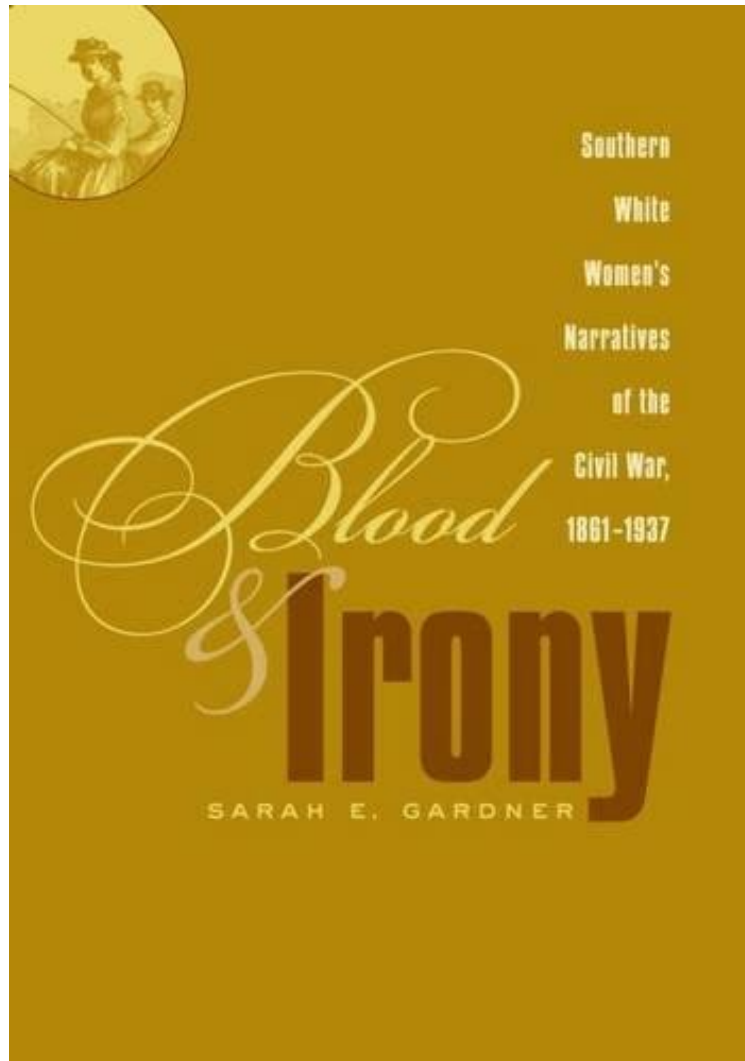


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Blood and Irony: Southern White Women's Narratives of the Civil War, 1861-1937

Sarah E. Gardner

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Sarah E. Gardner : Blood and Irony: Southern White Women's Narratives of the Civil War, 1861-1937 before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Blood and Irony: Southern White Women's Narratives of the Civil War, 1861-1937:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. A Masterful WorkBy Clifton C. HawkinsThis is among the best academic books ever written. Although its subject--Southern white women's depictions of the Confederacy--might seem unpromising, Gardner brilliantly uses her topic as a springboard to discuss universal themes. These include the meanings of history and memory; the relative merits of historical fiction, history, and biography; how writers obtain

authority; the ways in which groups of people can consciously shape historical narrative and memory; women's intellectual history; and many more. Long before finishing *Blood and Irony* [the title is taken from Virginia author Ellen Glasgow, whom Gardner discusses perceptively and at length] I wanted to rush out and read many of the primary sources Gardner presents, discusses, and analyzes. I expect disappointment if I do; by universal consent, including Gardner's, many of these works lack literary or historical merit, even if they provide the context for discussion of many important topics. It is customary for reviewers of academic books to parade their brilliance and expertise by carping about some minor flaws, and I might as well follow this hallowed tradition. Gardner uses "confessed" when she means "said," "stated," "acknowledges" and even "boasted". She repeatedly claims that the United Daughters of the Confederacy "compelled" its members to write about the Civil War, when surely the proper word is "encouraged" or "urged". She apparently believes that "Populism" [her capitalization] was somehow allied to the Populist party in the 1890s, which would have surprised any Southern Populist. Minor flaws aside, this is a stupendous achievement, which will stimulate thought on the nature of historical narration, the US Civil War, and women's experiences, contributions, and intellectual lives, among other topics. Truly great books transcend their immediate topic; *Blood and Irony* does this masterfully.

