

Clio's Scroll



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SPRING 2014 STAFF

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NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

We are proud to present the Spring 2014 issue of *Clio's Scroll*. With topics ranging from pre-modern European marriage patterns, the development of American tourism, and General Custer's Wife's perspective on Native Americans, these essays showcase the best in Undergraduate Historical research. These analytical investigations contribute to our understanding of the inner workings of diverse historical communities. This semester *Clio's Scroll* is also proud to introduce its extended version online at <http://www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~clios/>, which features two stellar theses that investigate the power of the media, showcasing research on Anglo-American film policy in West Germany and the Bay Area music scene of the 1980's.

Each work investigates a topic that required extensive research. The authors worked to surpass superficial understandings of such research, and were chosen for their ability to deliver a unique perspective. We feel that all of the pieces delve into themes that have an air of mystery about them and we hope that you enjoy uncovering these ancient stories.

Lastly, we are incredibly grateful for the hard work and feedback of our excellent associate editors, as well as the talented authors and those at Zee Zee Copy for collaborating with us. We would also like to thank Leah Flanagan for all her guidance, and the UC Berkeley History Department for its support.

Sincerely,
The Editors

TOWARDS AN EXPLANATION OF PREMODERN EUROPEAN MARRIAGE PATTERNS: LIFE CYCLE SERVICE AND AGE- AT-MARRIAGE¹

Luther Cenci

Since the 1960's, historians have increasingly taken an interest in the potential for demographic methods and data to shed light on the operation of key social processes over time and between geographic regions. John Hajnal set up one central line of inquiry when he described the existence of a European marriage pattern prevailing in lands west of an imaginary line he drew from St. Petersburg to Trieste.² Hajnal surveyed extant census data and population reconstructions and asserted that, for at least two centuries

1 This paper was written for Dr. Leora Lawton's course on the Social Consequences of Population Dynamics in the Demography Department. It owes many of its strengths (but none of its weaknesses) to the constructive criticism offered by Professor Jan De Vries and, especially, Alison Gemmill.

2 John Hajnal, "European Marriage Patterns in Perspective," in *Population in History: Essays in Historical Demography*, eds. D.V. Glass and D. E. C. Eversley (London: Edward Arnold, 1965).

up to 1940, the European population had married later and less completely than anywhere else in the world. As this paper will show, more recent data indicates that there were notable regional complexities within this broad European pattern. Patterns of late marriage are surprising in an era when marriage offered the only socially sanctioned venue for sexual activity and was the primary method for individuals to present themselves as independent adults in the community. Since delayed marriage was one of the few social checks on fertility available in the pre-contraceptive early modern world, the development of conditions encouraging or necessitating late marriage could have helped create an important control mechanism to ensure that population kept pace with productive capacity. Some economic historians go so far as to claim that this European demographic regime was a crucial factor in Europe's eventual economic dominance over other world regions.³

While a fierce academic debate rages about the specific mechanisms by which European late marriage affected economic growth, most studies treat marriage age patterns either as an exogenous independent variable or as the product of inherently non-economic, cultural choices, such as medieval Catholic doctrine.⁴ The both approaches are problematic; the first is essentially a claim of inherent European exceptionality, while the second is difficult to test empirically and makes sweeping claims of European

3 For example, see: Avner Grief and Guido Tabellini, "Cultural and Institutional Bifurcation: China and Europe Compared," *American Economic Review* 100 (2010) or Nico Voigtländer and Hans-Joachim Voth, "Why England? Demographic Factors, Structural Change and Physical Capital Accumulation during the Industrial Revolution," *Journal of Economic Growth* 11 (2006).

4 For instance, see: Tine De Moor and Jan Luiten Van Zanden, "Girl Power: The European Marriage Pattern and Labor Markets in the North Sea Region in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Period," *Economic History Review* 63 (2010).

cultural continuity which obscure complicating events such as the Reformation. This paper represents an effort to explain European nuptiality patterns as social phenomena produced by observable institutional factors. Since marriage takes place in a life-cycle governed by age-specific behavioral norms and economic opportunities, this paper will explore the possible influence of divergent economic structural patterns on the creation and maintenance of age-at-marriage patterns in Europe during the 18th and early 19th century, before the Industrial and Demographic Revolutions. Finally, it will single out the most promising of these, the prevalence of agricultural servants, and analyze the strength of its influence on intra-European regional variations in average age at marriage.

LITERATURE AND THEORY

STATE OF THE NUPTIALITY DATA

Before examining the origins of a European marriage pattern or patterns, however, we ought to discuss the evolution of the available information on premodern nuptiality. Hajnal's original 1953 paper posited the existence of a Western European marriage pattern where "mean age for the marriages of single women must be above 23, and has in general been above 24" compared to a non-European pattern where mean age at marriage for single women was below 21.⁵ He claims that this pattern obtained in virtually every population west of his St. Petersburg-Trieste line, yet largely supported his characterization using data from the northern portion of this region: England, the Low Countries, and the Scandinavian nations. In part, this is due to the existence of more representative and detailed data sets from these northern regions. His data for age distributions of single men circa 1850 do in fact seem to be largely similar within his western European region; but close examination

5 Hajnal, "European Marriage Patterns in Perspective," 108.

of his female distributions reveal that women in Spain, Italy, and the other Mediterranean nations had significantly lower percentages single in both the 20-25 and 26-30 age ranges, although not on the order of non-European societies.^{6,7} The obvious question raised by his 19th century figures asks whether this suggestion of a pattern dates back to the 18th century, which many would argue to be a critical decade for economic divergence.⁸ Anecdotal evidence hints that earlier Mediterranean nuptiality might hold in average female ages at first marriage: the figure for Tuscan women in the first half of the 18th century is around 21 years, while in selected communities in the Low Countries, England and northern France in the same time period it was always above 24 years and generally was around 27.⁹ Thus, the literature seems to suggest that Hajnal's initially monolithic "European marriage pattern" seems only to apply in northwestern Europe, with the outlines of newly distinguishable regions appearing in Southern Europe. The increasing body of data revealing a broadly North-South inter-European difference in female nuptiality patterns permits investigation of the determinants of historical nuptiality patterns to a much greater degree than in the initial Hajnal case.

CELIBACY

Most average age at marriage rates include some celibate men and women in their reconstructions. During the early modern period, a significant minority of people joined monasteries, nunneries, or other religious orders,

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ This discrepancy was identified in: David-Sven Reher, "Family Ties in Western Europe: Persistent Contrasts," *Population and Development Review* 24 (1998).

⁸ For example: Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 8.

⁹ Jan De Vries, *The Economy of Europe in an Age of Crisis: 1600-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 10.

which almost always forbade marriage and sexual relations. Furthermore, an even larger number of men joined the clergy, thereby reducing the stock of potential mates. These rates, however, were likely subject to regional variation as a result of denominational differences, the presence of religious institutions and clerical training facilities, and cultural preferences. One possible source of difference in regional age at marriage measures would seem to be the relative percentages of people who for religious reasons chose never to marry. However, since monastics lived in distinct corporate communities, they were not included in the population reconstructions commonly used to illustrate age-at-marriage patterns.¹⁰

Male celibacy or delayed marriage for non-religious reasons may have played an important role in the production of the EMP, since many professions, especially for young men, made it difficult to marry or conduct a traditional domestic life. Sailors and professional soldiers, for example, comprised significant number of native sons from some areas and their long absences from home may have made it difficult to marry until retirement.

ECONOMIC THRESHOLDS OF MARRIAGE

When they do venture to suggest sources of difference in age-at-marriage distributions, the majority of studies available rely on economic rationales to explain why some historical populations or subsets thereof marry earlier than others. These reasons for late marriage fall into one of three distinct categories: positivist population policy developed by rationalizing corporative entities, variations in the costs and benefits of marriage as perceived at the level of the individual decision-maker, and the effects of structural and cyclical factors on the individual's ability to acquire enough resources to meet the costs of marriage.

¹⁰ John Hajnal, "Two Kinds of Preindustrial Household Formation System," *Population and Development Review* 8 (1982).

By far the least common of these explanations is that European communities forced their members to marry late in order to consciously limit the expansion of the population relative to resources. Katherine Lynch argues that, at least in the tightly-controlled “home towns” of Southern Germany, the town government banned marriage among non-citizens, disreputable people, and those unable to support a household, “lest they and their children claim those entitlements to poor relief that flowed from membership in the urban community.”¹¹ It is almost certain that positive laws restricting marriage in the interests of the public purse were uncommon in both in the countryside, where it seems unlikely that coercive institutions would be sufficient to the task, and in very large metropolises, where rapid growth, state policy, and high in- and out-migration conspired to limit the development of a highly-controlled urban environment. While research into marriage regulation, especially by feudal lords in areas subject to serfdom, could be illuminating, the atomistic differences likely to exist from estate to estate make assembling a comparative dataset a truly Herculean task.

The decision-based model for late marriage patterns rests on the claim that “the establishment of an economic basis for the life of the couple and their children” were key influences on the feasibility of marriage at a given age.¹² Interestingly, the specific structure of the shift from bachelorhood to married life is rarely explored. Here, we venture to say that in order for marriage to occur, potential household income must be enough to meet a hypothetical income threshold of marriage, which is composed of two terms. First, income or accumulated savings must be enough

to meet the costs of new household formation, which include the costs incurred in acquiring and furnishing a living space, the costs of the marriage ceremony itself, and the assorted fees often imposed on marriage by the local lord. Second, income must be sufficient to cover the potential costs of feeding and raising a child or children, whose birth in this era without contraceptives was often a necessary consequence of marriage. The threshold level of income must take into account the lost earnings involved when women transitioned from production for the market, whether on the farm or in cottage industry, to childbearing and childcare. The threshold also need not be set at the absolute minimum necessary to avoid falling below the subsistence level as a result of marriage, but rather at whatever level necessary to avoid falling below a perceived baseline standard of living.

Theoretically, age-at-marriage patterns could be determined by differences in each of these factors (the up-front and opportunity costs of marriage). However, the complexity of the relationship between each determinant and the lack of anything resembling adequate data make measuring differences in this level all but impossible at this time.

However, as long as such an income threshold exists, structural and cyclical factors affecting a person’s ability to meet the threshold should have an effect on average ages at marriage. Income in the early modern period was largely determined by a person’s access to capital or land, or in protoindustrial occupations, the acquisition of the training necessary to produce the human capital-intensive goods such as fine woollens which predominated at the time. Access to land, capital, and education were governed by social practices which differed considerably between European regions. Of special importance to the problem of the EMP are social institutions which affect the age at which an individual could acquire access to sufficient land, labor, or skills in order to meet the income threshold of marriage. Within Europe, it

11 Katherine A. Lynch, “The European Marriage Pattern in the Cities: Variations on a Theme by Hajnal,” *Journal of Family History* 16 (1991): 81.

