

All Things Altered: Women in the Wake of Civil War and Reconstruction

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Recommended Citation

Robins, Glenn (2003) "All Things Altered: Women in the Wake of Civil War and Reconstruction," *Civil War Book Review*. Vol. 5 : Iss. 2 .

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/cwbr/vol5/iss2/3>

Review

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Spring 2003

Culpepper, Marilyn Mayer *All Things Altered: Women in the Wake of Civil War and Reconstruction*. McFarland & Company Publishers, \$35.00 ISBN 786413395

Southern Matriarchs

Post-war case studies

Marilyn Mayer Culpepper's **All Things Altered: Women in the Wake of Civil War and Reconstruction** is a straightforward narrative of the experiences of middle status and elite women of the postwar South. Her approach was to provide a broad overview of the social, economic, and political conditions that prevailed during Reconstruction and how Southerners' reacted to these new and unprecedented conditions. Culpepper also includes lengthy case studies of such women as Susan Darden, Virginia Smith Aiken, Anna Logan, Jo Gillis, and Sally Perry as a means of illustrating in vivid detail the personal sagas of Southern women.

The recurrent themes of **All Things Altered** are suffering and turbulence. When the war ended, Southern women were filled with a range of emotions: numbness, disbelief, and shock. For most Southerners, Culpepper writes on page 63, the lack of money, barren fields, severe labor problems and even nature itself posed seemingly insurmountable deterrents to a new beginning. In short, there was very little hope. Southern women, according to Culpepper, complained bitterly about their inability to secure reliable domestic and field help. They also denounced Congressional Reconstruction as a hypocritical farce, one designed for the sole purpose of denying white Southerners their freedoms. In addition, families were literally destroyed by war. Widows and orphans filled the war torn region and elderly unmarried women were shuffled amongst relatives.

Still, Southern women survived, and in fact were transformed. Countless women, Culpepper contends on page 225, changed their role following the war

from helpmate to breadwinner when of necessity they took over the family farm, the corner store, or taught school as a means of helping their physically or mentally impaired husbands. They also became involved in civic affairs, participating in such organizations as the Grange and a multitude of memorial groups dedicated to the preservation of the Confederate heritage. Of the five case studies, Susan Darden best illustrates the economic difficulties encountered by pre-war established families. It is also a vivid portrait of the political contention between Democrats and Republicans in postwar Mississippi. Sally Perry's story best represents the struggles faced by the women who headed single-parent households and the courage and fortitude such women displayed in the aftermath of a regional and national disaster.

All in all, **All Things Altered** is a very detailed and well-written anecdotal narrative of middle status and elite women of the postwar South. However, Culpepper's study possesses one major weakness: the author is too passive and does not provide any critical analysis, choosing instead to let the sources speak for themselves with the hope of painting a realistic picture of the era. As such this reviewer felt he had just finished reading an abridged version of *Gone With the Wind*. Indeed, Culpepper concludes her case studies with: And yet, in the midst of Sally's final paragraphs the reader is offered a glimmer of hope for a brighter tomorrow in the days to come. Eerily, Scarlett's final words were: After all, tomorrow is another day.

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