in the

³ Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, (New York: Cosimo, Inc.), 27; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 299.

eyes of Virginia law. Rothman wrote, "Despite the revulsion white Virginians expressed publicly toward sex across the color line, there was very little the law could do to stop it...When confronted with interracial sexual relationships, however, whites in Charlottesville, like whites generally across the state before the Civil War, seem to have no inclination to take such extreme actions."⁴ The people of Virginia portrayed a level of toleration for Isaacs and West's relationship, even if it was opposed legally because the relationship did not pose a direct threat to their society.

White men were not the only ones to cross the color line in southern society. Although white females were held to standards of purity, they too challenged societal norms by crossing the color line. An account of a white woman named Polly Lane and a slave named Jim was brought to light when Lane accused Jim of rape. Jim was not found guilty of rape, but Lane was guilty in the eyes of society for consenting to sexual liaisons with Jim repeatedly. Their account did not necessarily qualify as romance; it was more about Lane's promiscuity. The case was ultimately dropped because both parties consented to the sex.⁵

However, not all liaisons that crossed the color line were about sex and promiscuity. There were accounts of white women falling in love with black men. In *The Sea Captain's Wife*, Martha Hodes wrote of a love between Eunice Connolly, a white woman from New England, and her husband, a mixed race male, William Smiley Connolly. In the beginning, Eunice was the wife of a Confederate soldier named William Stone and they lived in Mobile, Alabama. Stone died in the Civil War, leaving Eunice

⁴ Joshua D. Rothman, *Notorious in the Neighborhood: Sex and Families Across the Color Line in Virginia, 1787-1861* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 57-87.

⁵ Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men*, 54-57.

and their children without a provider and protector. After moving back to New England after Stone's death, Eunice became acquainted with sea captain William Smiley Connolly who was of mixed blood. Eunice wrote of her love for Smiley in letters she sent to her mother stating, "I look for a loving glance of his eye which I always meet...and it is all his kind ways and thoughtful acts prompted by love and respect which he has for me that makes it so."⁶ Eunice's love for Smiley is a rarely documented case in which a white woman openly expressed love for a mixed man and uprooted her entire life to follow him.

During the Civil War, southern societies' concern about racial purity was increasing as slavery was further challenged. With increasing concerns about sex and romance across the color line, southern society's toleration for romantic liaisons began to fade. With the elite women at the top, Hodes wrote, "the danger of a liaison across the color line was graver for black men and elite women because those women were at the center of white Southern ideas about female purity." However, there were exceptions where elite white women dared to cross the color line. These women challenged not only societal norms, but also the dominance of white males. In *Within the Plantation Household*, Fox-Genovese wrote, "Others [white females] had extramarital love affairs of their own, and a few committed the ultimate rebellion against the dominance of white males by having sexual relations with black men."⁷ Therefore, whites and blacks both crossed the color line when it came to liaisons and romance from the antebellum period through the Civil War.

⁶ Martha Hodes, *The Sea Captain's Wife: A True Story of Love, Race, and War in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 197, 225-226.

⁷ Rothman, *Notorious in the Neighborhood*, 206; Hodes, *White Women, Black Men*, 5; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, 241.

Toleration of crossing the color line began to fade with the coining of the term “miscegenation”. Miscegenation was defined as the mixing of races, and the term was used against Abraham Lincoln and the Republican Party in 1864 asserting that they supported interracial sex and marriages. With the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 and miscegenation concerns, the issue of interracial liaisons and romance increased southerners’ fears of sex and romance between black men and white women throughout the remainder of the Civil War because it represented a challenge to slavery and societal hierarchies, but white people were not the only ones who opposed crossing the color line. In the Works Progress Administration slave narratives, ex-slaves such as Frances Batson, Jenny Greer, Andy Odell, Scott Martin, among others, did not believe in interracial marriage. Francis Batson, ex-slave of Nashville, Tennessee, wrote, “I don’ b’leeve in white en black ma’iages. Mah sistah ma’ied a’ lite man. I wouldin’ marry one ef hit would turn me ter gold.”⁸

Interracial relationships had consequences that began at home and expanded into society. People who were involved in liaisons or romance across the color line suffered consequences. Not only did white and black women lose their virtue, but white and black men lost their honor. Southern society then viewed them as lowly and outcasts. Men and women were permitted to divorce an adulterous spouse, but there was a double standard in consequences when it came to divorce. Rothman explained, “Although male adultery was certainly not viewed as acceptable behavior, a double standard nevertheless existed in European and American cultures that found a woman’s adultery far more egregious than a man’s.” Divorce not only added to the degradation of a female’s purity, but it also

⁸ Hodes, *White Women, Black Men*, 144-145; Francis Batson, Interview, Tennessee State Library and Archives.

took away the honor of the male. Some couples tried to work out their marriages, but as Rothman wrote, "Divorce was not a pleasant option, but it was the only equitable one petitioners believed available if they ever wanted to resume their places as respectable men and women in southern society."⁹

With Union troops moving into the South, covering up liaisons across the color line became more difficult for white and black southerners. Testimonies given by black men and Union leaders brought to light relations that were kept secret and at times suppressed. Hodes wrote about two testimonies, one from Major George L. Stearns who led Union recruitment forces for black soldiers, and one from James Redpath who collected testimonies from black men during the Civil War. Unmasking liaisons across the color line arose when Redpath and others tried to publicize the testimonies of white women having sexual relations with black men. Hodes wrote, "A few others seized on the wartime juncture of social and political upheaval to quote the stories they had heard from black men, and some black men themselves spoke publicly about white women and sex. As it turned out, the officers of AFIC suppressed all of these stories. Only in brief interval of wartime disruption were the voices of black men given credence in a public arena."¹⁰ Whether all testimonies were true or some were to spite the masters and mistresses, the consequences of divorce and humiliation had yet to challenge the southern slave institution.

Before the Civil War, mixed children did not challenge the institution of slavery because the children often worked on the plantation, and although liaisons between white women and black men provoked anxiety, liaisons did not threaten the foundations of their

⁹Rothman, *Notorious in the Neighborhood*, 186 and 193.

¹⁰ Hodes, *White Women, Black Men*, 128.

society. During the Civil War, liaisons across the color line, especially in the South, felt treasonous to staunch Confederates because men were risking their lives to uphold the slave institution while the women were undermining it by having mixed children who were legally free. Hodes wrote, "During the Civil War, the issue directly entered into the arena of national politics in a concerned manner; black men's hopes for the insistence on equality brought public expressions of fear from white Southerners, and those fears included direct references to white women and sex. White concerns over such transgressions moved well beyond the realm of neighborhood consternation."¹¹

Why suddenly was there a fear of liaisons or romance across the color line that was tolerated before? The answer to that question is complex. One, the Civil War was nearly over and emancipation was looming over southerners' heads which threatened to slavery and white male dominance. Two, the offspring of black men and white women began to undermine the institution of slavery. Since colonial times, a child's legal status was *partus sequitur ventrem*.¹² Children born to white women and black men were free. Romance across the color line was more difficult to contain within the households with testimonies of black men like Redpath being collected and the birth of free mixed-race children challenging southern societal views.