12 Hajnal, “European Marriage Patterns in Perspective,” 132. Also: Ruth Dixon, “Explaining Cross-Cultural Variations in Age at Marriage and Proportions Never Marrying,” *Population Studies* 25 (1971) and Ruth Dixon, “Late Marriage and Non-Marriage as Demographic Responses: Are They Similar?” *Population Studies* 32 (1978).

is possible to identify regions in which intergenerational transfers of property occurred at primarily at marriage rather than through inheritance after the death of the parents. By allowing the recipients of these transfers at marriage to inherit or purchase a lease of sufficient land at a relatively early age, regions where property was transferred at marriage would seem to have on average lower ages at marriage. However, some studies of parental mortality hazards during this period indicate that high parental mortality would have rendered differences in age-specific intergenerational property transfer structure largely inconsequential.¹³

The recovery period after major mortality events was characterized by relatively abundant land and high real wages, both conditions which ought to make it easier for individuals to meet the property threshold and get married earlier. In many cities, full access to protoindustrial capital (looms, spinning wheels, presses and other appurtenances of preindustrial manufacture) was regulated by craft guilds and industrial organizations. By adjusting the duration of apprenticeship contracts and level of fees levied when journeymen became masters, these guilds had substantial control over the ability of guild members to accumulate enough income and savings to meet the income threshold of marriage. Finally, high real wages within a region should, all other things being equal, make it easier for the people of the region to meet the income threshold of marriage. By affecting the level and age distribution of income, these regionally specific factors might affect the average age at marriage because they in part determine the average time necessary to meet the costs of marriage.

Despite the burgeoning quantity of theory and even anecdotal evidence ascribing European regional marriage age patterns to coercive regulations, variations in the costs and benefits of marriage, and macroeconomic factors, no study seems to use a structured, comparative framework to evaluate

¹³ Hajnal “Two Kinds of Preindustrial Household Formation System.”

the appropriateness of any of these models. Most likely, this gap in the literature is due to the difficulty of assembling a sufficiently reliable dataset which matches the patchily available data on age-at-marriage with comparable regional figures for each model’s putative explanatory variable.

SERVICE AND FAMILY LABOR: DIVERGENT LABOR ALLOCATION STRUCTURES

One of the important differences attested to in the literature between the Northern European zone and the Mediterranean zone in the premodern period is the exceptional prevalence of “life-cycle servants,” or young persons living outside their kin groups for a period of time as agricultural and domestic servants in Northern Europe.¹⁴ The term “life-cycle servants” is used to distinguish those who entered service temporarily (usually between their early teens and marriage) from “class servants,” for whom becoming a servant was a long-term or lifetime proposition. In England, these young men and women entered service primarily between the ages of 10-16 and made up 60 percent of the population between 16 and 24.¹⁵ To enter into service was to enter into what a contemporary source called “a covenanted state of celibacy” until exit from service which often occurred when a servant thought he or she had saved enough to afford marriage.¹⁶ Life-cycle servants made up between 9 and 17 percent of the population throughout other northern European Societies, but accounted for only around 2.7 percent of the population in Spain, with evidence that these low rates prevailed across the rural Mediterranean. The south was characterized by a much greater preference for

¹⁴ For example, Hajnal, “Two Kinds of Preindustrial Household Formation System” and Reher.

¹⁵ Ann Kussmaul, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

¹⁶ Anonymous, *Museum Rusticum et Commerciale* (London, 1766), quoted in Kussmaul, 83.

family labor.¹⁷

Both labor regimes were directed at resolving “the basic problem of family farming”: life-cyclical imbalances between productive labor and consumption as the ratio of able-bodied workers to dependents shifted over time.¹⁸ The critical difference between them in terms of their effect on nuptiality rates, however, was that the northern system equalized production and consumption between households by hiring out young men and women in a system which specifically precluded the opportunity for them to get married while the southern one actually did so through marriage. Wage data for female laborers in this period illustrate that, because of deeply ingrained cultural beliefs, premodern European societies both viewed women as and behaved as if women were less productive economic agents.¹⁹ Northern European societies accounted for this perceived difference by paying unmarried female servants between 60% to 30% of the average male wage.²⁰ In southern Europe, on the other hand, the absence of a female wage labor market (where differences in productivity could be accounted through wage rates) meant that family heads had an incentive to rid themselves of excess “unproductive” females as soon as possible. The divergent labor market structures in premodern northern and southern Europe made possible two equally rational strategies whose relative reliance on marriage to deal with gender and age-stratified productivity differences could account for the somewhat lower age at marriage (especially among women) found in southern Europe.

While there are substantial theoretical reasons to believe that life-cycle service ought to affect marriage age patterns, without good data there would be no

¹⁷ Reher, 228-229.

¹⁸ Kussmaul, 24.

¹⁹ Robert S. DuPlessis. *Transitions to Capitalism in Early Modern Europe*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997; reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 293.

²⁰ Kussmaul, 37.

methodologically reliable way to show that it really had the expected effect. Happily, it is precisely on this issue that the prevalence of life-cycle servants is distinct from the causal factors used in other models; the demographic data published in monographic family- or village-reconstitution studies often includes information on both age-at-marriage and the percentage of servants in the population. This permits hypothesis-testing to a degree unattainable for other models.

DATA ANALYSIS

As established above, recent research has suggested that there are regional variations in early-modern European age-at-marriage statistics, contrary to earlier assertions that a monolithic European Marriage Pattern of late marriage and high celibacy obtained over the entire continent. If it were to exist, such regional variation within Europe would permit investigation of the institutional factors which governed age-at-marriage in Europe before the demographic transition. This paper will synthesize the evidence available in order to evaluate if such regional variation does in fact exist and characterize its basic structure. Then, it will evaluate the effect of a key socioeconomic institution, life-cycle service, on age-at-marriage. If the prevalence of life-cycle service is strongly correlated with age-at-marriage, it will justify the assertion that the unique hunger of life-cycle servant-intensive economic structures for single young men and women drove up ages-at-marriage in some parts of Europe.

DATA AND METHODS

The primary dependent variable of interest for this study is mean singulate age at marriage (MSAM). While cohort mean age-at-marriage would be the most desirable and accurate indicator of age-specific marriage patterns, the difficulty of reconstructing premodern populations in sufficient detail to calculate cohort means makes it next to impossible to use for macro-level comparisons like this

one. In order to cope with this limitation, John Hajnal developed a method of determining MSAM from age-specific proportions single data, which can be much more easily reconstructed from parish records and early census returns. Given the percentage remaining single at a point in time within each 5-year age group between 15 and 50, the MSAM for individuals between 15 and 50 can be computed using Equation 1.²¹

Equation 1: Calculating Mean Singulate Age-At-Marriage from Proportions Remaining Single

$$\text{MSAAM} = \frac{(1500 + (\sum_{a=15-19}^{45-49} S_a) * 5) - (50 * \frac{S_{45-49} + S_{50-54}}{2})}{(100 - \frac{S_{45-49} + S_{50-54}}{2})}$$

where S_a is the proportion remaining single in group a (Hajnal 1953:129-131)

This method has two primary flaws. First, it does not account for mortality effects, which could distort the proportion of persons reported remaining single by adversely selecting for married or single persons (e.g. childbirth-related deaths among married women) or could cause the period value to deviate from the actual cohort mean age-at-marriage. Second, it assumes that the proportion-single distribution within a given population remains constant over time and the instantaneous period value is representative of a broader pattern.

While a substantial number of scholarly works have published age-specific proportions remaining single and even used Hajnal's method to produce MSAM figures, none have synthesized their findings in anything approaching a unified dataset. Thus, the regional MSAM figures presented here are drawn from disparate sources and manually crosstabulated with servant population proportions from

the same or comparable sample communities in order to permit comparison. The areas selected are all relatively small rural communities, which both reduces the distortion introduced by high migration rates in urban areas and is most representative of the conditions prevailing for Europe's predominantly rural population. The MSAM obtained from the French village of Longuenesse serves rather speculatively as a representative figure from Northern France, since few other reconstructions available from the area contain both appropriate marriage status distributions as well as estimates of the servant population.²² Drake's large regional analysis of rural Norwegian deanery records reports the MSAM figure used to represent Norway.²³ The MSAM for England is computed from age- and sex-specific marital status data from six English parish registers representing 7873 people.²⁴ Denmark's figures were based on a survey of 26 parishes in 1787 and 1801.²⁵ The MSAM figure for Coimbra, Portugal is calculated using the Hajnal method from the age- and sex- distributions of marital status from Mota's study of 26 freguesias (parishes) in said bishopric.²⁶ Deprez reports age-at-marriage data for the reconstructed populations of the villages of Adegem and Elversele in West Flanders, Belgium and from demographically vetted genealogical studies of the village of le Vieuxbourg and its surrounding hamlets.²⁷ Reher provides national aggregate MSAM data for Spain drawn from the 1787 Floridablanca census alongside

22 Hajnal, "European Marriage Patterns in Perspective."

23 Michael Drake, *Population and Society in Norway: 1735-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

24 Peter Laslett, *Family Life and Illicit Love in Earlier Generations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 26-27.

25 Hajnal, "Two Kinds of Preindustrial Household Formation," 456-458.

26 Guilhermina Mota, "Estruturas Familiares no Mundo Rural: Grupos Domésticos no Bispado de Coimbra em 1801." *Revista Portuguesa de História* 24 (1988): 18.

27 P. Deprez, "The Demographic Development of Flanders in the Eighteenth Century," in *Population in History: Essays in Historical Demography*, eds. D.V. Glass and D. E. C. Eversley (London: Edward Arnold, 1965).

21 Hajnal, "Age at Marriage and Proportions Marrying," *Population Studies* 7 (1953), 130-135.

regionally specific numbers from a large regional study of the central province of Cuenca.²⁸ Nazareth and Souza provide the age- and sex- distribution of marriage status charts from the village of Salvaterra de Magos in the Santarém, Portugal which, when processed using the Hajnal method, form the Portugal (Santarém) MSAM mean.²⁹ The Southern Italian figure is the mean of reported MSAM's for 26 individual communities in the Kingdom of Naples for which the percent of servants in the population was also recorded.³⁰ The compilation of each of these regional means from all over Western Europe permits the stratification of MSAM means by region (Table 1), and thus can be inspected for regional patterns.

The inclusion of mean values representing the number of servants recorded as a percent of the total population in each region serves as an instrument in Table 3 for the prevalence of institutional life-cycle service in each region: high numbers of servants indicating that life-cycle service was a common form of labor mobilization in that region. The actual proportions of servants in the population are calculated from the same survey used to generate the MSAM means. Where possible, these proportions are compared to figures published by Reher.³¹

RESULTS

Previous studies have hinted at the existence of regional variations in the European age-at-marriage; the

28 David-Sven Reher, *Familia, Población y Sociedad en la Provincia de Cuenca: 1700-1970* (Madrid: Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, 1988), 79.

29 J. Manuel Nazareth and Fernando de Sousa "Aspectos sociodemográficos de Salvaterra de Magos nos Finais do Século XVIII," *Análise Social* 17 (1981): 349.

30 Giovanna Da Molin, "Family Forms and Domestic Service in Southern Italy from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Centuries," *Journal of Family History* 15 (1990): 510-519.

31 Reher, 229.

stratification of regional sex-specific age-at-marriage means in Table 1 permits detailed investigation of that theory. Table 1 is ordered by female regional MSAM values, with the latest marriage age mean at the top. Inspection of the order of regions thus presented shows a clear pattern of relatively late marriage in the northern European regions sampled (Northern France, Norway, England, Denmark, and Flanders) compared to their southern European neighbors (Coimbra, Spain, Cuenca, Santarém, and Southern Italy).

Table 1: Regional Variations in Sex-Specific Mean Singulate Age-at-Marriage

Region	Date Range Studied	Female MSAM	Male MSAM
N. France (Longuenesse)	1778	32.4	34.3
Norway	1841-5	28.2	30.6
England	1574-1821	27.8	27.8
Denmark	1787, 1801	27.0	30.5
Portugal (Coimbra)	1801	25.0	28.0
Flanders	1608-1814	24.7	26.6
Spain (National)	1787	24.2	27.0
Spain (Cuenca)	1787	23.4	25.9
Portugal (Santarém)	1788	23.3	28.3
Southern Italy	1600-1855	21.1	25.5

See Methods Section for Sources

Table 2 illustrates the regional differential between the north and the south more clearly: on average, northern women marry at around 28 years old, while southern women marry at around 23. The difference is somewhat smaller when comparing northern men to southern men, but the pattern still holds, with northern men marrying on average about 3 years later than southerners.

