

FORGOTTEN “BROTHERS” IN ARMS: BRINGING FEMALE SOLDIERS OUT OF THE
DISCOURSE OF MYTH

By

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“Who am I without my armor

Standing in my father’s shoes?

All I know is that it’s harder

To be loyal, brave, and true.”

--Christina Aguilera, “Loyal Brave True”

I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my grandmother, Willa Deanne Stuckey Birchmore, who I believe was a woman warrior of the skies as part of the Civil Air Patrol, to all the female soldiers of the U.S. Civil War, and to the named, unnamed, and unknown women across the range of race, gender, ethnicity, culture, nationality, religion, orientation, and the span of time who have taken up arms. May your names be spoken and your stories told.

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ABSTRACT

In 2016, the Pentagon officially sanctioned women being on the front lines of combat for the United States. Although this was certainly a progressive moment to celebrate, it was by no means a phenomenon, as women had already been on the front lines of combat at the beginning of U.S. history, but this was especially the case for women soldiers of the U.S. Civil War. One large contributing factor for forgetting (and excluding) the military service of Civil War women was in the popular use of the rhetorical device *mythos*, or myth, in mid nineteenth-century America all the way to the present, which served as a means to foster a narrative of women only existing, and being capable, as warriors within myth. My dissertation focuses on how the myth of the woman warrior (such as the Amazons, Mulan, the Valkyrie, the goddess Sekhmet, etc.) has had an impact on the discourse pertaining to actual women who were in combat, particularly concerning what is archived.

My main argument is that while this myth, perpetuated by men's influence on the conventions of culture, makes godlike women suitable for the battlefield, it serves to keep the living, breathing women of reality outside of combat and in the domestic sphere. I combine the methodological approaches of Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa E. Kirsch with Susan Jarratt's concept of examining content from a Sophistic perspective through the dualistic relationship of *mythos* and *logos*, and what occurs between that relationship, *nomos*. To see the different ways the myth of the woman warrior took shape and how certain women interacted with, and were affected by, its discourse, I dedicate individual chapters to analyzing the memoirs, and associated archival artifacts, of three different women, Confederate soldier Loreta Janeta

Velazquez, Union soldier Sarah Emma Edmonds, and Buffalo soldier Cathay Williams, in the form of case studies. My findings show that myth of the woman warrior served to reinforce the institutions of power that reified the space of the military as strictly masculine, but it coalesced for each woman differently and had varied and particular layers according to the intersections of her identity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	11
Echoes of Stories Past.....	11
My Grandmother, A Woman Warrior.....	11
The Classical and the Myth of the Woman Warrior: The Amazons.....	14
Mythos and Nomos.....	18
Literature Review.....	24
How Mythos Constructs an Archive.....	24
The Construction of the Nineteenth-Century Woman.....	27
Rhetorical Scholarship on Women Soldiers.....	31
Methodology.....	35
Through a Prismatic Lens: Subjectivity of the Analyst.....	37
Reimagining Histories: Ethics of Exploring Possibility.....	39
Overview of Chapters.....	41
Chapter 1.....	41
Chapter 2.....	42
Chapter 3.....	42
Chapter 4.....	43
Chapter 5.....	44
CHAPTER 2: LORETA VELAZQUEZ AND THE QUEERING OF THE CONFEDERATE WOMAN WARRIOR.....	45
A Woman Writing and Fighting for Survival.....	45
Who was the “Woman in Battle”?.....	48
Her Archive.....	50
Methodology.....	52
Sparta and the South: Constructing the Confederate Soldier and the Confederate Woman.....	54
The Confederate Soldier.....	54
The Confederate Woman.....	57
Of Amazons, Of Joan of Arc, Of Loreta Velazquez: Establishing and Queering the Woman Warrior.....	61

The Queerness of Joan of Arc and Loreta Velazquez.....	61
“The Greatest and Noblest of Them All”: Resisting the Amazon Label.....	66
“A Mere Girlish Fancy”: Assigned the Amazon Label.....	68
Upholding Southern Honor.....	71
Upholding Southern Honor Through the Masculine Code.....	71
Upholding Southern Honor By Upholding Slavery.....	72
“Wr[ote] About Her Exploits for Money”.....	74
CHAPTER 3: THE MYTH OF THE CHRISTIAN SOLDIER IN SARAH EMMA EDMONDS’ NURSE AND SPY.....	78
For the “Throne of Grace,” not Women.....	78
Who was the “Nurse and Spy?”.....	80
Her Archive.....	82
Methodology.....	85
Christian Womanhood.....	87
White Christian Women.....	87
Black Christian Women.....	89
Invisible: Using Black Identity as Disguise.....	91
Military Regulation of Christian (and Warrior) Women.....	93
The Christian Soldier.....	96
The Male Christian Soldier.....	96
The (Female) Christian Soldier Sarah Emma Edmonds.....	99
The Unknown Christian Female Soldier.....	102
CHAPTER 4: THE MYTH AND MYTHOLOGIZING OF CATHAY WILLIAMS AS THE STRONG BLACK WOMAN (WARRIOR).....	107
Otherwise in “Good General Health”: A Black Woman Warrior.....	107
Who was Cathay Williams?.....	110
Her Archive.....	112
Methodology.....	115
Myth of the Strong Black Woman.....	115
What is the Strong Black Woman (SBW)?.....	115
The SBW and Physical and Mental Health.....	116
The SBW and Intersectionality.....	118

The Buffalo Soldiers.....	119
“Strength and Resiliency of the Human Spirit” Female Buffalo Soldier Cathay ...	
Williams and the SBW Myth.....	122
Preface to Cathay Williams’ Interview: How Readers Should Perceive.....	
Her.....	122
Rewriting the History: Mythologizing Cathay Williams.....	125
Imagining Her Childhood as an SBW Upbringing.....	126
Not the Right Kind of Woman, Not the Right Kind of Black.....	132
Reimagining Cathay Williams through Critical Imagination and Mythologiz.....	
ing.....	137
The Benefit of Mythologizing.....	138
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION.....	142
For Country, for God, for Independence, or for Money? Motivation and Myth of	
the Woman Warrior	142
War and Capitalism.....	143
Dress Like Joan...for the Money.....	146
Onward, Christian Soldier(ess)...for the Profit of the Soldiers.....	148
The Strong Black Woman...Doesn’t Need the Money.....	149
Where, Why, and How Do We See the Myth of the Woman Warrior To	
day?.....	151
In Historiography.....	151
The Need for Men to Be Men.....	153
Women Warriors in Pop Culture.....	155
How Do We Resist the Myth of the Woman Warrior?.....	157
In Feminist Historiography.....	157
Pop Culture: A Further Stimulus for Research.....	160
Final Thoughts: There is Hope for these Forgotten “Brothers”.....	161
WORKS CITED.....	166

Chapter 1: Introduction

Echoes of Stories Past

My Grandmother, a Woman Warrior

In 1940, my grandmother, Willa Deane Birchmore, joined the Civil Air Patrol in order to learn how to fly airplanes. Although she often joked around about how flying an airplane was fun and similar to driving a car, she joined with the awareness that she would be doing more than just learning for the experience or the fun of it. She would be learning how to avoid enemy fire as she flew her plane from the United States to England for the troops during World War II. Although my grandfather said in a letter to his mother that he and my grandmother “could go right into service...as airplane ambulance pilots...since we’re both qualified aviators,” he immediately followed this recognition claiming, “...I’m not going to let W.D. go into the service next year (nor the year after, etc!)” (Willa Deane Stuckey Birchmore Estate). However, regardless of what my grandfather said, grandmother made it plain that she would not let a man, even her husband, deter her from participating in this particular space by planning to ferry planes to England anyway. For me, she was the ultimate Rosie the Riveter who I thought could technically be considered a soldier, even though she was not supposed to be in direct combat. Amazingly, this part of her life was entirely unknown to her children and grandchildren until her seventieth wedding anniversary.

And yet, as I think of how close she could have come to battle, I am chastened by the knowledge that women have not just gotten *close* to direct combat, women *have*

been in direct combat throughout history. In fact, for the American Civil War alone, it is believed “an estimated 400 to 1,000 women, perhaps more, disguised themselves as men and took up arms” (Schulte *washingtonpost.com*). However, as I began to learn that many people had never heard of these women soldiers before, I found myself asking, *Why?* As feminist scholars Jordynn Jack and Jessica Enoch have questioned, “Why haven’t [they] learned about these women before? Why have [they never learned, [or] are just now [learning,] about these women’s rhetorical achievements?” (520). I believe that one answer to these questions is that these women involved in direct combat, as well as the women who have preceded and succeeded them, have had their actions chalked up to myth. More specifically, their actions have been relegated to the myth of the woman warrior. Challenging this myth by recovering their stories necessitates looking beyond history books and looking to the artifacts created by or related to these women.

Whether mythical or acknowledged, the figure of the woman warrior operates significantly in many world traditions, from the Amazons, to Mulan, to Norse Valkyries, to the Egyptian goddess Sekhmet. Even as evidence of women in battle started to creep into the historical record, their stories were often discounted or disputed. Further, many of the accounts of women in combat are filtered through the words of men, or given secondhand, as is the case for women throughout the rhetorical canon. The reality of the woman warrior comes to us only in pieces, as in the cases of women such as Joan of Arc, who was demonized in contemporaneous accounts, or the mentioning of women warriors in personal memoirs, or, for a time, in media exposed to the public consciousness. Therefore, we are required to use the “disparate parts” and

“incomplete pictures” that constitute their archives (Mastrangelo and L’Eplattenier 164). We may need to employ “critical imagination” (Royster and Kirsch 19) as we make our interpretations. “Critical imagination” is a tool for, as Kirsch would say, “ethic responsibility,” in which one makes an educated guess. We form this educated guess by “Accounting for what we ‘know’ by gathering whatever evidence can be gathered and ordering it in a configuration that is reasonable and justifiable in accord with basic scholarly methodologies. We must also consider the readings of silences and absences (Glenn, “Truth, Lies, and Method” 389) to rescue these stories from obscurity. Following these requirements, we adhere to David Gold’s belief that we are no longer “complicating an overly simplified [past,] [but rather, we are] complicating an overly complicated one” (23). By demonstrating that these women lived, and by examining the work their rhetorical contributions do in this space, we continue to complicate a past often used to justify conventions upheld in the present, and thus we challenge the current state of our society and culture. Additionally, we start to consider the implications of the rhetorical contributions of other populations who have been defined and relegated by the discourse of myth concerning the space of direct combat. My dissertation project, then, focuses on how the myth of the woman warrior (such as the Amazons, Mulan, the Valkyrie, the goddess Sekhmet, etc.) has had an impact on the discourse pertaining to actual women who were in combat, particularly concerning what is archived. My main argument is that while this myth, perpetuated by men’s influence on the conventions of culture, makes godlike women suitable for the battlefield, it serves to keep the living, breathing women of reality outside of combat and in the domestic sphere.

The Classical and the Myth of the Warrior Woman: The Amazons

In 1862, the Augusta, Georgia *Daily Chronicle and Sentinel* reported that “A North Carolina Amazon,” was discharged from the army after revealing her sex, in order that she might go home with her husband, who was also discharged. In another article from the *Savannah Republican*, the title, “An Amazon,” was used to describe another woman discovered to be in a soldier’s guise. The popular use of the term “Amazon” in these articles reflects what Erika Claire Strandjord says is “[the] nineteenth-century concept of tradition [emphasizing] continuity, authority, and a sacred regard for the texts and practices of the past” (285). In other words, nineteenth-century contemporaries looked to a tradition of what they considered classical texts that contained myths, and they used these classical references frequently in their rhetoric.

The term “Amazon” has historically referred to women who have stepped outside the common societal norms of passivity and submissiveness, and generally in contradiction to their prescribed role in patriarchies. These women are typically described as physically larger than usual, even “monstrous” (Isenberg 199), crude in habits, and readily provoked to aggressive behavior. John Quincy Adams, in discussing women’s political place, warned that “female societies such as the mythical Amazons, known for removing one breast and killing their sons, represented the antithesis of civil society...a grotesque caricature of men” (Isenberg 2). The term has been utilized repeatedly to recognize women involved in direct combat while still stigmatizing them as oddities. The rhetorical significance of this word “Amazon,”

then, is that it encourages the audience to be disapproving, which can lead to dismissing and then forgetting these women, and subsequently the loss of their stories.

Such a rhetorical move, a use of “classical imagery to promote a white nationalist agenda,”—is not “an isolated occurrence” (Zuckerberg 5), as “[p]olitical and social movements have long appropriated the history, literature, and myth of the ancient world to their advantage”(2) and used it to frame themselves as “the heirs of ancient Greece and Rome” (18). In other words, it is the myth of the white man as the superior and most valuable identity according to a belief that the history, texts, and myths from classical times are the white man’s origin and inheritance. After examining the data from the archival artifacts concerned with Civil War female and male soldiers, this is certainly the case for the white (especially Southern) men of nineteenth-century America (Cobb 42-43).

Although ancient classical texts do not necessarily have a “meaningful concept of biological race,” white men throughout history, including American, “fabricate a cohesive transhistorical ‘white’ identity” with the support of classical texts; perhaps even more significant, though, is the “deep well of misogyny” (Zuckerberg 19) embedded within such texts that further reify women as subordinate and exclude members of cultural and socio-political functions in a world framed to be for white men first. Evidence of how the parameters of women’s lives were constructed to keep them out of “the spheres of society in which men predominate” (Epstein qtd. in Glenn, *Unspoken* 22) are in the texts of classical writers such as Aristotle, who claimed women’s physical and intellectual inferiority and “ ‘natural’

deficiencies” (Glenn, *Unspoken* 20) or the Second Sophist and physiognomist Polemo, an Anatolian Greek from a Roman consular family and favored by Roman emperors.

In her work on the Second Sophists, Maud Gleason examines the influence of rhetoric such as Polemo’s on the Roman male population regarding their beliefs on the traits of gender as well as the significance of the gender binary. In particular, she examines Polemo’s forwarding physiognomic beliefs having to do with the ideal male body, such as if one does not walk like a lion, (62), or if one does not have a beard or enough body hair, he is not manly enough (68-69). Physiognomic beliefs concerning the female body constructing it as faulty and undesirable are also forwarded, such as having a soft, high voice equaled “femaleness,” so certain acts must be done to prevent this. Such acts meant doing everything possible to enhance the *pneuma*, “breath” or “the vital principle associated with the soul, with semen, and with the higher forms of intelligence” that keep a man “warm and dry” as opposed to a woman being “cold and wet” (85). Though some of these beliefs do not quite hold the same truth in modern history, the construction of women in classical texts, history, and myths as incapable, due to naturally weaker bodies and less intellect, is deeply embedded into modern patriarchal thought, which has rationalized the exclusion and relegation of women in all spaces, including the military. Even current political speakers have echoed this mindset, such as Mike Pence’s reference to the fiction and impossibility of Disney’s Mulan with her “delicate features and voice,” being a successful woman warrior in actuality (Andrews *msmagazine.com*).

As a means of resisting the exclusion or relegation of women, and resisting the

use and authority of classical texts to exacerbate that exclusion, in a “patriarchal territory of rhetorical practices,” Cheryl Glenn looks to the writings of noteworthy rhetoricians, such as Plato and Cicero, to discover how one woman had a more significant role in rhetorical contributions than many realize. This woman, Aspasia of Miletus, who was the lover of Pericles, is said to have interacted with and influenced Socrates, and as a result, her philosophies had an impact on his own concepts of rhetoric. Because of this, Glenn argues Aspasia is very likely “Our Mother of Rhetoric” (“Sex, Lies, and Manuscript” 194) who actually influenced the “founding fathers” of the western canon and is a main inspiration for their concepts, but her importance was unrecognized for thousands of years. Similarly, the Amazons seem to be the Ancient Greek mothers of the myth of the woman warrior. Of course, in noting this lineage, I recognize that rich myth traditions existed globally, and my project attempts to touch upon the diverse complexity of the myth of the woman warrior, with deference to the limitations of a dissertation.

Although prominent in myth through the stories recorded and passed down over millennia, perhaps there are no greater sources that describe the Amazons as women warriors than Homer’s *Iliad* and Vergil’s *Aeneid*. In *The Iliad*, King Priam of Troy reminisces on a battle with the Amazons during his youth as he and Helen observe the troops stationed on a field before the walls of Troy. As he reflects on this battle, he explains to Helen how these women stood out even in the company of “godlike” men, saying the Amazon women were the “peers of men” (Book III Gutenberg.org). In *The Aeneid*, the Roman poet Virgil describes one Amazon as:
Penthisilea there, with haughty grace,

Lead to the wars an Amazonian race

Amidst the press alone provokes a thousand foes,
 And dares her maiden arms to manly force oppose (Book I *Gutenberg.org*).

While one of these descriptions portrays these women as belonging and the other as their being out of place on the battlefield, both share the common trait of creating a phenomenon where there is a rare breed of otherworldly women capable of existing in this space traditionally occupied by men. The epics *The Iliad* and *The Aeneid* certainly do not discount that *some* women are capable of combat, but their describing these women as supernatural oddities does encourage the convention that female warriors are very much beings of myth, or at least out-of-place in the real world. As mythical beings, therefore, they would fall outside the conventions or societal norms, or *nomos*.

Mythos and Nomos

To examine how *nomos* works to keep women out of the space of combat in reality but within the space of myth, I look to the “Sophistical style,” or “the unique fusion of *mythos* and *logos* of oral narrative and rational argument” (Crick 40). In her work *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured*, Susan Jarratt provides a new approach to perceiving the Sophists, who have historically been harshly dismissed due to their successors such as Plato and Aristotle, who criticized them for using “amoral manipulation of an audience” as a means to arrive at a “truth” according to the laws, beliefs, and culture of the audience (xv). In her second chapter, she illustrates a “movement...of a long progress from one form of consciousness to another—from *mythos* to *logos*,” in which she claims that rather than the two concepts being “a function of narrative and rational argument at separate moments in history,” their

dualism is “fruitfully complicated by the introduction of rhetoric into the historical picture” (31). Essentially, she posits that instead of seeing the move from *mythos* to *logos* as a linear transition from “orality to literacy” (32), rhetoric complicates this by observing “argument and introspection in the epic” and “the role of myth in sophistic contributions to the rational revolution” (31), in which *mythos* and *logos* interface. To support this claim of dualism, Jarratt looks to the “persuasive speaking [that] appears in the earliest records of Greek discourse,” the Homeric epic, or *The Iliad* (32).

Perhaps part of Jarratt’s looking to the Homeric epic is that “in Homeric times, to possess knowledge...was to know how to bring a preferred reality into being over time through active engagement with the things and people of a shared environment” (Crick 29). For Jarratt, the discourse among the characters regarding their knowledge of war and Greek culture through narrative in Homer’s *Iliad* exemplifies how *mythos* serves the purpose of carrying world knowledge. However, *logos* is also at work, even if it does not occur in what Plato believes is the proper form for a logical appeal, dialectic. Instead, conversations between kings and their council demonstrate appeals to rationality. Thus, it is this gathering of men, who attempt to make rational arguments, that not only demonstrates “[a] shared interest” that is “necessary for rhetoric to work” (41) but also sets the backdrop for *nomoi* to come into being and be established.

It is *nomos* that creates a space between “the ‘mythic’ and the ‘logical’” in which law is “denote[d] as what all the people view as ““a valid and binding norm”” (Oswald qtd.in Jarratt 41). Similar to what we would call “conventions,” *nomoi* came into being through early assemblies concerning land, which then became councils for

military advisors, and then they became “representative assemblies...whose functions included making decisions about a full range of social and political issues” (42). Due to the social and political nature of *nomos* in these assemblies that occur in a “heavily patriarchal social order” (36), we can infer that women are not present at these meetings where rhetoric is at work and *nomoi* are established, as “the ideal woman” in such a social order is “disciplined by cultural codes that require a closed mouth (silence), a closed body (chastity), and an enclosed life (domestic confinement)” (Glenn, “Sex, Lies, and Manuscript” 180).

With no opportunity for women to be at gatherings outside the domestic sphere that help to form and reinforce *nomoi*, then, determining what spaces a woman may occupy, let alone exist in, men make these decisions for women. Additionally, though, these meetings allow for men to have interactive dialogue, which allows for “rational argument” or *logos* to occur. Perhaps, then, it is here that *nomos* influences what Jarratt believes to be the dualistic relationship between *mythos* and *logos*.

An important consideration when examining how *mythos* and *logos* influence and interact with one another is to be cognizant of the fact that what we consider “myths” were often sincere explanations of how the world worked according to a particular culture, which further contributed to establishing the *nomoi* of that culture. As Jarratt explains, myths were “a set of stories providing explanations of natural phenomena, detailed codes of everyday behavior, and even geographical and technological information” (32), and there was an “uncritical acceptance of the cultural code” (33) they exemplified. Perhaps, then, explaining that the wrath of the gods was the cause for an earthquake, a natural phenomenon that we now understand

as a real geologic event, parallels the possibility of considering Amazon warriors as women who may have actually existed. However, just as cultures can change significantly over a short span of time (Kirsch, “Being on Location” 24), so too do the stories associated with them. As rational argument is reached through the dialogic, questions on the existence of a warrior goddess with a cat’s head, or warrior women with supernatural qualities as the offspring of gods, may arise and welcome skepticism. In turn, when associations with what is deemed impossible impacts aspects of reality, we begin to question the limitations as well as the possibilities of myth concerning its role on influencing the social, cultural, and political in historiography.

I would like to make an additional observation, though. The dualistic relationship between *mythos* and *logos* is the association of *layers* of myths to the *intersection* of identities, which in turn establish conventions that are added on or that slightly deviate from “mainstream conventions” of a myth. In other words, depending on a person’s identity, the “valid and binding norms” for one identity may not apply to another identity in the same way based on the myths connected to that identity. To contextualize how layers of myths and their association with identity function, consider the myth of “The American Dream” in nineteenth-century America. This myth is that those who live in or emigrate to America have better, and more, opportunities to establish themselves in terms of finances, business, and property or land ownership if they make the trip and follow particular steps. However, the question becomes how many people actually see this dream become reality when their race, gender, original nationality, religion, and orientation are

factors.

What about women soldiers of the Civil War, and the woman warrior myth, then? What did it mean to be a Cuban woman fighting for the Confederacy, who openly discussed her queerness as a woman warrior, who donned blackface, and who openly admitted her desire for money for her memoir? What did it mean to be a white woman fighting for the Union, who glorified the Christian soldier, claimed to be a Christian, who donned blackface, and who took advantage of an identity often made invisible by race? What did it mean to be a recently freed African American woman fighting in the first U.S. Regular army composed of all African American men? What did it mean to be an African American woman, who was rejected by her regiment when her gender was discovered, and who was rejected by the Pension Bureau, ostensibly for not having a significant enough disability caused by military service, even after all her toes had been amputated? Certainly, all of the female soldiers of the Civil War encountered the same socio-political and cultural *nomoi* of nineteenth-century America shaped and informed by *mythos* and *logos* of the domestic sphere as well as that of the woman warrior. However, closer examination of particular women's stories demonstrates that in addition to the woman warrior myth, each of these women had myths associated with their various identities layered on top of their rhetorical contributions and used in such a way that it ultimately reinforced the influence of the woman warrior myth.

I believe that the dualism of *mythos* and *logos* are present concerning the depiction of the woman warrior from the oral culture of the Amazons of myth to the romanticized literary culture of the female soldiers of the American Civil War.

However, I would like to more closely examine what takes place *between* *mythos* and *logos* by examining the cultural and socio-political *nomoi* at the intersection of identities, and thus the impact of layers of myth for those identities, in addition to the mainstream *nomoi* of nineteenth-century America. The purpose of this project is to trace the discourse of *mythos* through myth and reality to help us understand the modern woman warrior. In order to trace this discourse, I examine how certain *nomoi* work to keep women soldiers of the Civil War out of the space of the military. I also see how these women “step out of the familiar and limited universe of the rhetor if only to step out of the limited universe of their everyday lives in order to experiment with a new perspective by fully—if only temporarily—immersing themselves within it” (Crick 41). In other words, I examine how these women soldiers immerse themselves into the *mythos* of women warriors and use the *nomoi* within it to their advantage in order to successfully occupy the spaces of combat.

For this project, I draw on archival research to examine the memoirs and historical writings about two women who disguised themselves as soldiers for the Civil War and the historical writings and writing genres of one who disguised herself as a Buffalo Soldier: Loreta Janeta Velazquez, Sarah Emma Edmonds, and Cathay Williams, respectively. I examine open-access digital newspaper articles and memoirs of soldiers in the Confederacy and Union armies as well as some of the public and private rhetoric of Southern and Northern nineteenth-century women that assist in establishing social and cultural conventions for women. In addition, I look, specifically, at the interview, enlistment and disability pension papers as contemporary artifacts of Buffalo Soldier Cathay Williams, and because of the lack of many artifacts

related to her, I also look to non-contemporary artifacts such as biographies, historical fiction, and poetry.

Literature Review

How Mythos Constructs an Archive

If we accept that men may exclude women from attending meetings that establish particular *nomoi*, we can posit that there is similarity concerning how such *nomoi* then shape history concerning the origin of the archive. When we consider the classical Greek root, *arkhe*, which means “commencement” or “commandment,” and its derivative *arkheoin*, which is “a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates, the *archons*, [or] those who have commanded” (Derrida 9), we come to understand that the word “archive” reflects the origin of the space as a place of privilege where those “who held and signified political power were considered to possess the right to make or to represent the law.” The *archons* not only held power over the law represented within the archive by acting as guardians but also “[had] the power to interpret the archives” (9-10). If those in power hold domain over an archive, a place holding pieces of their past and stories of their culture, they wish to maintain that power by prioritizing particular archives and reinforcing the records and stories of those archives that uphold “the dominant values of [the] [institution] and [culture]” (Glenn and Enoch 321) while destroying or leaving out evidence to the contrary in order to suppress the Other. The same could be said for myths that are archived, whether in an artifact or physical space or in the “collective memory” that can be “[selective], [imaginative], and often [perverse]” (Davy 133) as passed down through oral tradition or personal artifacts.

Although there are some archived myths of the woman warrior which are no longer accepted as reality, the privileged may take certain *nomoi* associated with those myths to further reinforce the dominant values in their own culture's history and mythology. Such was the case when Ida Tarbell asked the General Adjutant F.C. Ainsworth for access to the records of women who served as soldiers in the Civil War.

The response he gave her was:

no official record has been found in the War Department showing specifically that any woman was ever enlisted in the military service of the United States...[i]t is possible, however, that there may have been a few instances of women having served as soldiers for a short time without their sex having been detected...(qtd. in Blanton and Cook 28).

This response reflects not only the nature of the institutional Archive (or any archive)¹ to be limited in essential artifacts, as well as what it prioritizes, but also an adherence to staying true to a historical convention that had been upheld by a culturally dominant mythical one. In this sense, archiving becomes a method for management of myth for the dominant culture.

The construction of any archive, whether intentional or as an evolutionary coalescence, will be selective in what is included. This holds true not only for what artifacts might be selected to go into an archive or an archival collection, but also what is selected to go into the artifacts themselves by their creator(s). Cheryl Glenn attests to this reality saying, "all historical accounts, even the most seemingly objective historical records, are stories. And even these stories are selected and arranged according to the selector's frame of reference" ("Truth, Lies, and Method" 388). Therefore, even when looking at the histories and the myths that "are actually there" within an archive, it is

necessary to be cognizant that an archive cannot be “a literal substitute for the ‘reality’ of the past” (LaCapra 310), nor can we as researchers “conflate archives as ‘facts’ with the varied stories archival materials might tell [us]” (Lerner 196). Bearing this in mind, then, the following questions arise concerning how myths are situated concerning an archive’s construction: Which myths are archived? Where are they archived, and what does their location tell us? How are they archived? In epic poetry? Fiction? Hieroglyphs? If that is where those stories are archived, what happens to the possibility of considering certain aspects of the myth reality? What details of the myth have been forgotten or omitted as it was passed on through oral tradition or when it was finally documented?