With white southern women challenging the slave institution and their transgressions being made public, toleration for romance and sex across the color line ended; however, that did not mean that sex and love across the color line ceased. Although white slaveholders had affairs with female slaves to establish their dominance, not all white men abused or exploited black women. White men fell in love with black

¹¹ Ibid., 35 and 143.

¹² Ibid, 29.

women such as the case of Davis Isaacs and Nancy West and raised mixed families and vice versa like Eunice and Smiley Connolly. Before the Civil War their liaisons and romance were tolerated, but still opposed by southern society. Liaisons and romance between white and black southerners never ceased even with the war; however, the year 1864 marked a transition in the meaning of liaisons and romance across the color line. For the first time in the history of the southern slavery, sex across the color line directly challenged the slave institution the Confederacy was fighting so hard to preserve.

Chapter 4: From Slavery to Freedom

Few slaves and free blacks in the South enjoyed economic and social freedom from the 1840s to the 1870s because southern society was dominated by white men and women. Free blacks were either born free to a white mother or were granted freedom through manumission, emancipation, and/or self-purchase. Black men and women who were free from birth bought land, businesses, and some black southerners gained elite status in their societies as successful entrepreneurs. Whether a black man or woman was born free or granted his or her freedom in the South, blacks worked hard and faced many obstacles created by societies controlled by white southerners. Their success stories served as inspiration for the male character, Ezra Thomas, in the creative diary. His character was developed especially from the success story of James Thomas from Nashville, Tennessee and other free blacks from Charleston, South Carolina from the antebellum era to the Civil War era.

The ways in which slaves acquired freedom varied across the South, and only a few freed slaves achieved a high ranking in Southern society. Some slaves were permitted by their masters to save money of their own, but even those who were not permitted found ways to make money in a place where slave income was relatively uncommon. A success story about a Nashville slave named James Thomas was rare for the era in which he lived. Thomas's story from slavery to freedom inspired the character for the creative diary that will be further explained in the next chapter, but for now, my focus is on James Thomas's particular journey.

In the South, slaves were considered property, so any income they collected from selling within the slave community, to other plantations, or travelers went to the masters

and mistresses. Most slaves never had an income or seen money until after the Civil War. Ex-Slave Fleming Clark explained to a WPA interviewer, "I earned no money. All I got wuz just my food and clothes." Most slaves lived like Clark until after the war; however, there were plantations across the South that allowed their slaves to have an income and save money. Before the Civil War, slaves like Nan Stewart and Harriet Robinson reported that they had a small income and were permitted to save money on the side for their own personal reasons. Nan Stewart reported, "I us' tu gether de turkey eggs an' guinea eggs an' sell 'em. I gits ten cents duzen fo' de eggs. Marse and Missus wuz Enligh an' de count money like dis- fo' pence, ha' penny. Whut I do with my money? Chile I saved it to buy myself a nankeen dress."¹

Much like Stewart and Robinson, other slaves saved whatever income they collected, but instead of spending it on personal items, they spent it on their freedom. Slave Robert Rentfro of Nashville was given permission by the Nashville county court to sell alcohol in a store in which he saved money and bought his freedom. Temperance Crutcher and Sophy Malloy were two other examples of slaves who earned an income and saved money to buy themselves out of bondage. But few slaves made the sacrifice for others like Sally Thomas. Sally Thomas, mother of James Thomas, worked as a laundress who, over time, gained loyal clientele and expanded her business in Nashville. As a slave, Sally's financial success and mobility was significant, placing her in a category coined

¹ Fleming Clark, *Federal Writer's Project*, Tennessee State Library and Archives; Nan Stewart, Interview by Sarah Probst, Tennessee State Library and Archives, 1937.

“quasi-slave,” which meant Sally was granted freedom by her master without legal documentation of emancipation.²

By 1834, Sally had saved enough money to purchase her youngest son, James Thomas, out of slavery. She paid Ephraim Foster to purchase and protect her son with the promise that Foster petition to have James emancipated. Foster kept his promise, and James Thomas was emancipated by the Davidson County Court. Emancipation laws of Tennessee in the 1850s required that freed slaves move to another state, but James petitioned the court on the count that he carried out a “moral and industrious life” and he was granted his freedom in March of 1851.³ However, before Thomas was emancipated, he had built a successful career as a barber. With his new freedom, Thomas expanded his career beginning in Nashville, Tennessee, and expanded it across the country as he traveled.

Despite the racism with which southern society was tainted, many free blacks intermingled and worked together in the city of Nashville. In the book *In Search of the Promised Land*, John Franklin and Loren Schweninger wrote, “While the number of free blacks in the city [Nashville] remained relatively small, increasing from only 409 in 1840 to 511 in 1850, among the more than two thousand slaves were several hundred who hired themselves out and claimed the status of virtual freedom.” They went on to write, “Some [legally emancipated slaves] were given financial assistance by white relatives. Most free blacks sustained themselves by learning a trade or skill. They purchased small plots of land, accumulated personal property, started small businesses, and bought loved

²John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *In Search of the Promised Land: A Slave Family in the Old South*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 14-16.

³ *Ibid.*, 3-5.

ones out of slavery.” For example, after being an apprentice to a barber, Thomas purchased a building and opened his own barber shop in Nashville in 1846. So, before he was even emancipated, Thomas ran a successful business as a barber in Nashville, Tennessee.⁴

With the years growing closer to the Civil War, white southerners’ views about freed blacks and slaves grew hostile, and eventually pushed Thomas to close his barber shop and travel to another city. James Thomas traveled to New Orleans, Nicaragua, New York City, St. Louis, and hoped to one day return to his hometown of Nashville. Along his travels Thomas met many people, and even served as a body servant for A.J. Polk, who was a relative of President James K. Polk. Being a barber across the country, Thomas was exposed to Confederate and Abolitionist views when the Civil War broke out. However, he was respected by clients of both sides and offered no interest in choosing a side. A report in on James Thomas’s successful career by the newspaper *Weekly Advisor* in Montgomery, Alabama in 1870 stated, “according to the census, the Thomases were worth an estimated \$165,000, the third largest estate held by an African American family in the South.”⁵ Thomas’s life was an uncommon success story about a slave who became one of the most respected and wealthiest African Americans throughout the Antebellum and Civil War eras.

Black southerners who were free since birth had similar success stories when compared to James Thomas; however, being born free did not mean that they were equal in the eyes of white men. Depending on the region or state, free blacks had lives that spanned from rich to poor like the rest of southern society. States like Louisiana,

⁴ Ibid., 88-89.

⁵ Ibid., 75-85, 239.

Missouri, and other western states were more accepting of free blacks in their societies than eastern states such as Alabama, North Carolina, and Mississippi. In *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men*, Eric Foner wrote, “In the east, no one questioned that the free black should occupy a subordinate position in society, even where he had substantial legal equality. In the more fluid social structure of the west, however, free negroes might be able to rise socially and economically.”⁶ Again, depending on where free blacks lived determined their social and economic success.