Table 2: Differences in Mean Age-at-Marriage between Northern and Southern Europe

	Female MSAM	Male MSAM
Northern Mean of Regional Means	28.0	30.0
Southern Mean of Regional Means	23.4	26.9
Difference	4.6	3.1

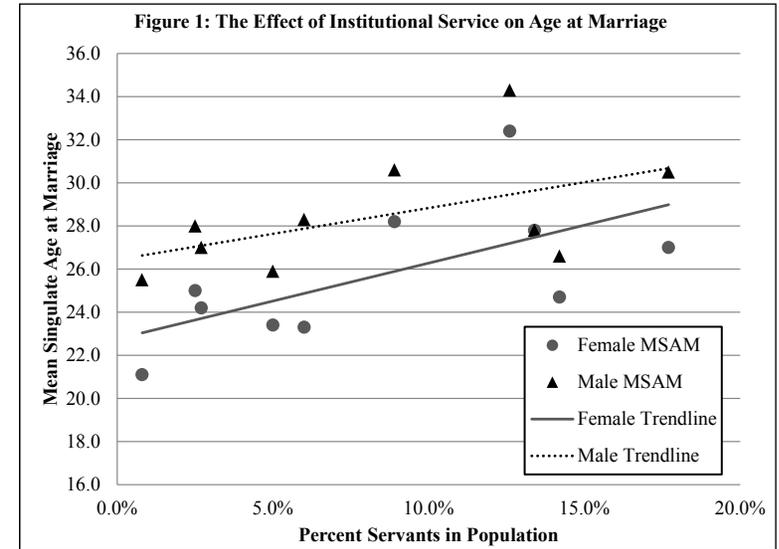
Having proven the existence of a strong North-South regional difference in mean age-at-marriage reconstructions, it is now possible to test the effect of the institution of life-cycle service, instrumented for by the percent of the sampled population recorded as servants. Table 3 does so by repeating the MSAM data from Table 1, but this time with regional servant population percentages displayed alongside and the sex-specific correlation coefficient (R) below. There is a strong correlation between the percent of the total population labeled servants (X) and both sex-specific mean distributions (Y1 and Y2), although it is stronger for women (Y1), meaning that as life-cycle service increases in prevalence, age at marriage also rises.

Table 3: Relationship Between Mean Age-at-Marriage and Servant Population

Region	Date Range Studied	(X) % Servants	(Y1) Female MSAM	(Y2) Male MSAM
N. France (Longuenesse)	1778	12.6	32.4	34.3
Norway	1841-5	8.9	28.2	30.6
England	1574-1821	13.4	27.8	27.8
Denmark	1787, 1801	17.7	27.0	30.5
Portugal (Coimbra)	1801	2.5	25.0	28.0
Flanders	1608-1814	14.2	24.7	26.6
Spain (National)	1787	2.7	24.2	27.0
Spain (Cuenca)	1787	5.0	23.4	25.9
Portugal (Santarém)	1788	6.0	23.3	28.3
Southern Italy	1600-1855	0.8	21.1	25.5
Correlation Coefficient (MSAM to % Servants)			Female Corr. 0.64	Male Corr. 0.52

Chart 1 illustrates the positive correlation between the prevalence of servants and the marriage age graphically. While each curve is composed of relatively few data points,

it is clear that populations with large servant components almost always marry later than those without servants.



DISCUSSION

After analyzing the available population reconstruction data from the early modern period, two major assertions have been vindicated: there is a divergence between a relatively late-marrying Northern European marriage-age pattern and a relatively early-marrying Southern European marriage age pattern, and that divergent pattern is highly correlated with the relative prevalence of life-cycle service. The actual strength of that correlation may differ from the reported value, since it is based on a rather small number of regional cases. Regional-scale abstract means were used because of the impossibility of finding cross-tabulated individual level data on either actual age at marriage or detailed occupational data from this early period. Still, the presence and positive direction of a correlation between the regional patterns is undeniable. Of course, it is not entirely certain whether life-cycle service is causing the divergent pattern, or if instead late age-at-marriage that is

creating the incentives driving the employment of life-cycle service. However, once in place, labor market norms are not exactly easily cast aside, so it stands to reason that the importance of life-cycle service to the Northern European rural economy would prevent any rapid decrease in mean marriage age, even if some more basic driver of the marriage age pattern were to disappear.

The existence of the divergent North-South age-at-marriage pattern revealed in this paper proves that Hajnal's theory of a consistent European Marriage Pattern must be substantially revised to better account for regional complexities within Europe. Within the limited scope of this study, it has only been possible to use the broadest of brushstrokes to illustrate some of the variations in the European experience of marriage. The details could best be filled in by collecting more information on the variables examined here, especially in areas which have been largely left out of this analysis. More data from France and Germany would substantially improve the robustness of these findings. Ultimately, it would be best to assemble data sufficiently distributed geographically that it is possible to study province-level variations, instead of just nation-scale regions. However, it seems unlikely that any further evidence would contradict either the general shape of the marriage age pattern found here or its general relationship to life-cycle service.

CONCLUSION

Since historical demography cannot be said to be the most transparently relevant subfield of historical research, it is worth stating explicitly how these findings might fit into a larger narrative of economic and social change. The correlations between life-cycle service and delayed marriage shown here is perhaps most persuasive as an illustration of the importance of the 17th and 18th century shift away from family enterprises and toward contractual relationships in Northern Europe in creating the social conditions which

gave birth to the modern economy. Family enterprise could accommodate substantial innovations in organization and allowed quite complex economic transactions through ingenious use of marriage, extended kinship networks, and adoption: the medieval Italian "super-companies,"³² the personal networks of Portuguese conversos in the Spanish Atlantic,³³ or Chinese "patricorporations"³⁴ are testaments to the resilience of this form of business organization. Yet what can be an effective form of allocating resources and labor at a microeconomic level may not be optimal at the macroeconomic level. The evidence presented here shows how contract labor, even in the distinctively premodern form of life-cycle servitude, historically produced an arguably positive and certainly more market-responsive social externality in the form of delayed marriage. By delaying marriage when labor was plentiful and wages low, servitude helped population keep pace with resources and capital. Family labor systems had no such feedback mechanism. As such, this survey provides evidence that this expansion of the market for labor eventually offered social benefits which innovations in non-market labor mobilization eventually were unable to match.

32 Edwin S. Hunt and James M. Murray, *A History of Business in Medieval Europe, 1200-1500* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 99-122.

33 Daviken Studnicki-Gizbert, *A Nation upon the Ocean Sea: Portugal's Atlantic Diaspora and the Crisis of the Spanish Empire, 1492-1640* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

34 Hill Gates, *China's Motor: A Thousand Years of Petty Capitalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

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HOTELS, SARATOGA SPRINGS, AND THE BUSINESS OF AMERICAN TOURISM

Christina James

By the late nineteenth century, Saratoga Springs, New York was known to be one of the most fashionable destinations for American tourists, commonly called the "queen of American watering-places."¹ At the center of Saratoga Springs' fame were its natural mineral springs and its many luxurious places of lodging, the largest collection of non-urban hotels of its time.² The growth of Saratoga Springs into America's first resort represented the development of American tourism from an activity reserved for the social elite into a commercial industry in which thousands of Americans participated. In Saratoga Springs, the construction of large hotels changed the nature of tourism, turning travel

¹ "Saratoga Surroundings," *Harper's Weekly*, August 11, 1883, 502.

² Richard Gassan, "The First American Tourist Guidebooks: Authorship and the Print Culture of the 1820s," *Book History* 8 (2005): 52.

into a more accessible, though less intimate experience. Additionally, the rise of hotels allowed for the growth of other travel related markets, namely the guidebook market, which together constituted a new framework for travel. This emerging tourist industry took on distinctly capitalist features, as hotel owners profited enormously. The upspring of hotels in places like Saratoga Springs was essential to the commercialization of traveling, illustrating the development of the infrastructure of the tourist industry, changing the experience of travelers, and exemplifying greater economic and social changes of the nineteenth century.

Despite its eventual popularity as a travel destination, Saratoga Springs was once identifiable solely by its proximity to Ballston Spa, a destination for wealthy travelers in the late eighteenth century. Ballston Spa's derived its popularity from its natural mineral springs, long seen in British and American culture as places of health and relaxation. In her history of tourism in New England, Dona Brown traced the popularity of springs to a longer tradition of high class traveling. "Travel to spas had been an important part of elite social patterns for a hundred years in England. Just as Bath did for London's elite... Ballston Springs fulfilled social needs for southern planters and for New York's and Boston's mercantile elite."³ Though also home to mineral springs, Saratoga Springs did not receive the attention from travelers that Ballston received in the late eighteenth century. Until 1800, the only notable structures in Saratoga Springs were two small log cabins.⁴ In 1812, Gideon Putnam, a landowner in Saratoga, built Union Hotel, the first hotel built to accommodate tourists in Saratoga Springs. Histories recorded that on the day the frame for the hotel was raised, residents from around the region gathered to watch, proclaiming the structure

³ Dona Brown, *Inventing New England* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), 36.

⁴ Nathaniel Bartlett Sylvester, *History of Saratoga County, New York* (Saratoga: Everts and Ensign, 1878), 153

"Putnam's Folly."⁵ While Putnam's neighbors considered his choice to construct Saratoga Springs' first hotel a foolish risk, Putnam's hotel began to attract visitors, and over the following decades, Saratoga Springs eclipsed Ballston Spa as the favored destination.⁶

Putnam's risk paid off due in part to the transportation innovations of the early nineteenth century, which allowed for more visitors to travel to Saratoga Springs. The Springs had a significant number of visitors in the 1820s, with one European visitor, James Stewart, writing in 1828 that "Fifteen hundred people have been known to arrive in a week. They come from all parts of the United States, even from New Orleans, at the distance of between two and three thousand miles."⁷ Moreover, the extension of the railroad to Saratoga Springs in 1833 brought the destination enormous prosperity.⁸ In the years that followed, the railroad made the journey to the Springs both easy and affordable for the growing American middle class. Together, the railroad and hotels formed a new framework which facilitated travel on a larger scale.

While early forms of traveling in the United States were centered on social networks and personal connections, the construction of large scale hotels in places like Saratoga Springs indicated a shift toward tourism which was more widely available to people who had previously lacked the status required for touring. Additionally, hotels exemplified a broader trend toward commercial business operations. Just as in the nineteenth century manufacturing moved beyond private workshops and homes and into factories, places of lodging grew from homes and inns into grand hotels. These new hotels differed from inns in several ways. "In an

⁵ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁶ Timothy Holmes, *Saratoga Springs, New York: A Brief History* (New York: The History Press, 2008), 18.

