

From Heart To Hearth: A Chronicle Of The Everyday Struggles Of Southern Ladies

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Review

FROM HEART TO HEARTH

A chronicle of the everyday struggles of Southern ladies

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Waugh, Charles G. and Greenberg, Martin Harry. *The Women's War in the South: Recollections and Reflections on the American Civil War.* Cumberland House, ISBN 1581820216

The Women's War in the South: Recollections and Reflections of the American Civil War, edited by Charles G. Waugh and Martin H. Greenberg, is an engaging and lively compilation of 28 individual stories, diaries, letters, and personal recollections of women (and men) who experienced the Civil War from a Southern perspective. The editors endeavor to provide a close look at how a variety of women from the South were affected by the war and how they chose to cope with it.

The women portrayed in these stories were predominantly educated white women from the middle and upper classes of society -- many of whom owned slaves. Some of them were hard working farmers, while others were prominent and pampered members of the Southern aristocracy.

Evident throughout this book are both noble and ignoble characteristics exemplified by these women. Many acted selflessly, sacrificing everything to aid the Confederacy. Others were self-centered and resentful in having to share their more patriotic husbands with the Confederate armed forces. Several are portrayed as using the war to satisfy their insatiable desire for adventure and greater freedom. Some meekly accepted their disheartening circumstances out of societal obligations. Among these women, strong support for the Southern cause was often conditional and dependent on their individual situations at any given time in the war.

One aspect of this collection stands out as a noteworthy weakness -- its limited scope of Southern women. By no means are the experiences of the

women in this book the norm for all Southern women. Significant segments of society are left out.

This narrow focus leaves the reader wondering about the wartime lives and circumstances of enslaved and free black women, poor white women, immigrants, Unionists, and women in other less visible stations of the social order, such as servants, factory workers, even prostitutes. As a result of this omission, the overall theme of the women's war in the South is incomplete and misleading. A message is conveyed that less-fortunate women within a community do not necessarily deserve to be included.

The strengths of this anthology, however, make it an entirely valuable and worthy addition to the literature of the American Civil War. The firsthand accounts bring a bygone era to life in a way that is not possible with secondary sources. The individual narrations are always engaging and frequently gripping. The subject matter is well documented in the appendix, and commentary is succinct. The editors have allowed the stories to speak for themselves and thus bear witness to the many intimate thoughts, emotions, fears, and everyday struggles experienced by these Southern women.

Arlyn Danielson is collections manager at the Newseum in Arlington, Virginia, and an avid student of the social history of the Civil War.