Free black southerners who lived in Charleston, South Carolina, in the 1850s and 1860s lived an array of different lives with some producing success stories of freedom and wealth. Charleston experienced a large influx of black migrants versus white migrants, making the majority of the city’s population black. In *Forging Freedom*, Amrita Chakrabarti Myers wrote, “About 40 percent of the state’s free blacks lived in Charleston in 1850, and on the eve of the Civil War Charleston had the fourth-largest free black population in the Nation, behind Baltimore, New Orleans, and Washington, D.C.” The number of blacks surpassed the number of whites in South Carolina and other southern states, so the black population turned to the white men of elite status to secure their liberty in the South. White Charlestonians did not view free blacks as equals in society, but the white men needed the skills and work force of the free blacks due to economic demands. Therefore, white men relied on the skilled labor force of black Charlestonians, free or enslaved, while the blacks relied on the white men to maintain their social status. Myers expanded on the relationship between black and white Charlestonians writing, “Blacks thus had to be cheaper, more reliable, more available,

⁶ Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 262.

and more compliant in order to maintain the goodwill of those who could fire them, deny them credit, or stop purchasing from them whenever struck their fancy.”⁷ Success did not come easy for blacks in Charleston, yet in some cases blacks broke through the social and economic barriers.

White men set up barriers such as head taxes, limited mobility in and out of states, bans from politics, and so on to maintain control over the outnumbering black population. The only freedom that black southerners enjoyed with little limitations was the purchasing of property. In *Slaves without Masters*, Ira Berlin wrote, “Like slaves, free Negroes were generally without political rights, were unable to move freely, were prohibited from testifying against whites, and were often punished with the lash. Indeed, the free Negro’s only right that escaped unscathed was his ability to hold property— a striking commentary on the American idea of liberty.”⁸ Some of the most successful free blacks stemmed from the purchase of property.

Free blacks purchased properties throughout the South to expand their business from street carts and markets to entire communities by perfecting their skills and/or trades. In this case, one trade that free black women excelled in was cooking and baking. Free black women such as Venus Deas, Ann Francis, Nancy Eden, Roxanna Niles, and renowned cooks Eliza Seymour Lee and Susan Jackson all perfected their cooking skills, bought property, and expanded their services to communities throughout southern cities. Their success did not happen overnight and often took years to save enough money to purchase property. Myers wrote, “While few [free black] women attained the fame of

⁷ Amrita Chakrabarti Myers, *Forging Freedom: Black Women and the Pursuit of Liberty in Antebellum Charleston*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 31; Myers, *Forging Freedom*, 87.

⁸ Ira Berlin, *Slaves without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), 97.

Eliza Seymour [and Susan Jackson], pastry cooks were among the best paid and most successful of black female entrepreneurs in many southern cities.”⁹ So, free black women perfected skills and trades and were successful in the southern society like free black men such as James Thomas.

Throughout cities in the South such as Nashville, Charleston, and others allowed for free black men and women to be quite successful. Although the cities had restrictions and barriers in place, the right for free blacks to purchase property was allowed. This created opportunities for free blacks to purchase land throughout southern cities and expand their businesses. The antebellum era through the Civil War era was filled with success stories of blacks whether they were born free or granted freedom. Black men such as James Thomas ran barber shops across the south while black women ran kitchens and bakeries. Free blacks were able to achieve wealth and elite social status despite southern white societies’ control and oppression.

⁹ Myers, *Forging Freedom*, 94.

Chapter 5: Diaries and Historical Fiction Romance

When the Civil War broke out across the South, many women turned to writing or diary keeping. Some of the writings were shared while others were kept secret to protect the documents from being discovered and destroyed. Southern white women wrote ferociously throughout the Civil War, and their diaries included their thoughts on the war, personal feelings, secrets, the South being occupied by Union soldiers, life at home, and so on. The diaries served as the most intimate and detailed descriptions into the minds and hearts of southern female writers. There were multiple ways women documented their everyday lives, but my focus for the historical fiction diary included here is on the diaries kept by southern white women in the antebellum era through the Civil War.

Diaries were used by southern women to write about their everyday lives, thoughts, and feelings, especially during the Civil War. Women wrote about the longing for men, and how sadness had overcome their days. Southern diarist Sarah Morgan wrote, “I wish we were all back again to 1860, that this war had never broken out, that Will [her crush] was as merry and gay as he was then... I only hope we will be as happy again.”¹ Morgan used her diary to vent about her frustration with the war taking her crush away. Her diary was filled with day-to-day details from 1862 to 1865 that entailed frustration toward Union soldiers moving into the South, distaste for the war, missing her crush, spending time with her girlfriends, and so on.

Morgan was not the only diarist that wrote about her frustrations concerning the Civil War. Not all writings were intended for publication, so women concealed their

¹ Sarah Morgan, *The Civil War Diary of Sarah Morgan*, ed. Charles East (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1991), 125.

personal writings from society and their families. The ways in which women concealed their diaries varied. Mary Boykin Chesnut kept her diary locked to hide the contents from her husband, as Elizabeth Fox-Genovese wrote, “There were always things in which she did not trust herself or her readers, always things that could not, for whatever reason, be written. From the starts she [Chesnut] kept her diary under lock and key.”² Whether Chesnut had secrets she did not want revealed or just wanted to keep her diary private may never be known.

Other diarists and their family members took concealment to the next level by omitting and/or destroying their writings. Diaries, letters, journals, and so on were destroyed to prevent damaging information to be publicized and defend the family honor. Eunice Connolly’s brother, Henry Richardson, destroyed Eunice’s letters to his mother about her interracial relationship with a mulatto sea captain, Smiley Connolly. In *The Sea Captain’s Wife*, Martha Hodes wrote, “For Henry Richardson, a sister who married a black man had no place in his self-fashioned life story. If anyone deliberately consigned those three years’ worth of missing letters to the fireplace, it was Henry.” It was considered treasonous at the time for a white woman to not only challenge the white patriarchal system but also the racial divisions. According to Hodes, Eunice forfeited her honor and respectability as a white woman in society by loving a man across the color line and publicly acting on that love. In other cases, diarists destroyed their own works to keep their thoughts and feelings from being publicized, destroyed by family members, and/or to control what content was permitted to be read. Diarists Isabella Martin and Myrta Lockett Avery deleted portions of their writings to conceal information before

² Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 347.

publicizing their works.³ The women knew that their works would be controversial or damaging to their honor as white women in society, so they controlled what the people read about their personal lives.

I decided to create a historical fiction diary account of an interracial love story from the point of view of a white southern woman in the 1860s. The historical fiction diary was based on research of a thirty-year span of southern society from the 1840s to the 1870s. The characters were developed by research into the personal lives of white and black southerners and the society that influenced their thoughts and actions. The diary begins in 1860 and ends in 1867 and creates an account of a plantation owner's daughter, Margaret Davis, falling in love with Ezra Thomas, the free black body servant or barber to Joseph Davis. Margaret's personal diary is kept hidden from her Confederate parents, and then, she later takes the diary from Mobile, Alabama, to her abolitionist grandmother in Buffalo, New York in 1864. Margaret writes in her diary as she and Ezra move to Liverpool, England in 1865, and she ends the diary in 1867 dedicating it to her newborn son Ezekiel Thomas. This account of Margaret and Ezra's interracial love depicts the possibility of romance across the color line in an era that it is not only uncommon but restricted. Their love challenges white southern patriarchy, and Margaret forfeits her honor and social status of an elite white southern belle. Her only hope of a happier and less restricted life is to flee the country and take residency in Liverpool, England.