⁷ William Leete Stone, *Reminiscences of Saratoga and Ballston* (Ballston: Virtue & Yorston, 1875). 161.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 178.

inn...one would be greeted and waited on by the landlord or landlady. In a hotel, one might expect to be greeted not by members of a family but by employees, perhaps a clerk.”⁹ The construction of more modern hotels altered the experience of travelers, changing what was once a personal interaction into one which more closely resembled a business transaction. Brown notes that the shift in names also reflected this shift; “Just as the words traveler and tourist suggest different histories, the word inn implied uses deeply embedded in tradition, while the word hotel implied a new sort of market transaction.”¹⁰ Additionally, the hotels which were built in the early nineteenth century in Saratoga Springs were given impersonal, formal titles, while boarding houses retained family names. In the 1825 edition of his guidebook, *The Fashionable Tour*, Gideon Minor Davison listed the “boarding establishments of the first class” as Congress Hall, Union Hall, and the Columbian Hotel, and notable boarding houses “on a less extensive scale” as Doctor Porter’s, Reed’s, and Palmer’s.¹¹ Saratoga Springs’ new hotels also looked radically different from their predecessors. Inns and boarding houses often looked very similar to private homes, while hotels were much larger, with opulent features.¹² Davison’s guidebook noted that “the edifice [of Congress Hall] is 200 feet in length, 2 1/2 stories high, with two wings extending back 60 feet...In front of the Hall is a spacious piazza, extending the whole length of the building, 20 feet in width, with a canopy from the roof, supported by 17 massy columns.”¹³ Congress Hall was not uniquely large or luxurious. Davison also described the United States Hotel as covering three acres, including its outbuildings and

gardens.¹⁴ The scale of the largest hotels in Saratoga Springs revealed the profit motive of hotel owners, competing with one another for the most fashionable lodge and attempting to maximize their capacity for customers.

The numerous hotels in Saratoga Springs, along with the expanding railways in the United States allowed greater numbers of people to travel than had before. The seventh edition of Gideon Davison’s *The Fashionable Tour* acknowledged this trend, “...the recent gigantic internal improvements in the northern and middle states, and the development of new and highly interesting natural scenery, together with the increased facilities for traveling, have greatly augmented the number of tourists within a short period...”¹⁵ As travelers flocked to Saratoga Springs, hotels began to market to specific types of travelers, while other hotels developed reputations for housing certain groups of lodgers. The most grandiose hotels in Saratoga Springs had salons, gardens, and piazzas- features desired particularly by traveling women. Similarly, hotels featured private rooms or apartments, where inns often had shared rooms for travelers. These private rooms gave tourists a more comfortable lodging experience, and were better suited for families and longer stays. In this way, hotels were able to cater to specific audiences, increasing profits and further revealing the manner in which consumerism became entwined with tourism.

The tourist guidebooks of this era illustrated the ways in which certain hotels were associated with particular types of travelers and their styles and preferences. Brown recognizes this, noting that

The Congress Hotel competed with the newer United States Hotel for the wealthy and fashionable...The Union Hotel kept out of the

9 Brown, *Inventing New England*, 26.

10 Ibid., 26.

11 Gideon M. Davison, *The Fashionable Tour, in 1825* (Saratoga: G.M. Davison, 1825), 66.

12 Brown, *Inventing New England*, 26.

13 Davison, *The Fashionable Tour, in 1825*, 66-67.

14 Ibid., 67.

15 Gideon M. Davison, *The Fashionable Tour: The Traveller’s Guide Through the Middle and Northern States and the Provinces of Canada* (Saratoga: G.M. Davison, 1837), xv.

contest, catering to those who were equally wealthy but devout, and to those who were actually visiting the Springs for their health...A number of other hotels and boardinghouses in town cost as little as one third of the price of the great barracks-like resort hotels. Price alone might determine who stayed where, but guidebooks routinely gave hints on the implications of such a decision.¹⁶

In Theodore Dwight's *The Northern Traveller*, Dwight advises tourists who wish to "avoid the inconveniences of gaiety and mirth" to opt to stay at Union Hall.¹⁷ Similarly, a later guidebook writer wrote that "[The Clarendon] hotel is largely patronized by a class of visitors who do not desire to mingle with the somewhat promiscuous company which fills the larger hotels."¹⁸ Just as the variety of places to stay in Saratoga Springs grew, the tourists who lodged in the Springs every summer became increasingly diverse over time. In the 1830 edition of his guidebook, *The Fashionable Tour*, Gideon Davison commented that "To this spot, perhaps more than any other on the globe, are seen repairing in the summer mornings, before breakfast, persons of almost every grade and condition, from the most exalted to the most abject. The beautiful and the deformed- the rich and the poor- the devotee of pleasure and the invalid- all congregate here for purposes as various as their situations in life."¹⁹ This aspect of tourism in Saratoga Springs remained throughout the nineteenth century, with one 1874 guidebook reading that "Saratoga is cosmopolitan, complex. It embraces a half dozen places, each attracting its own 'set.' One realm is ruled by the millionaires and the managing mother. There is a Saratoga for the invalid; still another for the sportsman."²⁰

¹⁶ Brown, *Inventing New England*, 37.

¹⁷ Theodore Dwight, *The Northern Traveller* (New York: Wilder & Campbell, 1825), 103.

¹⁸ Charles Newhall Taintor, *Saratoga Illustrated: The Visitor's Guide to Saratoga Springs* (New York: Taintor Brothers & Co., 1876), 21.

¹⁹ Gideon M. Davison, *The Fashionable Tour* (Saratoga Springs: G.M. Davison, 1830). 158.

²⁰ C.A. Faxon, *Faxon's Illustrated Handbook of Travel* (Boston: C.A. Faxon, 1874), 54

This hotel industry drew in new classes of tourists, demonstrating the spreading popularization of travel as a pastime accessible to Americans.

The variety of hotels and boardinghouses from which visitors to Saratoga Springs could choose revealed that no longer only wealthy travelers frequented Saratoga Springs. Furthermore, the booming hotel industry in Saratoga Springs allowed guests to choose the image they wanted to portray while vacationing in Saratoga Springs. Despite the new access that the growing middle class had to touring, travel continued to be considered a luxurious and fashionable activity. By not requiring the social networks and connections once needed to secure lodging, the hotel industry allowed for the middle class to stay in lavish accommodations, without maintaining upper class status. Brown took this argument further, claiming that the new nature of hotels changed the relationship of different groups of tourists to each other. "All one needed was money to make a show at the most stylish hotel in town. Instead of remaining a place where traditional elite alliances were cemented, Saratoga Springs quickly became a competitive arena for tourists."²¹ Just as hotel owners were continuously renovating and improving their hotels to compete for customers, tourists themselves sought to keep up with each other. This impacted the ways in which Americans thought about traveling. While the journey to the Springs was once done for health or relaxation, the trip became increasingly an effort to increase social status. One 1827 visitor remarked on the reasons travelers had for visiting Saratoga Springs, "Many visitors come here probably in good sound health, for amusement, for the sake of spending a week or two among the fashionable to see and be seen."²² The evolution of tourism as hotels grew in Saratoga Springs affected the reasons and motivations for traveling, ultimately changing the experience of travel.

²¹ Brown, *Inventing New England*, 37.

²² Holmes, *Saratoga Springs, New York*, 28.

The ever changing nature of the top hotels in Saratoga Springs required travelers to have access to frequently updated information on places of stay. Guidebook writers took on this responsibility. The first New England tourists' guide, Gideon Davison's *The Fashionable Tour*, published in Saratoga in 1822, remained the only guidebook of its kind on the market until 1825, when several similar books were published.²³ After the initial publishing of several guidebooks in the 1820s, the 1830s saw another boom of guidebooks. The multiple editions of the most popular guidebooks not only demonstrated the success and popularity of their first editions, but also signified how quickly the travel destinations changed. In his second edition of *The Northern Traveller*, published only one year after the first edition, Theodore Dwight acknowledged the success his first publication had been, writing, "The ready sale of the first edition of the *Northern Traveller*, during the last season, has encouraged the publication of another on the same plan, with an extension of the routes and the addition of many embellishments."²⁴ There was undoubtedly a profit motive which drove writers to continue to publish improved editions of their guidebooks. However, the rate at which destinations like Saratoga Springs were developing made updated versions of popular guidebooks necessary for travelers who wanted to know the details of the newest attractions and routes. Davison's 1830 edition of his guidebook illustrates the recent changes which his readers likely would have wanted to know,

The Union Hotel is one of the earliest and most respectable establishments in the vicinity, and is situated directly opposite to the Congress Hall. It has, within a few years, been much improved in its appearance, and enlarged by considerable

additions to the main building...A garden in the rear of the building, together with the north opening to the main street are among the varieties which contribute to the pleasantness of the establishment.²⁵

The second edition of C.A. Faxon's illustrated guidebook explicitly stated the necessity of having an up to date guidebook, "A new handbook is... needed each year, or, better still, an old favorite is corrected and improved from year to year."²⁶ The guidebook market became closely tied to the hotel market. As guidebooks served as publicity for hotels, hotels grew in popularity and expanded, in turn creating the need for an updated guidebook. Guidebook writers and hotel owners each contributed to the other's success.

Just as the growth of the hospitality industry in Saratoga Springs contributed to the success of guidebooks, hotels expanded the local economy of Saratoga Springs as they increased the flow of money for recreational expenditures. The hotel industry proved to be extremely lucrative. In his history on resorts in American history, Jon Sterngass compared the residents of Saratoga Springs, most of whom drew their incomes from tourist related business, to other Americans of the time. "In the census of 1850, in which the mean wealth of Americans was reported as \$1,001, eighty-five Saratoga residents owned real estate valued at more than \$5,000 and thirty-eight greater than \$10,000, including three Putnam descendants [and] at least five other hotel keepers."²⁷ Not only was the hotel business profitable, the values of hotels increased at exorbitant rates as Saratoga Springs grew in popularity. "The assessed value of Union Hall, set at \$40,000 in 1849, increased to \$80,000

²⁵ Davison, *The Fashionable Tour*, 166.

²⁶ Faxon, *Faxon's Illustrated Handbook*, 5.

²⁷ Jon Sterngass, *First Resorts: Pursuing Pleasure at Saratoga Springs, Newport, and Coney Island* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 24.

²³ Richard H. Gassan, *The Birth of American Tourism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 112.

²⁴ Theodore Dwight, *The Northern Traveller* (New York: A.T. Goodrich, 1826), iii.

in 1854 and \$200,000 in 1864.”²⁸ The rapid growth of the hotel market illustrates the concurrent growth of the tourist industry, through the development of transportation and the growth of tourist destinations. Furthermore, the growth of hotels both in number and size, but also in profit revealed the ability of the capitalist American economy to adopt a new industry. Not only were hotels no longer a home-based business, they became highly profitable, accessible to the middle class, and a growing area of the economy.

The large hotels of Saratoga Springs reinforced the infrastructure by allowing for the rise of other travel related businesses in Saratoga Springs. While mineral springs were Saratoga Springs’ primary claim to fame, new types of attractions began to appear in the Springs as the destination became a true resort. New facilities for leisure, entertainment, and socializing were established, and garnered patrons from local hotel guests.²⁹ Davison’s guidebook assured travelers, “there are always sufficient objects of amusement... Those whose taste is not gratified at the billiard rooms... can always enjoy a mental recreation at the reading rooms, or a short excursion in the neighborhood... The amusement of the day are usually crowned with a ball or promenade.”³⁰ Saratoga Springs was no longer simply a place of health and relaxation, but a place for entertainment and recreation. By the late nineteenth century, this process had led to the rise of casinos and horse-racing on a large scale in Saratoga Springs. Throughout the period, it was the existence of hotels which not only gave visitors a place to stay, but attracted tourists to the Springs with their luxurious accommodations. Just as had been the case with guidebooks, lucrative hotels benefited nearby recreational facilities.