When we consider what histories and myths are contained within an archive, we have to be aware of the legitimacy of authentication when it comes to interpretations. In addition, though, we also must consider what is *not* there, whether it is excluded, removed, or completely lost, in order to understand why certain histories, certain myths, or particular aspects of those histories and myths, are not on the rhetorical terrain. By expanding on her initial research on recovering Aspasia of Miletus, Cheryl Glenn “retells” the history of the rhetorical canon from Ancient history to the Renaissance by rereading and recovering texts of women rhetors in her book *Rhetoric Retold: Regendering the Tradition from Antiquity Through the Renaissance*.

Through this work, she demonstrates that:

Since history traditionally has been exclusively concerned with the public and the political, women have been excluded, relegated to the less-than-serious, private, and anecdotal sphere of everyday life. Thus, history itself has been

controlled by the power politics of gender, with men validating historical texts by writing and enacting them...(73).

The same can be said of myths in which men either do not validate stories of powerful women, omit parts of these stories, or ensure that no connection is made regarding females in roles normally mandated for males. Therefore, when we consider how the lack of particular myths constructs an archive, and in turn helps to construct conventions, we must ask ourselves: What happens when a myth is *not* archived? Does the possibility of not being able to consider a reality go away? Does the possibility of an actual person and their rhetorical contributions, which have been labeled as myth, fail to be recorded? These questions help us to further consider how myth further complicates our understanding of women warriors and their rhetorical contributions based on archival research.

The Construction of the Nineteenth Century Woman

In order to understand how the myth of the woman warrior is either preserved or reinforced, it is useful to examine other major rhetorical movements of nineteenth-century women to comprehend the various conventions creating obstacles for women soldiers that keeps them out of multiple spaces. Part of this examination requires acknowledging that in addition to women soldiers, other groups of nineteenth-century women did progressive and profound rhetorical acts in traditionally masculine spheres. These profound acts were performed in the movements of first-wave feminism, temperance, and human rights, as well as during the event of the Debate of 1860. All of these movements and events resisted the conventions and restrictions placed upon women by the Cult of True Womanhood.

The Cult of True Womanhood, a term coined by historians that referred to mid nineteenth-century authors' frequent use of it, was a "vague term" in which authors "assumed...that readers would intuitively understand exactly what they meant" (Welter 151). There could be slight alterations as to what the ideal nineteenth-century woman was with regard to author or reader definition, but there was a general consensus that there were "four cardinal virtues" to be considered ideal: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity, and these virtues were embodied in the roles of mother, daughter, sister, and wife. These cardinal virtues were established as the basis for a which a woman was judged by herself, "her husband, her neighbors, and society" (152). If there was one common trait amongst each of the major nineteenth-century women's groups, then, it was some form of resistance to the restricting cardinal virtues constructed, placed, and reinforced by both men and women.

In 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott organized the first Women's Rights convention, in which women gathered to publicly speak to the grievances covering a history of men abusing, overlooking, excluding, and silencing women. They forwarded a list, modeled after the Declaration of Independence, that spoke to injustices toward women. This list included but was not limited to, claims of failure regarding "her first right as a citizen, the elective franchise" withholding "all property, even to the wages she earns," lack of favor in divorce cases concerning "the guardianship of children" (Stanton, *Essential Feminist Reader* 59) no access, as well as subordinate roles, in the ministry, and the claim that God gave men authority to "assign for her a sphere of action" (60). Because anyone, "male or female," could be

condemned “as an enemy of God, of civilization and of the Republic” for “tamper[ing]” with True Womanhood (Welter 152), it was a bold move that women spoke publicly on the issues of women’s rights. Unlike the unfolding of the male rhetorical tradition, women’s rhetoric attained a public voice through writing, as Carol Mattingly said it was “the more acceptable (because less public)” form, before they moved on toward public oration (7).

One movement on which women spoke both orally and through the written word was the Temperance movement, formed primarily to address the high levels of alcohol consumption by men, which made them “abusive, irresponsible husbands” capable of cutting off fingers and pouring “boiling hot coffee” on their wives as well as chasing their children away with a “carving knife” (*The Nashville American*). Despite True Womanhood calling for women to “ ‘never retort...if he is abusive’ ” and to “ ‘become as little children’ and ‘avoid a controversial spirit’ ” (“A Young Ladie’s Guide” qtd. in Welter 161), the significant impact of intemperance on 19th century women made “more women united around the temperance issue than any other” (Mattingly 2). This significant abuse encouraged women to band together and become organized, which eventually resulted in meetings, conventions, and marches (5). Additionally, their coming together encouraged their publishing literature that conveyed the horror and injustice of intemperance undeterred by “legislation that create[d] hardships for women” (12).

Due to the horrors and injustices women faced from male intemperance and various other inequalities, nineteenth-century women also gathered together to debate the topic of a woman’s right to divorce, which became known as the Debate of 1860.

Depending on the state, laws concerning divorce were diverse, in which South Carolina “prohibited divorce for any reason” while it was allowed in other more liberal states such as Indiana (Mattingly 26). Due to variation in state law, women such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Amelia Bloomer advocated for alcoholism being considered as grounds for divorce (Mattingly 27). They further forwarded the concept that “[l]iberalized divorce [as] moral progress” preserved the home and prevented the “disgrace” of legal separation (Campbell 75). In opposition, Antoinette Brown believed that while a woman should be able to flee her husband to a state that allowed divorce, she should remain married and be loyal to her husband (77). Thus, while some women made their resistance to admonitions to “not retort” and to “accept submission as [their] lot” (Welter 162) very plain, others inadvertently reinforced socio-political constructs that kept them firmly in the place from which they strove to progress.

While there were split factions within these major movements of women, they were often recognized as solely white women movements. While there were Black women such as Sojourner Truth, whose 1851 speech “Ain’t I a Woman?” addressed the argument for women’s rights, Truth also addressed the enslavement of Black people, particularly concerning the treatment of white women in comparison to Black women. Francis Harper attended women’s rights conventions to “call for unity in diversity” by “bring[ing] separate elements together’ on some issues...[while] pointing out ways in which her experiences had been different from her [white female audience]” (Logan 47). Journalist Ida B. Wells dedicated her public platform to decrying the lynching of Black men, in which her “verbal magic” and “selective

description to persuade audiences geographically and emotionally” (Logan 75) with her “concrete and well-documented evidence” fostered awareness of the realities and horrors of the lynching of Black men in the south, the narrative created to justify it, and the failure to respond on the part of white men *and* women. The failure of the response of white women, in particular, demonstrated then, that intersections, and privileges, of identity determined the fronts of movements for which particular women fought. Based on those intersections, there would be layers of myth that impacted what facets of True Womanhood some women would encounter when engaging the myth of the woman warrior.

Rhetorical Scholarship on Women Soldiers

In her *Washington Post* article, Brigid Schulte echoes a repeated history taking place in the years from the Civil War to the present of female soldiers being forgotten and thus absent not only from history but from rhetorical contribution as well. Ida Tarbell of *The American Magazine*’s inquiry in 1909 revealed apparent “erasure” of women’s participation in active combat, and this appears to be an inherited tradition that evolved from men attempting to minimize the existence of female soldiers to the point of completely denying their existence. Similarly, just as we can go as far back as ancient documents to see how women warriors become a thing of myth, we can go to the war that started not even a century before the Civil War, the American Revolution, and see a similar occurrence where rare hints of women fighting suggests much history has been lost.

One possible reason for the General Adjutant’s brief reply to Tarbell’s inquiry on women soldiers of the Civil War could very well have to do with “the starkly

masculinized rhetoric of war and combat” which “position[s] women as an abstract goal men fight for (either a specific woman back home, or the generic ‘women and children’ needing protection), a motivating force allegedly undermined by the presence of actual women in combat” (Hallenback and Smith 210). This masculinized rhetoric that historically refers back to “patriarchy, hierarchy, (hyper)masculinity, violence, and the marginalization of all expressions of femininity” (Howard and Prividera 289) reinforces women as the “social inferior,” which is “‘the founding myth’” the male soldier holds onto to “differentiate [himself] by his actions,” and this myth continues to be “perpetuated in literature, folklore, metaphors, and the media” (290). Perhaps, though, a larger reason that the General Adjutant’s response to Ida Tarbell was made concerning Civil War women soldiers has more to do with a previous tradition of men’s attempting to minimize such women’s actions and words, which in turn leads to easily forgetting them, rather than representing an overt attempt to completely erase them from history.

One particular example of a man minimizing a woman’s participation in battle is that of Herman Mann, who in 1797 published *The Female Review, or Memoirs of an American Young Lady*, which told of the experiences of the cross-dressing woman soldier Deborah Sampson Gannett of the American Revolution. Initially, Mann “gushes with pride for her rejection of proper female behavior, praising her decision to join the military as a service to her country” when relaying his account of Gannett’s combat experiences (Abigail M. Smith 341). Gannett gave lectures recounting her adventures, for which she received compensation. However, two years later in 1799, the “scandal” of William Godwin’s *Memoirs of the Author of A Vindication on the*

Rights of Woman, a biography of his wife Mary Wollstonecraft illuminating her “{rejection} [of] chastity and the customs of her sex” (341) and her “masculine behavior” (342), reached America. Due to the harsh criticism of Wollstonecraft’s memoir, Mann wrote “a tempered address for Gannett” (341) in 1802, in which he recanted what he wrote in his memoir for her, by “scripting a performance—*An Addr’ss Delivered with Applause*...in which [Gannett] apologized to the public for her indiscretions” (344). He even had an introduction to his *Addr’ss*, in which he assured his audience that she ““returned to the domestic sphere and adopted her proper role of mother, wife, and friend”” (349). Here, Mann fell back on his awareness of the conventions of masculine, military rhetoric by framing Gannett as the wife and mother back home in need of protection in order to gain his audience’s approval, and in addition, this move served the purpose of distracting from Gannett’s military contribution that he originally had praised.

In spite of his attempts to regain his audiences’ favor and assure them of “his negative position on female sexual deviance” (Abigail M. Smith 348), Mann ultimately could not do so because Gannett gave a demonstration “[of] her martial skills” before delivering the address Mann had written for her (350). Her display of swordsmanship and military prowess, contrary to Mann’s script, echoed what many believed was Wollstonecraft’s call for a more liberal outlook on “the role of women,” and further reinforced people viewing Mann’s original publication of Gannett’s *Memoir* as a sort of “call” encouraging “women [to] give up their domestic duties and feminine delicacy for a life of Amazonian militancy” (345). Thus, even with Mann’s attempt to try and downplay Gannett’s deviance from femininity through this

performance, the performance itself could not change the fact that “such behavior in women was not condoned in real life” (350). Regardless of what many might argue is a patriotic act that contributes to the larger effort of founding a country, contemporary patriarchal thought established the belief of where women belong in reality, and that did not include the battlefield. This same normative expectation that society regard Deborah Sampson Gannett with respect to a woman’s proper place would continue to hold true for women of the Civil War era, particularly Southern women, who “found themselves in difficult contexts as they performed duties and roles outside the domestic realm, yet were still expected, by their culture and often by themselves, to maintain traditional feminine identities” (Harrison 247). Regardless of region, though, women of the Civil War, or Victorian women, “embodied a strict moral code to preserve the caste and character of the family and of the community” (Howard and Prividera 294), and stepping outside of this code “risked being labeled ‘not respectable’” and deviating from “the cultural norms of American society” (Blanton and Cook 3). It is little wonder, then, that women who disguised themselves as soldiers for the Civil War had the strong desire to remain undetected, and unless they were detected and reported, officially or unofficially, there is no way of accurately knowing how many women actually served as soldiers in the Civil War, meaning that those women and their stories are lost (7). However, despite the inability to recover some of these women, there has been a slow, but steadily growing trend of bringing the stories of the women we do know about to wider attention.

Although there *are* books that recognize these Civil War women warriors in more recent decades, these books focus more on the individuals about whom we have

the most documented information on the women who wrote about their experiences in memoirs. However, in 2002, Deanne Blanton and Lauren M. Cook claim that “[no] previous study of the Civil War has meaningfully or comprehensively addressed these martial women” (1), referring to their meticulous, ten-year archival research for their book *They Fought Like Demons: Women Soldiers in the Civil War*. Indeed, Blanton and Cook’s work attempts to address what Barbara Biesecker might view as a move toward “the [historical] contributions of collective women” rather than the “exaltation of individual actions” (144). Since Blanton and Cook’s work, other scholars are slowly beginning to see these women as a “recently rediscovered and valuable ride into history” (Tsui 6). In fact, in the April 2020 release of *The History Channel’s* magazine *History*, some of these women, including Loreta Janeta Velazquez (Harry T. Buford), Frances Clayton (Frances Clalin), and Jennie Hodgers (Albert Cashier) have space dedicated to them under the “Women at War” segment.

Methodology

This project draws from digital (because of the COVID pandemic) archival research that examines not only the available, known personal writings of Loreta Janeta Velazquez, Sarah Emma Edmonds, and Cathay Williams, but also writings about these three Civil War-era women warriors. The project looks at each of these women in individual chapters in the form of case studies to see how they used language, or language is used about them, to either challenge or reinforce a discourse of *mythos* concerning the woman warrior. To help me with my analysis, I consider a feminist approach to *mythos*, which asks questions such as: Who created this myth, and who continues to reify it? Who was present to establish the *nomoi* grounded

within this myth? To whom does this myth cater, and who does it harm? What does this myth reinforce, and what does it erase? Are there benefits or consequences to such erasure? Why do certain myths gain more momentum and influence *nomoi* while others are dismissed or lost? When do people challenge or reinforce myths and the *nomoi* they establish? What factors are weights at the intersection of mythos and logos? Why, and how, is the myth used or developed?

Part of my decision to trace this kind of discourse in such narratives stems from a desire to not only see how it can assign women to a particular space, but also how it can exclude them from another, and be used to an advantage by some women. Certainly, there is enough evidence to prove that women soldiers of the American Civil War *did* exist, such as the case of Frances Hook who assumed the alias Frank Miller but was discovered when a surgeon treated her after she was shot in the leg (Blanton and Cook 78). However, historical inconsistencies in memoirs such as Velazquez's *The Woman in Battle* and Edmonds' *Nurse and Spy* have led to skepticism about the validity of such accounts. With that in mind, then, my focus is to trace the discourse of *mythos* according to the rhetoric actually present in these primary sources while being cognizant that these archives, archives of memories, "cannot authenticate absolutely but can (be made to) authorize nonetheless" (Biesecker 130). I do not consider the stories of these women as necessarily representative of other women fighting in the Civil War. Instead, I consider how these women defy the woman warrior myth by their actual presence in the war.

As I trace *mythos* in these texts, I adopt Linda Ferreira Buckley's practice of "immersion" (qtd. in Gold), in which I "loose—and lose—[myself] into the era [I am]

studying” (Gold 15) by taking a close look at other contemporary writings of the time period. I look at contemporary war manuals, newspaper articles, and memoirs representative both of those allegiant to the Union and to the Confederacy to understand the conventions of the time and the area, and in turn, these help me to comprehend the positionality of these women. By examining these contemporary documents, I hope to maintain awareness of my own subjectivity as a white, Southern woman of the 21st century who has no military or combat experience.

Through a Prismatic Lens: Subjectivity of the Analyst

To further examine my subjectivity as a Southern white woman, I look to scholars Shirley Wilson Logan and Jacqueline Jones Royster to frame my analysis of Cathay Williams, an African American Buffalo soldier. As I look at the available archival artifacts concerning Williams, I bear in mind that “the abolition of slavery dominated discourse among black women during the first half of the [nineteenth] century” (Logan 3), and while black women “clearly [supported]...women’s rights, they considered it more important to align themselves with racial concerns than with cross-racial gender issues” (9), and white women often excluded Black women from their work and arguments for progressive action and inclusion. With this awareness, I am mindful in my analysis that Williams’ choice to enter into direct combat does rhetorical work that does not necessarily align that of with her white counterparts. Finally, as I draw from the archive and make interpretations of the rhetorical work she does, I consider Jacqueline Jones Royster’s claim that there must be “*attention to ethical action*” and a “*commitment to social responsibility*” as I come to understand “[myself] and others...as people in specific relationships to power, privilege,

authority, and entitlement” (280-281).

In order to examine my own gender-based subjectivities, I look to Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber’s explanation of a post-structuralist approach to gender. According to Hesse-Biber, post- structuralism is ““a loose collection of theoretical positions”” rooted in “the belief that there are more satisfactory ways to theorize gender than those reliant on patriarchal or essentialist claims.” To adopt this theory, Hesse-Biber says we must “[reject] objectivity and notions of an absolute truth and a single reality,” challenge essentialism and the description of

“woman” as an identity category that is fixed and unchanging...[recognize] social...[and male] constructions and [how] the risk of [perpetuating] [them] [reinforces] dominant...or male power interests,” and “[regard] knowledge as unstable and formed by the social and material world (66).

Expanding on Hesse-Biber’s call to challenge constructions of gender as an identity that is fixed or unchanging, then, I examine each of these women’s acts of dressing as male soldiers and resisting established gender norms, particularly those established by the Cult of True Womanhood and the myth of the woman warrior, as queer rhetoric. For the basis of my understanding of the term “queer,” I draw on Charles E. Morris III and KJ Rawson’s definition of queer that does “not simply signify a nonheterosexual *identity*” (77) but also has meaning as “[challenging] the normalizing mechanism of state power to name its sexual subjects: male or female, married or single, heterosexual or homosexual, natural or perverse” by observing how “social processes...produced,...recognized...and normalized sustained identity.” Additionally, the term “[critiques]...multiple social antagonisms, including race, gender, class, nationality, and religion, in addition to sexuality” (Eng et. al qtd.

in Morris and Rawson 75). It examines layers of antagonisms—layers of myths. Although I examine how the discourse of the woman warrior is queered in the memoir of Loreta Janeta Velazquez in particular detail, due to her overt expression of deviation from the conventional gender norms of her time, each of these women’s stories I examine supports “an assertion that ‘queers have been here’” (77). However, as I strive to “challenge normativity,” I recognize that heteronormative discourse is still evident in the writings of and about these women as well as some of the scholarship concerning them. Considering such discourse, then, I am mindful that I must not “[displace] the lives of actually existing LGBT people” (75) in my own analysis, particularly as I discuss the implications of bisexual and transgender rhetorics in Velazquez’s memoir, although “both [are] historically and culturally inaccurate terms” (Rawson 333) for her time.

Reimagining Histories: Ethics of Exploring Possibility

Through this awareness, I make my interpretations, and I also heed Royster and Kirsch’s suggested practice of “critical imagination” (71). Using this tool asks us “to think between, above, around, and beyond verifiable evidence to speculate methodically about probabilities, that is, what might be likely true based on what we have in hand.” Such careful consideration and attention to what is actually available reminds us to keep in mind that we speak on behalf of women (and men), who are no longer alive to speak in defense of themselves (71), but it also reminds us of the ethical responsibility to the representative of any community we study but also to the descendants of historical subjects by treating their ancestors with respect and dignity (Kirsch, “Being on Location” 25).

As I trace the discourse of *mythos* with the awareness of my subjectivities and with careful attention to ethics, then, I analyze this discourse through the lens of what Sarah Noble Frank calls “the performative *as if*.” In “Feminist Historiography *As If*: Performativity and Representation in Feminist Histories of Rhetoric,” Frank suggests the use of “the performative *as if*” in addition to “the traditional *as such*” (189) in order to avoid “[going] against the critical goals of early revisionary histories” (188). Similar to the aphorism “dance like no one is watching,” in which it is implied that a dancer is “constrained by the watchful gaze of her audience” before “the uttering of the *as if*,” Frank argues that so too “is the feminist historian, constrained, initially, by the historical contingencies imposed by traditional historiographical values and presuppositions.” However, through the lens of the performative *as if*, “a structure” is provided in which “fictional conditions for any given claim or activity are infinitely substitutable with other possible fictional conditions” (191). Regardless of her “as if” approach, though Frank is still aware of the necessity of the “as such” of traditional research, including careful attention to authentic documents and to ethical care. Awareness of the potential disparities of “as if” and “as such” provides perspectives on the possible biases of histories.

The result of this analysis will, I hope, shed light on the factors affecting the creation of myth, its function in and impact on a society, its mutability, and implications for ownership. By focusing on a brief time frame, the American Civil War, and narratives about female warriors participant in that conflict, I offer the possibility of broader understanding of how myth functions as an underlying aspect of rhetorical activities.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter 1

Hearing of my grandmother's experiences led me to think of women who had been in actual direct combat before, and to wonder why I had never heard more about these women. Why has there not been more attention to how their actions have done significant rhetorical work in terms of social, cultural, and political progression?

Scholarship does exist that I believe supports my project, and methodologies exist that facilitate my analysis. The myth of the Amazons as well as other myths involving the female warrior have influenced and continue to influence what is considered possible regarding this space. The rhetorical devices of *mythos*, *nomos*, and *logos* can be used to explain how myth complicates conventions. The development of myth depends in part on but also affects how myth can construct an archive.

Nineteenth-century women's rhetorical contributions challenged roles associated with gender, and subsequent rhetorical scholarship has been conducted concerning women's past and present roles as soldiers. Three women warriors of the American Civil War period provide subjects for study, each case showing variation in how the myth of the woman warrior functions.

Chapter 2

In the second chapter, I examine how Loreta Janeta Velazquez, in pursuit of financial reward, queers the discourse of the woman warrior in her postwar memoir *The Woman in Battle: A Narrative of the Exploits, Adventures, and Travels of Madame Loreta Janeta Velazquez, Otherwise Known as Lieutenant Harry T. Buford, Confederate States Army*. She employs *mythos* in her discourse to explain how she successfully occupies

the combat space and to justify her cause in fighting for the Confederacy. Archival sources such as Confederate newspapers and the personal memoirs of Confederate soldiers aid in my understanding the structure of society to which Southern women must adhere. Velazquez flagrantly deviated from this prescribed norm, attempting to justify her actions by favorably comparing herself to John of Arc, and claiming to act in the traditions of chivalry and patriotism. She positioned herself in the canon of the woman warrior, mirroring the romanticized Southern male notions of chivalry and glorification of warriors past. However, she queered her adoption of male identity, and contemporary archival documents show that her later disclosure brought censure rather than approbation.

Chapter 3

In the third chapter, I look at Union soldier Sarah Emma Edmonds' *Memoirs of a Soldier, Nurse, and Spy: A Woman's Adventures in the Union Army* and compare how the discourse of mythos is at work for her in comparison to Velazquez. In particular, I argue that Edmonds deflected from any overt association to the woman warrior, in terms of a classicist understanding, by deflecting her audience's focus to another warrior archetype: the white, male, Christian soldier. I examine how she painted herself as having Christian motivations that aligned with her ideal white male warrior and thus overshadow her transgression of being a woman warrior. To do this, I examine the construction of white Christian womanhood, military relegation of Christian (and warrior) women, and the construction of the Christian soldier by male soldiers and by Edmonds. In order to support these main points, I look at northern newspaper articles offering a favorable and unfavorable review of women soldiers, an excerpt of Frances Willard's "Woman in the Pulpit" and a newspaper article

considering white women's role in Christianity, and the personal memoirs of Union soldiers. By looking at these contemporary documents, I observe how Edmonds makes rhetorical choices to avoid the *mythos* of the woman warrior and criticism of her actions through her awareness of how the construct of Christianity according to white women and white men and soldiers places her in an advantageous position.

Chapter 4

For the fourth chapter, I look at the limited documents available for African American Buffalo Soldier Cathay Williams to examine how the discourse of *mythos* is attributed to Williams in the form of the archetypical strong black woman (SBW). In particular, I look at a document provided by the National Archives, "Cathay Williams, Buffalo Soldier-With Documents," that compiles some of the few artifacts related to her, such as her enlistment papers, a single newspaper interview, papers relating to her attempt to obtain a disability pension, poetry, and essential secondary scholarship. In this discussion, I examine how the redeploying of her voice, the evidence of neglect, the lack of her response, and the implied rhetoric of the majority in the gaps and silences of her archive demonstrate assigning her the SBW myth as grounds for justifying the denial of a full military pension. Additionally, though, I examine the uptake of this myth in other genres that tell her story, such as biographies, historical fiction, poetry, and a movie. Through my examination of these genres as data, I notice how the myth of the SBW is at work, placing her in the myth of the woman warrior, but I also consider the potential implications that mythologizing might have on the preservation of her story and history.

Chapter 5

For my conclusion, I examine the common connection of mythic discourse's effect on all of these women's stories: money. I observe how the space of finance does rhetorical work for the men who respond to each of these three women's rhetorical contributions through its traditional perception as a masculine space and occupation as well as a space in which women trespass. I then discuss how we see the discourse of the woman warrior myth still at work today, particularly with regard to women soldiers being sanctioned in all forms of combat in 2016 and the emergence of female super heroes, such as Wonder Woman and the warrior women of *Black Panther* as mythical woman warrior figures. I follow these considerations by examining how these figures can serve as sites of resistance and ultimately lead to greater awareness of actual woman warriors as well as create a potential pause to consider just how much mythic discourse constructs our understanding of the world and how certain bodies are established within it. I then transition toward concluding thoughts with my experience of seeing the children's play *Secret Soldiers: Civil War Heroines in Disguise* and how I see it as a progressive step not only in informing the public, especially the young public, of the significant role that not only these women played but also of allowing the possibility to consider that women have been active in this space all along, myth or no myth. This serves as a vehicle to examine, as well as elaborate, on the fact that while there is progress, there is still a tendency to use language to compare women soldiers to mythical female warriors or to fetishize the female warrior through figures like Wonder Woman, which further reinforces *nomoi* that the rhetorical work of real female soldiers resists.

Chapter 2: Loreta Velazquez and the Queering of the Confederate Woman Warrior

The story of the siege of Orleans, in particular, I remember, thrilled my young heart, fired my imagination, and sent my blood bounding through my veins with excitement. Joan of Arc became my heroine, and I longed for an opportunity to become such another as she.

--Loreta Janeta Velazquez, *The Woman in Battle*

A Woman Writing and Fighting for Survival

In the very first chapter of her 1876 memoir, *The Woman in Battle: A Narrative of the Exploits, Adventures, and Travels of Madame Loreta Janeta Velazquez*, former Civil War Confederate female soldier Loreta Velazquez declared her admiration for a “distinguished [woman] in battle,” for whom she had the greatest affection, and whose “glorious deeds” she “[desired] to emulate”: Joan of Arc (47). By listing Joan of Arc at the end of a list of other notable women warriors, as well as dedicating more writing space describing her, Velazquez painted Joan of Arc as a universal symbol representing all women who partook in battle. Interestingly, although she made her idolization of the Maid of Orleans quite apparent, Velazquez was sure to assert that her “opportunities and circumstances were different from those of [her] ideal woman...,[her] story [had] but little resemblance to hers,” and she even went as far as to say that she did as much “for the cause [she] espoused, and the great French heroine did no more” (48). In particular, Velazquez believed their stories and experiences differed because Velazquez did not share Joan of Arc’s horrifying fate of being executed for queering the roles and conventions of gender in 13th century France by “forgetting all female decency” and “disgracefully put[ting] on the clothing of the male sex,” (Kennedy, *History.com*) or heresy. However, Velazquez

did face persecution for her own queering of gender roles and conventions in 19th century America, and it was one convention that she did not observe, in particular, that resulted in relegating her story to the realm of the myth of the woman warrior.