During the Civil War, its devastating aftermath, and the decades following, many southern white women turned to writing as a way to make sense of their experiences. Combining varied historical and literary sources, Sarah Gardner argues that women served as guardians of the collective memory of the war and helped define and reshape southern identity. Gardner considers such well-known authors as Caroline Gordon, Ellen Glasgow, and Margaret Mitchell and also recovers works by lesser-known writers such as Mary Ann Cruse, Mary Noailles Murfree, and Varina Davis. In fiction, biographies, private papers, educational texts, historical writings, and through the work of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, southern white women sought to tell and preserve what they considered to be the truth about the war. But this truth varied according to historical circumstance and the course of the conflict. Only in the aftermath of defeat did a more unified vision of the southern cause emerge. Yet Gardner reveals the existence of a strong community of Confederate women who were conscious of their shared effort to define a new and compelling vision of the southern war experience. In demonstrating the influence of this vision, Gardner highlights the role of the written word in defining a new cultural identity for the postbellum South.

"A very readable account of the Southern female writers who for decades after the Civil War entertained American readers." -- Washington Times Gardner not only adds substantially to our understanding of the writers, the period, and the 'lost cause' creation, but also elucidates the process by which an historical imagination develops and changes over decades. (Peggy Whitman Prenshaw, Louisiana State University) -- Gardner's encyclopedic survey and extensive archival work bring together better-known texts of the era, such as writings by Margaret Mitchell and Ellen Glasgow, with unpublished and lesser-known works, including diaries and journals of Confederate widows.--American Literature A very readable account of the Southern female writers who for decades after the Civil War entertained American readers.--Washington Times The great strength of *Blood and Irony* is Gardner's analysis of the development of the Lost Cause myth, and she certainly succeeds in demonstrating how postwar reality informed interpretations of the past. Her focus on women's contribution to the creation of a new southern identity, and their active involvement in writing and publishing war stories throws up interesting questions about how women viewed themselves and their role in the postwar South. . . . *Blood and Irony* is a welcome addition to a new body of scholarship that explores the important contribution that women made to the creation of a cultural identity in the postwar South.--Civil War Book An important addition to what is, in many ways, a thin literature on the culture of the New South. . . . Instructors will find it a useful text in courses on the New South, southern women's history, and southern literature.--Journal of American History Should prove attractive to scholars representing a wide range of academic interests. . . . Should be added to all library collections and support courses on or research about the Civil War, women's history, or public history.--South Carolina Historical Magazine An impressively researched and thoroughly contextualized argument revealing that the ongoing reconstruction of the war experience served to soothe the region's psyche and reshape an unpalatable past. . . . Gardner brilliantly shows the UDC's determination to win the war over memory and history and its ultimate success in shaping not only regional, but national, understanding. . . . Highly recommended.--Choice Cogently argued and beautifully written. . . . *Blood Irony* is an important book that will undoubtedly stimulate much debate in the years to come.--Georgia Historical Quarterly A prodigious work of scholarship.--American Historical [Gardner goes] beyond the overtly racist implications of white women's literature to reveal subtleties in their critiques of the region. White women writers raised questions not only about the place of women in the South but also about social relations more generally. Gardner accomplishes her task with remarkable sensitivity, examining the complexities of women's writings without losing sight of their reactionary tendencies, particularly the whitewashing of the region's history of slavery and the justification for racial inequality and white supremacy.--Laura F. Edwards, *The North Carolina Historical* Gardner provides a thoughtful explanation of white women's efforts to shape the story of our nation's past.--Arkansas Historical Quarterly Gardner's work clearly illuminates the ways in which myriad women

writers built the edifice upon which Scarlett O'Hara eventually stood. . . . A welcome addition to the growing scholarship on women and the creation of historical memory.--Civil War History

Sarah E. Gardner's *Blood and Irony* is the best kind of history, 'soberly, discreetly, and fairly' presented, thoroughly researched, thought provoking. As enlightening as it is enjoyable to read, her assessment of the popular myths and painful truths of the antebellum and postbellum South gives to women their rightful place and influence in the interpretation of the Civil War and through the eyes of the distaff side, a fresh perspective and better understanding of our nation's bloodiest conflict.--Tennessee Advocate

In her analysis of texts by southern white women writing about the Civil War, Sarah Gardner not only adds substantially to our understanding of the writers, the period, and the 'lost cause' creation, but also elucidates the process by which an historical imagination develops and changes over decades. Her commentaries on illustrative texts and intertextual relationships are notably clear, coherent, and persuasive.--Peggy Whitman Prenshaw, Louisiana State University

Blood and Irony is very persuasive in its telling of how a distinctively southern story of the Civil War became the national story. It also contributes to our understanding of the development of the lost cause mythology and the ways in which it influenced and perpetuated the region's collective memory of the Civil War. . . . Instructors will find it a useful text in courses on the New South, southern women's history, and southern literature.--Karen L. Cox, *The Journal of American History*

From the Inside Flap Gardner reveals how southern white women writers created a cultural identity for themselves by consciously constructing a historical memory of the Civil War that fit the political and cultural needs of white southerners. Includes work from writers such as Ellen Glasgow, Margaret Mitchell, and Katherine Anne Porter, as well as pamphlets from the United Daughters of the Confederacy.