The nineteenth century is remembered as a time of great transformation in the United States; work moved into

factories and out of homes, wage-labor grew, a middle class with disposable income emerged, and capitalism thrived. The growth of tourism in America both influenced and reflected these processes. The recreational travel in which Americans engaged in the late eighteenth century required social status and connections in places such as Saratoga Springs or Ballston Spa. Hotels broke this pattern by turning lodging into a commercial industry. Hotels, like factories, were large in scale, efficient, and far less personal than their home-based predecessors. The hotels of Saratoga Springs contributed to the rise of the infrastructure of travel, allowing travel to grow into a profitable and popular activity, and attracting visitors of many backgrounds with their luxury and elegance. Hotel owners and other Saratoga Springs locals were able to capture profits from the influx of consumer spending, despite the rural location of Saratoga Springs. Just as the expansion of railways stimulated the growth of hotels, hotels allowed for the growth of other travel related markets such as guidebooks and places of entertainment and recreation. The new products which tourists consumed revealed the ways in which travel had become commoditized. Ultimately, hotels shaped travel in Saratoga Springs into an experience centered around consumption. Where Americans had once traveled for social connections and health, tourism evolved to center on the purchase of pleasure and status. The growth of hotels in Saratoga Springs exemplifies the development of American tourism, and should be viewed in the context of larger economic developments, ultimately reflecting the growth of capitalism in the United States.

²⁸ Ibid., 21.

²⁹ Holmes, *Saratoga Springs, New York*, 18.

³⁰ Davison, *The Fashionable Tour*, 168.

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**“HER LIFE ON THE PLAINS”: THE
DEPICTION OF NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN
IN THE MEMOIRS OF LIBBIE CUSTER**

Sarah A. Sadlier

Mrs. Custer has well served the purposes of graver history, for her facts are indisputable and at first hand. She furnishes the original colors with which the future artist may paint, the action which the poet and the novelist weave into song and romance. Her pages are crowded with pictures of a type of life almost extinct. Washington Irving in his Indian stories drew on records of a dead past. Mrs. Custer has drawn on living records of an intense present.

-- Mary E. Burt, 1901¹

¹ Mary Burt, "Preface," in Elizabeth Custer, *The Boy General: Story of the Life of Major-General George A. Custer*, ed. Mary E. Burt (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), vi. At the time of the Battle of the Little Bighorn, George A. Custer was a lieutenant colonel. During the Civil War, he had been promoted to the temporary rank (brevet) of major general, but he reverted back to his lower rank after the war's conclusion in 1865.

Over a century since his disastrous demise, Lieutenant Colonel George Armstrong Custer still remains America's foremost Indian fighter, but who was responsible for preserving his memory?

² We can largely attribute our enduring impressions of Lt. Colonel Custer to his wife, Elizabeth "Libbie" Bacon Custer.³ Although she is often credited with being her husband's biographer, her memoirs actually reveal more about her life on the Plains than his.⁴ Beyond simply enhancing her spouse's legacy, Custer published extensively about her experiences as a frontier military wife. In her writings, she transported her reader to a mythic nineteenth-century Western frontier—a land where the buffalo rampaged with reckless abandon, where women were as scarce as gold, and where men ventured to find their ill-fated fortunes.⁵ Most compellingly, Custer's narratives presented divergent stereotypes of Native American women: the idealized princess and the degraded squaw.⁶ This artificial contrast, which also appeared in an existing body of literature about Native American women, illustrated the power of racial ideologies in shaping the sentiments of white women in the West. However, the aforementioned binary disintegrated in Custer's work when intercultural interactions between her husband and a Native American woman threatened to disrupt Custer's public life.

² Robert Marshall Utley, *Cavalier in Buckskin: George Armstrong Custer and the Western Military Frontier* (USA: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 4.

³ Karen Miller Russell, Janice Hume, and Karen Sichler, "Libbie Custer's 'Last Stand': Image, Restoration, the Press, and Public Memory," *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly* 84, no. 3 (September 2007): 582.

⁴ In 1874, George A. Custer published his autobiography, *My Life On The Plains: or, Personal Experiences with Indians* (New York: Sheldon and Company, 1874). The title of this essay suggests that Libbie Custer had an equally important life on the Plains and her own significant interactions with Native Americans.

⁵ Elizabeth B. Custer, *Tenting on the Plains: Or General Custer in Kansas and Texas* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1895), 353, 319, 163.

⁶ Elizabeth B. Custer, *Following the Guidon* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1890), 96.

With her "first hand" facts and her eloquent expression, Custer depicted Native American women in a vivid manner. The trilogy that Custer produced—"Boots and Saddles" (1885), *Tenting on the Plains* (1887), and *Following the Guidon* (1890)—portrayed her frontier experiences between 1865 and 1876, a period now known as the height of the Plains Wars. During these hostilities, intercultural relations between whites and Native Americans were exceedingly rare except in the case of combative confrontation. Captivity narratives, which consisted of accounts composed by whites abducted by Native Americans, detailed white interactions with Native Americans. However, Libbie Custer was not a captive; rather, her husband was the captor of Native Americans, such as the Cheyenne. Thus, she gained access to Plains culture in a manner that very few women in the West had before her.⁷ She was able to observe quotidian life in the camps of allied Native Americans and to attend the tribal council meetings of the Cheyenne. Moreover, she was in frequent contact with Native American women, which allowed her to copiously comment on their activities, attributes, and commonalities.

Despite these recurrent interactions with Native American women, Custer's opinion of them did not differ drastically from that of her contemporaries. Her propensity to perpetuate established tropes of Native American women was the product of her public position as a military widow. Although Custer's memoirs pertained to the earlier period of the Plains Wars, she wrote them closer to the conclusion of the conflict, more than a decade after her husband's "Last Stand." By this time, she had molded a profession out of writing reflections on her life with the famous and valiant Indian-fighter Custer; therefore, her public profile relied heavily upon the stainlessness of her husband's image.⁸ Her principal purpose became defending her deceased spouse's legacy

⁷ Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), 29.

⁸ Shirley A. Leckie, *Elizabeth Bacon Custer and the Making of a Myth* (USA: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 7.

against disparagement, which included criticism of his conduct against Native Americans and of his extramarital affair with the Cheyenne woman, Monasetah. Consequently, Custer was likely inclined to preserve conventional, one-dimensional stereotypes of Native American women to avoid evoking sympathy for this group with whom her husband had so cruelly and so closely intermingled.

By reiterating established tropes of Native American women, Custer's narratives serve as a microcosm for the broader body of literature written in the late nineteenth-century about this racial Other. The prevailing picture of Native American women at the time was often ambivalent and based upon the reports of white military officers.⁹ In their accounts, Native American women could either be "noble Indian princesses" or "ignoble squaws."¹⁰ According to historian Sherry Smith, "the former term denoted women who were 'childlike, naturally innocent, and inclined toward civilization, Christianization, and to helping and mating the white man.'"¹¹ Additionally, the "noble" Native American woman would fearlessly defy the authority of Native American men. In contrast, the Anglo-American representation of her antithesis was a "squat, haggard, ugly, papoose-lugging drudge who toiled endlessly while her husband sported in the hunting fields or lolled about the lodge."¹² Such women "fought enemies with a vengeance and thirst for blood unmatched by any man."¹³ In this system of belief, princesses proved to be apt allies while squaws acted as devious enemies. Smith contended that these widely accepted conceptions of Native American women made it difficult for military members to see Native Americans as "real, individual humans," since both "princess and squaw operated as depersonalized symbols, devoid

9 Sherry L. Smith, "Beyond Princess and Squaw: Army Officers' Perceptions of Indian Women," in *The Women's West* (OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), ed. Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, 63-75.

10 Smith, "Beyond Princess and Squaw," 65.

11 Smith, "Beyond Princess and Squaw," 66.

12 Ibid., 66.

13 Ibid., 66.

of humanity."¹⁴ Although Custer was not a formal member of the military, she fit flawlessly into this racist tradition, since her memoirs encapsulated this oppositional and somewhat paradoxical representation of Native American women.

Only in recent decades have historians begun to recognize the importance of frontier women's observations of Native Americans for enriching our historical understanding of the Plains. For instance, in her 1984 study, historian Glenda Riley asserted that white women "labored under a set of images and preconceptions of females in the nineteenth century that influenced and shaped their view of American Indians."¹⁵ Custer's memoirs exemplify this trend by both confirming and complicating rigid racial dichotomies pertaining to Native American women. Nevertheless, scholars have largely ignored Custer's multifaceted representation of Native Americans. Even articles and biographies of Libbie Custer only passingly refer her depiction of Native American women, and none offer in-depth commentary on the topic.¹⁶ Yet Custer's memoirs provide a revealing perspective for what Western historian Peggy Pascoe deemed to be the foremost of "reasons to study the American West:" the intercultural relations between white women and Native Americans.¹⁷

Using her unique exposure to Native American women, Custer constructed ostensibly "authentic" narratives about intercultural relations between women during the Plains Wars for her late-nineteenth century readers. In spite of her extensive

14 Ibid., 66.

15 Glenda Riley, *Women and Indians on the Frontier: 1825-1915*, (NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1984), xiii.

16 Maryan Wherry, "Women and the Western Military Frontier: Elizabeth Bacon Custer," in *Nineteenth-century Women Learn to Write*, ed. Catherine Hobbs (University of Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 218; Sandra L. Myres, "Romance and Reality on the American Frontier: Views of Army Wives," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (October, 1982): 423.

17 Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), xvii.

interaction with Native American women, Custer largely perpetuated the image of the noble and ignoble savage. While portraying Native American princesses as willing allies, youthful beauties, independent individuals, and moderately civilized women, she vilified Native American “squaws” as spiteful enemies, decrepit crones, slavish wives, and repulsively primitive women. Her adoption of this dualistic approach to Native American women showed the persistence of racial ideologies in coloring the perceptions of white women in the West, as well as the utility of these representations in dehumanizing the racial Other. Nonetheless, Custer partially abandoned this inflexible stereotype in the case of one Native American woman—Monasetah. This individual’s coerced sexual relationship with Lt. Colonel Custer threatened Libbie Custer’s public prestige and forced her to reassess her static interpretations of Native American women. In this manner, Custer’s narratives both reinforce and confound historians’ comprehension of the way in which white frontier women viewed and interacted with Native Americans in the late nineteenth century.

Custer’s entry into the world of violent and complex intercultural exchange on the Plains could not have been anticipated, given the banality of her upbringing in Monroe, Michigan. By 1862, the twenty-year-old Libbie Bacon found herself trapped in her hometown. She had graduated valedictorian of the Young Ladies Female Seminary, but she yearned for some greater destiny. The young woman felt suffocated by her two career prospects—teaching or marriage. The monotony of marriage seemed a rather daunting fate to the vivacious Bacon. As the town’s belle, she received many suitors, though none left any profound impression on her until she met her future husband, George Armstrong Custer.¹⁸ Over the course of the next two years,

18 Shirley Leckie, “The Civil War Partnership of Elizabeth and George A. Custer,” in *Intimate Strategies of the Civil War: Military Commanders and Their Wives*, eds. Lesley Bleser and Carol Gordon (NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 179.

they engaged in a courtship that persisted until their marriage on February 9, 1864. Libbie Custer’s beloved “Autie,” as she affectionately called him, appealed to her for a variety of reasons, including his fame as a Civil War hero and his ability to provide her with an exciting escape from the dullness of Monroe.¹⁹

Custer’s liberation from the confines of her hometown marked the beginning of her path to the Plains. In a letter written during their early days as a couple, George Custer remarked, “Libbie Bacon is the fortunate or unfortunate person... who will unite her destinies with mine.”²⁰ Indeed, Custer’s destiny would be inextricably linked to her husband’s career, since she would accompany him on many of his military campaigns and record them for posterity. During the summer of 1866, George A. Custer accepted the lieutenant colonelcy of the Seventh Cavalry, a regiment whose principal purpose was to enforce the U.S. government’s claim on the Trans-Mississippi West through military engagements with Native American resistance movements. The Plains were home to a multitude of tribes, including the Cheyenne, Arapaho, Arikara (Ree), Kiowa, Kiowa-Apaches, Comanche, and Sioux. Their homeland and hunting grounds were threatened by the rapid post-war expansion westward, and they retaliated against the encroaching settlers. Dealing with these diverse groups was no simple task for the U.S. military force dispatched to the region. Some of the Native American groups, such as the Arikara and Crow, aided the U.S. military’s expeditions against rival tribes, but the majority opposed the presence of the army. Native Americans were experts at evading capture by cavalry units, who sought to relocate loosely armed bands to reservations, where they could be contained and civilized.²¹ Lieutenant Colonel Custer was chosen

19 Leckie, “The Civil War Partnership of Elizabeth and George A. Custer,” 180-181.

20 George Armstrong to Elizabeth Bacon Custer, “Libbie Bacon is the fortunate or unfortunate person... who will unite her destinies with mine,” Letter (December 19, 1863), *Shapell Manuscript Foundation*, accessed February 19, 2014, <http://www.shapell.org>.