If the account were real, then Margaret's diary, like Mary Boykin Chesnut, Isabella Martin, Myrta Lockett's, among other white southern women's diaries, was

³Martha Hodes, *The Sea Captain's Wife: A True Story of Love, Race, and War in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 263; Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Women in the Civil War* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 192.

concealed. She not only feared her diary was subject to being destroyed by her mother or father, but also risked the interracial relationship she had with Ezra. Her love for Ezra and their relationship undermined the southern society in which Margaret's Confederate parents were fighting to uphold in the Civil War. Keeping the diary a secret was Margaret's only chance at a life with Ezra, and the only account of their love story recorded. So, it was imperative for Margaret to preserve that history to be shared with their future child.

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The Diary of Margaret Davis 1860-1867

October 19, 1860

The rain has not stopped falling since early this morning. I helped Millie with ironing the linens until noon.¹ Mama gets angry at times that I like to labor but it was better than walking around the house aimlessly. On rainy days watching Millie cook passes the time since I cannot be outside watching the azaleas grow. 'Tis one of my favorite things to do watching Millie cook. She is very precise as to which ingredients she adds and when. I pray to the Lord that Mama would allow me to cook. Instead I am confined to ironing, schooling, and reading in the library.

November 24th, 1860

The day started like any other with Millie cooking breakfast and Jane fetching water for Papa's coffee.² Mama preferred warm milk and made me drink it as well. Oh, how I wish Mama would allow me to drink coffee! She says I will get too excited and irritate her nerves. At breakfast, Papa was talking about a new barber coming to live on the plantation since the previous barber, an Irishman, headed up North to New England. Papa told Mama he would live in the house, but away from us. Papa instructed Millie to clean out the old storage room near the library by the end of the week and have Jane sweep and mop the floors. Uncle Obadiah and Papa are building a table for the barber to place his tools.³ I sure am curious as to who the new stranger will be in our home.

¹ Millie Evans is the black house servant of Joseph and Helen Davis.

² Jane Evans is Millie's daughter and a house servant in training.

³ Uncle Obadiah refers to Margaret's uncle, Obadiah Davis, on her father's side of the family.

February 23rd, 1861

Mama sure has been ill tempered toward Millie lately. Millie was sent to the field for a day, and Papa was furious when he learned of it. Papa was always protecting Millie which angered Mama. Jane often came to me when this happened. We talked about how we were both anxious about who the stranger coming to live with us is. Mama gets frustrated when I distract Jane from her housework, so we must limit our talks. Papa has been real quiet about the identity of the barber. Perhaps it will be another Irishman and Papa is concerned he will leave for the mills in the North like the previous. Perhaps it will be a colored man. Mama and Papa call them negroes, but Grandma Delilah taught me when I was a girl to call them colored because it was a kinder word than negro.⁴ I agreed with Grandma Delilah, but I could never admit that to Mama and Papa.

April 21st, 1861

I have never heard of or seen a free colored man on Papa's plantation before. This new barber by the name of Ezra Thomas came from a barbershop in Louisiana. His hair is short and tightly kept to his head.⁵ His eyes are dark like Papa's morning coffee, and he is quite short for a colored man. He was a quiet, mysterious man who did not make eye contact with us. Papa has taken a liking to him, but Mama does not care much for colored people. Ezra will be living in the old storage room by the library. It was cleaned out by Millie and Jane as Papa ordered and the barber's table was placed inside by Uncle Obadiah. I am supposed to be studying my arithmetic but 'tis much more enjoyable to ponder on the changes around the house.

⁴ Margaret's grandmother on her father's side of the family.

⁵ Ezra Thomas is the barber and/or body servant on Joseph Davis's plantation.

July 22nd, 1861

Millie burnt the biscuits this morning sending Mama into a rage. She slapped Millie straight across the face sending her to the floor. I look at Jane to see how she reacts to her mother being punished. Jane's face is unmoved and she has told me that although it saddens her there are consequences for one's actions. 'Tis true for everyone but if Mama were slapped in front of me, then surely a tear would streak my face. Mama is not a kind woman, but she protects me and Papa to the end of the world. She once threatened to shoot a man who accused Papa of not paying for a pound of sugar. As it turned out, the slave sent to pay wound up lost along the way. Mama then threatened to shoot the slave if he was ever again late to pay. I often wonder where Mama got her ill temper from since Papa was always calm and timid. Perhaps 'tis because Mama's parents died from influenza when she was a girl. She was sent to live with a family friend in the North which turned out to be Grandma Delilah. That is how Papa and Mama met. They became good friends and then married. Papa inherited the plantation from Mama and they moved to Mobile, leaving Grandma Delilah in Buffalo. Papa said she was an abolitionist and did not want to move to Mobile.

October 15, 1861

On my way back from the privy, I stole a glance at Ezra picking azaleas for the kitchen vase. 'Tis strange watching a man so delicately picking flowers. His ways are mysterious. I wonder what his life was like before he moved here. How did he live? Was he wealthy or poor? And, did he have a family? Is he a gentleman as he appears or is he full of secrets and 'tis why he is quiet from fear of speaking truth about something? Papa hired him, so Ezra must be trustworthy. Mama broke my staring by yelling from the

balcony to quit piddling around and get ready for bed. For if she knew I was staring at a colored man picking flowers she would have flew into a rage. I skipped into the house and quickly got ready for bed.

December 9, 1861

Mama has been frantic here of late with talk of recruiters for the army going door to door looking for men to serve the Confederacy. Mama's fears were proven true when a recruiter by the name of James Smith from the 2nd Alabama Infantry Regiment came to the door and requested Papa and Uncle Obadiah's presence.⁶ Uncle Obadiah could not go due to a riding accident when he and Papa were boys. That meant Papa would have to leave us here. I wonder what is going to happen to Ezra, Millie, Jane and the other slaves with Papa gone to war. I heard talk Ezra was going to be Uncle Obadiah's barber while Papa was gone. Oh, how I wish Papa did not have to fight in the war! Mama will oversee the household while Uncle Obadiah watches over the slaves. I fear for Millie, Jane, and the other slaves because Uncle Obadiah dislikes the colored more than Mama and Papa.

December 10, 1861

Papa left us at seven o'clock this morning for Fort Morgan.⁷ Mama and I were sad to be left here without Papa. I do not know where I shall go when I need to shed a tear for Mama is not the comforting kind. She stood there gazing out the front door as the driver went down the pathway until Papa could no longer be seen. Without a tear she walked upstairs to her and Papa's room closing the door. Oh, why did Papa have to leave me and

⁶ The 2nd Alabama Infantry Regiment recruited men for the Confederacy from Mobile, Alabama, in 1861.

⁷ Fort Morgan was under Confederate control from 1861 to 1864 and protected Mobile Bay from Union forces.

Mama here? I pray God has mercy on his soul and sends him home to us unscathed by the war.