Velazquez's persecution came in the form of critics such as Confederate general Jubal Early, who took issue with what he saw as a memoir that "[omitted] several key players as well as "factual inaccuracies" (Wilde 257), and "the number of respected historians" who have labelled her a fraud (Blanton and Cook 16) since her memoir's publication to the present. Perhaps Velazquez's greatest transgression for Early, though, was her admitting her desire to obtain the profits her memoir accumulated, and thus resisting the Cult of True Womanhood belief that "[woman] was only to work for pure affection, without thought of money or ambition" (Welter 160). Before Velazquez began her story in the first chapter of her memoir, she stated in her preface:

"To speak plainly,...I care little for laurels of any kind just now, and am much more anxious for the money that I hope this book will bring in to me...The money I want badly, while praise, although it will not be ungratifying, I am sufficiently philosophical to get along very comfortably without" (12).

Despite saying she was not necessarily seeking praise, Velazquez's use of the word "laurel," a plant used as a wreath to crown heroes or those worthy of honor in ancient Greek and Roman myth and culture, indicated her belief that she had done a service for her country—"the sunny South" (66)—worth acknowledging. In other words, she "unhesitatingly laid claim to the fiscal rewards she believed was her due" (Leonard 262), and that payment came in the form of the proceeds of her book.

Regardless of her transparency explaining her motivation to publish her

memoir, Velazquez's status as a woman exhibiting the queer behavior of seeking money set the stage for her readers to perceive her in an unforgiving light at the very beginning of her memoir. In fact, her main contemporary critic, Jubal Early, expressed disdain and "disgust at [her] blatant confession of her financial motives" (Leonard 262), even after she personally contacted him to explain that the money would help her support her "devotion [to] the education of [her son] as her health was "failing" (qtd. in Patty Wilde 258). Perhaps if she had mentioned in her preface that her financial aspirations were motivated by a desperate desire to support her son, then Velazquez would have persuaded more of her audience to perceive her as working out of affection. She did not, though, and responses such as Early's, who took issue with her authenticity and financial motivation, and who did not relent even when Velazquez explained her financial motivation as being reinforced by her affection for her son, set a precedent for how audiences, and history, should perceive her story.

Despite her failure to appeal to audience members such as Jubal Early and convince them to accept her story and that she was a successful woman warrior, Velazquez utilized a number of rhetorical moves in an attempt to appeal to a Confederate audience and persuade them to accept her queering of the woman warrior and ultimately overlook her seeking monetary gain. These rhetorical moves were informed by an awareness of the construct of the binary of southern masculinity and femininity that informed the conventions of Southern culture, which are evident in the content of contemporary artifacts, such as the memoirs of Confederate soldiers, as well as "her media savvy" (Wilde 266). Loreta Janeta Velazquez attempted to queer her performance as the woman warrior in her memoir, *The Woman in Battle*, by

inserting herself in a woman warrior canon that paralleled Confederate soldiers' rhetorical moves constructing the Southern soldier, Confederate women, and Confederate honor. Additionally, she compared her story to Joan of Arc's as similar, and yet distinct, and ascribed her actions to the construct of Southern honor, but she was ultimately undercut due to her financial motivations.

Who was the "Woman in Battle"?

In the first chapter of her memoir, Loreta Janeta Velazquez described her childhood and her family's European origins to promote "a Spanish colonial legacy, quite similar to the South's slave culture, as a way of positioning herself within the Confederacy" (Alemán 118). Born in 1840 to a French-American mother (Bonnie Tsui 23) and a Spanish father in Havana, Cuba, she claimed that she descended from the "ancient," (Velazquez 49) "well known and highly honored"(50) family of Velazquez, whose blood is that of "Castilian nobles, [and] whose deeds are intimately connected with some of the most impressive episodes of Spanish history" (49). Among these episodes she claimed that an ancestor who oversaw the "expedition which discovered Mexico" (50). In 1849, her parents had her leave Cuba and go to the United States to live with her aunt in New Orleans to attend a Catholic school. During her time there, she used her money to buy books that discuss "the events of the lives of kings, princes, and soldiers." It was then that she learned of the siege of Orleans and declared that Joan of Arc became her "heroine" who was "peerless in her eyes" (Tsui 24) and she "longed for an opportunity to become such another as she" (Velazquez 52). Her reading of other books that included "warrior heroines of history[,] whose stories inspired [her,]" (Tsui 24) such as the Hebrew judge Deborah, the Celtic queen

Boadicea, and the nun-lieutenant Catalina de Eranso, and these stories encouraged her to “[emulate] [other] female warriors” (Blanton and Cook 42). Even after getting married at a young age and having children, she still harbored these dreams, and when her children died of illness, her “grief at their loss probably had a great influence in reviving [her] old notions about military glory, and of exciting anew [her] desires to win fame on the battlefield” (61). To distract herself from the loss of her children, Velazquez waited for her husband to leave to join the Confederate forces, and then she obtained a disguise, that consisted of a “wire net shield” under her clothes to “[conceal] her true form and [give] her something of the shape of a man” (69), “trimmed [her] hair tolerably close” (75), and used a false mustache to give “a more manly air...to [her] countenance” (80). She then recruited some soldiers, and joined the Confederate army independently under the alias of Lieutenant Harry T. Buford. Shortly after she joined her husband where he was stationed, he was killed when “a weapon exploded in his hands” (Velazquez 98).

Despite her grief over her loss, she chose to continue her service for the Confederate army as both a soldier and spy, and after solidifying her decision, she “bought a smart and mannerly [enslaved] negro boy, named Bob, of about eighteen years of age” to do chores for her and take care of her horses while she was in the army camp (101) as a means to enact her adherence to white supremacy. During her service, Velazquez fought at the battles of Bull Run, and Ball’s Bluff, Fort Donelson, and Shiloh. Additionally, she alternated between serving as a soldier and doing spy work, as she “had a talent for assuming disguises” (139). In her first work as a spy, she dressed as a woman and went to Washington to the War Department to meet

Secretary of War Simon Cameron, and coincidentally, President Lincoln (152). Later, she went to New Orleans, in which she disguised herself as a male citizen, and she was eventually arrested under suspicion of her gender. When her gender was discovered, she was fined ten dollars and imprisoned for ten days (193), before she “had to smuggle [herself]...among the soldiers again” (194) to rejoin the military and return to combat. She was arrested one more time before her career as a soldier ended.

Due to the request of her second husband, his untimely death, and “[her] secret now known to a great many persons” Velazquez decided to serve the Confederacy as a spy, which role she performed until the ending of the war (354). She married two more times, one marriage the result of a scouting trip to Venezuela (559) to convince Confederates to move there, and the other to a mining man in Utah (607). Eleven years after the war ended, she published her memoir detailing her experiences as a soldier and a spy and claimed that the memoir was written based on memory (12), a concession that Confederate General Jubal Early capitalized on as one of his criticisms concerning the accuracy of her account (Leonard 256).

Her Archive

Because of criticisms like Jubal Early’s, Loreta Janeta Velazquez’s archive not only consists of her memoir *The Woman in Battle*, but it also includes contemporary responses to her memoir, such as book reviews, letters, and newspaper articles that further reinforced her story. Among some of these contemporary responses is a review of her memoir by Reverend J. William Jones, who said “her account ‘will be read by those who are fond of the marvelous,’” although he was not certain “‘how far it can be received as *history*,’” and he questioned how Velazquez possibly achieved all she did

and where according to the dates she provided (Wilde 259). Another contemporary reaction is in a letter from literary luminary Mark Twain, in which he claimed he turned down the chance to collaborate on her book saying, ““The woman is a fraud—her assertions are without any foundation whatever...I declined very positively”” (qtd. in Wilde 262). Responses in contemporary artifacts such as these provide the foundation for what would become a scholarly trend to regard Velazquez’s memoir with skepticism concerning its authenticity, and with derision.

The responses of historians concerning Velazquez’s *The Woman in Battle* have built upon the initial skepticism resulting from contemporary critics who first took issue with it, and thus a significant number of artifacts and amount of scholarship has been attached to Velazquez’s story over the years to support it “as largely fiction” (Blanton and Cook 270). Historian Elizabeth D. Leonard examines Jubal Early’s grievances and his claims of ““several inconsistencies, absurdities, and impossibilities”” that made Velazquez a pretender (256). She includes his capitalizing on the fact that Velazquez and her editor, C.J. Worthington, both confess in the preface to her memoir that the piece is “a product of memory” as well as “the stylistic skill and judgment of an editor sensitive to the demands of popular readership” (256). Additionally, Leonard notes Early’s claim of having an interview with Velazquez and ultimately being ““satisfied that she had not written the book of which she professed to be the author”” (256). Historian Richard H. Hall observes that many of her “anecdotes...have been verified,” but challenging the veracity of Velazquez’s story stems from “the difficulty of filtering out the myths, the garbled and distorted information in newspaper stories, and her own deceptions, and then of isolating and more clearly establishing the facts”

(200). Blanton and Cook, who argue that “the veracity of her narrative is corroborated in Civil War-era newspapers, the testimony of fellow Confederates, and government documents,” still concede that “there are glaring historical inconsistencies in the book, and Velazquez did indeed cram a great deal of activity into very short periods of time” (270). William C. Davis’s scathing assessment posits that she was someone who started as “a teenage prostitute in New Orleans” (5) and then became a con artist who “virtually invented and refined techniques that confidence women would employ for a generation” (3) to manipulate the media into believing her story. The main concern for most historians, then, is to assess the accuracy of Velazquez’s account based on available archival artifacts through the lens of traditional research, or research that involves “meticulous treatment of historical sources” and that avoids “passively [responding] to suit the researcher’s particular agenda (Bizzell 7).

Methodology

Due to discrepancies scholarship and archival artifacts have exposed revolving around the “truth” of Velazquez’s narrative as opposed to the “Truth” of Civil War history, I am informed by Cheryl Glenn’s call to observe “the fruitful and necessary tension between history and history writing” (“Truth, Lies, and Method” 387) as I examine and analyze Velazquez’s queering of woman warrior discourse and Confederate honor and their relationship to the myth of the woman warrior. I am especially mindful of Glenn’s point that while history often constitutes “a past [that] was not really there,” histories still “do (or should do) something, and they never reflected a neutral reality” (388). With the consideration of Velazquez’s

embellishments and selectivity regarding her memoir, then, I also consider the potential for selectivity and embellishment, as well as the use of intentional language, in the contemporary historical discourses surrounding Velazquez's memoir. I do this because historiography must "disrupt...traditional memory" for the "interest of both the present and future" in order to address silences, challenge absences, and assert women's contributions to public life" (389). Essentially, attention to accuracy is not my concern, as feminist historiography questions accuracy in terms of who is writing history, who guards and preserves historical writings, where those historical writings are held and who has access to them, and how historical writing is censored, erased, or completely disregarded.

To frame my understanding of how Velazquez is situated in historiography as she queers the woman warrior, I look to Charles E. Morris III and KJ Rawson's definition of "queer," who do not define it as just a nonheterosexual identity but also as resisting any kind of "normalizing mechanism" and the social antagonisms associated with it. With this framework in mind, I first examine the construct of the Confederate soldier and the Confederate woman in the memoirs of Confederate veterans Ephraim McDowell Anderson, Royall W. Figg, Johnson Hagood, John S. Mosby, Jubal Early, John B. Morgan, and Arthur Herbert to see how Velazquez tries to mirror a Confederate construct of an ideal warrior. Second, I discuss how Velazquez queers the woman warrior through her resistance to the Amazon myth and her self-comparison to Joan of Arc to justify her own actions, while also trying to assert a distinction to avoid causing offense. I then examine how Velazquez queers the woman warrior in particular ways in an attempt to directly appeal to a sense of

Southern honor that Confederate soldiers had constructed. Through Glenn's explanation of historiography's function, and Morris and Rawson's definition of queer, I observe the rhetorical strategies that Velazquez employed in an attempt to navigate around the myth of the woman warrior, but I also analyze why those strategies either fell short or exacerbated her already precarious position due to her financial motivations.

Sparta and the South: Constructing the Confederate Soldier and the Confederate Woman

The Confederate Soldier

In order to understand the rhetoricity of Velazquez's queering of the woman warrior, it is important to understand how Confederate soldiers painted themselves and Southern women with regard to their understanding of the ideal Confederate soldier and Confederate women's place regarding warfare. In particular, they framed gender as a binary of masculinity and femininity with heteronormative gender roles. As a means to illustrate this binary, then, they turned to a history of warfare steeped in classical tradition, the history of Sparta.

In the memoirs of numerous Confederate veterans and soldiers, there was a move to refer to Spartan culture as being exemplary of how a Confederate warrior should be perceived. In the memoirs of Ephraim McDowell Anderson and Royall W. Figg, both men turned to classical history—the superior military history of Sparta—as a comparison that served to define the strength and fortitude of the masculine, white, Confederate soldier. Ephraim McDowell Anderson of the First Missouri Confederate's memoir utilized a range of Greek history and culture to defend the right of secession,

Southern independence, and the preservation of Southern culture. More significantly, though, he referred to “that devoted band, who gave their lives to save the freedom of their country” (122) or the Spartan 300, who stood against the Persians at Thermopylæ, as being similar to the soldiers of the Confederacy who took a last stand to defend their homeland and independence against impossible odds. Royall W. Figg also glorified the 300 and the Spartan warrior as he romantically reflected on the loss of his fallen comrades exclaiming:

‘Will not the ‘three hundred’ live forever! Was it in vain they died? What was their short and humble lives worth to them and the world? But dying, they have been a lesson to a hundred generations, and Sparta will be honored as long as one brave heart survives...They are akin to all the bright and noble spirits that the world has embalmed in song and story (261-62).

Anderson and Figg’s epideictic rhetoric of Sparta was a similar move to what John Belk argued the Roman poet Horace attempted to do in his odes as he “[provided] a set of values for Roman boys: courage, fierceness, and Spartan discipline” in which he [hoped] Roman boys will “naturalize’ these values and see “Rome’s destiny as the next great warrior culture” (162).

Additionally, Anderson and Figg forwarded the ingrained belief of “ ‘the Spartan atmosphere’ that was necessary for producing combat leaders” (Howard Callaway, qtd. in L. Michael Allsep 393) within the Confederacy. In other words, Anderson and Figg mimicked Horace’s rhetorical influence by framing Confederate soldiers as not only fighting for the preservation of Southern independence and culture, but they also framed themselves, their culture, and others’ perceptions of them as the successors of what they believed to be the epitome of a warrior that will live on in the songs and stories—mythologization—passed down in history.

However, while both Anderson and Figg's words reflected what men deemed, and continued to reify, as the standard of a warrior and masculinity, they never acknowledge that Spartan culture also "institutionalized...homosexuality in a way not inconsistent with the manly virtues of the warrior, but never often enough to constitute more than exceptions to a general rule" (Allsep 386). Whether out of ignorance or the choice to be selective with history, though, neither Anderson nor Figg acknowledge the homosexual element of Spartan men's lives. More specifically, there is no recognition of the "'received model' of Greek homosexuality," or the pederasty model, that Spartan warriors adopted in order to foster and establish close bonds amongst comrades. This model promoted the homosexual relationship between "an older male and a younger," in which the older male, the *erastés* (lover), who was between 20 and 30 years, was a lover *and* mentor to the younger male, the *eronemos* (beloved), who was between 12 and 18 (Bertosa 8). Anderson and Figg, however, focus on the glorification of these men dying for their cause when the odds were against them, which is similar to the "Lost Cause" narrative, a narrative of "heroism, patriotism, and/or the defense of states' rights" (O'Connell 463-64) against the larger force of the Union that "valorized the Confederacy and ignored the realities of slavery" (462). By omitting the homosexual aspect of Spartan culture and emphasizing the glory of the 300's sacrifice as similar to the sacrifices of Confederate soldiers, then, Anderson and Figg paint Sparta's idealized warrior culture as heteronormative.

Not only did Confederate soldiers forward a heterosexual understanding of the Spartan warrior culture that they took on as their own, but they also made plain their

belief that their figure of the idealized, Spartan-like, soldier was strictly white. When discussing the exchange of prisoners in his memoir, Johnson Hagood observed how “[the] Confederate proclamation outlawing negro troops and white officers commanding them was well known to the enemy”(184) and that the “negro prisoners” would not be “[introduced]...into the negotiations” (183). In essence, because African American troops were outlawed in the Confederacy, the Confederates did not recognize these African American men as prisoners of war, and in turn, did not recognize them as soldiers. By not recognizing African American men as legitimate soldiers, they were excluding them from the Spartan-warrior parallel, because the Spartan warrior had been deemed a sort of ancestor of the Confederate white soldier and masculinity.

The Confederate Woman

In addition to illustrating themselves as the equivalent of the heteronormative Spartan warrior, not only did Confederate men exclude non-white men from the space of combat, but they excluded women, by portraying them as the opposite of a masculine and capable Spartan warrior and framing them as victims in need of rescue or protection, passive observers who glorified the men who fought. Indeed, one soldier, Colonel John S. Mosby, relied on the mythic trope of warriors saving the woman carried off when he reflected on the actions of Union General Philip Sheridan. Specifically, he believed that if Sheridan had sent his Major’s wife and mother-in-law to prison, then it would “stimulate the activity of [his] men,” just as “Homer’s heroes were not paralyzed when Helen was carried off to Troy; it only aroused their martial ambition” (373). Ironically, Mosby’s analogy to Helen did the opposite of what the

sophist Gorgias strived to do in his “Encomium of Helen,” which was “to free [a woman]...[who] had the ill omen of her name...of blame and, having reproved her detractors as prevaricators and proved the truth, to free her from ignorance” (50).

Gorgias appealed to his audience to see Helen as a woman whose voice was redeployed by men who blamed her for the Trojan War, and to allow for her a space to speak back to how men had spoken and written her history for her. Mosby’s reference to Helen, then, was the opposite of a sophistic perspective, in which he placed Helen—Southern women—in her traditional role of passive victim dependent on the actions of men.

Regardless of Gorgias’ attempt to give Helen a voice that at least allowed her to speak to her situation of captivity and whether or not she was willing or if she was proactively helping herself, Mosby’s use of Helen as an analogy to the helpless woman was just one example of the archetype whereby other men, such as Jubal Early, painted Confederate women as helpless victims of the war. When describing what he witnessed after the pillaging and burning of Confederate homes by Union forces, General Jubal Early refers to the women affected as passive victims and repeatedly uses the phrase “helpless women and children” (298). In essence, he equated an ideal quality of Southern women’s femininity with the expectation that they either are, or will, act weak in the face of adversity due to their reliance on men’s strength.

Perhaps the most significant rhetorical move that Confederate soldiers made to delegate Confederate women’s role in warfare is in the comparison to Spartan women, another reference to the idealized Spartan culture. Just as Confederate men aligned

themselves with the warriors of Sparta, so too did they align Confederate women with the figure of the Spartan woman. Known for being drastically different from the women of Athens, particularly in terms of domesticity and the freedom to move around within the city state, a Spartan woman's main role was to serve the state by reproducing more Spartans or to die in childbirth as a service to the state. Ideally, this would mean giving birth to a healthy son, who would go through the rigorous process of training for combat for most of his childhood and into his early adult years. If he survived this process, he was symbolically sent off to battle through the act of his mother offering him his shield, reminding him of his duty to either win in battle or die a glorious and honorable death.

Confederate soldiers such as Colonel John Mosby, John B. Gordon, and Arthur Herbert celebrated such symbolism of women and their place in warfare. Mosby admitted a wish for the women of the South to hold such reverence for the Southern soldier, saying, "I want to see in Southern women some of that Spartan heroism of the mother who said to her son, when she buckled his armor: 'Return with your shield or return upon it'" (105). John B. Gordon likened a woman from Mississippi to "the heroines of Sparta who gave their hair for bow-strings" and who "have been immortalized by the muse of history" when she made the economic sacrifice to burn her cotton fields so that the Union forces would not find a use for them (118). Arthur Herbert illustrated Confederate women as going through the same ritual of proudly sending off their men to war with smiles and happy words, saying "No Spartan women of old gave up their nearest and dearest, with more loyalty or heroism" (3). Such a reverence for the Spartan woman suggested a romantic notion that while it was desired

that Confederate women support and glorify—mythologize—the white Confederate soldier, she must do so while remaining behind in her designated space doing her designated role. She must provide her hair for bow strings, or sacrifice something of herself—her cotton fields, her need for clothes—to make bandages or clothes for the soldiers. She must hand the shield, the role of soldier, to her *son* and not take it upon herself or hand it to her *daughter*, regardless of either one of them having just as much of a will or reason to fight.

In the very first chapter of her memoir, Loreta Velazquez attempted to appeal to her audience and “validate her reasons for breaking traditional gender roles” by “[placing] herself within a lineage, [and rhetorical canon] of woman warriors (Jessica Enoch and Jordynn Jack 522). Before ending the chapter with a focus on her idol woman warrior, Joan of Arc, Velazquez listed other noteworthy woman warriors of history to support her claim that “women have nothing to blush for in the martial deeds of those of their sex who have stood upon the battlefield” (45). Her list included: the Hebrew Judge Deborah, Semiramis, Queen of the Assyrians, Tomyris, the Scythian queen, Boudicea, the queen of the Iceni of Britain, Bona Lombardi, an Italian peasant girl, the Spanish Catalina de Erauso—the “nun lieutenant”—who fought in South America, the American Molly Pitcher, and the Polish woman Appolina Jagiello. By documenting this list “[o]n the basis of historical example” (Tsui 24) in her memoir, Velazquez established a feminist warrior heritage—a woman warrior canon—forwarding that women in direct combat was not a single occurrence, and there was a range of cultures, geographies, and time periods these women represented. By listing these women, Velazquez mirrored Confederate soldiers’ glorification of a male, Spartan—Confederate—warrior culture by

establishing that there was a strictly *woman* warrior culture and that there had been one all along.

Of Amazons, Of Joan of Arc, Of Loreta Velazquez: Establishing and Queering the Woman Warrior

The Queerness of Joan of Arc and Loreta Velazquez

After creating a list of woman warriors throughout history, Velazquez dedicated three sections of her memoir's first chapter to three woman warriors of history. The first two were for the "Nun-Lieutenant" Catalina de Erauso and Apollonia Jagiello, and the third one to conclude the chapter was for Joan of Arc. Ending her list of woman warriors with a section for Joan of Arc was particularly significant, as it was in this section that Velazquez drew a comparison of her story to Joan's, saying "I did all that was possible for me to do...for the cause I espoused, and the great French heroine did no more" (48). Over the course of her memoir, though, Velazquez's language describing her perception of Joan shifted from viewing her as "the greatest and noblest of them all" (47) to calling her "a mere girlish fancy" (138). This transition of Joan's portrayal suggested that while Velazquez acknowledged how parts of Joan's queering of the woman warrior, her wearing dress traditionally for men (what we might refer to as gender queer with modern eyes) justified *her* own queering of the woman warrior, it also implied that she had an understanding of how Joan's queerness viewed in the public consciousness could impact her own story as a woman warrior.

Joan's queerness, known by present audiences as cross-dressing, did important rhetorical work for, and justified, Velazquez's queering of the woman warrior because it "abrogated the destiny of womankind" through her "[transcending] her sex" and

“[setting] herself apart and [usurping] the privileges of the male and his claim to superiority” (Warner 131). In order to promote her claim of being commanded by God to liberate France from English rule as virtuous and to successfully recruit manpower, Joan had to persuade men that she had a position that held authority. Her answer to demonstrating such authority and her virtue was through her “self image,” which meant she needed to reject her femininity, and “[assume] the garb of virtue,” or the “apparel of men,” as virtue was a trait “associated with [men] (vir)” (133). Therefore, Joan adopted the male fashion of the “doublet and hose” and the “pudding-basin” (137) hairstyle in order to have the outward appearance of a man’s body, believing that such a change would enact the privileges that came with a male body through representation of male dress. For the men who were on “her side,” her queerness “for a time...confirmed their faith,” (82) as she declared from the beginning that her purpose, and her dress dedicated to that purpose, were driven by the voices she heard from God, or “the angels whose company she loved” (131) in order to free her country. Essentially, Joan had forwarded her cause, and her queerness, as grounded in patriotic zeal, but especially in Christian precepts. The need for male dress in order to have the associated privilege of successfully becoming a Confederate soldier was certainly not lost on Velazquez, but she also knew that she would have to justify *her* act of queerness, and so she looked to aspects of Joan’s queerness that supported her own queering of the woman warrior.

When Velazquez began the section about Joan of Arc in her memoir’s first chapter, she referred to Joan as “[a] religious enthusiast” who was executed for being “a perpetual menace, and a perpetual encouragement...even as a prisoner”, before

calling her “a great-hearted patriot [who] remains to all time as an example of what a woman may do if she only dares, and dares to do greatly” (47). By acknowledging Joan’s capacity to affect men through their intimidation by her or her inspiring them, Velazquez acknowledged Joan’s rhetoricity as a woman warrior, but at the same time, she called attention to Joan’s religious and patriotic motivation. Essentially, Velazquez reminded her reader that Joan’s actions—her woman warrior status, her queerness—are noble, and therefore are justified. This reminder was a preface for Velazquez’s readers to absorb the information she shared at the end of the chapter.

At the end of the first chapter of her memoir, Velazquez mentioned again that she “longed for an opportunity to become such another as [Joan of Arc]. She revealed that:

while residing with my aunt, it was frequently my habit... to dress myself in my cousin’s clothes, and to promenade by the hour before the mirror, practicing the gait of a man, and admiring the figure I made in masculine raiment. I wished I could trade places with my brother Josea. If I could have done so I would never have been a doctor, but would have marked myself out for a military career, and have disported myself in the gay uniform of an officer (53).

Through this structure of her first chapter, Velazquez asserted Joan of Arc’s queerness as justified due to its noble underpinnings of “religious enthusiasm” and patriotic zeal. Additionally, though, the mentioning of Joan before elaborating on her own queerness implied that Velazquez had the same understanding of the necessity of changing her image—her body—by means of male dress in order to have the privilege of access to the space of the military, a space occupied and ruled by male bodies.

Although Velazquez praised Joan for the rhetoricity of challenging gender and its constructs, there were certainly features of Joan’s story from which Velazquez deviated. The most significant deviation noticeable in their stories was Velazquez’s

sexuality in connection to her queerness as opposed to Joan's. In order to comprehend the significance of the distinction between Velazquez's queerness and Joan's in terms of sexuality, it is necessary to examine how Joan's queerness functioned in terms of cultural context in 15th-century France.

While Joan was a cross-dresser who rejected her femininity and took on male dress (Warner 133), it cannot be concluded that she was a lesbian, even if it is tempting to do so today (135). She still insisted that she was "La Pucelle, The Maid," and she "never proclaimed that she was a boy," nor did she "once [pretend] that she was male" (137). For Joan, her queerness was "a device...to make something of herself...to lay claim to greatness beyond the expected potential of her sex" (135). When she was put on trial in 1431, the charges laid against her were "the truth of her voices" and "her male dress" (126), in which her dress, in particular, "offended a divinely ordained order" (Warner 90). Her male dress had "[perverted] biology" as well as "[upset] the social hierarchy" (133). The focus of Joan's transgression for queerness, then, had more to do with how *dress* represented the gender of her body and its associated privileges for the men with authority, the Church, as opposed to her own perception of the gender and sexuality with which she identified.