21 Leckie, “The Civil War Partnership of Elizabeth and George A. Custer,”

for his position because he had no compunction about executing a campaign of total war to reign in the Native American “hostiles.”²² Although Libbie Custer was mindful of this potentially hazardous environment, she still elected to participate in her husband’s march westward.

As opposed to other military wives, who remained at home while their husbands were on campaigns, Custer traveled with her husband’s camp, which placed her perilously close to warring Native Americans. Her husband’s assignments included sojourns to Texas, Kansas, and the Dakota Territory, which later became the subjects of her memoirs. Due to her position as the wife of a cavalry commander, Custer was often privy to information about the Plains Indians that the few other wives who traveled with the expedition did not obtain. Even while he was away, Lt. Colonel Custer kept his wife apprised of any developments relating to Native Americans. In his letters, he reaffirmed that she should be cautious about being a woman in the West by telling her the story of a white woman who had been captured by Native Americans and subsequently “rendered insane by their barbarous treatment.”²³ She credited this incident and others like it with fueling her fears of Native Americans and employed them as implied justification for her husband’s controversial treatment of various tribes.

An ever-present theme in Custer’s works was her apprehension of a Native American attack, a common concern among frontier women. In fact, the most regularly expressed anxiety in Western newspapers and diaries of the era was the trepidation of capture by Native Americans.²⁴ Men were similarly aware of the dangers to white women, but they did not openly

express their feelings so as to maintain their manliness.²⁵ When she recalled her days on the Plains, Custer remembered trying to avoid detection by Native Americans, but an ill-timed clock “was always striking when silence was golden; for instance, when the foe was near.”²⁶ In these moments, she “felt that breathing was altogether too much noise from a frightened woman,” for even this noise could reveal her position to Native American abductors.²⁷ This constant, crippling fear soon developed into paranoia, as “every little pile of rocks seemed, to my strained eyes, to hide the head of a savage.”²⁸ Shirley Leckie suggests that in showing her vulnerability and weakness in the face of such grievous danger, Custer situated herself as a model of Victorian femininity, who could not risk compromising her purity in an encounter with reputedly unrestrained Native Americans. For her, the dishonor of a rape was a fate worse than death.

Custer communicated that Native Americans were particularly dangerous to white women by tapping into dehumanizing racial ideologies. According to Custer, even if captive white women were rescued, death would have been preferable to the humiliation of having cohabitated with Native Americans.²⁹ In one of her recollections, Custer repeated a well-known story she had heard of a Denver woman begging to be taken from the frontier, where she was in “deadly peril” from Native American attacks, for she “was sure to be murdered if she remained, and might as well die” rather than risk rape (although Victorian propriety dictated that Custer not conclude her sentence in such direct terms).³⁰ She elaborated on this topic by adding

192-194.

22 John Stephens Gray, *The Centennial Campaign: The Sioux Wars of 1876* (USA: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 170.

23 George Armstrong Custer, quoted in *The Custer Story: The Life and Intimate Letters of General George A. Custer and His Wife Elizabeth*, ed. Marguerite Merington (New York: Devon-Adair, 1950), 218.

24 Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880*, 59.

25 Sandra L. Myres, *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience, 1800-1915*, (University of New Mexico Press, 1991), 65.

26 Elizabeth B. Custer, “Home-making in the American Army,” *Harpers Weekly* (September 22, 1990), 3, in *A Libbie Custer Gallimaufry!*, ed. by John Connell, (Austin, TX: 1978).

27 *Ibid.*, 3.

28 Custer, *Tenting on the Plains*, 374.

29 Elizabeth B. Custer, *The Custer Story*, 284.

30 Elizabeth B. Custer, *The Boy General: Story of the Life of Major-General*

that captured women “suffered degradation unspeakable; the brutalities of the men, the venom of the squaws...People in civilized conditions cannot imagine it. But we who have seen it know. Death would be merciful in comparison.”³¹ Although Custer never mentioned her personal interaction with such captured women, she likely appropriated news she gleaned from other frontier reports or literature to create these stories. In them, she maintained a racial hierarchy in which Native Americans were base and almost subhuman. The association with Native Americans was correspondingly degrading and dangerous to Victorian female purity, the preservation of which, she inferred, should be the aim of white society.

In the late nineteenth century, pervasive fears of the rape of white women justified racial violence, such as the lynching of Blacks in the South.³² Similarly, Custer played to earlier established fears of the rape of white women by Native American men to vindicate her husband’s controversial policies for controlling the so-called “hostile” Native Americans. In this sense, the racialization of rape influenced the implementation of harsh military measures against Native Americans. When Western newspapers castigated the severity of the Army’s Indian policy, Custer protested to her aunt in Kansas, “Surely you do not believe the current rumors that Autie and others are cruel in their treatment of Indians? Autie and others only do what they are ordered to do.”³³ She proceeded to lament that, “if those who criticize these orders could only see for themselves” the risk of capture by Native American men, they would no longer be so eager to denigrate her husband.³⁴ She did not explicitly detail the terrors of rape, torture, and murder that, she

George A. Custer, ed. Mary E. Burt, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1901), 63.

31 Custer, *The Custer Story*, 284.

32 Estelle B. Freedman, *Redefining Rape: Sexual Violence in the Era of Suffrage and Segregation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 89.

33 Custer, *The Custer Story*, 284.

34 *Ibid.*, 284.

believed, were surely to follow, but her audience was likely familiar with the sensational newspaper stories of such Indian attacks.³⁵ Although instances of Native Americans raping white women on the Plains were in actuality quite rare, Custer used the threat of rape or cohabitation to her advantage by implying that the racial Other deserved punishment for its supposedly frequent transgressions.³⁶ Such rhetoric served a dual purpose: Custer effectively played into existing stereotypes to rationalize her own fears and to defend her husband’s campaigns against Native Americans.

Custer promoted a vision of Native American women in which their barbarity merited the interference of civilized society. In the late nineteenth century, the discourse of civilization was shaped by race and gender ideologies. White female writers of the nineteenth century, such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman, viewed true womanhood—a middle-class white woman’s typical behavior—as an indicator of “advanced society.” Women like Custer utilized concepts of Victorian femininity as a recognizable measuring tool to distinguish between superior and inferior society. Those racial groups in which women did not exhibit the femininity associated with white women deserved to experience an aggressive civilizing process.³⁷ Thus, Custer portrayed the enemy squaws as even more savagely masculine than their warrior husbands, insinuating that belligerent Native American women were especially threatening to the white women on the frontier due to their uncivilized and unfeminine nature.

By arguing that Native American women harbored personal vendettas against white women, Custer vilified Native American women and situated them as the antitype of their feminine, white counterparts. In doing so, Custer separated Native American women from civilized races, suggesting their inferiority.

35 Custer, *Following the Guidon*, 90.

36 Sandra L. Myres, *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience, 1800-1915*, 64.

37 Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 25, 122.

While she informed her readership of the dangers posed by all Native Americans, stating that a “savage” would fight if there is a possibility that he could capture a white woman, she complicated this traditional storyline by adding a new, potentially more horrifying factor to the mix: the vengeful Native American woman. She professed that in Native American cultures, “the squaws are ignored if the chiefs have a white woman in their power.”³⁸ The result of this implicit sexual neglect caused the Native American women to bring “a more fearful agony” upon the captive white women, and “wild with jealousy, heap cruelty and exhausting labor upon the helpless victim.”³⁹ In the scenario that Custer outlined, squaws were unduly cruel and acted on their base sexual needs, rather than expressing the Victorian restraint exhibited by white woman. She viewed squaws as wild and not in possession of the domestication that she possessed as a white woman. Thus, she represented them as the most ignoble and uncivilized of enemies, unworthy of empathy from her readership, while she demonstrated the exigency of military protection for white women.

Custer even projected her general terror of squaws onto allies of the American army, illustrating her inability to eschew her racial biases towards women who did not match the princess stereotype. Custer’s tale of a lowly Arikara “squaw,” whose tribe was allied with the Seventh Calvary, best exemplified this tendency. When Custer witnessed a Native American boy returning with an enemy scalp, she developed a story about his mother. She inferred from the scene that the Arikara mother, “knowing that it would count her child ‘a coup’ if he put another wound in an already dying man, sent him out and incited the child to plunge a knife into the wounded warrior.”⁴⁰ This act of violence was even more concerning to Custer because she “saw the mother’s eyes gleam with pride as she watched the miniature warrior admitted among the mature

and experienced brave.”⁴¹ Custer’s words conveyed that this Native American woman was bloodthirsty and lacked the humanity inherent in white women, which further reinforced the cruelty aspect of the “squaw” paradigm and the need for the coerced civilization of this group.

Custer was even more appalled that squaws themselves behaved as unfeminine warriors, suggesting that this action further illuminated their repulsive thirst for blood.⁴² In perpetuating this established trope of Native American women, Custer depicted women who resisted the authority of her husband’s military command as unnatural and meriting condemnation. In making them distinct from white Victorian women, she created an emotional barrier between her eastern audience and Native American women. She regaled her reader with her “perfect knowledge” of the “desperate work” that the Native American women had performed in preparation for an unnamed battle against American troops.⁴³ Although Custer did not witness the battle, she reported that General Gibbs saw “an old squaw cease for an instant stirring her soup, snatch her knife from her belt, plunge it into a soldier who was unsuspecting of a woman as a warrior, resume her soup-stirring perfectly imperturbed, not even looking at the dead soldier by her side.”⁴⁴ The belligerent behavior of the squaw was not what most shocked Custer; rather, she was struck by the dearth of humanity that the Native American woman exhibited after committing the foul deed. She expected the woman to respond in the same manner that she presumably would—with disgust. She did not mention that this squaw’s family members had likely perished at the hand of the military. Instead, this Native American woman’s hostility and lack of remorse demonstrated to Custer the need for strict control of these uncivilized enemies of the U.S. Army.

38 Custer, *The Boy General*, 64.

39 *Ibid.*, 64.

40 Custer, *The Boy General*, 122-123.

41 *Ibid.*, 122-123.

42 Smith, “Beyond Princess and Squaw,” 65.

43 Custer, *The Boy General*, 61.

44 *Ibid.*, 61.