January 16, 1862

Papa has been gone for a month now and Mama has been melancholic ever since. She walks around the house like a ghost, pale and silent. Mama fears Papa may not return, and I hear her sobs at night whilst I lay awake fearing as Mama. Uncle Obadiah seems all too happy to be in charge of the slaves and Ezra. He yelled at Jane yesterday for spilling milk as she carried it into the kitchen. Mama does not interpose when Uncle Obadiah is going at a slave. As here of late, Mama has been relying on Millie to bring her warm milk and biscuits. Mama even talked to Millie for a moment and not about what to clean or cook. 'Tis strange that Mama seeks comfort from Millie knowing of Papa's indiscretion a few years ago. Jane and I rarely speak of it but we sure are glad to know we are sisters. I wonder what Grandma Delilah would think of it. Would she be tickled to have another granddaughter or ashamed of Papa's infidelity? Perhaps we could discuss it when I visit her next.

February 18th, 1862

When I went downstairs for breakfast, I noticed Mama and Uncle Obadiah talking quietly in the library. Uncle Obadiah was telling Mama that Fort Donelson had been surrendered to the Union last week and that he did not believe the Confederacy could come back from such a loss.⁸ Mama noticed me peeking through the door and ordered me away. Papa was out there with strange men fighting in a war to keep the colored in

⁸ Fort Donelson was surrendered to Union Forces in February of 1862. The Confederate loss meant Kentucky would remain in the Union, and Tennessee was subject to Union advances to the south.

bondage. I would rather Mama and Papa free all the colored than for Papa to die in this atrocious war. His life is more important to me than any amount of money, for he is the one who sang to me when I could not sleep as a child. Oh, how I wish this war would end so my Papa can come home!

March 11, 1862

Ezra has been in the fields tending to the slaves since Papa left. I wonder what he would think of it. Uncle Obadiah does not run the plantation like Papa did. He is untrusting of the slaves and gets frustrated with them over every little thing. Perhaps 'tis due to his riding accident when he and Papa were boys. As the story went, they were riding in a grassy field when a runaway slave boy startled the horses sending Uncle Obadiah off the horse and onto the ground. Papa said his back pained him ever since and Uncle Obadiah disliked the colored ever since. If Papa were to come home tomorrow, I ponder upon the thought of how he might react to the changes Uncle Obadiah has made to Papa's life work.

April 19, 1862

Mama received a letter from Papa yesterday morning. Papa wrote to us from Fort Morgan. He wrote that the Union victory at the Battle of Shiloh was a hard blow to the Confederacy and the Mississippi was now subject to Union control.⁹ He warned that if the Union assumed control over the river that food and other goods would be blocked from being imported into the South. His letter was a warning for Mama and Uncle Obadiah to begin storing food, clothing, and any other things we may need. His letter was

⁹ The Battle of Shiloh was a two-day battle that began on April 6th, 1862. Shiloh was one of the bloodiest battles of the Civil War and ended with Union victory over the Confederacy. The victory opened up the Mississippi river to the Union Forces.

filled with concern, and Papa wrote Mama that he loved and missed us dearly. What did that word mean, *love*? Papa had never spoken such a word before. The war was already changing my Papa. What kind of man will he be upon his return if this war does not take him from us?

May 14, 1862

With Papa gone for some time, Mama has been quiet and sits sewing most of the days. Mama finished sewing a coat for Papa today and plans to send it to him. She has spent many of days working on that coat. 'Tis her pride and joy to have sewn that coat for Papa. Lately, Mama has taken a liking to Millie since Papa's absence. They sew together and at times Mama helps Millie with the cooking. 'Tis nice to see Mama smile once again. Her friendship with Millie is strange, but at least Mama has found comfort in another soul.

June 21, 1862

Jane and I enjoyed picking azaleas for the kitchen vase. Since Papa has been gone to war, Ezra has been tending to the slave men and Uncle Obadiah. I wondered if he missed picking the azaleas for Mama's kitchen vase. A couple days ago the strangest thing happened. Jane took her basket of flowers in the house. I remained outside studying the plantation with my eyes when I noticed him standing by the well. That was the first time we had ever made eye contact with one another. I could not help myself but smile, and to my surprise, he smiled back. My heart fluttered and caused me to panic and run into the house to tell Jane.

July 19, 1862

Mama left the house at eight o'clock this morning to visit Aunt Clarissa for gossip and sewing.¹⁰ Millie and Jane were confined to cleaning the entire house and preparing dinner for a party Mama is having this evening. Mama asked me to make bouquets for the dining room, parlor, and library for the evening to bring life into the house. I was standing there picking azaleas when sudden gloom fell upon me. Papa had been gone for months now and Mama has been busy with sewing and gossip to take notice of my demeanor. I quietly cried and began picking up the azaleas I dropped on the ground when a deep, gentle voice asked me if I needed a hand. Our eyes met, and he handed me a handkerchief so I could dry my tears. He took the basket from my hand holding it so I could place the flowers in it. We silently continued to pick a few more azaleas and he helped me set them in the vases once in we went in the house. We flashed each other a smile, and he went out of the house before anyone could notice. Shortly after, Mama returned with Aunt Clarissa. Oh, how I fretted one set of eyes had seen our encounter for Mama would have Uncle Obadiah punish him. I did not want that on my conscience for it would be too much to bear to be the cause of a person's punishment or worse.

September 14, 1862

Mama received another letter from Papa. Most of the men in his regiment had been disbursed but they allowed Papa to remain at Fort Morgan. He wrote Mama a poem

¹⁰ Aunt Clarissa is Margaret's aunt who is married to Obadiah Davis.

Helen,

The stars remind me of your light.
 For they help me sleep at night.
 My love, I will come home, and bring peace for your heart.
 When you lie awake at night,
 Look to the stars as I have for light.¹¹

As Mama read it, she cried and smiled. What did it mean to smile and cry? I thought tears were reserved for pain. Mama explained it to be a feeling of warmth and comfort, tears of happiness. Mama told me it was part of love. There that strange word was again, *love*.

November 24, 1862

It was a dark and gloomy day due to the heavy rainfall. It rained so violently that the slaves were permitted to remain in their cabins for the day. Uncle Obadiah went home to be with Aunt Clarissa. Mama followed along and spent the day with them leaving me at home with Millie and Jane. Millie usually spent the day baking while Mama was gone, but flour was hard to come by these days. She had to clean around the house instead. Jane went to one of the slave cabins to play with her slave friend June. I sat in the library and read. While I was sitting there reading, he walked into the library. He asked me the name of the book I was reading, but I did not answer. I was as frozen as the ground after a long winter snow. He smiled and told me not to worry that Millie would warn if Mama was to return. I felt relieved and we began talking for what seemed like hours.

¹¹ Helen Davis is Margaret's mother.

He told me of his life as a boy. He was a slave in Virginia, but was sent away to Nashville, Tennessee when his mother passed. She was the only remaining family he had. Once in Nashville, he became an apprentice for a barber. Then, at age seventeen, he had saved enough money to buy himself from his master and did so. His ex-master then petitioned the court for emancipation, and it was granted upon the request he leave the state. He moved to Louisiana to open a barber shop with an aged man he met in his childhood. He said three years later in 1860, Papa went into the barber shop to get a haircut. Papa voiced his suspicion that his personal barber would leave, and asked if anyone was interested in the position if the Irishman was to leave. A couple months after Papa returned to Alabama, he accepted the position and sold his half of the barber shop.

