



Southern Womanhood and Slavery: A Biography of Louisa S. McCord, 1810-1879

Leigh Fought

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Southern Womanhood and Slavery is the first full-length biography of Louisa S. McCord, one of the most intriguing intellectuals in antebellum America. The daughter of South Carolina planter and politician Langdon Cheves, and an essayist in her own right, McCord supported unregulated free trade and the perpetuation of slavery and opposed the advancement of women's rights. This study examines the origins of her ideas.

Leigh Fought constructs an exciting narrative that follows McCord from her childhood as the daughter of a state representative and president of the Bank of the United States through her efforts to accept her position as wife and mother, her career as an author and plantation mistress, and the Union invasion of South Carolina during the Civil War, to the end of her life in the emerging New South. Fought analyzes McCord's poetry, letters, and essays in an effort to comprehend her acceptance of slavery and the submission of women. Fought concludes that McCord came to a defense of slavery through her experience with free labor in the North, which also reinforced her faith in the paternalist model for preserving social order.

McCord's life as a writer on "unfeminine" subjects, her reputation as strong-minded and masculine, her late marriage, her continued ownership of her plantation after marriage, and her position as the matron of a Civil War hospital contradicted her own philosophy that women should remain the quiet force behind their husbands. She lived during a time of social flux in which free labor, slavery, and the role of women underwent dramatic changes, as well as a time that enabled her to discover and pursue her intellectual ambitions. Fought examines the conflict that resulted when those ambitions clashed with McCord's role as a woman in the society of the South.

McCord's voice was an interesting, articulate, and necessary feminine addition to antebellum white ideology. Moreover, her story demonstrates the ways in which southern women negotiated through patriarchy without surrendering their sense of self or disrupting the social order. Engaging and very readable, *Southern Womanhood and Slavery* will be of special interest to students of southern history and women's studies, as well as to the general reader.

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