Custer recognized that some Native American women could serve as invaluable allies, but only if they conformed to the stereotype of the civilized and noble princess. According to Custer, the sister of Black Kettle was a “powerful ally” in procuring peace with the Cheyenne.⁴⁵ Her high birth, along with her youth, indicated her potential to be one of the few noble Native Americans whom Libbie Custer would encounter on the Plains. Custer’s propensity to view beautiful, young women—whom she called “princesses”—as allies continued with her description of the Cheyenne’s Monasetah, who was a captive taken by Lt. Colonel Custer at the Battle of Washita in 1868. In one of her first paragraphs describing this woman, Custer identified Monasetah by name and recognized that she was a ranking individual among the Cheyenne, since she was the daughter of Chief Little Rock.⁴⁶ This naming is particularly significant, as Custer only named one other woman, who she similarly perceived to be Cheyenne royalty. According to Custer, Monasetah was incredibly “useful” in searching for the trails of the Native Americans that the army was tracking.⁴⁷ For Custer, “the painstaking of her patient search was something wonderful to watch.”⁴⁸ She reveled in Monasetah’s expertise and marveled that neither white nor Native American men could see the subtleties in the signs that a Native American woman could because of her “delicate touch and her untiring patience.”⁴⁹ These feminine traits indicated to Custer that Monasetah was more like a Victorian woman than a Native America, as possessing the manners and behaviors of white woman during this period signified a civilized nature. Custer also noted that Monasetah had served as an advisor to the military commander and suggested that her intelligence and judgment helped secure the Cheyenne’s surrender, offering a rare glimpse

of Native American women in leadership positions.⁵⁰ Custer’s especially positive portrayal of this female ally is notable, but upon closer inspection, it reveals much more about Custer’s intercultural interactions than meets the eye.

Most significant in the narrative of Monasetah is Custer’s complete omission of the history of the Battle of Washita, the event in which Lt. Colonel Custer’s forces captured the Cheyenne princess. In November 1868, Lt. Colonel Custer attacked Chief Black Kettle’s Cheyenne camp on the banks of the Washita River, near present day Cheyenne, Oklahoma. During this military conflict, later deemed to be a massacre by his critics, Custer’s cavalry targeted Native American women and children, burning tepees, killing ponies, and capturing women.⁵¹ In her narrative, Custer barely referenced this event, suggesting that she retrospectively sought to absolve Custer of the blame for his brutal actions. Thus, she did not discuss how her husband violated military principle by targeting the noncombatant women and children at battle.⁵² Beyond the carnage of the battle, Custer also did not explicitly reveal the forced sexual relationships that white soldiers maintained with conquered Native American women, which would have unduly soiled the reputation of her husband’s command. There was a

50 Ramona Ford, “Native American Women: Changing Statuses, Changing Interpretations,” *Writing the Range: Race, Class and Culture in the Women’s West*, eds. Elizabeth Jameson and Susan Hodge Armitage, (University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 43. Ramona Ford has noted the sparseness of nineteenth-century documents that discuss Native American women in leadership positions; thus, Custer’s account offers an important exception to the historical record.

51 Leckie, “The Civil War Partnership of Elizabeth and George A. Armstrong Custer,” 195.

52 Mark Grimsley, “‘Rebels’ and ‘Redskins’: U.S. Military Conduct toward White Southerners and Native Americans in Comparative Perspective,” in *Civilians in the Path of War*, eds. Mark Grimsley and Clifford J. Rodgers, (University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln and London, 2002), 148, 150.

45 Custer, *Following the Guidon*, 90.

46 *Ibid.*, 90.

47 Custer, *Following the Guidon*, 91.

48 *Ibid.*, 91.

49 *Ibid.*, 91.

“larger conspiracy of silence” amongst U.S. army officers to conceal these fairly common relationships, which were a taboo in white society.⁵³ Unlike the rape of white women on the frontier, the rape of Native American women was not unusual during the Plains Wars, and after the battle of Washita, there were many rumors of forced concubinage by Custer’s cavalry.⁵⁴ In the past, Indian women had interacted sexually with white traders, often in consensual relationships, but in the context of the Plains Wars, white officers and enlisted men saw native women as their rightful conquest. Thus, they demanded sexual privileges from their captives.⁵⁵ Additionally, the Native American women with whom the soldiers were having intimate relations served purposes beyond sheer sexual enjoyment. Custer acknowledged that the captive Monasetah was a valuable intermediary between cultures, but she declined to comment on her sexual activities with her captors, thereby preserving the “conspiracy of silence.”

Custer did not publically disclose that her husband allegedly was having intercourse with this Native American princess, for it would have sullied the picturesque image of the husband that she had cultivated.⁵⁶ After his death, Lt. Colonel Custer’s critics exposed his extramarital and interracial relationship with Monasetah. Captain Fredrick Benteen, a subordinate and detractor of Lt. Colonel Custer, vocalized his disapproval of this intercourse, noting that the camp’s surgeon had seen the two copulating multiple

times.⁵⁷ Though these accusations were not widely publicized, such allegations—also supported by the army’s scout, Ben Clark—tarnished the flawless memory that Custer had constructed of her husband and forced her to grapple with Monasetah on an increasingly personalized and human level.⁵⁸ Consequently, her representation of Monasetah was more multidimensional than any of those pertaining to other Native American women, even as she attempted to interpret and fashion Monasetah’s emotional motivations to fit into her meticulously crafted, public narrative.

Perhaps in response to the criticism of her husband, Custer implied a liaison between Monasetah and Tom Custer (her husband’s brother), which may have been intended to divert suspicion from her deceased spouse. Although she did not mention their relationship directly, Custer’s implicit acknowledgment of Monasetah’s sexual relationship with only Tom underscored the “noble” trope of “mating the white man.”⁵⁹ By mentioning Monasetah’s acceptance of the nickname “Sallie Ann” from Tom, perhaps Custer was suggesting a more intimate connection between them, both as a form of private reassurance of her husband’s faithfulness and a rebuke for Custer’s critics. Her text deepened Tom’s relationship with Monasetah by asserting that “Monasetah had no other feeling but pleasure at the exchange, and she was rarely addressed by any other name.”⁶⁰ Yet, Monasetah’s acceptance of this white identifier was by no means the most striking aspect of Libbie Custer’s narrative. She took care to point out that Colonel Tom had been “rechristened by the Indians” as Mouksa, meaning “Buffalo Calf.”⁶¹ Although her own husband received Native American monikers, such as “Son of the Morning Star” and “Yellow Hair,” the absence

53 Scott D. Sagan and Samuel K. Sagan, “Pickett’s Other Charge: On the 150th anniversary of Gettysburg, a look at the family secrets its officers kept,” *The Wall Street Journal* (June 21, 2013), accessed February 19, 2014, <http://online.wsj.com/>.

54 Grimsley, “‘Rebels’ and ‘Redskins,’” 151.

55 Albert L. Hurtado, “When Strangers Met,” *Writing the Range: Race, Class and Culture in the Women’s West*, eds. Elizabeth Jameson and Susan Hodge Armitage (University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 122-142.

56 Nathaniel Philbrick, *The Last Stand: Custer, Sitting Bull, and the Battle of the Little Bighorn* (New York: Viking Press, 2010), 21.

57 Philbrick, *The Last Stand*, 138-139.

58 Jeffrey D. Wert, *Custer: The Controversial Life of George Armstrong Custer*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 289.

59 Smith, “Beyond Princess and Squaw,” 65.

60 Custer, *Following the Guidon*, 97.

61 *Ibid.*, 97.

of these facts from her narrative implied that she may have had an ulterior motive in depicting the reciprocal feelings of this Native American ally and the white officer.⁶² In doing so, she offered an alternative parent for the half-white, half-Indian son of Monasetah, Yellow Hair, without directly calling attention to the affair to readers who had no knowledge of it.

Custer's internal recognition of Monasetah's sexual significance to her husband complicated the image of the benign, noble princess, causing her to combine the characteristic princess-squaw dichotomy into one individual. Custer communicated her fear of this ally in a passage in which she imagined her rival attacking her: she felt that "with a swift movement" Monasetah could "produce a hidden weapon, and by stabbing the wife, hurt the white chief who had captured her, in what she believed would be the most cruel way."⁶³ The deceitful image of Monasetah differed drastically from the literary trend of representing "noble" Native Americans as naturally innocent and instead parallels Custer's earlier stories about unfeminine and warrior-like squaws. This deviation from Custer's normally strict observance of the mutually inclusive stereotypes of the princess emphasized how this Native American woman personally threatened her. The words "cruel way" and "stabbing the wife" might be understood as an allusion to the affair itself, expressed in a manner in which Custer could conceal her husband's infidelity to her public audience.

Despite Monasetah's divergence from the established trope of the tame "princess," Custer returned to the "noble and ignoble" dichotomy in her discussion of Monasetah's looks and her general commentary on Native American beauty. Custer was largely unwilling to describe desirable qualities among Native Americans, and she only titled allies as beautiful when they displayed "childlike" physical

characteristics. For instance, Custer observed that Monasetah would not have been pretty except she possessed "the beauty of youth, whose dimples and curves and rounded outlines are always charming."⁶⁴ Custer may have believed that Monasetah's beauty, coupled with her high station, justified the attentions that Monasetah received from her husband. Her youth saved her from the fate of the unattractive and older Native American women, since in Custer's view the "features of the Indian women are rarely delicate, high cheek-bones and square jaw being the prevailing type."⁶⁵

Custer's preoccupation with girlish, noble beauty reappeared multiple times in her narratives, suggesting that she may have been searching for the cause of her spouse's infatuation with Monasetah and for other white officers' affinity for Native American women. When she visited a Sioux camp with her husband, Custer was absolutely fascinated by the "village belle, and the placid manner in which she permitted us to walk around her, gazing and talking her good points over," which suggested to Custer that the native woman "expected homage."⁶⁶ For Custer, this woman's domesticated comportment, similar to that of a white civilized woman, illustrated her superiority over other woman of her race. This example further illustrated the unbreakable connection Custer saw between beauty and status since she did not depict any women without high-birth as beautiful. Once more, she reemphasized that beauty only came with "extreme youth," which with its "ever attractive charms can make one forget the heavy square shape of Indian faces and their coarse features."⁶⁷ This notion of forgetting indicated that Custer saw women's appearances as an explanation for miscegenation. For Custer, the transcendence of racial boundaries could only be attained if exceptional beauty obscured Native American ethnicity.

64 *Ibid.*, 96.

65 *Ibid.*, 96.

66 Elizabeth B. Custer, *"Boots and Saddles:" Or Life In Dakota With General Custer* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1885), 61.

67 *Ibid.*, 62.

62 Evan S. Connell, *Son of the Morning Star: Custer and the Little Bighorn* (New York: North Point Press, 1984), 417-418.

63 Custer, *Following the Guidon*, 95.

When this aesthetic was achieved, Native American women could interact with whites civilly and respectfully.