Velazquez's queerness not only associated with her dress but with her exploration of gender as she "was disposed to murmur at Providence for having created [her] a woman" (53). While Joan still declared that she was still a woman—La Pucelle—while wearing men's clothes and a man's hairstyle, Velazquez called herself the man Lieutenant Harry T. Buford, and she changed her body, her voice, her mannerisms, and her name in order to be performative in her identity as a male soldier.

She “concealed [her] true form,” her “woman’s waist,” with “wire net shields” to “[give] [her] something of the shape of a man” (69), used a “false mustache” to give “a more manly air...to [her] countenance” (80), tried “[her] best to walk with a masculine gait,” and when she spoke, she did so “with as masculine a manner as [she] could put on” (65). When Velazquez interacted with women in her disguise—her constructed male body—she acted the role of protector by “[drawing] [herself] up to full height” and saying to a drunk soldier “ ‘Excuse me sir, but these ladies are under my charge, and I am able to take care of them without assistance’ ” in “as severe a manner as [she] could” (101). Thus, the measures Velazquez took to enact her queerness was not just about becoming a man in dress, but in body and mind, as well, as she “[destabilized] the South’s normative gender categories” (Alemán 112). She did the same as Joan in dress, but she went beyond and further queered Joan’s queering of the woman warrior through her performative actions while she identified as Harry T. Buford.

Velazquez also further queered Joan’s example of deviation of the woman warrior through the indication of her exploring her sexuality and “[opening] a narrative space for the enactment of protolesbian desire” (Alemán 116) in her memoir while she embodied her male soldier alias. In the fifth chapter of her memoir, she described what Jesse Alemán calls a “same-sex [seduction]” (116) when she decided to have “mild little flirtation” with a young girl, Miss Sadie, as she thought “it would be necessary...to learn how to make herself immensely agreeable to the ladies” in order to be successful in her role as “a dashing young Confederate officer.” While having this flirtation, she admitted she “had some curiosity to know how love-making went from the masculine standpoint” (Velazquez 87). After describing encounters

with other women in which she was “breaking young ladies’ hearts by [her] fascinating figure and manner” (204), Velazquez seemed to have been self-congratulatory without fully understanding the consequences of publicly admitting behavior perceived as scandalous.

“The Greatest and Noblest of Them All”: Resisting the Amazon Label

Perhaps one of the most notable aspects of Velazquez’s referencing Joan of Arc repeatedly throughout her memoir, as well as highlighting convenient aspects of Joan’s queerness, was that it resisted the Amazon label that male reporters often used to identify women soldiers of the Civil War by instead referring to Joan, an actual woman warrior. In archived newspapers of the Civil War for the South, there was a popular trend to frame women soldiers whose sex was “revealed,” or “discovered,” as “romantic young ladies” (Blanton and Cook 145) and compare them to some of the most referenced women warriors of western myth, the Amazons. An 1862 article from *The Milton Chronicle* titled “A North Carolina Amazon” described a “Mrs. Blayton” who “cut her hair off, put on men’s clothing, and went with [her husband] into camps and enlisted for the war” and had “[made] her sex known in order to accompany her husband home” (2). Such rhetoric framed her as deviating because she placed her womanly duty to her husband before her duty to the conventions of femininity. In fact, according to Blanton and Cook, “the female soldiers who claimed patriotic zeal or love for a man as their reasons for fighting were rewarded with the longest articles and no little amount of praise” (150). Velazquez, on the other hand, went against her husband’s belief that “it is out of all reason that [she] should even think of associating in the manner [she] proposed” (66) by not only going to war against his wishes but by

remaining in the army after his death. According to this suggested meaning of “Amazon” then, Velazquez did not fit the description.

There were a number of newspapers who followed this popular trend of identifying female soldiers by the Amazon label. Velazquez herself was very likely referred to as an Amazon in an 1874 article in *The Mobile Register*, “A Confederate Amazon.” It is probable that this referred to Velazquez because it mentioned a woman, a Mrs. E.H. Bonner, who went by Lieut. Harry T. Buford, during her time of service. In her memoir, Velazquez claimed to “[perform] services other than those of a strictly military character under the *pseudonym* of Lieutenant Harry T. Buford.” Additionally, when she served as a spy for the Confederacy, she did not give her actual name, but rather she would “[give] [her] name as Mrs. Williams” (314). Therefore, “E.H. Bonner” very well could have been another alias for her to mislead Union agents as she spied among their ranks.

Regardless of who is named, though, the “Confederate Amazon” in this article is described to be:

filled with that unprecedented love of country and patriotism, so beautifully exemplified by the women of the south during the war, and unwilling to see those whom she held most dear march to the front, she made preparations, notwithstanding her sex, to participate actively in the strife (*The Mobile Register*).

Certainly, this description was epideictic, but it was soon followed with the reassurance that her behavior has been corrected when it was discovered that “the gallant young officer was not of the stronger sex,” and she was persuaded to “participate in active warfare” by “[acting] as a spy.” As a result, “Amazon” was utilized as a means to highlight her temporary soldier career as an oddity. It made sense, then, for Velazquez to

highlight Joan's career, because not only is Joan an actual woman warrior, but her queerness is associated with a holy purpose.

"A Mere Girlish Fancy": Assigned the Amazon Label

To address the possibility of women using Joan of Arc as a justification for female warriors, men made rhetorical moves to utilize Joan's name as a tool for shaming and dismissing Civil War female soldiers. One of these men was Confederate soldier Johnson Hagood. In his memoir, Hagood praised the "ideal" Southern woman for her virtues and for confining herself within her assigned gender roles by juxtaposing her to Joan. When General Johnson Hagood recounted addressing his battalion as he presented the flag sewn for them by Southern ladies, he proclaimed:

But while the sons of the South have vindicated the blood they have inherited from patriot sires, her daughters have illustrated all that is admirable in the attributes of woman. No Joan has arisen from them to gird on the harness of battle... There has been no need for them to unsex themselves, nor will there ever be a death of manhood requiring such sacrifice while a woman remains the true and holy creature which God made her (114).

By saying the "attributes of [the] [Southern] woman" before mentioning Joan of Arc, Hagood established the expectation for his reader of a comparison of the ideal woman to one who is exceptional because of the gravity of her choice to step out-of-bounds. He compared the virtues of the Southern woman to a woman who was punished for her actions in the harshest manner for her queerness, her heresy, by being burned at the stake, a punishment also administered for women accused of witchcraft. In fact, in the nineteenth-century, "America had inherited another image of woman, one associated with deception or even witchcraft, that developed into the political symbol of a woman 'passing' for a man" (Isenburg 47). Clearly, the taboo of women cross-dressing from

13th century Europe had lingered and been passed on in men's rhetorical tradition all the way to 19th century America.

While there was epideictic rhetoric that praised and glorified Joan's actions and deviance, and Velazquez placed her on the highest pedestal as her favorite of women warriors to serve as a model to emulate at the beginning of her memoir, Hagood's contrasting the actions of southern women to Joan's, and the use of the verb "unsex," appealed more to the negative connotations associated with Joan's career as a warrior and her contribution to history. Indeed, Hagood further established the impossibility of women having such a role by strongly proclaiming that "nor will there ever be such a death of manhood requiring such sacrifice." Such a proclamation echoed "white men's fears of their sexual inadequacy" (Cobb 174) as well as their belief that "masculine virtue assumed a larger, national purpose of reaffirming the state's power to protect the strong over the weak" (Isenburg 104).

Men of the press also fostered a discourse around Joan's name to make it a label for shaming or even demonizing women soldiers. This was the case for a woman soldier named "Emily," who "fell in the service of her country, which she fondly hoped to save" and who had a "hallucination" that she "was a second modern Joan of Arc, called by Providence to lead our armies to certain victory in this contest" (*The Lawrence Tribune* 14 April 1864). Although there was epideictic rhetoric for her patriotism, the use of "hallucination" and its association to Joan suggested a mocking tone, as it referenced to a popular belief of Joan's hearing voices from God, which resulted in connecting her to witchcraft. Additionally, the use of Joan's name in association with women soldiers served the same function as the use of the word

Amazon to frame women soldiers as eccentric and a rare occurrence. Although she was a real woman warrior, Joan of Arc had become mythologized over the course of history, so the use of her name to describe other real women warriors had the connotation of a mythical reference. As a result, then, even when a woman soldier was praised for her actions through a comparison to Joan of Arc, the implication was that the comparison also served as an indictment for transgression.

When considering the possible connotations attached to the Amazon label, perhaps it was no surprise that Velazquez avoided using that term. However, just as men used the title of the mythical Amazon warrior as a label to cast dispersions at U.S. Civil War women soldiers, so too did men over the course of history mythologize Joan of Arc's name into Amazon mythology. In fact, "the name Jeanne d'Arc, Joan of Arc, is an invention," and it was a name that Joan herself never used (Warner 184). Instead it was "a disturbing example of how culture, [and its *mythos*] works on history to recreate its protagonists in familiar, [*logical*,] forms," as "Arc" can have the meanings of "bow," "arch," and "curve" (184), and the bow was a "weapon of the Amazon" (185). As a result, Joan's very name became synonymous with "Amazon." The mythologizing of Joan's name was largely due to "no other "stock of knowledge about human behavior to draw on" in order to frame her success and influence, and "she was assimilated into Amazon folklore in order to pluck out the heart of her mystery and thereby to tame her" (197). Her name had this double-negation connected to it, then, when men used it to label and identify female soldiers of the Civil War.

All of this considered, perhaps Velazquez calling Joan a girlish fantasy in later

parts of her memoir was intentional. When she recalled visiting Rheims Cathedral, the place where Joan attended the coronation of Charles VII, she admitted that while she could “better appreciate the performances of Joan of Arc at their true value,” the “romance had been pretty well knocked out of [her] by the rough experience of life” (543). She acknowledged how Joan’s queerness helped support her in her own pursuits, but she also attempted to establish a distance between them due to the use of Joan’s name in the discourse surrounding female soldiers. It made no difference though, as her mentioning Joan, a woman who had the stigma of queering the woman warrior associated with her name, would only exacerbate the negative reaction to the main issue her audience would take with her memoir: her financial motivations.

Upholding Southern Honor

Upholding Southern Honor Through the Masculine Code

Velazquez concluded the second chapter of her memoir saying, “As for me, I was perfectly wild on the subject of war; and although I did not tell my husband so, I was resolved to forsake him if he raised his sword against the South” (61). By having these words at the beginning of her memoir, Velazquez attempted to establish immediately that “even a Cuban woman can be a ‘genuine Southerner’” (Alemán 118) by choosing to honor the South over loyalty to her husband. Thus, she was inserting herself into the Confederacy by appealing to her Southern audience’s sense of, and appreciation for, Confederate honor. Certainly, one way that she appealed to this sense of honor was through the language describing her performative actions.

Southern honor itself was a construct in which “southerners generated a counterdiscourse through lost-cause iconography that valorized the heroics of

southern manhood (Alemán 117). This was evidenced in the memoirs of Confederate soldiers but also in the cultural events people attended, such as a “mock medieval tournament” in which “mounted Confederate officers” fought for “honor of a belle” as well as demonstrated that “[gallantry] was a main strength of the Confederacy” (Channing 8). In the years between the end of the war and the publication of Velazquez’s memoir, reading material and cultural events informed the Lost Cause narrative and exemplified how Confederate honor took shape with regard to performativity.

Velazquez’s establishing a woman warrior canon and highlighting the positive aspects of Joan’s queerness, such as her patriotic zeal, were tools she used to mimic the worship of Spartan warrior culture and romantic knighthood that were embedded in Confederate honor. She used her queerness to be masculine in her appearance by “parting with [her] long and luxuriant hair” (75) creating her masculine body frame and applying facial hair. She also used it, though, to enact Southern honor by taking on the gallant role of protecting the women “under [her] charge” (101), and in reinforcing women’s prescribed role of being safely left behind through gestures such as “producing a young lady’s photograph” to a woman who flirted with her, and telling her she was “‘as good as married’” (123). In doing so, Velazquez was ostensibly offering the young lady a reason of honor to cease any flirtation.

Upholding Southern Honor by Upholding Slavery

A true gallant Southern gentleman of the nineteenth century required a servant, so acquiring an enslaved person, “Bob,” was an important element in completing Velazquez’s act. In so doing she was further embodying white masculinity and

reinforcing the perception that she was a “true son of the South.”

Velazquez reported that Bob was eager to participate in military life:

My colored boy Bob was a better soldier than some of the white men who thought themselves immensely his superiors; and having possessed himself of a gun, he fought as well as he knew how, like the rest of us. When the enemy gave way, I could hear Bob yelling vociferously; and I confess that I was proud of the darkey’s pluck and enthusiasm (132).

Bob’s prowess reflected well on Velazquez and supported her role of Southern officer and gentleman. Comparing him to the white soldiers could have been a projection of her own sense of equivalence and superiority, in that she had agency through his actions. Bob was acting at her direction, not on his own volition. The positive results of his performance reinforced her presentation of the gallant Southern white man dominating a Black man. This explained, then, why Velazquez was not sympathetic when Bob was afraid:

Bob... The darkey was just beginning to have some appreciation of what fighting was really like, and was badly scared. I told him that if he ran off and left me, I would kill him if I ever caught him again; which threat had its desired effect, for he stuck to me through thick and thin. (106)

However pleased Velazquez was with Bob’s performance, as it reflected on her own presumed masculinity, his active participation in fighting would not have been universally accepted throughout the South. Whether Black men should be permitted to fight was the subject of debate throughout most of the war, based in part on the assumption of inferior capability, and in part on concern that they might prove all too competent. There had for some years been great concern that if Black men were taught military skills, they would rise up against and harm their enslavers, as had happened in the case of the Nat Turner rebellion. This fear was so great that in some

Southern states laws were passed restricting the ability of Black people to own guns, or even hunting dogs (Ore 49).

Limitations on such rights of ownership extended further to ownership of real property or engaging in certain occupations, because Black people were legally considered “inferior” and not entitled to rights granted to those who were citizens. In the well-known Dred Scott case, the Court’s decision was based on the argument summarized by Chief Justice Taney that in the view of the Founding Fathers, Black people were “so inferior” that “they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect” (Ore 40).

By ascribing to this viewpoint, in consonance with the perspective of a Southern gentleman of honor, Velazquez would not be expected to see any problem with placing Bob in harm’s way for the purpose of enhancing her own masculine prestige and glory. According to the definitions of the Southern code of honor, Bob had no rights and therefore no say in the matter. When Velazquez, fearing discovery, decided to hire Bob out, again he had no say in the matter—not only was he “inferior, with no rights,” he was also “property,” and according to the precepts of a Southern gentleman, Velazquez had the unquestioned right to dispose of him or otherwise derive income from his use-and likely she needed the money.

“She [Wrote] About Her Exploits for Money”: The Undercutting of Velazquez

Velazquez employed multiple rhetorical moves to justify her queering of the woman warrior and to appeal to her audience, particularly her Southern readers. Through the example of the Lost Cause narrative, a construction that shifted focus from the Confederacy justifying slavery to Confederate soldiers being similar to

Spartan heroes or gallant knights, she attempted to frame a woman warrior tradition in a similar light. With this attempt to establish a woman warrior tradition, she particularly focused on Joan of Arc and highlighted the elements of Joan's queerness that justified her own as she inserted herself into the woman warrior tradition she established. She forwarded her own queerness as the means that allowed her to be performative and therefore uphold Southern honor through her embodiment of Southern masculinity in her appearance and interactions with women and her embodiment of white masculinity in her interactions with the enslaved man Bob. Regardless of these strategic rhetorical moves, and despite some of them, such as her mentioning Joan of Arc, having the potential to backfire, they proved fruitless, as the main issue that was a constant for Velazquez's audience was her candor regarding her financial aspirations.

The multiple scholars who have written about Velazquez are sure to highlight her critic, General Jubal Early's, grievances against her, including his taking issue with historical inaccuracy. Additionally, many of them highlight Early's questioning of her identity as truly being that of a "cultivated Spanish lady" (qtd. in Alemán 110). The most pertinent complaint of Early's that they examine, though, is his noting that Velazquez had "the audacity to...[write] about her exploits for money" (111), as not only did such behavior go against the conventions of the Cult of True Womanhood by not earning money that went to the benefit of men, especially Confederate veterans, but it also reflected a failure on Confederate men to preserve the Confederacy and provide an economy to support its people.

In his book that incorporates meticulous research looking at archival artifacts

connected to Velazquez's many aliases, historian William C. Davis also focuses on her desire for monetary gain in addition to noting all the historical fallacies his research supports of her as a fraud. In particular, Davis seeks to prove Velazquez as "always a scheming opportunist, whether creating and marketing her Civil War story or trying to raise hundreds of millions of dollars in her startling ambitious swindles" (3). He argues that from the start of her life, as a likely prostitute, she realized that fame and notoriety, "even if fleeting, might be parlayed into money" and could get her out of the brothel (14). Over the course of the book, he traces how he believes she was constantly needing to acquire money from others and was never able to hold onto it long due to irresponsible spending as well as lawmakers catching up to her fraudulency. When he assesses her desire for the proceeds that would come from the publishing of her book, he observes that "[her] candor had its purpose, for she also employed the poor weak woman pleading for help motif" (151). In essence, the focus on Velazquez as a swindler, proving she was never a female soldier, reinforces the myth of the woman warrior by focusing on accuracy. Additionally, though, this focus disregards the question of how the "transgression" of women seeking money, as many Civil War female soldiers joined for the pay, reflects the social and cultural *nomoi* that put these women in such a position in the first place.

In the introduction of his book, Davis claims that "we have nothing *reliable* from which to glean a personal portrait" of Loreta Janeta Velazquez (2). However, even with archival research as meticulous as William Davis's concerning Velazquez's life, it fails to take into account the awareness feminist historiographers have when approaching archival research. What is documented as history may be labeled as

“facts” by historians, but is seen by feminist historiographers to be “a missing link” somewhere between “the real” and “discourse” as “all historical accounts, even the most seemingly objective historic records, are stories. And these stories are selected and arranged according to the selector’s frame of reference” (Glenn, “Truth, Lies, and Method” 388). Further still, Velazquez’s story raises the question of which myths those in power will capitalize on when a person’s story sheds light on how exactly the marginalized are oppressed, or it calls for change by asking an audience to consider the possibility of different identities, and intersections of identities, in spaces traditionally deemed for the majority.

Chapter 3: The Myth of the Christian Soldier in Sarah Emma Edmonds' *Nurse and Spy*

“There is one thing that I have noticed on the field in every battle that I have witnessed, viz.: that the Christian man is the best soldier...I believe that a man can serve God just as acceptably in fighting enemies of liberty, truth, and righteousness with the musket down South, as he can in the quiet pulpits of the North; in fact, I am inclined to think to think he can do so a little more effectually in the formal place. I only wish there were more of our holy men willing to take up the carnal weapons of warfare, forego the luxuries of home, and, by setting examples worthy of emulation, both in camps and on the battlefield, thus strike a fatal blow at this unholy rebellion.

-Sarah Emma Edmonds

For the “Throne of Grace,” not Women

In contrast to Loreta Janeta Velazquez’s flamboyant rhetoric catering to Confederate masculinity and her mythologizing historic woman warriors with the ultimate goal of promoting sales of her memoir, Union soldier Sarah Emma Edmonds employed a modest approach that supported her Christian ideal. When she learned of the fall of Fort Sumter, and the beginning of the Civil War, in 1861, Edmonds declared “I thank God that I am permitted in this hour of my adopted country’s need to express a tithe of the gratitude which I feel toward the people of the Northern States” (19). Such references to God, as well as Christianity, were a dominant influence in her memoir *Nurse and Spy in the Union Army: Comprising the Adventures and Experiences of a Woman in Hospitals, Camps, and Battlefields*, in which she grounded her experiences as a soldier on her Christian morals and values, as well as painted her paragon of a soldier, the Christian soldier. Through a repeated adulation of the Christian soldier, Edmonds unwittingly forwarded patriarchal constructs that

strengthened the prominence of the myth of the woman warrior and complicated the success of real women in the military. These constructs included the myths of the Christian soldier and Christian womanhood, which were further defined and complicated according to race. However, while they did contribute further to an inability to see women as capable soldiers, Edmonds utilized such constructs as a means to navigate the woman warrior myth. She did so by constantly referring to her Christian faith and practices while describing her experience in the army as well including the story of an unknown female, Christian soldier to serve as a substitution that was representative of her experience as a disguised male soldier.

Velazquez's memoir *The Woman in Battle*, was published eleven years after the war, stated to be for monetary profit, and explicitly detailed her gender performativity under the alias Harry T. Buford. Edmonds' *Nurse and Spy*, however, was published while the war was still ongoing in 1865, was stated to obtain financial proceeds for soldiers, and she was evasive about her gender performativity and never mentioned her male soldier alias of Franklin Thompson. With these two different scenarios, one woman was subjected to public ridicule and condemnation, and the other was ultimately forgotten for writing her memoir the in a way that persuaded her audience that she had not necessarily stepped outside the bounds of femininity. Twenty years after the war, though, Edmonds publicly came forward to claim her military alias, and with the support of former comrades, obtain a pension to help treat old war injuries (Blanton and Cook 161). It was not until over half a century later that historians such as Sylvia Dannett undertook research on Edmonds and brought her story and memoir to public notice, as recent scholars Deanne Blanton and Lauren M.

Cook claim that Dannett “casted female soldiers in a more realistic light” (240). As a result, Dannett’s work painted a fuller, though slightly exaggerated, picture of Edmonds’ performative actions and provided other biographers with the discourse to more fully develop the story of Edmonds’ service.

Who Was the “Nurse and Spy”?

Five years before her enlistment as a male soldier in disguise, Sarah Emma Edmonds ran away from her farm home in New Brunswick, Canada. After doing hard farm labor with her sister in place of her sickly brother, her father failing to notice her accomplishments making up for her brother’s ineptitude, and her father’s plan to marry her to a man much older than her (Tsui 9), she decided to escape “the brutal father” (Garrison 13). When her father learned of where she had run in 1858, she took on the form of a man to escape a man. She “cut her curly hair and donned male clothing [and] [adopted] the identity of ‘Franklin Thompson’” before she moved again to continue evading him (Hall 76). This act of changing her body made Edmonds a representation of the desperation women felt to find means of successfully entering, and continuing to occupy, spaces designated for men that would allowed them more freedom of movement. In order to maintain her identity as a man according to cultural and social expectations, biographer Sylvia Dannett claims that in addition to adopting male clothing and hairstyle, Edmonds even courted women, as “a young man who did no dating or even courting might [be] regarded with suspicion” (44). As a result, when she crossed the Canadian-United States border at the age of nineteen to work for a publishing company in Connecticut, (Leonard 169), she had time to become well-acquainted with her male alter-ego in both character and dress (Tsui 11).

When the war began, she enlisted in Company F of the Second Michigan Infantry Volunteers (Leonard 170), or the Flint Union Greys (Tsui 10) under her alias of Franklin Thompson. Due to her short stature and delicate frame, Edmonds began her army career as a nurse, as all military nurses were male at the time of her enlistment (Garrison 15). Later, she accepted an assignment as a postmaster, and then as a mail carrier, for her regiment. Her former superior officer General O.M. Poe explained that this was due to “Frank’s effeminate looks, ““and for that reason, was detailed as a mail carrier, to avoid taking an efficient soldier from the ranks”” (Leonard 171). Thus, while only men could be soldiers, it seemed that there were also spaces deemed more suitable or appropriate for “delicate” or “effeminate” men in the army. She did participate in some combat, though, particularly when she was under enemy fire, at battles such as First Bull Run and Fredericksburg (172). However, in March 1863, her military career came to an end, not because of “injuries or detection” (Blanton and Cook 98), but because she suffered a recurrence of malaria, and her fear of being detected drove her to leave the army, and her alias Franklin Thompson was listed as a deserter.

Although Edmonds left her army service as a soldier, she still desired to serve the Union cause, as she claimed in her memoir saying, “To prove to my friends that I am not ambitious of gaining the reputation of that venerable general (Halleck)... I am about to return to the army to offer my services in any capacity, which will best promote the interests of the Federal cause—no matter how perilous the position may be” (384). Edmonds chose to serve the remainder of the war as a nurse, but she served as a *female* nurse, which became an occupation recognized for women in 1862

(Leonard 179), before she left the army and after she published her memoir in 1865.

Her Archive

Documents such as the rediscovered letters of Union soldier Sarah Rosetta Wakeman, contemporary newspaper articles, and military and government papers indicate that Edmonds was not the only Union woman who crossed the boundary of gender to serve as a soldier in the Civil War, and it seems like this boundary was more porous than we might have thought. Perhaps the most telling artifacts concerning the porous nature of this boundary are the newspaper articles documenting the varied reception of discovered women soldiers in the Civil War. Civil War newspapers evidenced a range of how the public reacted to and received women soldiers who crossed this boundary.

Although Union newspapers appeared to generally portray female soldiers in a more favorable light in comparison to their southern counterparts, there was still the possibility of harsh criticism and judgment toward the women featured (Blanton and Cook 153). One female soldier named Rebecca Peterman, who “was renamed ‘Georgianna’ by newspapers,” faced harassment as well as criticism when her gender was discovered as newspapers “[charted] her every move” (232). Ironically, the media’s sensational use of language making claims that she “[seemed] bound to create a sensation, but...her notoriety is not of the most enviable kind” gave birth to and further ignited their harassment of her as they searched for more content to publish that criticized her wayward actions. Such criticisms included mentioning her being arrested as well as her stepfather’s opinion that while he, her mother, and siblings were “very staid, respectable people,” she was “a great grief to her mother, brother,

and sisters” and “perfectly uncontrollable” *Grant County Witness* March 30 1865). By including the words of the family patriarch on the matter, newspapers successfully marked her as an outsider from the family unit as well from the nineteenth-century social system, which served to add an extra layer to the offense. As a final criticism, the article ended with the statement, “She [declared] that two other young girls of this county were her companions in the army; but no one [believed] it” (*Grant County Witness* March 30 1865). With such an ending, the reader was encouraged to conclude that not only did this girl offend by dressing as a male soldier but by being a liar as well through her “implausible” claim that other women had also done as she did. The criticisms of Union newspapers toward women soldiers could be as harsh as the ones in the Southern papers, but Northern papers appeared to be more forgiving and generous with their praise. This praise, though, was usually accompanied by an appeal to nineteenth-century romantic sentiment. For instance, in an article from the Pennsylvania *Monogahela Republican*, a discovered female soldier’s story was ultimately framed as loyalty of a loving wife devoted to following her husband to battle. Her decision to join the Confederate army was described as due to her “[insistence] on going with [her husband]” when he returned to the army as “[she] had determined upon the sacrifice,” and after being privately married, she enlisted and “donned the rebel uniform” before they were split up. In this case, her “sacrifice” was illustrated more about giving up her femininity to be with her husband rather than dying in service of her country. The article ended saying that the spouses were reunited and that Mrs. Stone “resumed the habiliments of her sex” before praising her appearance as “the most modest and demure of dames” (January 12, 1865). This

conclusion reassured readers that Mrs. Stone had returned to her rightful place as a proper lady as well as guided them to perceive her transgression as a forgivable misstep deemed an acceptable and desirable aspect of women's role as wives. It praised her for a service done out of womanly love and for returning to where she belonged while not condoning her performing such actions again.

Even when papers praised women soldiers, such as Mrs. Stone, the praise was frequently accompanied by derisions, which were sometimes especially damning. This was the case for the women soldiers Mary and Mollie Bell, in which an 1864 article for *The Daily Examiner* "asserted the girls were harlots." Another Richmond paper, *The Whig*, described Mollie Bean, a woman who had served for two years and had been wounded twice, as a "poor creature" who, after being arrested twice, demonstrated "from her record [that she was] manifestly crazy" (qtd. in Blanton and Cook 154). Articles such as these exemplified the risk a woman took for her reputation by donning soldier's clothing, and regardless of her reasons for doing so, the voice of a white, patriarchal press dominated and wrote over these women's stories to quickly cast them off as "yesterday's news" and to explain their transgressions as the result of women with loose morals or of unsound minds who could only be expected to contravene.