He said that the countryside was quite different from the city, but he enjoyed the quiet. He also mentioned that one day while gathering well water for the slaves, his eye caught sight of the most beautiful thing he has ever seen. He flashed a smile at me, and at that moment, I realized he was talking about me. I confessed my interest in him as well and we promised to consider our attraction, but with great caution to Mama and Papa. For if they knew of our betrayal, it would break their hearts.

December 22nd, 1862

I finally could get away to write. Life on the plantation has been chaotic lately with the Union blockades along the Mississippi River and southern railroads. Mama was furious when she could not afford to buy flour or molasses so Millie could bake for our usual festivities. This year we are going to Uncle Obadiah's house for Christmas since there is little food here. Millie and Mama spent all day yesterday dying old dresses for us to wear on Christmas since the dress shop closed. I comforted Mama in library when she

began to cry. I told her that we should pray to the Lord. Mama and I knelt on the library floor and prayed that the Lord would deliver us from our troubles and watch over Papa. She wiped my tears from my face and gave me a warm embrace that I had longed for from her.

February 10th, 1863

Mama and Millie have spent days sewing quilts for us and the slaves. The weather has been bitter lately making it nearly too cold for any work to be done on the plantation. Our breakfasts no longer include biscuits or bacon, for pork and flour are hard to come by these days. Last week we ran out of flour and had to buy flour from Uncle Obadiah and other neighbors who were willing to sell a portion. Mobile has turned into a community center where everyone relies on one another for food and clothing. Aunt Clarissa started a sewing group among the women around Mobile to sew quilts and clothing for families without enough heat in their homes. Neighbors buy food together and then divide it among themselves.

April 29, 1863

Papa has been gone for nearly two years now and writes less and less as the Union troops make their way deeper south. Word is that Stonewall Jackson had died at the Battle of Chancellorsville leaving the Confederacy without a great commander, and the Union army has more men than the Confederate. Union forces have already passed through Tuscumbia and are pushing southeast. In Papa's last letter, he questioned whether Mama should send me to live with grandma Delilah until the war is over. My heart ached for my love and me. Oh, how would I survive without him! My heart sure

would break. I wrote a letter to Grandma Delilah, and Jane gave it to June who passed it along secretly to a trusted acquaintance who promised to send the letter to Buffalo. My heart frets as I wait to hear from Grandma Delilah, for what if her response is too late for me and my love?

May 15, 1863

Mama requested ornaments to be made for the front and back doors. I set out to pick the azaleas and snuck a conversation with my love. He and I have been writing letters to each other since Mama does not go out much as here of late. We read them then consigned them to the fireplace when no one is watching. When it is too risky to meet each other, we leave the notes in hidden places around the plantation, or Jane passes our letters in and out of the house. Jane even asked June to keep a hidden box for our letters to store until it is possible for her to pass the letters. Mama nearly caught me one evening reading a letter from my love, and I had to tell a story that it was from Grandma Delilah. Thank God Mama did not take the letter to test my story. She glared at me and walked away. My heart beat louder than roaring thunder.

June 9, 1863

Mama and Papa wrote Grandma Delilah requesting my stay with her until the end of this dreadful war. Like me, they are awaiting a response from her. There is not a day that has passed I do not fret over the fate of me and my love. It is growing harder to hide our affections. We long to be together every moment of every day. Guilt has plagued us though, for our love is treason to the Cause and Papa. If anyone were to understand, then

it would be Grandma Delilah. She has not yet responded, and if she has, then her letters have not reached us.

August 22, 1863

His last letter assured that if I were to be sent to live with Grandma Delilah in Buffalo, then he would quit and find work up North to be close to me. With that, I began to think being sent away would be good for us. Maybe it would give us a chance to be together without secrecy and fear of being caught. Oh, if only Grandma Delilah would write a response to my letter! I ponder upon the thought of how she will react to my letter. Will she approve, or will she tell Mama and Papa? I pray that she keeps this from them for me and my love's sake.

September 7th, 1863

Mobile has resorted to chaos and anger since this dreadful war has plagued our city. There were riots three days ago that destroyed a portion of the city's businesses. Mama flew into a rage that southern ladies were acting so uncivilized that they destroyed half the city and took things they did not pay for or earn. Mama instructed me to never resort to such lowly actions and that the good Lord would provide for us in due time. Mama had a lot of faith that the Lord was going to deliver us from this cursed war and bring Papa home. Mama and I felt that the Confederacy would fall to its demise, but no longer concerned ourselves with the loss. We only want Papa to return and this cursed war to end.

October 16, 1863

With food and clothing being so scarce, Mama had to turn to Uncle Obadiah and Aunt Clarissa. They helped feed the slaves on the plantation and Aunt Clarissa's sewing group made clothes for everyone. Mama wrote to Papa about her concerns that we will run out of food, and it would be best to send me away to live with Grandma Delilah. Mama fretted that we would soon run out of food, so the slaves were only fed once a day. In the house, we usually eat only breakfast and dinner. Since no word from Grandma Delilah has reached Mobile, Mama wrote another letter to her requesting my stay until the war is over. She fears that the letter may have been lost or even destroyed.

December 18, 1863

No word from Grandma Delilah has yet arrived. Mama took to sewing with Aunt Clarissa for the soldiers, not just Papa. They sew for hours and mainly at Aunt Clarissa's house. Uncle Obadiah has a larger plantation than Papa and has more children. Jane and I are Papa's only children, but Uncle Obadiah has four sons to run his place while he runs Papa's. At times, I wonder if Papa and Mama wished I was a boy. Oh, how their lives would have been better if I was a boy! I am so ashamed to be a woman! If I were a boy, then perhaps I would have gone to war and spared Papa.

February 1864

With most of the south starving and in need of clothes, the Union army continued to defeat the Confederate taking over more railroads and ports. There seems to be no hope of the Confederacy becoming victorious. Our men are outnumbered and being slaughtered on the battle fields. They are starving and cold. How can men win a war

when they have not enough food to eat or clothing to wear? Mama, Millie, Aunt Clarissa and other women continue to sew clothing for the men, but the demand is too high and materials too low. I pray to the Lord to have mercy on their souls. Mama fears that if I do not leave soon, that it will be impossible for me to get to Buffalo. The only letters we receive in the mail are from Papa and the neighbors informing us about the war. I am tired of hearing about this confounded war. There is no hope in victory, so why not just end the war and send all the men home to their families?