In contrast, Custer represented Native American women who could not fulfill the requisites of youth and high status as ignoble squaws, characterized by what Smith called “squat, haggard, and ugly” exteriors and primitive natures.⁶⁸ Of the older women surrounding the aforementioned village belle, Custer remarked, “it was surprising to see all the other squaws giving up the field to this one so completely. They crouched near, with a sort of ‘every-dog-must-have-its day’ look, and did not dispute her say by making coy eyes as we spoke to them.”⁶⁹ In this depiction, the Native American women seemed no better than animals or dogs crouching below their master, jealous of the attention that the beautiful received from the whites. In Custer’s opinion, their lack of attractiveness and femininity robbed them of nearly all admirable qualities, as demonstrated by her encounter with a cluster of older native women. Custer was so revolted by these wizened and wrinkled women that she “wished with all [her] heart that the younger and prettier women” had been there to communicate with her.⁷⁰ Instead, the “cunning and crafty looks of the antique ones kept [her] imagining that knives were hidden in the voluminous folds of their blankets, and that, quick as thought, they might plunge one into us as we stood there defenceless [sic].”⁷¹ Here again was the image of the bloodthirsty savage, who was only capable of vindictive action, thereby demonstrating the indissoluble connections that Custer maintained between ugliness, cruelty, and barbarity in ignoble squaw imagery. This depiction left the squaws increasingly dehumanized and seemingly resistant to the civilizing mission that Custer’s husband had undertaken on the frontier.

68 Smith, “Beyond Princess and Squaw,” 65.

69 Custer, “*Boots and Saddles*,” 62.

70 *Ibid.*, 87.

71 *Ibid.*, 87.

For Custer, to cling to native tradition denoted ignobility whereas to accept the civilizing process indicated nobility. This hierarchical vision fit into the larger Victorian era tradition of categorizing peoples of different ethnic groups by dividing into the more or less evolved, based on their correspondence to white notions of societal progress.⁷² As a product of her time, Custer ranked societies in a hierarchy that spanned from “primitive” to “civilized,” with the civilized culture being superior.⁷³ The less evolved Native Americans in her memoirs were the squaws, who wore garments “cut in the most primitive manner.”⁷⁴ In contrast, Custer depicted the young and beautiful daughter of a Native American chief as more civilized because they wore the same items worn by white women. This individual matched the qualifications of the “noble” Native American, and she also carried with her a piece of white culture: a parasol. She “held it with dignity, as if it might be to her as much an insignia of state as the mace of the lord-mayor.”⁷⁵ The accoutrement of a more civilized culture allowed Custer to interact with this particular Native American woman without fear because it showed her the princess’s inclination towards docility.

Correspondingly, Custer could not relate to the ignoble squaws despite her intimate interactions with them because of her enduring acceptance of racial ideologies that depicted them as savage and dangerous. When Custer visited one of the Sioux villages with her husband, the older Native American women examined her, touching her shoulders and “smoothing and caressing her.”⁷⁶ Custer had to “suppress the terrified start” she felt at this unexpected encounter, but she allowed them to proceed in their investigation of her physical

72 Richard Hofstadter, *Social Darwinism and American Thought* (New York: Beacon Press, 1992), 63.

73 Custer, “*Boots and Saddles*,” 114.

74 Custer, *Following the Guidon*, 88.

75 *Ibid.*, 61.

76 *Ibid.*, 88.

differences.⁷⁷ The Native American women compared their hair to hers, “laying the two side by side,” and in her opinion, “generously giving [her] the preference.”⁷⁸ According to Custer, even the Native Americans acknowledged the superiority of Anglo-Americans after this meeting. Although she did not know what they were actually saying about her hair, Custer assumed that these primitive people viewed themselves as inferior based on their lack of femininity in comparison with her own. Thus, she manufactured evidence of their willingness to value her as the model of civilized woman and their desire to achieve such standards of white beauty. Her recollection of this encounter illustrated how entrenched racial ideologies led her to interpret their conversation in the white man’s favor despite the fact that she did not understand a single word of their language.

Custer was largely unable to see her intercultural interactions from the Native American perspective. According to historian Julie Roy Jeffrey, “like their husbands, fathers, and brothers, few women revealed an awareness that they represented more of a peril to the Native American way of life than the Indians posed to white travelers.”⁷⁹ Libbie Custer reflected this principle perfectly. When one of the Cheyenne children of the captured Washita women curiously touched her soft palm, she starkly described the interaction as, “my hand was imprisoned.”⁸⁰ The synecdoche and utter dissociation from the hand that came in contact with Native Americans revealed her revulsion and underlying fear of contact with this “uncivilized” people. Moreover, she failed to recognize the very nature of the intercultural relation. Her husband was the captor and the Native American child was the captive of the U.S. government. Custer could not exhibit

empathy for the Cheyenne women with whom she interacted due to entrenched racial perceptions that permanently clouded her judgment.

Furthermore, Custer could not sympathize with the “papoose-lugging drudge who toiled endlessly while her husband sported in the hunting fields or lolled about the lodge”; rather, she used this racial caricature as means of separating white women from Native American women.⁸¹ For Custer, Native American women were subservient in their relation to Native American men. Her depiction of them reflected the established trope of the “long-suffering Indian woman, who toiled like a slave for her husband.”⁸² Although Custer mentioned very few women by name, she did regale her readers of the “squaw among them, Medicine Mother.”⁸³ Custer claimed to have seen Medicine Mother’s husband “lounging on the floor of the hut while she made his toilet, combing and plaiting his hair, cutting and oiling the bangs.”⁸⁴ Not only did she perform these tasks, but she also performed other menial duties, such as dressing him and lighting his pipe. This wife even bathed her husband, for which Custer called her a “faithful slave.”⁸⁵ Simultaneously, Custer contrasted this theme of the obsequious squaw with her own relatively privileged position in the camp. In doing so, she echoed other white women frontier writers who invariably contrasted their lot with that of their Native American counterparts. Custer accomplished this by discussing how her husband would not allow her to lift a finger around the house and how the soldiers treated her and all of the other military wives like princesses.⁸⁶ In doing so, she showed the status of women in Native American cultures had not been elevated to

77 Ibid., 88.

78 Ibid., 88.

79 Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880*, 36.

80 Custer, *Following the Guidon*, 88.

81 Smith, “Beyond Indian Princesses and Squaws,” 65.

82 Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880*, 96

83 Custer, *The Boy General*, 172-173.

84 Ibid., 172-173.

85 Ibid., 172-173.

86 Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880*, 96.

the degree that it had in white society.

To create contrast between civilized society and the brutality of Native American women's lives, Custer claimed that Native American men deliberately denigrated their women. Using Victorian concepts of civility, social scientists claimed superior civilizations elevated women's positions in society.⁸⁷ Custer adopted this form of measurement when she discussed the ignobility of Native American society. She argued that Native American men made women perform all of the domestic labor so as to isolate her from the "plane she is never allowed to reach."⁸⁸ They did so by making the women haul wood, pitch tepees, pack camping equipage, and braid war garments, so that these women had "no idle hour" and "the freshness of youth soon departed from the face of a bride."⁸⁹ This bleak picture was in keeping with the squaw depiction in literature of a female worker who endlessly toiled. Thus, she validated the classic trope of this type of Native American woman.⁹⁰

To Custer, the model of the "servile squaw" was not as innocuous as it appeared to be. In her view, exposure to this uncivilized hierarchy could negatively affect whites. Custer relayed a commonly told story in the camp of an officer who made his white wife measure the march of his troops by tying her handkerchief to the spoke of the wagon and counting every rotation for the entirety of the march. She reported both men and women generally hold such treatment of women in white society as unacceptable, and "nothing but a long life among Indians, and having the treatment of the squaw before him, would cause him to act with such brutality."⁹¹ Therefore, Custer alleged that white men could

be driven to the cruelty of Native American men, and white women could be made to be as servile as Native American women. Such a proposition would have surely concerned a Custer's eastern audience and encouraged them to support the military mission against the uncivilized and brutal Native Americans.

Still, Custer showed that not all Native American women were obedient to their men: "princesses" could resist the subjugation whereas "squaws" could not. Custer depicted resistance to male authority in the character of Monasetah, who "found the husband her father had chosen a very distasteful" man and being "some what spoiled, owing to her exalted rank, she refused to do all the groveling labor expected of her, and became unmanageable."⁹² According to Custer, Monasetah became so rebellious that neither "threats nor warnings moved her, and when her liege attempted to force her to submission, she shot him, crippling him for life."⁹³ In Custer's analysis, Monasetah's boldness was due to her "lofty manner" and "the superiority of birth."⁹⁴ Although Custer did not witness any of these events, she attributed all of Monasetah's defiant actions to her status; therefore, Custer reverted back to the trope of the Native American princess, which she had previously complicated via her assumption of Monasetah's violent nature.

While the oppositional categories of "princess" and "squaw" made it difficult for Custer to see Native American women as individuals capable of human emotion and depth, Custer discovered some degree of commonality with Monasetah. Her husband's relationship with this Native American woman forced her to interact with her on a personal level. Although she had been frightened to meet Monasetah initially, Monasetah's baby "disarmed" her

87 Smith, "Beyond Indian Princesses and Squaws," 65

88 Custer, *Following the Guidon*, 92.

89 Ibid., 92.

90 Smith, "Beyond Indian Princesses and Squaws," 65.

91 Custer, *Boots and Saddles*, 127.

92 Custer, *Following the Guidon*, 94.

93 Ibid., 94.

94 Ibid., 94.

fears and allowed her to dispel her previous suspicions of her violent tendencies. With regards to motherhood, Custer portrayed this princess as similar to presumably maternal white women. In her interactions with this mother, she discovered the “universal language” of communicating affection for babies, proposing that “brown mothers were just as susceptible to flattery concerning their babies as white women are, and understood as readily if they spoke out language that everything we said was praise.”⁹⁵ This sameness based on maternal identities closed the gap between Monasetah and the civilized white woman, since Native American women could only be separate from civilization when white women thought of Native American women as their antithesis.⁹⁶ Monasetah was no longer the opposite of white women because she fit into the model of Victorian domesticity, which called for women to be loving mothers. Thus, Custer endowed the character of Monasetah with humanity that no other Native Americans in her stories possessed, indicating that Custer’s intercultural interactions with this woman were profoundly different than those with any of her other contemporaries.

Despite her frequent and prolonged interactions with Native American women, Libbie Custer’s impression of this racial Other overwhelmingly matched established, dichotomous tropes and did not change over time with the exception of Monasetah. Her unoriginal depictions prove the resilience of racial ideologies in forming the frontier woman’s experience in the late nineteenth century and reveal how the dehumanization of Native American women was used to justify U.S. military aggression during the Plains Wars. Conversely, Custer’s complex representation

of Monasetah was a surprising departure from the binary of the princess and the squaw. The personal menace that the memory of Monasetah posed to Custer’s public image as the widow of a faithful and benevolent military man caused her to reevaluate this Native American princess on a human level instead of solely basing her assessment on racial preconceptions. This alteration in her perception demonstrates that interracial sexual relations on the Plains could act as a catalyst for the modification of entrenched racial ideologies, if only for strategic reasons.

In the kind of false modesty expected of a proper lady, Custer once lamented that there were “no dates, no statistics and alas, I fear, no information that would be valuable to a historian” in her memoirs.⁹⁷ This supposition could not have been more incorrect. Her publications offer historians a unique perspective into a “dead past,” which comes alive in the “intense present” of her captivating narratives. Through her vivid depictions of Native American women, the noble and ignoble ambivalence characteristic of nineteenth-century frontier literature becomes accessible to the modern reader, as do the contradictions of this historic trope. Custer’s writings on race, gender, and sexuality on the Plains offer a window into the neglected narrative of white and Native American women. It is time to illustrate that her life on the Plains matters just as much as his.

⁹⁵ Custer, *Following the Guidon*, 90, 95.

⁹⁶ Robert F. Berkhofer, *The White Man’s Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books Edition, 1978), 29-30.

⁹⁷ Elizabeth Custer, *The Civil War Memories of Elizabeth Bacon Custer: Reconstructed from Her Diaries and Notes*, ed. by Arlene Reynolds (Austin, TX): University of Texas Press, 1994), 1.

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