Regardless of whether the media framed them in a positive or negative light, then, these women's stories being associated with their gender and brought into the public consciousness made them cultural and social oddities. Understandably, then, Edmonds chose to tell her story in her memoir so that it was never outright stated that she served in the 2nd Michigan Infantry in male disguise (Blanton and Cook 157) due

to the “justified fear of the ugly rumors and talk that accompanied her public acknowledgement that she had served in McClellan’s army in male disguise” (Burgess 6). So how did Edmonds tell her story of her military service disguised as a man without outright saying she served under her male identity of Franklin Thompson?

Due to an understanding of societal conventions in Victorian America as well as the documented evidence of how some women were received, Edmonds very likely anticipated what would happen to the value of her service, and her story, if she fully disclosed she had dressed as a *male* soldier. As a result of this fear, Edmonds took precaution with how she relayed her exploits as a soldier by means of deflecting her readers’ focus away from gender and more toward her Christian faith. However, while she made references throughout her memoir that reflected her Christian values and morals and made her faith evident, it was her repeated reference to one particular figure, and myth, that helped to frame her involvement in the military, and ultimately, her service identifying as a male soldier, in a more receptive and forgiving light.

Methodology

It is the figure of the Christian soldier that Edmonds repeatedly forwarded, and her propensity to forward the Christian, male, white soldier myth that stands at the center of this analysis. Her adherence to the Christian soldier myth was a rhetorical move, that, although an overshadowing of her story, and a praise at the expense of her own place in history as a woman warrior, was a means to navigate the myth of the woman warrior and to compose a female warrior narrative the “right” way in order to appeal to her audience. As I examine her references to the Christian soldier myth, I look to Cheryl Glenn’s explanation on the rhetoricity of silence and how it can be “a

strategic choice, one directly growing out of kairos” and “as a means of rhetorical delivery, can be an empowered action both resistant and creative”

(*Unspoken* 155).

It is within this space of resistance and creativity, then, that I see Edmonds established a silence when she told her story by detailing what she witnessed while in the army but not making it plain to the reader that she was sometimes disguised as a man, nor did she go into great detail as to how she achieved her male disguise and alias as Franklin Thompson, as opposed to Velazquez’s thorough explanation concerning her alias of Harry T. Buford. Additionally, I draw on Ryan Skinnell’s analysis of Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s strategic use of “...paternalistic resonances that were crucial for establishing common ground with her audience as a way to mitigate their resistance to her cause” (131) as the strategy Edmonds employed for her spoken, written, and implied rhetoric that surrounded her silence. Edmonds utilized silence as a tool to navigate the woman warrior myth, deflect from her male soldier identity, and to justify her actions if her role as a male soldier was ever discovered.

I analyze other contemporary documents alongside Edmonds’ memoir that contextualize the influence of Christianity within the Union, while bearing in mind that Christian doctrine was also very much present and prevalent amongst the rhetoric and Christian believers of the Confederacy. These documents include newspaper articles that illustrate northern women’s roles within Christianity, and the diaries of Union soldiers Leonard Brown, Colonel Oscar L. Jackson, Nixon B. Stewart, and the book of nineteenth century historian Samuel P. Bates. My analysis of these documents provides further insight into the rhetorical situation of Edmonds’ memoir.

Before I begin my analysis of Edmonds' memoir, though, it is necessary to examine the background and roles of Union women within Christianity in nineteenth century, how Edmonds situates race within an understanding of white Christianity, and the portrayal and groundwork for construction of the Christian soldier myth.

Christian Womanhood

White Christian Women

The ingrained, indoctrinated, belief, and myth, to have women “ritually separated from men in certain sacred spaces” (Mountford 53) was not only evident in Christianity, but in the military as well, as the military and the soldier used the Christian woman's “place” to further relegate her “place” in the military, which in turn helped to keep her in the realm of the woman warrior myth. In Edmonds' memoir, Christian womanhood figured perhaps most notably in Mary Safford, a Union nurse. Safford offered her assistance in a military hospital in Cairo, Illinois. After listing various tasks she might do for each particular wounded soldier, such as writing letters, reading, providing food, and offering comfort, Edmonds said Safford “must pray for a fifth who is afraid to die, and wrestle for him till light shines through the dark valley” (361). Through this act of praying for a dying soldier, Safford did a “Christian duty” that was allowed within the confines of what the patriarchal and traditional conventions of nineteenth-century Christianity would accept her gender doing within the space of the military as well as within the masculine sphere.

As Cheryl Glenn claims, it is “no surprise” that “women and other traditionally disenfranchised groups have been excluded...from full participation in the production of all Western canonized cultural forms” (*Unspoken* 23), and

Christianity “confirmed and perpetuated the inequality between the sexes” (21). In fact, the dominance of patriarchal Christianity concerning woman’s place was a topic of discussion during the nineteenth-century first wave of feminism. The second president of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), Frances Willard, asserted in her piece “Woman in the Pulpit” that “There’s been a history to read things in the Bible very literally while reading others loosely. This is particularly the case concerning female silence and subjection as it is culturally current and profitable to men” (*The Rhetorical Tradition* 1121). This claim capitalized on the issue of women’s hesitancy to be outspoken rhetors in nineteenth-century America as the feminist movement got underway. However, both members of the WCTU and other first-wave feminists countered this issue by providing an example of how to be an outspoken woman and supporting outspoken women. This often involved strategies of framing themselves as modest and pure as they appealed to their audience. Thus, Edmonds was using a rhetorical strategy that many other American nineteenth-century women were also putting to use. However, even as women were proactively speaking to their situation as a collective, well-ingrained institutions continued to exert their power and strive and put women back in their place. Edmonds’ observation of Safford was a representation of how the institution of Christianity had an impact on women’s movements and actions as more passive participants in the Civil War. Such passivity was certainly encouraged, as an article in *Pittston Gazette* titled “What Women Can Do For the Soldiers” informed women that in addition to “words of praise, of sympathy, and inspiring cheer” women could:

save these youth...by keeping fresh in their hearts the pure memories of

home, the innocent delights of the fireside, the sweet thoughts of mothers and sisters, by recalling the sacred teachings of the Sabbath school and the church, to prepare them to die Christianly in service of their country (April 30, 1863).

Similar to articles that mentioned women soldiers with the additive that those women had returned to their homes and female garments, the words of this article shared the same sentiment on women's role of remaining behind and within the home while the men went away to war to protect them. However, there was also the implication that within this role in the home, women—"mothers and sisters"—also had the responsibility, and Christian duty, to domesticate and remain in their homes by means of teaching and raising Christian *boys* who would die as ideal soldiers or veterans.

Black Christian Women

Even as men shaped and defined women's place by adhering to a patriarchal understanding of Christianity, such a definition did not apply to nor include *all* women. It was a definition that strictly applied to the women who were seen—white women—by the men who held the power—white men. Essentially, Christian womanhood in nineteenth-century America did not apply to Black women. This nonequivalence of the white Christian woman and the Black Christian woman was “historically rooted in the colonial past” in which a seventeenth-century law once “made it illegal for Africans and Black Americans to be recognized as Christians” (Hahn 344). During the Civil War, though, there was a narrative forwarded by antislavery Northerners to reassure other Northerners concerned over more Black people moving into the North. Within this narrative was one story about a Black girl named Aggie, who “finds Christianity and proper morality by living with, and working for, a Quaker woman.” The real reassurance was that Aggie could not “be

anything other than a domestic servant to white people...but in the right milieu...would prove a good laborer and a good Christian” (Masur 1065). In her memoir, Edmonds used a similar theme and uneven development—a silence and invisibility—due to Black women not fitting into a mold of White Christian womanhood as a means to cater to her white audience’s sense of superiority and to potentially promote which people were the “right” kind of Christians to be the “right” kind of soldier.

Edmonds’ portrayal of Black women and their situation within her construct of the Christian soldier figured most prominently in chapters 30 and 20 of her memoir, in which she described a Black woman visiting the army hospital , and also described disguising herself as a female “contraband,” or a person “classified...as contraband of war...[or] as property” by the Union army who did not have to be returned to slavery (“Living Contraband” *NPS.gov*). It was Edmonds’ depiction of Black women in military spaces, as well as her disguise as a Black woman whom she labeled as a contraband, that painted how she situated them within a white understanding of Christianity and categorized them as invisible, which ultimately framed how well they aligned with her construct of the Christian soldier. In her memoir, there was a repeated move to compare the roles and actions of Black people to a standard of whiteness, such as a comparison of Black troops to white troops, which also occurred in the form of white Christianity. Perhaps one of the most significant examples of these comparisons was a depiction in the last chapter of her memoir, in which she recounted her experience as a female nurse, after reverting back to her identity as a woman, where a Black woman came to visit sick and injured

soldiers in a Virginia army hospital.

In this depiction, a Union soldier had requested a chaplain ask a Southern lady if he might have some of the tea she brought, but she acerbically refused, to which the chaplain responded with an implication that her behavior was unexpected as well as not Christian. After this exchange, a Black woman walked up to the chaplain with food, drink, linen, and bandages saying ““I wish to do something for de Union soldiers, Lord bless ‘em!’”” When the Union soldiers learned that this woman had brought them food, drink, and supplies, they responded to her with ““God bless you, aunty! You are the only white women we have seen since we came to Winchester!”” (382). In this instance, while the Black woman spoke to her own Christianity by stating “Lord bless ‘em,” her Christian act was assessed according to their symbol of ideal Christian womanhood, which crystallized in the form of the White woman. Edmonds did not record the response and reaction of the Black woman, so there was a gap as to how this woman felt about the comparison. There was a silence. Ironically, the Black woman’s act stood as the model example of how to be Christian, as opposed to the Southern white woman’s un-Christian behavior, and yet the Black woman was still called White for her exemplary behavior. Thus, while Black women could do truly Christian acts in military spaces, those acts were only recognized as being ascribable to a White woman. Such a move, then, assisted to reify White Christian women, like Edmonds, who were truly Christian enough to also be forgiven for passing as White Christian (male) soldiers.

Invisible: Using Black Identity as Disguise

In addition to replacing Black women’s Christian acts with “whiteness,”

Edmonds also relied on their status of invisibility to further reinforce who qualified as a Christian soldier. In one of her espionage excursions, Edmonds took on the disguise of what she refers to as a “female contraband,” in which she used a “coloring process” (107), or blackface, and she joined a group of Black people who were serving the Confederate army, whom she claimed “preferred to be in bondage with their friends rather than be free without them” (263). The interesting aspect of her mentioning this was that the preferences of these people were relayed through her words, rather than her directly quoting their words, and there was no thorough explanation as to what the whole story was concerning their options. Additionally, there was no mention of her speaking directly with any of the Black people with whom she worked. In fact, there was an engraving in the chapter depicting Edmonds in her disguise along with another Black woman, but her back was to the woman while she picked up an army paper to slip into her pocket, suggesting Edmonds did not interact with her, and thus did not hear her words and include them in her memoir. In other words, Black women were silent in this particular military space they and Edmonds inhabited at the same time. Thus, Edmonds’ audience was encouraged to believe that this is where the Black woman chose to be and only had silent, menial roles in the army camp.

When she integrated herself amongst the other Black people and entered the Confederate camp, she explained how she obtained information from the officers while serving them food, saying “The officers generally talked in low tones, but would sometimes get excited, forget that there were darkies around, and would speak their minds freely,” before she took papers she found in an officer’s coat pocket and put them in her own (263). This derogatory language confirmed Black women’s

status of invisibility concerning how she and the other Black women were able to move about and be a presence while essentially being nonexistent. In addition, though, it also demonstrated “how seamlessly we can sometimes trigger the expectations of those whom we meet...when we evidence the symbols of those expectations (Royster *Re/Framing Identifications* 19). Edmonds knew who would stand out in an army camp as not belonging—white women—so she “evidenced” the symbol of a woman who would be present, but go unnoticed, by changing the color of her skin and “triggering” the expectations of the Confederate soldiers around her. However, once she reached her goal by obtaining information needed, she was able to remove the Black color from her skin—her “contrabandness”—and return to her male, white, Christian—privileged—soldier status, as she indicated by saying she “[donned] another costume” before she was “dispatched to Washington with official documents to McClellan” (267). The result of her return to her male soldier alias assured her audience that she had reverted back to the “right” kind of race *and* gender, and thus, the “right” kind of soldier to continue her soldierly duties. Ironically, this idea of the “right” soldier was further emphasized later in this chapter, where Edmonds recalls her encounter with a soldier that Edmonds potentially used as a substitution to her own story.

Military Relegation of Christian (and Warrior) Women

Edmonds wrote her memoir in such a way that it was evident that she navigated tricky terrain concerning where women were relegated according to their gender, and their race, concerning military spaces. While she wrote her memoir in such a way that she deftly navigated this terrain, she also still appealed to her

audience's expectation of where women were concerning warfare, particularly concerning their roles as Christian women, as her mentioning of nurse Mary Safford suggested. In essence, Edmonds knew her audience, and she did what other Union soldiers would also do in their diaries, memoirs, and personal writings concerning the war, which was define and assign for women the appropriate spaces they inhabited during the war according to their gendered Christian roles.

When other Union soldiers discussed the Christian Union woman and her contribution to, and involvement in, the war effort, there were many of the same themes and tropes concerning women's role in and relation to war found in Confederate soldier diaries present. In Confederate soldiers' diaries, books, and memoirs, though, there was a popular rhetorical move to reinforce the woman warrior myth by portraying themselves as akin to Spartan warriors or knights of old protecting the women they left behind. In the personal writings of Union soldiers, however, there was a popular trend to use the patriarchal and traditional associations and myths of Christianity with gender to construct women's place in war, which in turn helped to reify the woman warrior myth. This was evident through the common themes of absence (or distance) on women's part due to the expectation of passivity and incapability based on the womanly, Christian duties they were expected to fulfill elsewhere.

As the diary of Leonard Brown of the 47th Regiment Iowa Infantry and the book of contemporary historian Samuel P. Bates illuminated, women may have stepped out of the home to assist in the war effort, which could have included going to the front lines to attend to the wounded in hospitals, but they were still kept

figuratively distant from the role of soldier by instead being expected to perform their Christian duties in the form of nursing and charity work. In the conclusion of his diary Brown referred to the women in the Union female organizations Sisters of Charity, Women's Loyal Leagues, and Aid Societies as "Patriotic Christian women" who came from "all denominations" because they "visited the sick in the hospitals" and established Soldiers' Homes, Orphan Asylums, and Schools for Freedman "as fast as the army advanced" (545). Here, Brown painted the patriotic *Christian* woman with a trope that was not uncommon, that of the nurturer, in which she did her Christian duty by tending to the sick and providing shelter in spaces that did not have her directly involved in battle. Bates also capitalized on this trope in his book as well, when he mentioned "...the Christian woman at the front bearing tender care and consolation among the sick, the wounded, and the dying" (6). Both Brown's and Bates' words indicated an allowance of woman getting as close to the battlefield as possible and yet still keeping her distant by not letting her be a soldier due to the barrier and the influence of the Christianity myth concerning women's place.

In other instances, Christian women were placed in the background by being written as completely absent from the battlefield due to the expectation that they be "the no less devoted and Christian agent at home, wearing out her life in wearisome days and nights of labor" as a "type of service which was as patriotic as that of the soldier who bore the musket" (Bates 6). Here, Christian women were indicated as best serving through complete absence from the battlefield and fulfilling the trope of the woman left behind for protection while also performing her Christian role by praying for her loved ones and further domesticating her home. Union Sergeant Nixon B.

Stewart echoed this duty of prayer and reiterated the placement of Christian women away from the battlefield when he recounted marching through a town in which a flag was presented to his regiment by a man “on behalf of the loyal women of [that] city...[who] are incapable of participating in the rough fortunes of war, but are here today to cheer you with their presence and smiles, and breathe the prayer that God may protect you in your lives” (13). In this one sentence, women’s association with God was framed as a moment for them to pray for the soldiers moving on rather than a calling or blessing from God to join in the fight, due to their “incapability.” It was an association that acknowledges women’s contribution as Christians before forcing them to recede into the background.

The Christian Soldier

The Male Christian Soldier

Whoever holds power over an archive, creates archival artifacts, or alters those archival artifacts, either creates, assists in creating, or upholds myths that serve those who are already in power. The myth of the woman warrior served as a device for the governing force, to allow women a space to be recognized as warriors in mythical or folk tales with their supernatural status, in order to keep them out of the masculine military space in actuality. Additionally, though, other myths created, preserved, and reinforced by institutions governed by the majority could serve to further marginalize and exclude with regard to what *kind* of soldier belongs in, and was ideal for, the military space of the real world. Essentially, the strength of one myth backed by an institution of power could reinforce or strengthen other particular myths—adding layers—which further restrict and control a particular population’s movements and

roles. For Sarah Emma Edmonds, her use of the myth of the Christian soldier to deflect attention away from her service as a woman served as another layer to reinforce the overarching myth of the woman warrior.

Throughout *Nurse and Spy*, Edmonds made a number of references to “the Christian soldier.” Among these were her describing the last words of a soldier to his wife and her recounting the death of a soldier she greatly admired. In the first chapter, she detailed the death of a soldier who referred to his views on religion, Christianity, as his final words, and she claimed that his reference to his faith was “[glorious] words for a dying soldier” and that he was a “Christian patriot” (27). In chapter seven, she mourned the loss of her friend, Lieutenant James V., saying “He was a sincere Christian, active in all the duties devolving upon a Christian soldier, and was greatly beloved by both officers and men” (98). This repetition with which she alluded to the Christian soldier and his Christian values actually mirrored the same rhetorical move in the personal writings of or about Union soldiers, who also crafted and upheld their understanding of the figure of the Christian soldier as a paragon of the ideal soldier.

One soldier who painted the Christian soldier as ideal for battle in his diary was Leonard Brown, who said, “...He does give the soldier in answer to prayer renewed courage to meet the enemies of his country. The Christian soldier, after fervent prayer to God, feels safe in the midst of dangers...” (556). With these words, Brown asserted that the bravest soldiers were Christian due to the courage that they ultimately received from God, but he also established that they were blessed and protected by God for fighting on the right side. Here, Brown’s language suggested the subscription to a particular expectation of what kind of soldier one needed to be in

order to successful, or perhaps even accepted, in the Union army.

In addition to Brown, historian Samuel P. Bates also upheld the ideal of the Christian warrior through his examination of the biographies of Union soldiers in his book *Martial Deeds of Pennsylvania*. Throughout his collection of biographies, in which he quotes soldiers and what other soldiers had to say about their peers, he was sure to refer to a soldier being remembered for his Christian character. He did this by attaching the word “Christian” to phrases such as “the mark and bearing of a soldier” (524), “warm-hearted...officer,” (532), “fine soldierly bearing and a high sense of honor” and “high-toned gentleman” (753). All of these phrases suggested that these descriptions were said with the mindset that they described ideal Christian soldiers who were *men*. Perhaps the most significant mention, though, was when he quoted Brigadier General Thomas F. McCoy, who said, “I feel sure that the highest type of a soldier is a Christian citizen fighting the battles of his country” before following it with a statement of “To model his command after that type was his aim” (873). Once again, the Christian soldier was portrayed as the most superior. In addition, though, the use of masculine personal pronouns left no room for doubt as to which gender was being referred to concerning who counted as a soldier, even if (s)he was Christian.

Although both Bates and Brown wrote these observations after the war, their shared opinions on what appeared to be the sentiments of numerous soldiers suggested that the Christian soldier was a desirable standard to live up to during the war. It seemed, though, that it was also an established expectation and convention of being the best kind of soldier to which a man had to subscribe if he wanted to be respected. Perhaps, too, being identified as a Christian soldier also meant avoiding dishonorable,

and undesirable situations, which meant avoiding the wrong kind of attention and ultimately avoiding suspicion of any kind. With such a consideration in mind, then, perhaps Edmonds' constant referral to the Christian soldier as well as her own Christianity, is evidence of her following a sort of guide that the men of her time provided according to the rhetoric they dispersed that established not just the right kind of person to be, but the right kind of soldier to be as well.

The (Female) Christian Soldier Sarah Emma Edmonds

By drawing from the figure of the Christian soldier crafted by Union soldiers, Edmonds justified her actions as a soldier by applying their construction to her identity as a Christian soldier, and inadvertently, her identity as a woman warrior. However, she made the parameters surrounding this male construct of the Christian soldier more malleable, and more porous, in order to deflect, or substitute, when necessary to suit her needs with regard to appealing to her audience. Thus, Edmonds circumvented the myth of the Christian soldier by detailing how she was a devout Christian while she was a soldier throughout her memoir. To do this, Edmonds highlighted her Christian belief at the very beginning of her memoir, ascribed to the concept of "Christian courage," mitigated gender by including moments of her acts identifying as a Christian *woman* in order to appeal to her audience in multiple forms and focus their attention in the direction in which she wanted them to focus.

Perhaps Edmonds' most significant reference to herself as a Christian as a means to connect to, and establish herself as, a Christian soldier was found in her first chapter. The chapter began with an explanation of where and how she came to learn of the start of the war, followed by her acknowledging her status as a non-citizen of the

United States who could return to her parents in Canada and was under no obligation to take part in the conflict. However, she believed she could not be passive with the knowledge others were suffering, and when she found herself asking the questions, “[What] can I do? What part am *I* to act in this great drama?” she “carried this question to the Throne of Grace, and found a satisfactory answer there” (18). By beginning her memoir, in the second paragraph of her first chapter, with a statement that portrayed her as an outsider who chose service and sacrifice by looking to God for guidance, Edmonds immediately set the stage for her readers to perceive her as a devout *person* motivated by faith and service, not glory. This illuminated her as a qualified and sincere candidate for the ideal Christian soldier she came to define and shore up throughout her memoir. In addition, though, her lack of directly referring to her gender, as she proclaimed herself a Christian, served the function of encouraging her readers to ignore her trespass as a woman dressing and acting as a soldier. Instead, it encouraged her readers to focus on her fighting under a Christian banner and ultimately being the right kind of soldier. In addition to the reassurance of her Christian foundation and motives, Edmonds also aligned herself with the Christian soldier figure by demonstrating her belief in and uplifting the idea of “Christian courage,” a quality which Leonard Brown highlighted as a trademark quality of being a Christian soldier. In Chapter 18 of her memoir, Edmonds quoted General Howard, “a noble Christian patriot” (244) known historically as “the Christian general” (“Oliver O. Howard battlefields.org) concerning his view on Christian courage. She quoted him saying, “I assert that the highest type of courage is Christian courage...I am able to say that I can go into battle fearing no evil. And would to God, for their

sakes, that every officer in the army and every soldier in the ranks could declare...that God had done such things for him” (245)! By citing what she believed to be an authority on Christianity, as well as an authority of high rank in the army, Edmonds set the stage for her readers by establishing her credibility as one who understood the qualities of what made a true Christian soldier. Additionally, though, this citation of an authority figure further served to detract from any consideration of her speaking on the Christian soldier, or Christianity, as a woman. Instead, she let this man speak for her as a representation of what Christian courage is, which did the work of her readers connecting his beliefs to hers, and thus making her a similar Christian soldier to him.

Edmonds also navigated the Christian soldier myth through mitigation, in which she acted the role of Christian as a woman and as a soldier, depending on her disguise, all while remaining vague on her actions as a “man,” in order for her audience to see her roles as a *Christian* as a means for justification for her role as a soldier. In one instance, her memoir detailed how she took on the disguise of an Irish peddler woman, for espionage purposes, and while on her mission, she “fed [a] poor famished rebel as tenderly as if he had been [her] brother” (153) as well as “breathed a brief and earnest prayer” (156) for him on his deathbed at his request. By doing the assigned role of the Christian woman to administer to the sick and pray with the dying, as well as adhering to the trope of women as nurturers, Edmonds painted herself as following the conventions of Christian womanhood even though she had previously been disguised as a male soldier. Thus, to counterbalance her transgression of crossing gender boundaries within Christianity as well as the military, the documentation of her acts as a Christian while identifying as a woman

served as a means to soften any potential criticism directed at her should her soldier alias become discovered.

The Unknown Christian Female Soldier

Edmonds' adherence to and knowledge of the conventions of gender and Christian myth and nineteenth-century culture allowed her to successfully navigate the barriers to keep women out of combat and in the parlor rooms. Like the other women who donned a soldier's uniform she joined a *sisterhood* of women, a collective, who all contributed to the breaking down of such barriers through their actions of dressing and performing as soldiers. By further extension, she joined a more exclusive sisterhood of women who documented their combat experiences, such as Loreta Janeta Velazquez and Sarah Rosetta Wakeman. Unlike Velazquez and Wakeman, though, Edmonds was evasive about the extent of her service disguised as a man by deflecting her audience's attention to her construct of the Christian soldier. However, she incorporated a particular event which not only served as a means of deflection, but also subverted many of the patriarchal tropes she was forced to reify, including the figure of the Christian soldier. This event was her encounter with a fellow female soldier in disguise dying on the battle field, which ultimately served as a glorified substitution of Edmonds' own act of cross dressing as a male soldier and serving in the Union Army.

In Chapter 20 of *Nurse and Spy*, Edmonds came across “[an] [interesting] [patient]” (271) wounded on the battlefield of Antietam, known as “the bloodiest single day in American history” (Bowman *NPR.org*). She proceeded to explain that she picked out this patient as “interesting” amongst the heavy carnage on the

battlefield due to first noticing the “youthful” and “sweet face” of a young boy, only to have her suspicion grow as the “tone and voice made [her] look more closely at the face of the speaker.” After hearing the soldier speak, she found her belief “well-founded” that this boy was, in fact, a young woman (271). Once she had a doctor examine this female soldier, she recorded this woman’s final words, which were:

I can trust you, and will tell you a secret. I am not what I seem, but I am female. I enlisted from the purest motives, and have remained undiscovered and unsuspected. I have neither father, mother, nor sister. My only brother was killed today. I closed his eyes about an hour before I was wounded. I shall soon be with him. I am a Christian, and have maintained the Christian character ever since I entered the army. I have performed the duties of a soldier faithfully, and am willing to die for the cause of truth and freedom. My trust is in God, and I die in peace. I wish you to bury me with your own hands, that none may know after my death that I am other than my appearance indicates...I know I can trust you—you will do as I have requested? (271-272)

By deliberately sharing the words of this unknown female soldier (UFS), Edmonds made a move akin to suggesting her readers see this woman’s service, and sacrifice, as equivalent to the service of other potential Christian women who had disguised themselves as soldiers, or Edmonds herself. Even though Edmonds was not explicit about the extent of her cross dressing as a man in her memoir, her sharing of this story served as a sort of insurance policy, in addition to a substitution of her (Edmonds’) experience, that was meant to combat the dominant narratives that sought to damage the reputation of women soldiers serving for the “wrong” reasons.

In order for UFS’s story to serve as an effective substitution for Edmonds’, Edmonds made sure to hone in on UFS’s declaration of Christian belief and intent. Perhaps this was no where more evident than when UFS claimed to be “a Christian, [who] [had] maintained the Christian character ever since [she] entered the army.”

Just as other Union soldiers defined the Christian soldier as exemplary of a soldier who acted honorably, UFS assured Edmonds that from the beginning of her service, she had done the same by having “the purest motives” from the beginning of her enlistment to her final moments. Through UFS’s words, then, Edmonds’ audience was also encouraged to see Edmonds’ act of becoming a male soldier as originating from “the purest motives”, this having been the case from the beginning of her enlistment to the end.