March 5, 1864

Oh, a letter finally reached us! Grandma Delilah wrote back to Mama accepting her and Papa's request for me to live with her in Buffalo. Mama said I had to travel by foot and horse to Kentucky, and then board a train instead of traveling by boat since the Union army controlled much of the Mississippi and the Gulf as well as the railroads in and out of Alabama. I have never traveled so far by horse nor have I been aboard a train before. Uncle Obadiah had to tend to the plantation, so Mama and Papa had to ask my cousin to guide and protect me on the trip to Kentucky. Samuel walked by my side as I rode the horse, and we had to stay quiet most of the time.¹² The nights and early morn were quite chilly, so we had to use the quilts Mama sent with us to keep warm. Once we arrived, I bid Samuel farewell and boarded the train. It roared out of the station at eight o'clock sharp. The ride was noisy, and the train smelled of whiskey, cigars, and perfumes. My stomach churned at the smells, and fresh air seemed like only a distant dream. Oh, how I cannot wait to get to get Buffalo and get off this dreadful train. I can no

¹² Samuel Davis is Margaret's cousin who is the youngest son of Obadiah Davis.

longer write for my headaches are growing unbearable. I shall write again upon my arrival Lord willing.

March 12, 1864

The Lord has blessed me with a safe arrival in Buffalo despite the awful atmosphere on the train. Grandma Delilah was elated to see me after so much time passed since I last visited. Her hair was thin and as white as fresh snow. Her eyes were glossy and as blue as the clear Alabama skies in summer with her face wrinkled like the ripples of sea water. Her smile and warm embrace and brought comfort to my weary soul. She assured me my love would arrive safely as she handed me a cup of coffee. At last, I could enjoy a cup of dark, succulent coffee that I had longed for as Papa drank it every morning. Grandma Delilah and I discussed my writings. She was pleased and impressed I had kept it hidden from Mama and Papa. She instructed me to bury or burn it if there ever was a chance of discovery. She urged me to be cautious, but I informed her she is the only one who knows of my writings besides my love. That was untruthful, for Jane and June knew of the writings back home.

May 19th, 1864

Grandma Delilah came down with a fever that required my attention for quite some time. I could not go off to write for she was very ill. Her fever has gone now and she is her old self again. Last week, she sent the paperboy to purchase some ink so that I may begin to write again. She reminds me of the importance of my writings and protecting them. I quailed at the thought of burning my writings, watching them char and turn to ash. The good Lord allowed me to keep my words hidden from Mama and Papa,

and now they are safe here with me and Grandma Delilah. I wish I could have wrote more when I was in Mobile. There were so many memories of Jane, Millie, and especially of my love. I have not heard from my love for months and I pray that he is safe. No word from Papa has reached us here either. For the two men I love the dearest are silent and tossed in a world of chaos. The Union papers write of many victories over the Confederacy and their ultimate defeat seems just a sunrise away. What will we do when this war is over? So many lives lost, homes destroyed, and towns turned to ashes. What kind of south will I return to some day?

August 3, 1864

Grandma Delilah paced rapidly around the dining table. Tears streaked her pale wrinkled face. She muttered of Papa as a boy whilst she continued to pace around. I asked her what seemed to be the matter, and with fear in her eyes, she stuttered "Union forces have reached the shores of Alabama." My heart sank as did my knees to the floor. The air left my lungs as the thought of never seeing Papa again. His kind blue eyes and deep laugh that shook the shutters would forever be silenced. Oh, Papa I am sorry for dishonoring you and Mama! Lord please be with Papa. Bring him home to Mama, for surely melancholy would plague her for the remainder of her days if she were to lose Papa.

August 12, 1864

No letters from Mama or Papa have reached us in Buffalo. Grandma Delilah passed the time baking and sewing dresses for the local dress shop. I know now what that word *love* means. I feel it when I cry for Papa to return safely from the war. I feel it when

I miss Mama, Millie, Jane, and Uncle Obadiah. I feel love when I imagine my love and me together, but my love for him is different than my love for the others. My love for him is deeper and would bear all things. I miss my love dearly and pray for his safe arrival. Oh, I could not bear to lose two men I love dearly in my life, for surely deep sorrow would plague my soul!

September 15, 1864

The rain only made this day gloomier. No word from anyone back home yet. The paper boy informed Grandma Delilah that Union forces had reached the Gulf. Our hearts fretted for Papa, Mama, Uncle Obadiah, Millie, Jane, and others back home. Lord have mercy on their souls! There were no words for our fears concerning Papa, for Union troops would have no mercy on a Confederate soldier. Lord, I beg of you, see to it Papa makes it home to Mama. She has suffered enough from his absence.

October 6th, 1864

Three weeks have passed since the news from the paper boy. The *Evening Courier and Republic* reported that Lincoln received a telegraph from Union forces that they took control of Fort Morgan and were holding Confederate soldiers.¹³ Grandma Delilah and I sobbed together fearing Papa may not return home. Lord be with Papa, and bring him home to us. Still no word from my love. Was he captured, lost, or worse? I could not bear to lose him and Papa!

¹³ The *Evening Courier and Republic* was a Union newspaper in Buffalo, New York, that published between 1861 and 1875.

December 23rd, 1864

Christmas this year will most certainly be the gloomiest of all Christmases. With no word from anyone, all I have is Grandma Delilah. We baked sugar cookies together and sang Silent Night trying to hold ourselves together for the good Lord. This is the first Christmas without Mama and Papa. Oh, how it would be the greatest Christmas gift of all to hear from them and my love. 'Tis all I have prayed for this year.

January 8th, 1865

Grandma Delilah received a letter today from Mobile. She and I stared at it afraid of what news it contained. We opened the letter slowly and together. It was from Mama! Papa returned home back in November. He was ill upon his return, but Millie nursed him back to health. Mama wrote us that everyone was safe and sound. She wrote about Union troops who came to the plantation, but only asked for a warm meal, and then, they were on their way. Mama expressed her frustration in the letter how the Union men so proudly asked for assistance from Confederates. Mama wrote that Papa instructed her to be calm in their presence because they were only trying to get her riled up. Mama explained that she kept her grace and fed the men, scolding them under her breath, for she was a true southern lady.

February 15th, 1865

Today the good Lord answered my prayers. A knock-on Grandma Delilah's door turned out to be my love. We ran to each other and shared a long-awaited embrace. He had fresh perennials and a gift box for me. Inside the gift box was a beautiful blue calico dress. I ran upstairs to put it on, and he took me out for dinner. Oh, how wonderful it to

have my love to myself without secrecy or fear of Mama or Papa discovering us. One day, I hope to have the courage to tell them of our love for each other, but I fear their hearts could not bear it. 'Tis all that pains me in this world to know I cannot share with them the truth about who hold my heart.

My love had been gone for nearly two years of my life. He told me that he lived in St. Louis and worked for a barber to save money to support me and Grandma Delilah. When I questioned why he did not write, he answered "Margaret I did not trust anyone with my words for you." He continued to explain that some people were more damning than in Mobile, especially since the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 and ex-slaves fleeing to the cities for work. I forgave him for making my heart suffer all those nights. We are going out again tonight to walk the city and enjoy each other's presence, for we know not what the future holds for us.

March 30th, 1865

Been some time since I last wrote. As here of late, I have been feeling quite faint. Illness strikes me in the morning, and the sight of food at times has me bilious. Grandma Delilah insists I see a physician. Perhaps she is right, but I am embarrassed to go out due to being so languid. I have laid in this bed for a couple weeks now praying for the illness to cease, but it only grows stringer as the days pass. My love hired a physician to come to Grandma Delilah's since I refused to go out. The physician is coming at the end of the week. Oh, Lord I pray for this illness to pass!

April 1st, 1865

The physician came at nine o'clock this morning. His conclusion struck fear into my heart, for I have never witnessed the birth of a child. The physician informed me that Lord willing, the baby should be born sometime in late December or January of next year. My love came into the room after the physician left, and I shared with him the news. His eyes lit up, and he began to cry and laugh at the same time as Mama had once before when she received a letter from Papa. Grandma Delilah came into the room to see what all the commotion was. When we told her I was with child, she danced around the room joyously. All the happiness in the world for an unborn child. Thank the Lord for this blessing of life.

April 18th, 1865

I can no longer return home to Mama and Papa, for they will know of my treachery. Love and shame cloud my mind. They cannot know of my unborn child. Grandma Delilah agreed, and was fearful of what they might think of me. The news would break their Confederate hearts to know of my condition. Surely, they would blame my love for this. Oh, Lord what shall I do! The only comfort I have is knowing that the war has ended. Although the Union was victorious, the bloodshed will be no more, and families can begin to rebuild their homes and towns. I may not recognize the South upon my return some day. Will Alabama still have beautiful blooming azaleas? Will the air stench of death and war, or will it return to its clean, fresh scent of flowers and warm biscuits? 'Tis the home I long to return to some day with my family.

June 23rd, 1865

Grandma Delilah has arranged for my love and me to flee to Liverpool, England.¹⁴ We are awaiting a response from her acquaintance overseas. My love has worked every day except the Sabbath to save money for our family. A physician has cleared my voyage, but warned we mustn't leave too close to December, for it could cause the baby to come too early. Once Grandma Delilah receives word from Liverpool, my love and I will be on our way. We know not what a new world holds for us, but we do know that we hold each other. 'Tis what matters in this world, the love between two souls.

July 14th, 1865

I was so busy packing that I have not written as here of late. My love and I parted ways from Buffalo. Grandma Delilah and I shared a long embrace, and she told me to write her once we made it to Liverpool. Our driver took us to New York to board the steam ship. Walking on the dock, the steamship was quite immense. The smell of the sea turned my stomach as I boarded. We put our possessions away and prayed together for our safe voyage and arrival. It was said that we should reach Liverpool within two to three weeks. Oh, how I pray the good Lord watches over us on this voyage to an unknown world and new life.

July 17th, 1865

'Tis the third wretched day aboard this ship. My morning illness has extended throughout the remainder of the day. I cannot write as I wish to, for my illness only

¹⁴ Liverpool, England was a major immigrant city in the 1860s.

increases with the motion of the sea. Once we are safe and sound in our new home, I will write once again. Goodbye for now.

August 2nd, 1865

The town house is splendid, for Grandma Delilah's acquaintance was a very kind man. Oh, the Lord knows I do not deserve such a wonderful life. My love has gone to work whilst I am here sewing linens to pass the time until the child is born. My love told me of the Florence Nightingale Training school for nurses.¹⁵ Baking from the home was my initial choice of occupation or when we moved here, but nursing would offer us a better life. Once our child is born, I will begin my training. My love promised to stay home with the babe until we can hire a nanny. I was not fond of the notion of a stranger watching over our child, but we had to work to build a stable life for our little one.

October 15, 1865

Sewing and baking is all I can do here. I stay in most of my days. My love comes home every evening with fresh flowers and a smile to greet me. Our lives here together are pleasant, for our being together does not impose on our neighbors. They flash us smiles when we pass on the street, and a kind aged couple brought us a dish they called scouse. It was rather delicious if I must say so myself, but my love did not enjoy it as much as me, but it was a nice welcome. If Millie were here, then she would have asked the aged couple for the recipe. Oh, how delightful it would be to know how to prepare the dish myself!

¹⁵ Florence Nightingale Training schools for nurses in England date from the 1860s. These schools provided training for nurses.

December 30th, 1865

The birth of our son has brought much joy into our lives. He is quite small with light brown skin. His eyes resemble the color of a hazelnut. My son, my boy Ezekiel Thomas, his birth was the proudest moment of our lives.¹⁶ My love cannot stay away from our boy. He has rocked the babe to sleep every night since Ezekiel's birth a week ago. My love sure is a proud Papa, and now I can be called Mama. Oh, how delighted Grandma Delilah would be to hold the babe in her arms and kiss his little nose. My love and I talked about returning to the Union once the war is farther in the past, but before Mama and Papa are too aged. I pray Grandma Delilah will get a chance to gaze upon her only grandchild once before the good Lord calls her home.

February 19th, 1866

My child, Mama has not written for so long due to your birth and training. I am training to be a Nightingale to make you proud of me one day. Your Papa will open his own barber shop soon enough. Your nanny Isabel is a kind soul and cares for you while Papa and I are working. My boy Ezekiel we miss and love you dearly when we are away. Lord willing you will grow to be a kind, driven young man as your Papa once did. One day, we will voyage to the Union for you to meet your Ma, Pa, and Grandma Delilah who is your great grandmother. Mama will not be able to write much longer, for my training is too demanding.

¹⁶ Margaret and Ezra were not married, so when Ezekiel was born, she had them put his last name as Thomas on the birth certificate instead of Davis.

May 11th, 1866

My son, being a Nightingale is rigorous work. The stench of soiled linens and death never leaves one's nose.¹⁷ My days and nights are long and some seem to never end. My boy you are growing more every day. Oh, Lord how I long to be home with my Ezekiel more! Your Papa sees you more than me and cook for Mama when I have long days. Your Papa is a passionate, caring man, and 'tis a shame people back home judge him based on his skin color. Your Papa is as fine as any southern white man and has cared for us as such, if not more.

October 8, 1866

It pains my soul to write to you of the death of your great grandmother, my Grandma Delilah. She is the cause of your Papa and me having a life here with you. She was a strong, God fearing woman that loved unconditionally. Your grandparents are still alive, and last we heard, live in Mobile on a smaller plantation. Millie and Jane moved to New England to find work and get away from the South. Your Papa and I talk of returning when you are older so you can meet your grandparents. We write letters to Millie and Jane who hope to meet you one day as well. Jane is your aunt according to your grandfather's indiscretion years ago with Millie. Granma knows and came to terms with him years ago. Do not let temptations get you boy. Be a man like your Papa, and one day, you too will have a family that is honorable and just.

¹⁷ Cholera outbreaks were widespread and common in Liverpool, England in 1866.

December 29th, 1866

'Tis the day you were born a year ago my son. You were a small thing with curly black hair and hazel eyes. Our skin may not be the same identical, but you are my boy. Your Papa and I live you dearly. Ezekiel, you must grow and write to your children one day. I dedicate my writing to you. My writings are of your Papa and me and how our love brought us here and gave us you. My boy, you are the light of our lives and we promise to love and protect you all our days.

January 1867

My time for writing is over my son. I want to live my life and put all my time into you and your Papa. One day, I will teach you to write, and as I have said, write for your future children. Be brave in this world my boy. Love those that curseth you. Help those that suffer. Love the Lord thy God with all your soul. Ezekiel, my writings are now yours. They will be safely kept until you are old enough to understand the contents thereof. Your Papa and I love you.

Margaret Davis-Thomas