Through the inclusion of UFS’s story, Edmonds also capitalized on a sense of a divine sanctification through UFS’s mention of “trust,” when she claimed her “trust in God” immediately after declaring she died “for the cause of truth and freedom.” Through this use of “trust,” UFS portrayed her role as a soldier as something that was essentially a part of God’s plan, which invited Edmonds, and indirectly Edmonds’ audience, to perceive her actions as blessed and preordained rather than heretical and deviating. Thus, Edmonds invited her audience to perceive her own story as one of a woman whose acts as a soldier are ultimately sanctified by God, as she too fought for “the cause” with a trust in God and a Christian foundation.

While Edmonds implied that the aligning of UFS to the standard of the Christian soldier served to encourage her audience to be forgiving toward this woman, it also drew attention to UFS’s success of having lived up to the standard of what Edmonds believed to be the ideal soldier, but as a woman. Indirectly, Edmonds forwarded a truth through UFS’s story that women can be successful soldiers of the real world, not just of myth, when the female soldier is evaluated by the standard of the Christian soldier. In other words, just as Velazquez’s mythologizing of Joan of Arc

was the set standard for her fighting as well as any man, Edmonds' mythologizing of the Christian soldier established the measure of competence for how a woman could successfully be a soldier as long as she chose to do so for the right reason and in the right way, albeit she also had to be right *kind* of woman doing it.

Edmonds' never mentioning UFS's true name was due to her being bound to honor UFS's request that she "bury [her] with [her] own hands" so that her body was not handled by men, and no one would know of her true identity after she died. However, by including her encounter with UFS, Edmonds not only further challenged women warriors' placement in myth instead of reality, but she also avoided the mythologizing, or canonization, of notable woman warriors in history by acknowledging this nameless woman's existence. She avoided "female tokenism" through a recognition of "the plurality of practices that together constitute the everyday" (Biesecker 157) by bringing her reader's attention the nameless, or yet-to-be -discovered women warriors, and although Edmonds did not mention any other encounters with female soldiers, UFS came to be a symbol of such a collective of women. More importantly, though, Edmonds provided a space for her audience to consider the potential of other everyday women cross dressing as soldiers, and just as she asked her audience to see her actions mirrored in UFS's as worthy of forgiveness and being overlooked, so too does she potentially do so for all the other supposed (and probable) nameless women soldiers. Perhaps Edmonds really emphasized her point of forgiveness, though, through the example she set of how to perceive, and ultimately treat, women who fought as *Christian* soldiers. When UFS died, Edmonds was sure to note that she "gave her a soldier's burial, [under the shadow of a mulberry tree]

without coffin or shroud, only a blanket for a winding-sheet,” and through such an act, Edmonds not only acknowledged UFS’s service and sacrifice as something real, but she also provided a sort of symbolic space. In other words, she gave UFS a space that serves a similar function to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Washington, D.C. which represented all the nameless, unidentified, soldiers of past wars, except Edmonds created the Grave of the Unknown Female Soldier, representing all the other nameless, unidentified, and lost women soldiers of the Civil War. By doing all of this, Edmonds established her own canon, a canon of what she perceived to be *real* female soldiers, albeit according to her perception of what constituted a truly Christian soldier. She made the uncanonical canonical, through the recognition of a “forgotten Christian brother,” or sister, in arms, but in the process, she added herself to this canon through the rhetorical strategies of substitution and deflection.

Chapter 4: The Myth and Mythologizing of Cathay Williams as the Strong Black
Woman (Warrior)

I wanted to make my own living and not be dependent on friends or relations.

--Cathay Williams

Otherwise in “Good General Health:” A Black Woman Warrior

On October 14, 1868, Private William Cathay of the 38th US Infantry, which was later known as the Buffalo soldiers, was “honorably discharged” from the US Army. In the “Certificate of Disability Discharge,” the captain of the infantry stated that Cathay had “been feeble...both physically and mentally, and much of the time quite unfit for duty.” In the same document, a surgeon claimed that he was of “a feeble habit. He is continuously on sick report without benefit. He is unable to do military duty... This condition dates prior to enlistment” (*buffalosoldier.net*). While the report supported the discharge being due to disability, and used masculine pronouns, it failed to reveal one important detail. William Cathay was actually a woman—a woman named Cathay Williams.

Years later in June 1891, former Buffalo soldier Cathay Williams filed for a disability pension, claiming “deafness and frostbit feet, toes of each foot having been lost” as well as rheumatism and neuralgia for her service under her male alias of William Cathay (*buffalosoldier.net*). On September 9 of that year, a doctor employed by the Pension Bureau was ordered to examine her and provide the Bureau a description of her condition. After his examination of her as a woman, he concluded that she could hear a conversation, and therefore was not deaf, had no changes in her joints, muscles, or tendons, and therefore had no rheumatism or neuralgia. Perhaps

most significant, and “horri-fying,” according to Deanne Blanton, though, was that after “[reporting] that all toes on her feet had been amputated, and she could only walk with the aid of a crutch...the doctor stated that she was in good general health” (*buffalosoldier.net*). After the doctor submitted his report, the response Williams received from the Pension Bureau was that although she “[alleged] that she contracted small pox in St. Louis, MO, Oct. 1868, [and] while suffering from said disease she was [ordered] to swim the Rio Grande...[and] the...effects of small pox caused deafness,” her claim was “Approved for rejection. No disability from cause alleged since filing claim” (National Archives *buffalosoldier.net*) An additional document, an estimate for the amount of disability, stated that “claimant does not appear to have alleged disability to feet as pension cause of reason of rejection and that Bureau cannot, under circumstances state disease for which discharged” (National Archives *buffalosoldier.net*). Thus, even after it was blatantly noted that she could not walk properly, Cathay Williams was denied an invalid pension by the military, and there were no known records supporting her ever attempting to obtain a pension again.

When the doctor who examined Williams wrote “nil” on the claim, thus forwarding the assertion that she was “in general good health,” (Blanton *buffalosoldier.net*) despite her difficulty in walking because of the loss of her toes, his overall sentiment echoed a white, patriarchal construct—a myth of Black women that served as a “controlling image” (Collins 123). This controlling image, “the strong Black woman” (SBW) was “used as a stereotype to justify the exploitation and abuse of Black women—a group presumed to possess subhuman emotional and intellectual capacity yet immense physical strength, and thus able to withstand abuse by

slaveowners” (Davis and Jones 302). The application of this mythical construct was prevalent in Williams’ 1868 disability discharge papers as well as the assessment papers of the Pension Bureau doctor who examined her for her pension candidacy in 1891. In using phrases such as “unfit for duty” and “feeble habit,” her discharge papers spoke to assumptions of her supposed intellectual and emotional capacity. The captain of her company suggested a lack of passion for military duty and lack of intellect by her constantly being incapable of duty and mentally weak, while the post surgeon implied a tendency to be lazy and being useless due to being “continuously on sick report.” It was the documents of the Pension Bureau doctor’s later diagnosis, though, that heavily implied a belief in her immense physical strength and that if she could endure slavery and its abuses, then a “large [and] stout” (Blanton *buffalosoldier.net*) woman like her could certainly endure walking on feet without toes.

By rejecting her claim for a pension with the dismissive, and damning, conclusion that she was “in good general health,” the message given to Williams was clear. Regardless of her service, the written proof to back it up, and the literal proof of her body demonstrating the severity of her disability, the military believed she could endure without a pension. She was deemed tough enough. She was considered strong enough. She was discerned to be a “strong black woman” (SBW)—a woman who was a “tireless worker in the paid-labor market as well as the unpaid reproductive labor of the family” (Collins 205)—a woman who “endured[physical and emotional] abuse” as well as sexual harassment, and who constantly gave of herself to her family, especially in her role as a mother (208). By looking to this myth, I propose that

because Williams did not attribute her strength elsewhere—to God, or to herself, others attributed a sort of Amazonian strength to Cathay Williams, and she was fitted into a particular warrior archetype, that of the “strong black woman,” or SBW. Additionally, I believe that through the attribution of this myth as well as the ““limited materials”” and ““discrepancies throughout”” her archive allowed (Diane Williams qtd. in Gillis 9) a space for interpretation and creativity in which she was framed as a SBW, and in turn a woman warrior of myth, in other genres. This possibility arose in part *because* of the SBW myth, and the promulgation of this archetype has also allowed for her story to be further mythologized. As I examined how the SBW myth was attributed by others to Williams, I reminded myself that I was writing about a woman who represented a particular community and intersection of identities (“Being on Location” Kirsch 25), which meant I also had to be mindful of my positionality as an educated, middle class, heterosexual, cisgender white woman.

Who Was Cathay Williams?

Cathay Williams told her story for a newspaper interview with an unidentified reporter of *St. Louis Daily Times*, who had “heard rumors of a female African American who had served in the army” (Cathay Williams *National Association of Black Military Women*). In other words, her story was relayed through the words of the interviewer and author of the article. However, before the reader could read her story within the article, the interviewer added his own commentary on his overall impression of her as an oddity, not just as a woman warrior, but as a sort of exoticized woman warrior. Following this preface, the article began with Williams informing her interviewer that her mother was enslaved by “wealthy farmer” William Johnson, who

moved her and her family to Jefferson City, Missouri when she was still a small child (Williams qtd. in Tucker 45). When the Civil War had broken out, the Union Army came to Jefferson City and freed her and the other enslaved persons, and although they “went to work for the Federal Army as paid servants” (Weiser *buffalosoldier.net*), they more accurately were classified by the term “contraband,” in which “[enslaved persons] were conscripted as soldiers and support workers in the Union Army” (McCormick *warhistoryonline.com*) and were “forced to serve in military support roles such as cooks, laundresses, or nurses” (*nabmw.org*). Although “[she] did not want to go” Williams was “carried...off” by the Union force who “freed” her to Little Rock, Arkansas by “Col. Benton of the 13th army corps” (qtd. in Williams) of the 8th Volunteer Indiana Infantry (Gillis 9).

By the time the Civil War ended, she had been sent to Jefferson Barracks where she “remained some time” (Williams). Jefferson Barracks was “a primary recruiting depot for the postwar army” in which it was likely that Williams learned that African Americans were being enlisted as full-time citizens in the Regular army (Tucker 73). Then, in St. Louis, she enlisted “as a man named William Cathay” (Abercrombie *amazingblackhistory.com*) in the Thirty-Eighth United States Infantry Company A commanded by Captain Charles E. Clarke on November 15, 1866 (Williams). According to her enlistment paper provided by the National Archives, she was listed under the name of “William Cathey,” listed as twenty two years old, described as having “black eyes, black hair, [and] black complexion” and being “five feet nine inches high,” and she was said to be “by occupation a cook” (National Archives *buffalosoldier.net*).

In the interview, Williams claimed that she joined the army partly because of “a cousin and a particular friend” who “never blowed on [her]” Like most other aspects of her life, little was known of Williams’ experiences in the army as a Buffalo soldier due to lack of documentation. Right after enlisting, she became sick, and when she rejoined her company, she “did guard and other duties,” and “[she] was never put in the guard house, [and] no bayonet was ever put to [her] back” (Williams *buffalosoldier.net*). Otherwise, scholars had to rely on recorded events that took place within her company, such as marching, “garrison duty, [drilling] and [training], and...scouting for signs of hostile [indigenous peoples]” (Blanton *buffalosoldier.net*). After being in four different army hospitals a total of five times, Williams said she “got tired and wanted to get off,” so she “played sick, complained of pains in [her] side, and rheumatism in [her] knees” before the post surgeon discovered her gender and arranged for her discharge. After briefly discussing her experience in the army, she recalled moving to Pueblo, Colorado where she worked as a cook and laundress and got married. She ended her marriage after her husband stole from her, then moved to Trinidad, Colorado. She concluded the interview saying she hoped to get some land, that she “[will] never live in the states again,” and that she “want[ed] to get along and not be a burden to her friends or relatives” (qtd. in Williams).

Her Archive

In addition to a small portion of her interview, it is her application for a military invalid pension, the estimate for her disability, and the rejection of her application that provided a glimpse of what may have occurred and what she may have experienced during her time as an enlisted Buffalo Soldier and what the results

of that experience were in her later years. In 1891, Cathay Williams filed for an invalid pension for her military service, and her application was rejected in February 1892. According to Blanton, the 1900 census of Trinidad, Colorado, “does not list Cathay Williams, nor cite any black woman with a similar name.” Thus, scholars have hypothesized that Williams either left Trinidad or died between 1892 and 1900. Blanton posited, though, that due to her “handicap” and “the assumption that she was in financial straits when she applied for the pension, it seems unlikely that she relocated” (Blanton *buffalosoldier.net*) According to her archival artifacts, then, it seemed that attributing strength to her as a SBW, who did not need her pension, ultimately hastened the decline in her health and her death.

Some of the most significant differences regarding Cathay Williams’ archival artifacts in comparison to those of Loreta Janeta Velazquez and Sarah Emma Edmonds are that Williams did not have any artifacts that contain her direct words, such as a memoir, and her archive is also sparse in material. Velazquez and Edmonds’ archival materials include their personal memoirs, advertising of their memoirs, newspaper articles with suggested references to their soldier or alternative aliases, and diaries or letters of former comrades rejecting or supporting their claims to military service, but the archival materials related and contemporary to Buffalo Soldier Cathay Williams are paltry in comparison. Velazquez’s materials are more prominent because of her memoir, her variation in name spelling and aliases related to her espionage work, and perhaps most notably, her reputation for being avaricious and a fraud according to her contemporaries and later historians. Sarah Emma Edmonds’ artifacts are more well-known because of her memoir, her publicly coming forward to obtain a pension, and

her donating her memoir's proceeds to charities benefitting soldiers. With regard to Cathay Williams, though, there is only the single newspaper interview from 1876, an enlistment paper from 1866 under her alias "William Cathay," the disability discharge paper from 1866, the claim for deafness and loss of toes due to frostbite dated 1891, the estimation of the amount of her disability in 1891, and the rejection to her claim in 1892. Otherwise, there are only some pieces of creative writing dedicated to her as well as references in popular culture.

The small number of artifacts in Cathay Williams' archive require "[bridging] the space between 'factual claims and interpretive assumptions' (Susan Jarrett qtd. in Gold 25) for scholars, but it also creates a space where some authors of various genres have taken significant creative license to expand on Cathay Williams' story. By creating these genres, authors either inadvertently associate her story with the discourse of the SBW myth, or resist it, through the aspects of her life they choose to illuminate or through their choice of genre and style. These genres include a new historicist biography by Philip Thomas Tucker, poetry by Nancy Kastebaum historical fiction and Linda Bird, and a movie telling her story in an alternate universe, *The Harder They Fall* (2021) by Jeymes Samuel and Boaz Yakin. In each of these genres, authors made particular choices to fill in the gaps of her story by either focusing on the entirety of her life or imagining and expanding on a specific phase of her life, such as her childhood, her time in the military, or her life out West. Through the language used to expand on or reimagine her story, these genres either reify or resist the SBW myth, and therefore the woman warrior myth, and regardless of reification or resistance, they also further mythologize her while at the same time bringing her story into public

consciousness.

Methodology

In order to understand how SBW myth functions regarding the artifacts in Williams' archive as well as in other genres, I was informed by Patricia Hill Collins's foundational scholarship of the SBW myth and trope, and Shardé Davis and Martinique Jones' explanation of the complexity of the SBW myth in terms of how it harms black women and the history of how that harm has taken shape. I provide a brief overview of SBW scholarship, and I also provide a brief history of the Buffalo soldier to illustrate how that factors into the intersection of Williams' identities as a black and female Buffalo soldier. I then synthesize the attribution of the SBW myth by authors of different genres to her story by following the outline of her interview. Using this outline, I examine how these authors have expanded on particular aspects of her story and have either reified or resisted the SBW myth, and in turn, the woman warrior myth, but I also examine how this reification or resistance has brought her further into public conscience, or existence, regardless.

Myth of the Strong Black Woman

What is the Strong Black Woman (SBW)?

To understand how the myth of the strong Black woman (SBW) is applied to Cathay Williams, I look to scholars Patricia Hill Collins and her description of the SBW, as well as Shardé M. Davis and Martinique K. Jones' argument that called for a reclamation of the term, in order to provide an overview on the subject. In particular, I drew on their scholarship to explain what the SBW is, how it enacts violence on Black women in physical and psychological ways, and how it affects Black women at the

intersection of race and gender, particularly concerning white women and Black men.

The SBW myth is a “controlling image” (Collins 197) and white construct created as a tool to control people’s perception, and the physical and rhetorical movements, of Black women. It has assigned Black women the characterizations of “extreme independence, self sacrifice, and emotional silencing” (Davis and Jones 301) while being stoic regarding a history of abuse and exploitation since slavery that continues into the present. Some Black feminist scholars argue it is “a refashioned mechanism from earlier centuries to restrain Black American women from defining their own identities” (Davis 23). Additionally, “gendered racial stereotypes of Black women” that often intersect with the SBW myth are figures such as “Jezebel (beautiful and sexually promiscuous), Mammy (asexual and nurturing), and Sapphire (angry and aggressive)” (Davis and Jones 302). In essence, the myth of the SBW as represented by these stereotypes was (and for many, still is) a White construct “inform[ing] American culture” that was ultimately designed to control and “punish” Black women for their outspokenness against inequality, as such rhetoric “disrupts the status quo and challenges the authority and power of elite societal groups” (Davis 23). This construct to control Black women further results in controlling cultural, societal, literary and rhetorical perceptions of Black women as strong enough to “withstand the battle...at the intersection of race and gender...and its many consequences” (Davis and Jones 305).

The SBW and Physical and Mental Health

Such consequences include violence upon Black women that leads to psychological distress and physical health issues. The psychological distress involves systemic racism and sexism as well as the “psychological burden” of identifying with

the SBW image. Because of the “[high] rates of Black poverty,” it is often essential for Black women to work, as being “submissive and more feminine does not put food on the table.” As a result of a perceived “dominance” and “unnatural strength” in Black women, then, not only are Black women exploited by white people, but by “those who are closest to them” in the “depiction of [them] [in African American communities] as working tirelessly and constantly giving of themselves to their family. Because of the “[valorizing]” of such strength, it places particular expectations on Black women within their own communities and puts them in a position where they feel they cannot “reject exploitive work” or “walk away from responsibility, especially from their families” (Collins 204-205).

Because of the multiple layers that come with the mental toll of the SBW myth, it also becomes detrimental to Black women’s physical health as well. In her address “Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired: The Politics of Black Women’s Health,” Angela Y. Davis comments on how social and political rhetoric, and the myths carried with it *do* ultimately affect health, saying “While our health is undeniably assaulted by natural forces frequently beyond our control, all too often the enemies of our physical and emotional well-being are social and political” (19). According to Davis and Jones, A study from 2001 showed that “exposure” to racism, “obligation to family and kinship networks, and deprivation causes early onset of chronic illnesses and increases [their] risk of early disability and mortality” (309). In an even more recent study, which examines the physical and mental health of Black people in the current social and political movement, authors Juanita J. Chinn, Iman K. Martin, and Nicole Redmond conclude that “Black women have continued to make significant inroads in many

disciplines yet remain one of the few demographic groups that must advocate for themselves to receive consistent and high-quality care” and that “without equity in social and economic conditions, health equity is unlikely to be achieved” (“Health Equity Among Black Women” 216). In other words, the expectation to be the SBW within the intersection of race and gender kills Black women.

The SBW and Intersectionality

Part of how the SBW myth affected Black women from the standpoint of gender was not just how they are compared to white women, and how white women treated them, but in how Black men placed the SBW myth onto them according to the expectations and cultural conventions of the African American community. As Black women acquired the literacy of “[t]he internalization of strength and its manifestation in the everyday” white, patriarchal “mainstream society” (Davis and Jones 305) as well as formerly enslaved Black men seeking to establish their manhood and to have agency, pushed back by informing cultural conventions that made Black women a target “at the intersection of race and gender.” This meant that, according to white, mainstream society, Black women are the antithesis of femininity, not considered damsels in distress like their white counterparts, and “too crass, disrespectful, and self-sufficient to be women. To Black culture, though, they are too “feeble, temperamental, and discordant to be Black” (305). Additionally, though, Patricia Hill Collins points out how Black women have traditionally been told to “let Black men lead,” a message “[pandering] to misogyny in African American communities,” as Black women being “too strong” has made Black men “too weak” (184). Regardless, it would seem that there is a myriad of expectations, and fighting of battles on multiple

fronts, concerning the intersection of race and identity within the SBW myth.

Perhaps one of the most important arguments scholars make with regard to the SBW myth is that Black women are strong because they have no choice to be anything else. Collins notes that “Black women have learned to become the strong Black woman” (SBW) (208). Certainly, this is due in part to expectations forcibly put upon them. Davis and Jones emphasize Collins’ point, saying “Black women are warriors because [they] have to be,” and their intention is not to reify “long-standing accolades” that Black women are superhuman or invincible who possess the traits to not need or seek help (315). Through statements such as these, then, it is important to recognize that while Black women such as Cathay Williams *may have* had a lot of strength, language that assigns characteristics akin to the SBW myth risk the potential of overlooking the fact that applying such expectations can do considerable harm. Additionally, it does not truly allow space to consider and recognize at what personal cost she suffered. Perhaps most significantly, though, it overlooks how privilege influences the expectations society places on particular identities with regard to strength and who can afford to do without strength, and who cannot.

The Buffalo Soldiers

In order to have a better understanding of how the intersection of race and gender might have impacted her experience in the army, it is important to have an understanding of who the Buffalo Soldier was. The word “Buffalo Soldiers,” in the context of Cathay Williams’ experience, referred to the first African American men who enlisted in the Regular United States Army, starting in 1866, as free citizens of the United States. The Buffalo Soldiers received their name from the Cheyenne, as

the Cheyenne found the Black troops were “as tough and powerful as the noble North American bison so revered by the Great Plains tribes (Lt. Gen. Daniel Bolger *ausa.org*). The term “Buffalo Soldier” included all the men of the 9th and 10th Cavalry Regiments, and the 24th, 25th, and Second 38th Infantry Regiments in 1866. Their purpose was “to help control the [indigenous people] of the Plains, capture cattle rustlers and thieves, and protect settlers, stagecoaches, wagon trains, and railroad crews along the Western front” (Onion et al. *History*). In many ways, though, they helped to “make the West” (Donaldson 18) by “laying telegraph lines, exploring, and mapping uncharted terrain” (20).

Part of the reason the Buffalo soldiers became a reality was because of the “thousands of African Americans [who] headed to the western frontier to homestead and find a safe space to create independent black enclaves and communities” (Donaldson 10). For these particular African Americans, going westward meant “flee[ing] coerced labor, intimidation, and southern tyranny” (11) in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War and the Reconstruction of the South. Becoming a Buffalo Soldier was seen by African American men as an additional way to “start life anew” as opposed to “whites who joined the military as a last resort” (10).

Although the Buffalo Soldiers had the reputation of being tough, they “were scattered in some of the most isolated and volatile areas in the west” in extremely cold weather conditions at night and hot days in the desert, as well as other harsh aspects of frontier life (19). Despite the harshness of their situation, though, the Buffalo soldiers “[had] the lowest military desertion and court-martial rates of their time” (Onion et. al *History*). This was something they especially took pride in when contrasting their

service to their white counterparts.

In addition to the harsh elements of the natural environment in which they found themselves, the Buffalo Soldiers also faced racial tensions within their regiments as well as in the line of duty. When the Buffalo soldiers first started, their regiments had white officers who “felt these men unworthy of an education and refused to provide the necessary funds, buildings, or personnel to teach them” (Donaldson 23). White officers also “raised the old fears, similar to those of the days of slavery, of an uprising” when Black men began to be assigned as officers to the same regiment, which led to requests that those officers be split up into different regiments (25). In other words, there could not be too many Black officers leading Black soldiers.

As they dealt with racism within their regiments, so too did the Buffalo soldiers encounter it in their dealings with the white civilians they served. Many of the civilians that they encountered took issue not only with their being an all-Black regiment but with the “caravan of Black people who followed [them]” (Donaldson 21). Such feelings of discontent unfortunately led to harassment and even the horrifying practice so often performed in the South: lynching. In fact, after one Buffalo Soldier of the 25th Infantry, a regiment with “a proud history of defending themselves against civilian and officer abuse,” was lynched, the 25th infantry shot into and burned the buildings of anyone who had been involved in the lynch mob (22).

Although becoming a Buffalo Soldier was seen as an opportunity for African American men to have opportunities to support reinvent themselves by having a new life away from the old one—slavery and the South—it was also an opportunity to prove their *Black* masculinity. By becoming Buffalo Soldiers, Black men found the

opportunity to “express manhood in a society committed to circumscribing all black expressions of humanity” (13). By becoming Buffalo Soldiers, Black men were discovering and establishing what it meant to be *Black men*.

“Strength and Resiliency of the Human Spirit:” Female Buffalo Soldier Cathay Williams and the SBW Myth

Preface to Cathay Williams’ Interview: How Readers Should Perceive Her

Before sharing the information about her childhood in her own words, Cathay Williams’ unknown interviewer prefaced the interview and her story by stating he had heard of “a character in Trinidad...a colored woman by the name of Cathy Williams,” whom some residents called “Kate,” and he heard specifically that “[this] woman had served as a soldier during the late [Indian] war and was in other respects an interesting individual. After briefly describing the home in which she resided and to which she invited him in for the interview, he commented on her way of receiving him, saying it was polite, “though with an [exaggerated] formality that had a slight touch of the ridiculous.” He then went on to describe her physical characteristics saying, “Kate is tall and powerfully built, black as night, masculine looking and has a very independent air both in conversation and action. Dressed in male attire she would readily pass for a man...she appeared hard and sinewy as if her life had been one of exposure (*Daily Times* qtd. in Tucker, 195). He ended the article noting that he was sure to include the information that he himself had “examined the [discharge] paper and found it to be a service document, a discharge from the army” as well as some of the discrepancies, such as Williams not remembering dates and locations (195).

Through this select choice of language, Cathay Williams’ interviewer had already

framed how readers should perceive her. Before readers even had the chance to read her story in her own words, she was associated with some of the signature characteristics of the SBW myth. The comment of her “exaggerated formality” and it being “ridiculous” with regard to how she received the interviewer echoed the characteristic of “subhuman emotion and intellectual capacity” associated with the SBW myth. She was exotic for “being black as night” (Jezebel). She was the antithesis of femininity for not being the damsel in distress (white), and instead she was “masculine” and “hard and sinewy.” She was “independent” with her words and actions (extreme independence). Overall, his exoticizing of her through the framework of the SBW myth labelled her as a unique kind of oddity, just as the Amazons were oddities as a result of their exoticization, in which readers were encouraged to see her service as something out of the ordinary, and as a result, it encouraged readers to see her, and her service, as more mythical rather than factual.

In her historical fiction *Daughter of a Daughter of a Queen*, author Sarah Bird, who writes from an imagined first-person perspective of Cathay Williams, gives Williams voice in response to the damaging effect of this preface that was framing her as theatrical, unreliable, and ultimately, an SBW. In particular, she portrays Williams as responding to the reporter’s ignorance concerning her use of language according to her rhetorical situation. Her response, to what Bird writes as “an *assumed* formality,” is “‘Assumed?’ Because I knew when to say ‘ain’t’ and when not to” (3)? Through this challenge, Bird portrayed Williams as calling attention to a necessity of Black women needing to use a “unique communicative style” known as “code switching,” in which Black women “liv[ed] in ‘two different worlds’” by speaking in “Black English

vernacular in the presence of other Black women” in order to be accepted by the Black community, especially Black women, while speaking standard—“appropriate”—English in front of white audiences (Shardé Davis 22). Bird highlights Williams’ need to utilize this communicative style and how the interviewer’s framing of her “exaggerated formality” as “ridiculous” reflected an “anti-Black linguistic racism that [was] used to diminish Black language...[and] [that] [was] not separate from the rampant and deliberative anti-Black racism and violence inflicted upon Black people in society” (Baker-Bell 2-3). In fact, Bird has Williams be frank about the interviewer’s blatant racism with regard to her use of “appropriate white speech” rather than use of Black vernacular, in which she observes, “When I didn’t turn out to be some green gal fresh off the plantation never knew the touch of shoe leather, and was, instead a person who could talk just as proper as him when she was of a mind to, here’s what the skunk dump wrote in the January 2, 1876, edition of the *St. Louis Daily Times*” (3). Through this imagined response, Bird confronts the SBW trope being applied to Williams by calling to the forefront a hard truth. Condemning someone’s language practices by making those practices inferior to “superior” language practices did damage. Such condemnation influencing how an individual’s story will be perceived and received—a story about a woman who was a real woman warrior— did damage.

Not only does Bird highlight how language associated with the SBW myth did damage in the preface to Cathay Williams’ interview, but she examines the damage of the documentation of this, as well, through Williams’ reflection on the permanency of the article in which she was featured. To show the impact of what was documented,

Bird has Williams contemplate the consequences with her saying:

How do you answer back to a newspaper? With just a few words, that bowler-hatted jasper made me out to be a fraud and every word out of my mouth a lie. No wonder folks don't believe me when I tell them I was a Buffalo soldier. Having both of my feet amputated last year has not strengthened my case either (3).

By having Williams voice the effects of how her story was received, due to how her interviewer preserved her words in a public newspaper article, Bird illuminates how the construction of archives, similar to the construction of language, can create or reify myths, such as the SBW, or the myth of the woman warrior. Because Williams could not speak back to the newspaper article relaying her story, she became a woman who spoke “ridiculously” and who lied by telling tall tales of her being a female Buffalo soldier in disguise.

Rewriting the History: Mythologizing Cathay Williams

Indeed, a similar sort of inclination was present amongst comments by historians having to do with what was, and what was *not* documented in terms of how the SBW myth was, or could have been operating. In her book review titled “Mythologizing Cathy Williams,” in which Sarah Eppler Janda reviewed new historian Philip Thomas Tucker’s biography *Cathay Williams: From Slave to Female Buffalo Soldier*, Janda notes Tucker’s failure to “demonstrate what was so noteworthy about this one woman who pretended to be sick in order to avoid service she herself willingly entered”(19). Although Janda responds to Tucker’s biographical depiction of William’s life, her assessment of this particular drawback overlooks the fact that Williams had been in service for two years. Even more significantly, there is an omission of information of the evidence provided concerning how often Williams

was sick during her service. Perhaps most significant, though, is that there is no consideration for what Williams may not have been willing to disclose to her interviewer in terms of her health. As Audre Lorde said in her piece “Living with Cancer,” “[Black women] have been schooled to be secret and stoical about pain and disease” (35), another oppressive trait of the SBW myth put upon Black women. If this facet of the SBW myth served as a potential barrier for Williams, then, it encouraged viewing her story with skepticism and placing it further in the margins, and in turn, placing her further in myth.

In response to historians who have claim that Williams saved her comrades and earned awards for doing so, historian Frank Schubert says that these historians “[projected] Williams’ story to fit a certain worldview based on little information” and make her to be a bigger model than she actually was. Additionally, he believes that the exclusion of and lack of representation of “black history portrayals shouldn’t deflect focus from lesser-known figures that have sacrificed far more for the black community,” and while taking a risk by joining the army is noteworthy, “it doesn’t make her a hero” (qtd. in Christina Ayele Djossa, *atlasobscura.com*).

Imagining Her Childhood as an SBW Upbringing

Another instance in which the SBW myth is either taken up or resisted regarding Williams’ biography is in how authors imagined her childhood. At the beginning of her interview, Cathay Williams stated that her father was a “freedman” while her mother was a slave. While almost all scholars agree that her “[father’s] name is unknown,” and there is no documentation on him, there are a number who claim that her mother’s name was Martha, who took the last name of the man who enslaved her

(Tucker 17; Society for Women and the Civil War). Due to her mother being enslaved, then, Williams also had “the legal status of a slave”(Weiser *legendsofamerica.com*). Because her father was a freedman, and plantation owners desired to keep enslaved persons from interacting with freedmen (Tucker 18), it was likely that Cathay had more interactions with her mother than her father. As a result of the likelihood of her having had little interaction with her father, as well as almost no documented evidence of him, authors of various genres tend to take note of, or expand on, the relationship between Williams and her mother, and they use that relationship as a launching point to further expand on imagining Williams’ story. Within this space of expansion, some authors have echoed the SBW myth or fallen upon aspects of the woman warrior myth. Regardless, the exploration and imagining of her possible relationship with her parents is suggested to serve as the foundation, or source of strength, that explained where Williams got the traits that would make her capable of being a female Buffalo Soldier.

Perhaps the most interesting speculation regarding Williams’ relationship with her parents is the one that Tucker made with regard to her unknown father, as his language strongly surmises her father’s background as well as suggests how her father shaped her into becoming an SBW. The conjectures Tucker make about her father comes from a new historicist approach, in which “we do not look at history objectively, but rather we interpret events as products of our time and culture,” and “we are hopelessly subjective interpreters of what we observe” (“New Historicism, Cultural Studies (1980s-present),” *Purdue OWL*). Through this approach to research, then, Tucker draws on the historical context of the Santa Fe Trail, it’s connection to the Mexican- American War, how that war impacted Missouri in terms of volunteers,

and how many of those volunteers were African American men forcefully brought to fight, to ultimately forward the theory that Williams' father may have been one of those men. By drawing these connections, Tucker attempts to explain how Williams' father may have obtained his freedom, but additionally, these supposed connections served to support the claim that "for the rest of her days the inspiration of her father's life would not be lost to the daughter" (17). In other words, Tucker forwards that Williams' father may very well have influenced her decision to move out West and to join the military based on his status of being free. In addition, though, Tucker deduces through the narrative of another formerly enslaved woman, Linda Brent, that once Williams was old enough to realize she was enslaved, and she realized the brutal life that awaited, her self-image was "shatter[ed]" as "a fatherless slave girl" (24). This framing of Williams' father prefaces how Tucker framed Black motherhood.

Although Tucker is one of the only two scholars who have really speculated on who Williams' father was, he joins a majority of authors who explore the possible relationship with her mother, or at least mention her mother's name. Basing his analysis on the new historicist approach, Tucker describes the life of enslaved women such as Cathay and her mother as being set within a matriarchal society, claiming that it was "maternal instincts" that "[created] a woman who shouldered more responsibility." He also asserts that this was a "liberating experience" that "helped to strengthen the character, will, and determination of black women not only despite of but because of slavery" (25). Such an assertion demonstrates Tucker's awareness that Black women were strong because slavery had made it so that they had little choice.

However, Tucker's acknowledgement of Black women having no alternative

but to be strong fails to examine how the “liberating experience” and “responsibility” of being the stabilizing factor in the form of the matriarchal figure was not liberating at all. As Collins, Davis, and Jones all examine, part of the psychological distress that results from the expectations of the SBW myth forced upon Black women is to be the nucleus of the Black family and not having the option of walking away from such a responsibility. Additionally, regardless of Tucker’s provision of a Swedish woman’s account of visiting the South, in which she observed how Black women were more liberated than white woman according to “the egalitarian tendencies of slave life for black females” (25), there is no examination of the options of child rearing for women of each race. As bell hooks noted in “Homeplace (a site of resistance),” Black women “for the most part worked outside the home serving white folks, cleaning their houses, washing their clothes, [and] tending their children.” They then went home, and if they had the energy, they had “to conserve enough of themselves to provide service (care and nurturance) within their own families and communities” (383). In essence, Tucker’s point about the “liberation” of the Black matriarch as the central figure does not acknowledge that enslaved Black women were often forced to be a mother figure to white children in place of those children’s delicate, feminine white mothers, in addition to Black women’s responsibility of being mothers to their own children as well.

Through his hypothetical construction of both parents’ backgrounds, then, Tucker argues that, regardless of her enslaved status, “the odds for Cathay Williams’ future survival in life were enhanced because she inherited qualities of strength of character, resiliency, and determination from her parents” (17). Essentially, then,

Tucker forwards that both parents' influences came together to shape her into a resilient—strong—Black woman as a sort of inheritance. Throughout his biography of Cathay Williams, Tucker uses the word “resilient,” or variations of this word, in association with Williams to emphasize his point that she was “an enduring testament to the strength and resiliency of the human spirit” (14). By forwarding her as a “testament” or “proof” of what strength “of the human spirit” looks like, he gives her Biblical—Amazonian—qualities that made her a sort of sole symbol of what strength looked like for everyone.

Other authors were also sure to mention the mother of Cathay Williams in some kind of capacity, whether it was in a single line of poetry or throughout an entire book. Nancy Kastebaum's poem “Cathay Williams” references Williams' mother with the line “Martha's baby girl was born” (*buffalosoldier.net*). Alphonso Stephenson creates a thorough description of Cathay's childhood, in which he examines the nature of her and her mother's relationship, a relationship of an enslaved mother and daughter trying to protect one another and themselves from physical and sexual abuse, from Williams' birth up to the point the Union Army took her away. Perhaps the most interesting depiction of her relationship with her mother, though, is in Sarah Bird's book *Daughter of a Daughter of a Queen*.

In Bird's historical fiction, Cathay Williams introduces herself in the first chapter as having “royal blood” that “comes from [her] grandmother Iyaiya.” After this introduction, she immediately instructs the reader not to picture her Iyaiya as “one of those sweet old grannies,” as she was “one of the Leopard King's six thousand warrior-wives, what the French called *les Amazones* (3). When she describes the Union Army

arriving at the plantation on which she was enslaved, Williams makes a reference to the influence of *Iyaiya* on herself and her mother, saying “*Iyaiya* had drilled it into mama to never show weakness before your enemy and mama had passed that rule onto me” (9). Thus, the trait of the SBW myth to suppress emotions and put up the front of being strong is utilized here to illustrate a strategy for survival as well as a rhetorical skill that was learned. This utilization does the work of echoing the fact that Black women have no choice but to be strong while also reifying their stoicism and lack of vulnerability.

While there are traces of the SBW myth in the first chapter, there is also a marked resistance to the myth of the woman warrior in relation to Cathay Williams as a Buffalo Soldier. As Williams instructs her audience in the very beginning of the first chapter, her readers are not to associate her grandmother with a Euro-centric, white construct of women warriors, who are only so due to the supernatural, and who exist solely in myth. The implied mocking tone of referring to Amazons using *les Amazones* denotes Williams’ disdain regarding how the word impacts real women warriors. To further ensure her descending from a real woman warrior, this fictional Cathay Williams confirms such ancestry for her audience through the parting words of her mother. Toward the end of the chapter, when she is forcibly taken away by the Union Army, her mother shouts to her “ ‘Remember who you are... You are the daughter of a daughter of a queen who was one of the six thousand virgin warrior-wives of King Ghezo, the greatest of twelve kings of Dahomey!’ ”(12) In opposition to Tucker’s new historicist approach, Bird imagines, rather than conjectures, that Williams is descended from a real woman warrior of a real female-warrior tribe in Africa, in whose footsteps Williams follows, rather than being inspired by her father’s

hypothetical army service.

Not the Right Kind of Woman, Not the Right Kind of Black

Scholars and authors have capitalized on what Cathay Williams may have done during her time in the army, but perhaps the most significant focus with regard to the SBW myth is with regard to a focus on her motivation revolving around men. In particular, scholar Philip Thomas Tucker and author Sarah Bird elaborate on the meaning behind Williams' mentioning in her interview that she joined the army with a cousin or her "particular friend." In both of their works, Tucker and Bird ground her actions in the army according to assigned gender conventions or heteronormative values.

In his other book on Cathay Williams, Tucker attributes the SBW myth to Williams through the supposition that she made the decision to join the military through a natural maternal instinct in Black women. Specifically, he supposes that "her cousin might have been younger, and perhaps in need of assistance from another family member, especially a nurturing female" (65). Although the forwarding of this argument is an attempt to resist the potential argument that her "motivations to enlist" were "ego-based" and "masculine-driven," as well as to reject the label of her being "the brazen Amazon" (65-66) it ultimately does what Tucker attempts to avoid. By claiming her intentions were based on an SBW expectation pushed onto Black women, which is to care for their family—for Black men—at the expense of their own needs, it still places Williams in the domestic sphere according to a white construct and a patriarchal framework. This is a construct and framework that requires Amazonian strength and willpower to prioritize her cousin—her family—a Black man, over herself. Such a

placement, then, further distorts the significance of her contribution as an actual female Buffalo Soldier.

In her book, Sarah Bird centers her story of Cathay Williams on a fictional romance between Williams and sergeant Wager Swayne, in which one of the goals for Williams during her time in the military is a heteronormative one. Over the course of the novel, Bird develops the relationship so that after some misunderstandings in which Swayne believes Williams made homosexual advances toward him, he accepts her as a lover once she reveals her true gender identity to him in secret. After declaring their love for one another Williams proclaims to him, “I know I don’t please you in the usual man-woman sort of way...But I am good and true and will give you strong children who will build a new world for our people” (313). Bird’s imagining of an event such as this does the similar work of placing Williams among the “romantic young ladies” as Civil War- era newspapers often liked to label female soldiers, in which they explained away these women as choosing to fight in order to be by a husband’s side. Thus, even if it is not Bird’s intention, the emphasis of a heteronormative relationship in the uptake of Williams’ story performs a similar rhetorical move of providing a logical explanation as one of the few acceptable reasons why women chose to fight as soldiers. Once the acceptable reason was given, these women could go back to being women, and the matter was forgotten. The emphasis on her having an imaginary romance, then, has the same implications for depictions of Williams’ story.

When Cathay Williams relayed in her interview how her comrades “acted real bad to [her]” after she came forward and revealed her gender, their rude reaction

spoke specifically to the particular intersectional conflict Black women faced according to race and gender, in which she was “not the right kind of woman, but neither was she the right kind of Black” (Crenshaw qtd. in Khaleeli *theguardian.com*). In contrast to the memoirs and archival artifacts in connection with Velazquez and Edmonds, there is no documentation that proves that anyone supported Williams’ service outside of the artifacts available. Additionally, Williams did not have the privilege of race to make herself be seen as akin to a Euro-centric Joan of Arc figure (perceived in the "acceptable" way according to white men’s terms) like Velazquez. She also did not have the privilege of identifying as a White Christian, which was the persuasive banner to fight under, as Edmonds did. Perhaps most significant of all, though, is that while white men certainly condemned women for being soldiers, others still either voiced their acceptance of them as comrades, as Velazquez illustrated in her memoir, or they came forward to confirm their service, as Edmonds’ former comrades did to help her obtain her pension. There is plenty of proof about how white men attempted to keep female soldiers out or erase them, but there is also proof that they supported and preserved the service of *white women*.

As the rude reaction of Cathay Williams’ comrades showed, when her gender was discovered, and the recording of “racist treatment from white officers and civilians” (Donaldson 30) revealed, Williams most certainly fought on two fronts dealing with issues of race and gender during her service as a Buffalo Soldier. The reaction of her comrades was particularly significant, however, as it reflected what Davis and Jones call “the supposed allies” in their scholarship related to the strong Black woman collective. This term refers to Black women learning a hard truth that

“groups who should serve as [their] allies are often positioned as [their] adversaries.” In particular, white women often utilize their whiteness by aligning with racist systemic forces, such as Velazquez aligning herself with racist Southern honor, and Edmonds aligning herself with white Christianity, while Black men utilize their maleness by aligning with systemic patriarchal ones (Davis and Jones 306). In the case of Black soldiers in both the Civil War and as early Buffalo soldiers, their time in the military appeared to serve as a means of their own kind of reclamation: Black manhood.

In his book, Donald R. Shaffer argues that Black soldiers of the Civil War fought for freedom as well as “the same opportunities, rights, and status enjoyed by White men,” and they “reckoned their position in gendered terms (15). Similarly, LeTrice D. Donaldson claims that the Black soldier from the Reconstruction era to World War I fought not only as a means to exercise his citizenship but to also “demonstrate[e] that they were real men in an era when proving one’s manhood was a national obsession.” This need was especially intensified by “[t]he rise of social Darwinism[,] [which] only fueled the rhetoric of scientific racism that claimed black men to be cowardly, sexual deviants, and incapable of military leadership” (11). It seems, then, that the military space—the space of the Black Union troops—the space of the Buffalo Soldier—needed to be a strictly Black *male* space in order for free Black men to further define, as well as reclaim, an identity of Black manhood.

When Cathay Williams’ gender was revealed, her comrades’ reaction of treating her poorly echoes the Combahee River Collective’s point that “[the] reaction of Black men to feminism has been notoriously negative” as Black men realized that

they might not only lose hardworking allies concerning their own struggles but also “be forced to change their habitually sexist ways” in how they interact with and oppress Black women (298). Although “feminism” was not a term that would have been understood as it is from a post-structuralist standpoint, Williams’ act of entering into the military is in-and-of-itself a feminist act, as she goes against the racist and patriarchal systemic forces set up to block her from entering a male-dominated space. Her comrades’ reaction to this feminist act *was* ultimately negative. For them, the discovery that a Black woman could fill a role they deemed as a pathway to establishing Black manhood undermined the value of their manhood and of boosting their own self-image.

Certainly, Black men—Black soldiers—did have allies in Black women, such as Ida B. Wells and Mary Church Terrell, who prioritized human rights’ issues, such as the lynching of Black men, and Sojourner Truth, who praised the Black Union 54th Massachusetts Regiment saying, “now is de day and now is de hour for the colored man to save dis nation” (*Narrative of Sojourner Truth* x). However, when Cathay Williams became a Buffalo Soldier in 1866 after enslaved persons were officially emancipated, focus shifted from abolition to obtaining more rights as citizens, such as the right for Black men to vote, which would happen when the Fifteenth amendment was ratified in 1870. While Black women allies such as Sojourner Truth did support the progress of Black men, she, along with other Black women such as Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, expressed concern at the lack of inclusion for Black women in the amendment, saying, “There is a great stir about colored men getting their rights, but not a word about the colored woman; and if colored men get their rights, and not

colored women get theirs, there will be a bad time about it” (Truth *nps.gov*). Here, Truth’s rhetoric directly challenged an opportunity for Black men to be established in a class that was distinct from that of Black women.

In a similar manner, Williams’ entering the army and successfully occupying the space as long as she did directly challenged, as well as successfully conquered, another space that Black men were determined would place them in a class distinct from Black women. Just as newspaper articles for the North and South, as well as diaries of Southern and Northern soldiers, crafted myths that appealed to white ideologies of masculinity or the ideal soldier to minimize, dismiss, or erase female soldier’s actions, so too did the animosity of Williams’ comrades serve a similar purpose. By establishing displeasure as a collective, that, presumably, had the same goal in terms of establishing Black manhood, it fostered a practice of forwarding the message that Black women stepping beyond their bounds into Black male spaces was not to be encouraged, nor was it to be tolerated. Such a practice potentially led to an audience beginning to believe that the actions of women such as Williams was not even imaginable.

Reimagining Cathay Williams through Critical Imagination and Mythologizing

Although mythologizing the work of women in combat has the potential to cause erasure and do harm, these myths also provide the possibility of preservation and making a story heard and a name repeatedly said. The myth of the strong Black woman nearly erased Cathay Williams’ involvement as a Buffalo Soldier from history. Omitting mention of her true gender in the original discharge papers, and the dismissive tone in her invalid pension papers, stating that she did not receive her

ailments in the military, gave the impression that those in charge wanted the matter dealt with and concluded quickly. It seemed, then, that the best way to deal with it quickly was to say that, despite having to walk on a crutch due to her amputated toes, she had no disability at all.

However, there is evidence that Williams circumvented the myth that tried to erase her, by propagating her story with the goal of its continued recirculation, which further led to its mythologization. Considering that the *St. Louis Daily Times* newspaper journalist from St. Louis had to track her down, one has to wonder if he had gotten word of her story through its recirculation within a community, which was then shared with other communities. Further, there was evidence according to Tucker's preface of his biography of Williams, in which he recalls receiving a letter about a fight breaking out at Fort Riley, Kansas over the existence of Williams. The fight had been between a soldier, who identified as a Buffalo Soldier history buff, and a soldier who had been to Junction City, Kansas and had been told about Williams by the residents. According to this letter, Tucker's book had apparently "[confirmed] the oral history maintained by [the] Junction [City,] [Kansas] residents" (8), but this letter confirmed that while a myth could be erased according to the "expert," the mythologizing of someone and their story could also be revealed, according to the novice.

The Benefit of Mythologizing

In recent literature, as well as in popular culture, Cathay Williams' story is examined and celebrated. Some of these genres, such as poetry, attempt to remain historically accurate. In Senator Nancy Landon Kastebaum's 1999 poem "Cathay Williams," there is a stanza saying, "Because of her illegal enlistment/Her

pension passed her by/ But she picked herself up and moved on/ And never questioned why” (*buffalosoldier.net*). Here, the dismissal of her pension is also observed, but it does not complete the poem, as the last stanza says, “A salute to Cathay Williams/ The hero of this rhyme/ A special woman of the west/ A legend in her time.” By ending with this stanza, the poem ends on an emphasis of its purpose, which was to acknowledge Cathay Williams’ story and to encourage the reader to see her as a *legend* worth admiring and worth talking about. Other genres, such as the historical fiction *She Was a Buffalo Soldier: The Story of Cathay Williams: Book One* by Alphonso Washington, tells the story from the imagined perspectives of Cathay’s mother, Martha, as well as from Cathay herself. In particular, Cathay’s childhood is presented as a time period that would ultimately prepare her for a life in the army, in which she wrestled “Grecian-style” with the stepsons of the plantation owner but also realized the differences in developing male and female bodies and what that meant in terms of pretending to be a man (140). By taking liberties with filling in the gaps of her story with fictionalized narrative, Washington appeals to his audience by providing access to Cathay’s thoughts and motivations, which adds an entertainment value to the story of her life and later military service. When entertainment value is added to true stories that were originally sparse in content, it fosters an invested interest on the subject, which potentially leads to audience members wishing to know more.

Perhaps the most significant genre that mythologizes Williams’ story is the recent 2021 movie *The Harder They Fall* (2021). In the movie, Williams is depicted as a character named Cuffee. When she is asked by the character Nat Love what her real name is, she responds with, “Cuffee my real name...Name I was born

with...Cathay Williams.” In other words, Williams is presented here as identifying as Cuffee and giving up her birth name. There is never any mention of the name William Cathay, her ever having a disability, or her service as a Bufffalo Soldier in the film. Although it seems curious at first that Williams is not depicted as what she was known for, actress Danielle Deadwyler, who played Cuffee, presents the portrayal as a consideration of what Williams’ life may have looked like in a sort of alternate universe, in which she had continued living as a man, and if she had any disabilities, she never disclosed them. In Deadwyler’s own words, and based on her own research concerning women soldiers of the Civil War, she says:

I knew Black women were a part of the space, but they just weren’t recorded in the same way that white women who were trans in the Civil War era were... This was a liberatory freedom practice for Black women, and in thinking about it for Cathay, she wanted to access a particular kind of freedom. So I was able to take all that information and synthesize it with the liminal space of fact and fiction that we were riding with...(qtd. in LeGardye *YahooNews*)

Through Deadwyler’s portrayal, audiences are able to see a facet, though fictional, of Williams’ life that shows her as an active and progressive member of the community who has agency regarding how she would live her life as well as how every person she encounters would treat her. It provides that entertainment value and inspires enough interest to encourage audiences to seek more information about her.

Certainly, Williams’ existence is mythologized to a large extent in *The Harder They Fall*, but the sentence before the opening credits of the film began to roll succinctly states, “While the events of this story are fictional... These. People. Existed.” (*The Harder They Fall*). Thus, while such a move demonstrates the film writers’ attention to acknowledging the existence of the actual historical people

depicted in it, it also suggests that setting the film within a fictional storyline ultimately serves a *benefit*. Essentially, Cathay Williams' story being fictionalized, being further mythologized, does the work of making her spot on the historical map more prominent. With that consideration, then, perhaps mythologizing is necessary. Perhaps mythologizing means that Williams' story *does* become myth, but perhaps that is how it survives and why people continue to say her name.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

For Country, for God, for Independence, or for Money? Motivation and Myth of the Woman Warrior

Mythos, myth, is a vessel for the communication of knowledge that helps us comprehend the world we inhabit. It helps explain the spiritual, cultural, political, and even economic aspects of a society for its members. Mythos may present a way of understanding the physical world with its variety and myriad of sometimes dazzling phenomenon. Myth may be steeped in actual events or embellish on a grain of truth, and sometimes, they are cherished and preserved if they tell a truth that those in power want to hear. However, myth may be changed, and myth may be created. It may be interwoven with logos-the logical, the known reality-and nomos, the rules and social conventions that determine the paradigmatic boundaries within which a society can function. Myth may influence this paradigm, but the paradigm may determine what myths or elements of myth are selected for archiving.

The Woman Warrior myth is that a woman, to be a warrior, must be vested with superhuman qualities. Logos, however, tells us real women have actually served as soldiers in combat. In this discussion I review the cases of three women who did actually serve as soldiers in the period around the American Civil War. I examine the similarities and differences in their actions and rhetorical practices, and I discuss how these are factors in the subsequent forwarding of their stories by others. The classical myths of woman warriors such as the Amazons have had a dominant hold influencing the discourse of actual women warriors of history, and in keeping with the Western classical tradition, the myths that are resisted and reified or created by white women

appear to hold the most sway. The stories in which there are gaps and in which myth does not appear to be present have potential for myth to be attributed to them, and this appears to especially be the case for populations such as women of color who do not say much, do not come forward, or who are silenced. The three women whose cases were selected for this study were from diverse backgrounds, approached the problems created for them individually by the woman warrior myth, and their rhetorical efforts led to different results.

All three of these women—Loreta Janeta Velasquez, Sarah Emma Edmonds, and Cathay Williams—shared the act of dressing as men to participate as combatants in the military space, a space dictated by conventions or norms of the times to be exclusively for men. In doing so, they all defied the belief (nomos) that was firmly upheld, especially by men, that ordinary, real women were not capable of serving as soldiers—thus, in challenging this belief, they defied the idea of a woman warrior as only a mythical being. They all divulged their transgressing the male-female boundary in order to obtain money, but their underlying motives were not entirely the same. Velasquez seemed to have undertaken her impersonation of a male soldier at least in part for the sake of adventure. Edmonds claimed to have joined for reasons of morality. Williams, like many persons displaced by the war, was in need of steady employment. All three, however, may also have been driven by strong pecuniary needs as a reason for enlisting, as well as a reason for their eventual revelation.

War and Capitalism

Except for a few elite individuals, the war imposed significant, and often severe, financial hardship on most of the population, both North and South. In the

agrarian South, Christopher Memminger, the Secretary of the Treasury, assumed like many, that the war would be of short duration, and he expected that the early loans taken by the government would be quickly repaid by import duties. However, the Federal blockade cut off almost all foreign trade and removed this income stream. The Treasury issued bonds, and finally, paper money, unsupported by gold, but unfortunately, many states, and even banks, also issued their own paper notes, creating ever-worsening inflation.

This financial debacle was disastrous for the women of the South. Traditionally, men controlled the finances, and in many instances, were the absolute masters and owners of all property, but many men who were off campaigning had been wounded, captured, or killed. This left many women with no recourse other than the hope that relatives, or even strangers, would take them in (Channing 27-33). For some, the idea of joining the fight-in disguise-may have presented a strategy for circumventing the male domination of the almost-defunct financial system and avoiding starvation.

For less affluent women in the North, the situation was not much better. Northern men-again in charge of the financial system-quickly seized on opportunities to expand their manufacturing and transportation operations to meet the needs of the war effort. They also used the war as a platform for consolidation and take-overs within many industries, leading to the creation of great monopolies. This expansion and monopolization created immense wealth for the elite, but it left the lower classes in dire straits. The Midwest farmers suddenly lost their market to the south, and a run on gold in the early days of the

war led to inflation nearly as bad as in the South. “The gap between richer and poorer was growing steadily wider... Yet many a New York laborer was scarcely keeping up with the cost of living”(Jackson 77).

Again, the men were in charge of the money, although on Wall street where speculators gathered in a frenzy, there were “Included in their number a sprinkling of daring women-“(Jackson 77). On the other end of the spectrum, though, the reality (logos) was that working-class women were often exploited, earning penurious wages. For these women, the idea of soldier’s pay, along with provision of meals, clothing, and some shelter would have been a comparative release from poverty--as long as they were seen as fitting within the convention of being “men” who could earn money for their participation in the fight, instead of women who were expected to nobly donate their efforts to the cause, according to the myth of True Womanhood.

We have seen that *mythos* interacts with, modulates and is modified by history. If there is one aspect of *mythos*, and the myth of the woman warrior, that remained constant in connection to Loreta Velazquez, Sarah Emma Edmonds, and Cathay Williams archives and stories, it was that there are layers to myth with regard to how it related to their intersections of identity. Due to their own intersections of identity, and how they were situated within the social, political, and cultural conventions of nineteenth-century America, then, Velazquez, Edmonds and Williams each found herself interacting with or challenging the myth of the woman in her own way. However, none of these women were able to determine the public’s perception of them or completely dictate how the myth of the woman warrior would impact their story.

Dress Like Joan... for the Money

Loreta Janeta Velazquez constructed her identity as a woman warrior through the publication of her memoir, *The Woman in Battle*. She challenged the myth of the woman warrior, bypassing the Amazon label. She did so by queering the canon of warrior rhetoric and inserting herself into a canon of other noteworthy women warriors, while mirroring the rhetorical moves of Confederate soldiers who mythologized and compared themselves and Southern honor to Spartan warriors and their sense of honor. By mirroring the rhetorical moves of Southern soldiers, she also painted herself as racially superior by fighting in the defense of Southern honor. Additionally, she queered woman warrior discourse by overtly and repeatedly insisting on her success as a *woman* warrior by constantly reminding her reader of her time and success as a soldier in disguise, who in the end, still identified as a woman. In other words, she repeatedly challenged her readers to reconsider what they had been taught to believe concerning women's place in warfare while they read her story.

However, through her queering of woman warrior discourse, Velazquez inadvertently mythologized her own story, particularly by associating herself with Joan of Arc, a woman warrior who has famously been mythologized and romanticized throughout history. Through such a comparison, Velazquez followed a trend of nineteenth-century readers' tendency toward the romantic by her self-comparison to such a figure. Perhaps this was a primary misstep in her memoirs, as many female soldiers of the Civil War were written off as "romantic young ladies" (Blanton and Cook 222) by the press and male soldiers, and Joan of Arc was weaponized as a label against other women warriors who were discovered or who

publicly disclosed themselves. Thus, Velazquez's attempt to recast herself as a modern-day Joan of Arc only served to provide fodder for her critics and detracted from her financial prospects from publication.

For Velazquez, she had not only dared to cross dress and enter the masculine realm of warfare, but she had also dared to write about—preserve—her experience of being a woman warrior in a time when “women’s writing careers faced censure and hostility” (Alexandria Peary 220), and further, she asked that she be paid for it. This request, in the midst of all her other transgressions, appeared to be the greatest sin of all, as she dared to admit that she desired money at a time when, according to the Cult of True Womanhood, “[woman] was to work in silence, unseen...only for pure affection, without thought of money or ambition” (Welter 160). Although it was a very real possibility that many women joined the army in disguise because the pay was good compared to that for menial “female” labor, Velazquez’s public declaration of wanting money from her book went against established feminine conventions not only constructed by men but constructed and upheld by women as well. Instead of being the nurturing woman of “pure affection” who either did not seek money or had used her money without “ambition” to help others (men, in particular), she had resisted the conventions of femininity. As a result, her actions could have potentially framed other female soldiers who told their stories as money-grubbers. Perhaps, then, this could have been a reason why the majority of female Civil War soldiers did not share their stories, as they either feared people would view them as mercenary, or they knew that they would be unlikely to make any profit from writing and publishing a memoir, as evidenced by Velazquez’s financial disappointment. Seeing the unprofitable result and

the societal disdain of her efforts would serve to discourage others with literary ambitions from following her example.

Onward, Christian Soldier(ess)...for the Profit of the Soldiers

While Velazquez believed that sharing her story would enlighten her audience to the existence of women warriors, challenge their originally-held beliefs, and bring her profit, Sarah Emma Edmonds turned to a “feminine,” more conservative, and conventionally appropriate, approach regarding her encountering of the myth of the woman warrior. In contrast to Velazquez’s flamboyant style, Edmonds conducted her activities somewhat surreptitiously. Rather than bragging about her cross-dressing, Edmonds was almost apologetic for the necessity of assuming her disguise in her memoir. Even though she was similar to Velazquez in not acknowledging the use of the Amazon warrior trope, she still deviated significantly from Velazquez’s approach by not acknowledging the myth of the woman warrior altogether. Essentially, she did not associate herself with mythologized woman warriors such as Joan of Arc or other woman warriors throughout history.

Edmonds associated herself with another warrior figure she forwarded as ideal, the Christian soldier, while also never explicitly referring to her own gender. By forwarding this kind of warrior, described by her as the ideal form of the white, male soldier, and, unlike Velazquez, by not referring to her gender overtly, Edmonds avoided the use of queer discourse with regard to the woman warrior. In addition, though, by forwarding herself as more of a white, Christian soldier, modeling the white, male Christian soldier and fighting for Christian principles, instead of focusing on her being a female soldier, Edmonds created a space for her audience to generously

view her and the unnamed, self-proclaimed Christian female soldier she mentioned in her memoir. She created a space for her audience to see her as a Christian soldier of reality, rather than a woman warrior, even if the “Christian soldier” can also be viewed as a mythical construct.

By framing herself as a Christian who had followed the example of male soldiers who exemplified the ideal soldier—the Christian soldier—Edmonds justified her actions of stepping beyond the domestic sphere as acceptable because she transgressed for a noble, persuasive cause and also because she managed to stay within the conventions of femininity with regard to finances. When her memoir was published, it was made clear that the proceeds of her book would go to the benefit of the soldiers. Thus, unlike Velazquez, Edmonds managed to exude affection and not be seen to work, or write, for monetary gain, thus adhering to what the *nomoi* of the Cult of True Womanhood called for women to do. Perhaps her maintaining and honoring of the conventions of femininity, then, assisted Edmonds years later when some of her fellow comrades came forward and acknowledged her when she revealed her soldier alias of Franklin Thompson, which she had avoided doing in her memoir. By not coveting the money her memoir garnered for herself, and instead donating it to soldiers, to *men*, Edmonds had exemplified Christian, *feminine* behavior that was not only to be rewarded, but it also potentially lessened the impact or assigning of the myth of the woman warrior to her story.

The Strong Black Woman...Doesn't Need the Money

Perhaps one of the most interesting ways in which the myth of the woman warrior was at work during this period was in the story of Buffalo Soldier Cathay

Williams, since the sparse materials available in her archive, as opposed to the archives of Velazquez and Edmonds, gives license to embellishment and diversion of her story that elevates it from legend to myth. Unlike Velazquez and Edmonds, who either acknowledged the myth of the woman warrior in some capacity, or who do not acknowledge it, but forward another warrior myth, Cathay Williams neither acknowledged the myth of the woman warrior, nor did she forward another kind of warrior myth as its substitute. Instead, she has the myth of the woman warrior attributed *to* her in the form of the strong black woman (SBW) myth present in the disability pension papers of her archive as well as in the genres of writing, such as biographies, historical fiction and poetry, that focus on her story. Through the utilization of this myth by others, Williams is depicted as not only having something close to supernatural physical strength, but perhaps most significantly, she is portrayed as having an Amazonian willpower to confront and handle the obstacles she faced, because her experience of being a formerly enslaved woman had given her a thick skin. Most significantly, there is evidence in the doctor's assessment of her in her disability pension papers that regardless of her physical disabilities of hearing loss and being partially crippled due to amputated toes, she was healthy enough to not need a pension for her service as a Buffalo Soldier. The result of this discourse, then, was that, as a Black woman, Williams was believed to be "strong enough" without assistance from the military, and thus she did not need a pension—acknowledgement of her military service—to get by. By utilizing this reasoning myth of the SBW, then, Williams' existence was unacknowledged and unrecognized, creating a sense of nonexistence, and as a result, such nonexistence only heightens the strength of the

myth of the woman warrior that developed from her story.

Similarly to Velazquez and Edmonds, then, the need for money and how Williams attempted to obtain it ultimately determined how much influence the myth of the woman warrior would impact her story in terms of its preservation. While Velazquez had made a miscalculated decision with her rhetorical strategies, and Edmonds made the most persuasive ones, Williams had made neither of these rhetorical moves; in fact, Williams appeared the most straightforward in telling her story and providing the papers that evidenced her service and her ailments, for which she needed money for treatment and assistance. Regardless of the *logos* evident in her papers as well as the physical disability her body showed, Williams' race was the basis for applying the SBW myth, a version of the woman warrior myth, and this appeared to determine her worthiness of financial support and recognition. Similarly, Velazquez's ethnicity is frequently cited in critiques of her memoir, demonstrating that as a foreigner from Cuba, she did not represent the ideal of the "pure, white Southern female." So it would seem that both Velazquez and Williams potentially had finances withheld from them on the basis of stereotypes associated with race, whereas Edmonds held white privilege to her advantage.

Where, Why, and How Do We See the Myth of the Woman Warrior Today?

In Historiography

The myth of the woman warrior and its classical foundations still has influence in today's historical, cultural, social, and political contexts. When people asked me about the topic of this dissertation, and I told them the topic as well as my argument, I repeatedly got responses such as "I have never heard of these women before." I

understood that “history has traditionally been concerned exclusively with the public and political,” which are two strong defining characteristics of traditionally masculine spaces, including the military. I also understood that “has been controlled by the politics of gender, with men validating historical texts by writing and enacting them” (Cheryl Glenn, *Rhetoric Retold* 73). However, I still found myself surprised by this response. Perhaps my surprise was due to the time I had spent with my research material and developing a sense of personal connection while interacting with the archives (Lucille M. Schulz ix) of these three particular women, as well as the other women whose stories I encountered. As I thought about it more, though, I realized that I certainly never learned about these women in any history class throughout my formal education. Instead, I learned about these women from another woman, my mother, due to the traditional histories constructed by “the politics of gender” to which I had been exposed.

What is written in the history books, concerning female soldiers and their rhetorical contributions during the Civil War, is due not just to what the predominantly male historians choose to include or omit, but also on whose stories they decided to base historical facts. In the diaries of Confederate and Union soldiers of the Civil War, as well as the journalist’s content from Cathay Williams’ interview, politics of gender were certainly at work and thriving. When Williams spoke of how other soldiers treated her after she was revealed, the suggestion was that the ideal (Black) woman let Black men lead by keeping the Buffalo Soldiers as a strictly masculine space. Confederate men’s memoirs crafted the construct of the Ideal Woman who stayed at home in the image of the Spartan mother. This archetypal woman was made strong by

keeping the home fires burning while staying away from the fighting. The ideal white woman also let the men go off to fight in order that they might be masculine. In the diaries of both Union and Confederate soldiers there was utmost praise for the patriotic women who put their feminine attributes to good use by sewing flags, collecting war bonds, and running charities in order to support “the cause” as well as “their men” on the front lines. Through such journalistic and personal depictions of women during the Civil War period being supportive at home, soldiers and journalists relayed the message of “THIS home front activity is what to focus on concerning the women. THIS is what is to be remembered.”

In addition to crafting the ideal women in their diaries and newspaper articles, Civil War soldiers and newspaper journalists were also sure to craft their figure of the ideal soldier. For Confederate soldiers, the ideal soldier emulated the Spartan warrior and fought for Southern honor as well as to prove his virility. For Union soldiers, the ideal soldier also fought to establish his masculinity as well as his Christianity. The common theme, then, amongst all these archives with regard to the ideal soldier was that the Civil War was deemed by men to be “a *man*’s fight” (Blanton and Cook, 14), and the Buffalo Soldier was a Black *man*’s occupation. Through this common theme, then, the construct of the ideal soldier by the Confederate, Union, and Buffalo Soldiers relayed the messages of “THESE are the qualities of an ideal soldier. THESE are the soldiers of actuality.”

The Need for Men to Be Men

In addition to how history has been taught concerning these women soldiers, there have been rhetorical moves conducted to discount these women. Their existence

in some instances has simply not been documented, or their actual archives lost, destroyed, not recognized, or overlooked, and thus their existence lost altogether in the history from the Civil War up to the present. In some cases they have been dismissed by assignment as mythical. As Adjutant General F.C. Ainsworth's letter responding to *American Magazine's* Ida Tarbell's 1909 inquiry about female soldiers of the Civil War suggested, the War Department had *no* official record of such women. In addition to swift dismissals which failed to challenge the authenticity of records or do more research, there were also moves made to amend previous recruitment procedures and to ensure that there was no possibility of women getting past the system.

Specifically, the army amended their recruitment procedure by requiring potential recruits to strip naked as part of their physical examination. In 1917 archival footage from the royalty-free archival collection site *Critical Past*, World War I veterans are shown showering naked together as well as lining up in front of doctors to be examined while naked ("Newly drafted American army soldiers undergo medical examination in the United States"). Although the US War Department during the Civil War required that recruits be stripped for examination of disease or disability, the lax follow-through of following protocol, and the stress to enlist more manpower, resulted in many women maintaining their disguise as male soldiers. The archival footage from 1917, though, showing large numbers of men standing together stripped of their clothes to be examined, suggested that the practice was taken more seriously during World War I (WWI). Although the stories of female Civil War soldiers were published in newspapers from the "beginning of the Civil War until the beginning of WWI," their publications began to decline because of the shift in focus to the news concerning

the Great War. By 1914, stories about female soldiers of the Civil war were still published, but they were only found in veterans' publications (Blanton and Cook, 286). By the 1930s, the stories of these women "had all but disappeared from the print media" (287).

What was particularly damning about the period during the 1930's was Francis Simkins and James Patton's study of women of the Confederacy, which evidenced that by that time, women soldiers were "no longer culturally accepted without question or condemnation" (Blanton and Cook 295-296). Simkins and Patton fostered this condemnation by asserting, "It should not be assumed...that these Confederate Amazons were taken seriously. They were regarded as eccentrics, and if not always morally loose, they were considered so by the public" (qtd. in Blanton and Cook, 296). Certainly, there were contemporaries that did not accept the actions of these women, but as time lapsed, focus changed, and people who lived during the Civil War began to pass away, it became easier for historians to alter and construct the narrative revolving around female soldiers of the Civil War.

Women Warriors in Pop Culture

Just as what was documented, left out, or forgotten had an influence on history and fostered the myth of the woman warrior, the intentionally fictitious woman warrior figures in pop culture can weave innovatively into its fabric. Specifically, these figures can be used as means to promote the myth of the woman warrior by further emphasizing their mythical status and overshadowing actual women warriors of history. With exaggerated, superhuman abilities and powers assigned to these women, they are unhampered by the inability to get past boundaries of gender. The

development of their characters and plot lines may serve to paint them as a weapon of feminism. We see that this has occurred in the depictions of the woman warrior figures Wonder Woman, Mulan, and Captain Marvel. While their popularization celebrates the ideas of resistance against gender-based norms, the logical paradox may be the conclusion that “if you lack these superstrengths, you had better stay in your ‘proper place.’”

The reception of the 2017 *Wonder Woman*, with the superheroine played by Gal Gadot, has been exceedingly positive. Many female audiences claimed to have cried while watching such a strong female super heroine cross “no-man’s land” on a WWI battlefield when none of the men would. However, while this movie certainly made leaps and bounds with its representation of a strong, progressive, and feminist female superhero that women and girls could look up to, it also allowed the potential for the strengthening of the woman warrior myth due to Wonder Woman’s identity as an Amazon. April Coan commented on this potential after-effect, saying that the movie particularly affects the “ferocious women in combat” of WWI due to “fictional characters like Wonder Woman [being] the only women who actually engage in physical combat in the movie,” meaning “audiences probably left the theatre with the impression that real women did not participate directly in the war during World War I” (*bitchmedia*). Thus, Coan called to attention what the myth of the woman warrior often covers up, which is that women of reality have been in the space of the military and direct combat, have always been there, and have been there *successfully*.

The myth of the woman warrior is at work in woman warrior figures depicted in pop culture not only due to their already mythical status but in how those in power

utilize this mythical status to support arguments that women do not belong in the military. We see this at work in the words of political leaders such as Mike Pence, who made the argument that ““Despite her delicate features and voice, Disney expects us to believe that Mulan’s ingenuity and courage were enough to carry her to military success.”” Perhaps more disconcerting was his additional argument that attraction between opposite sexes could lead to potential sexual violence for military women, and thus, he concluded, “Moral of story: Women in the military, bad idea” (Andrews MS). In her article discussing the release of Disney’s live action version of *Mulan* in 2020, Audrey Andrews of *MS* pointed out Pence’s rhetorical use of the word “delicate” to describe Mulan as clearly an emphasis on why “women simply cannot be successful in this supposedly manly sphere.” Additionally, she noted his use of a “tool of the patriarchy”—the argument that women need male protection—due to “ideas based on sexual dimorphism” that women have naturally weaker bodies. Perhaps most significant of all, though, was although Pence has claimed to be a staunch supporter of the military, his framing of the release of the original animated Disney movie *Mulan* as being “victimizing” further painted women being in the space of the military as a transgression that harmed men, even in the current moment.

How Do We Resist the Myth of the Woman Warrior?

In Feminist Historiography

From the 1930s to the 1980s, scholarship on the contribution of female soldiers of the Civil War was relatively quiet, save for scholarship on women such as Sarah Emma Edmonds in Sylvia Dannet’s work in 1960, which was partially due to the generous amount of material related to Edmonds. It was in the 1990s that there

was renewed and more focused scholarship that began to emerge concerning this *collective* of women. Although there *are* books that recognize these women in recent decades, they still focus more on the individuals about whom we have the most documented information or the women who wrote about their experiences in memoirs. However, in 2002, Deanne Blanton and Lauren M. Cook claim that “[no] previous study of the Civil War has meaningfully or comprehensively addressed these martial women” (1) concerning their meticulous, ten-year archival research for their book *They Fought Like Demons: Women Soldiers in the Civil War*. Indeed, Blanton and Cook’s work attempts to address what Barbara Biesecker might view as a move toward “the [historical] contributions of collective women” rather than the “exaltation of individual actions” (144). Since Blanton and Cook’s work, other scholars have slowly begun to see including these women’s stories as a significant revision of history. In the April 2020 release of *The History Channel’s* magazine *History*, some of these women, including Loreta Janeta Velazquez (Harry T. Buford), Frances Clayton (Frances Clalin), and Jennie Hodgers (Albert Cashier) have space dedicated to them under the “Women at War” segment.

Regardless of women soldiers of the Civil War being recognized in this recent release of *History*, though, it is only a very brief section of the segment, consisting of three paragraphs, and even the cover story is misleading, as it says “Women Spies Who Turned the Tide,” rather than specifically pointing out that some women were actually soldiers in direct combat. Additionally, the cover image is a photo of two men, Confederate prisoner Lieutenant Washington and Union Captain Custer. Despite this magazine issue representing the growing historical interest in the Civil War, these

women are still mentioned only in a single column in a public magazine, in a small section or the margin of a textbook. And yet, this mention is a start, as it represents a demonstration of these women starting to come back into the public consciousness and have their stories known. The lack of particular women rhetors and the failure to bring them into public memory is an issue explored by Jordynn Jack and Jessica Enoch in their writing about their “[bringing] recovered women’s rhetorics into the classroom.” In their piece “Remembering Sappho: New Perspectives on Teaching (and Writing) Women’s Rhetorical History,” Jack and Enoch seek to “[introduce] students to a revised and expanded rhetorical tradition—one that not only includes women rhetors but also embraces rhetorical practices alternative to the competitive, public, agonistic, and linear tactics so highly valued for over two thousand years” (518). Essentially, they seek to examine women rhetors whose rhetorical activity goes beyond the rhetorical canon of what traditionally has been rhetoric about rhetoric.

Regarding what occurs in their respective classes, Jessica Enoch recounts her students “voiced frustration” and their questioning “‘Why haven’t we learned about these women before? Why are we just now learning about these women’s rhetorical achievements?’” after reading “writings by women from Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz to Frances Harper” (520). In Jordynn Jack’s Southern Women Rhetorics seminar, her students have a similar reaction when they came to the realization that “popular and public memory” portray southern women as “romanticized figures [such as] southern belles, steel magnolias, mammies, or slaves—few of them endowed with the agency to speak (or write) for themselves.” This discovery makes them aware of “southern women’s rhetorical absence” (520). To challenge this absence and the dominant

framing of southern women as these romanticized figures in public memory, one of the women Jack had her class examine is Loreta Janeta Velazquez. By reading a memoir of a woman such as Velazquez, not only does Jack help her students to reevaluate their understanding of Southern women's rhetorical activities, but she also raises awareness for a woman and a group of women marginalized by history concerning the space of combat and the military. Developing such awareness encourages further study and more scholarship on these women's rhetorical contributions.

Pop Culture: A Further Stimulus for Research

Although there is risk to the presumptive integrity of history in how pop culture reifies the myth of the woman warrior, it also allows for a space of resistance. In particular, people watching movies such as *Wonder Woman*, *Mulan*, *Captain Marvel*, and *Black Panther* fosters a space for curiosity, which is an essential trait when it comes to archival research. Even as April Coan notes the risk of movies such as *Wonder Woman* overshadowing the contributions of actual woman warriors of history, the making of such movies creates the potential for audiences to do research on the movie. In turn, doing research has the potential to perhaps intentionally, or accidentally, come across the stories of actual women warriors. In fact, in a more recent article about *Wonder Woman*, Kimiya Shokoohi discusses how “warrior women like the Amazons existed in real life” by supporting her claims with historical research discussing the archaeological find of “the graves of four female warriors from the 4th Century BC Sarmatian region” (*BBC*). Shokoohi sheds light upon the fact that sometimes, there is a grain of truth to myth, even as myths develop in particular ways in order to promote a specific narrative.

April Coan also does the same work as Shokoohi by using her article dedicated to Wonder Woman as a platform to inform her audience on other actual women warriors of history. She focuses particularly on “the women warriors of the Dahomey Kingdom in West Africa,” also referred to as “the Dahomey Amazons” (Jazzi Johnson, *Teen Vogue*) and is sure to point out that these women not only existed, but they also existed in significant numbers (5,000), had “female officers,” and were “the only warriors entrusted to serve in the king’s bodyguard” (*bitchmedia*).

Final Thoughts: There is Hope for these Forgotten “Brothers”

In January of 2020, the semester that I started writing my prospectus for my dissertation, I went to see the play *Secret Soldiers: Civil War Heroines in Disguise* at the Nashville Children’s Theatre. The play’s central focus was on female soldier Sarah Rosetta Wakeman, who fought for the Union Army and died in a military hospital while in service. Her story became known after the letters she wrote home to her family were discovered over a century later by an ancestor in a family attic. In addition to Wakeman’s story, though, the stories of Sarah Emma Edmonds and Loreta Janeta Velazquez were interwoven into scenes in which they interact with Wakeman or other characters. It was pleasing to see that the playwright had included the stories of other women known to have fought as soldiers in disguise, as I believe that this follows what will become a more common practice of telling a collective of experiences. Additionally, it reflected a recognition that there were many women who disguised themselves as male soldiers, including the possibility of others, whose stories will never be known or told.

Although the play was performed at a children’s theater, there was an

interactive component that allowed audiences of all ages to engage with the content. Toward the end of the play, there were two nurses tending to Sarah Rosetta Wakeman, and they discovered her gender. After this discovery, a debate ensued, in which one nurse argued that her gender should be made known, so that Wakeman, and the women who come after her, will get recognition as being successful *female* soldiers and perhaps open more doors of opportunity for women. In opposition, the other nurse responded that if Wakeman's gender was revealed, she would not get the pension she deserved for her service, and because Wakeman was a woman, her reputation could be tainted for the rest of her life. Additionally, the opposing nurse claimed that the former nurse's argument was unrealistic in lieu of the reality of life for women in nineteenth-century America, and though it was admirable, her argument that Wakeman's gender reveal might open a door of possibilities for women was "a silly dream." Once the two nurses had made their argument, the cast members turned to the audience to see what everyone thought regarding whether or not Wakeman's identity should be revealed, and they allowed for audience members to make their case as well as ask them questions while they were in character.

During this interactive component with the audience, I witnessed an incredible moment of feminist resistance and hope regarding the myth of the woman warrior. As audience members of all ages raised their hands to make their argument on what decision should be made concerning Wakeman's fate, a hand was selected, and a small child's voice spoke. I turned in the direction of the voice, and I saw it was a little girl, who was perhaps six or seven. With a sincere, but polite, tone, she looked at the nurse who opposed revealing Wakeman's identity and asked, "Why did you say her

dream was silly?” referring to the expressed hope of the other nurse. The player responded very professionally by first apologizing to the other actress, who accepted it, and then gave a very sound explanation for why she believed what she did.

And yet, the question that this little girl asked still seemed to resonate in the room. *Why was her dream silly?* It certainly resonated with me, as I thought of these women and all they had gone through and all they had overcome to achieve what they did. It led me to other versions of this question, such as “Why is a dream of seeking a better income by entering in this particular space silly? Why is desiring to enter a space where your gender is not held against you silly? Why is it silly to seek glory in battle when male warriors throughout time have done so? Why is it silly for people other than men to have causes they believe in and wish to fight for in battle? Why is it silly to think women cannot be in this space when there is evidence, outside of myth, that they have been there all along and have been successful?” These then led to further questions pertaining to the present, which were, “Isn’t it silly that it took so long for women to be sanctioned in all roles of combat as late as 2016? Isn’t silly that the first female Army Ranger graduated in 2016? Isn’t it silly that first female Green Beret graduated in 2020? (Thomas Gibbons-Neff, *New York Times*). Isn’t it silly that there are still debates over transgender people serving, when they have been there all along as well? Isn’t it silly that anyone’s capabilities would be judged on the basis of race, or gender, or ethnicity, or any other irrelevant/nonpertinent qualities?”

Perhaps the little girl’s original question resonated with these women, too, as it seemed as if she, in a similar move to Gorgias’s writings on the nonexistent and Helen of Troy, had called these women into existence, in which we were hearing their voices

through her question. Here was someone who had not gone through years of elementary, middle, high school, and college without ever hearing of these women, and after first learning of them, she was already resisting language that risked placing them back in the realm of myth. It was after hearing this child's profound question, and pondering on the significance of it, that I smiled to myself and thought, "Someone will remember these "brothers"—these *sisters*. There's hope."

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