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CLASS, REGION, AND MEMORY IN A SOUTH CAROLINA–PHILADELPHIA MARRIAGE

Daniel Kilbride

The 1839 marriage of the Philadelphia gentleman Joshua Francis Fisher with the South Carolina aristocrat Elizabeth Middleton illuminates some of the tensions between class and sectional identity in the Civil War–era United States. Neither family had much in common with ordinary people in its respective region. Because of their wealth, privilege, and travels, both families shared a cosmopolitan, elitist sensibility that marked them as members of a national, and even transatlantic, leisure class. Because of their reactionary attitudes, the Fishers were in some ways more southern than northern, despite their residence in Philadelphia. During the Civil War, the Fishers were active supporters of the Confederacy, whose defeat they interpreted as the triumph of middle-class, democratic values in the United States. After the war, Joshua Francis Fisher sought to memorialize his family history as a record of a vanished aristocracy as well as, he hoped, an admonition to his children.

Keywords: Fisher, Elizabeth Middleton; Fisher, Joshua Francis; upper class; marriage; refinement; Civil War

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Joshua Francis Fisher, a wealthy socialite from Philadelphia, wed Elizabeth Middleton, the youngest daughter of Henry and Mary Helen Middleton, at Middleton Place, South Carolina, on March 12, 1839. The newlyweds soon set off on a honeymoon trip to Philadelphia, where they arrived in mid-May. Except for several trips back to Carolina, summers spent in Newport, an excursion to Europe, and other leisure trips, the couple would spend the rest of their lives along the Delaware River, until Fisher's death in 1873 and Eliza's nineteen years later. They would witness transformations they could hardly have imagined, despite having grown up in a period of dynamic social change. Eliza, the daughter of one of the South's most prominent families, would see it humiliated during the Civil War and Reconstruction, and Fisher would witness the eclipse of his reactionary, prosouthern social circle in the city of Philadelphia. He would even wish for Union defeat during the Civil War. "I might find some satisfaction in the overthrow of Democratic Institutions," he wrote petulantly to his cousin John Brown Francis in the early days of Lee's invasion of Pennsylvania.¹

Eliza and Fisher made a good match, as their friends and relations were quick to observe. Neither was noted for physical charm. A portrait of Fisher from about 1835 shows a portly and self-possessed gentleman. Of Eliza, Fisher's cousin Sidney George Fisher remarked that she "has no beauty and has red hair, but her countenance has a pleasing expression & her figure is good," an observation borne out by a portrait completed around 1840. But they possessed complementary temperaments. Both were well-educated, cultivated, traveled, and snobbish. Each matched the other in taste for the arts, politics, and literature. And they shared a love for late-night socializing, particularly dance, conversation, and cards. Eliza's self-possession offset Fisher's somewhat impulsive personality, and each fostered the other's charitable activities—Fisher's with the Pennsylvania Institution for the Instruction of the Blind and Eliza's patronage of various

musicians. The families matched up just as well as the principals. Fisher became close with Eliza's brother Williams, who had taken over at Middleton Place after the death of Middleton Senior in 1846. Through letters and visiting, these reactionaries reinforced each other's distaste for the nation's political culture, which they viewed as excessively democratic and bizarrely indifferent to the opinions of genteel folk like themselves. The relationship was more one-sided regarding sectional issues. Fisher became radicalized by his southern in-laws and by the views of the conservative, prosouthern social circles in which he circulated in Philadelphia. At the same time, however, the Middletons continued to make frequent visits to the North, particularly Philadelphia and Newport, and they socialized easily with privileged people like themselves from all parts of the nation.²

Toward the end of the war, Joshua Fisher's thoughts turned to the future and the past—to memory and forgetting. He dedicated himself to setting down a narrative of his family's eminence. Interpreting the Union victory as democracy triumphant, Fisher penned a memorial in which his family's intersectional circle embodied the virtues of privilege in antebellum American life. Like Frederick Douglass, who devoted himself to maintaining the memory of the Civil War as a moral struggle between freedom and slavery, Fisher's efforts to memorialize gentry families amounted to a political act. Unlike Douglass, Fisher made no efforts to publicize his views after the war's end. Rather, he sought to inspire his children to remember the virtues of aristocracy in a democratic world.³

Over the past twenty-five years, there has been much writing, but little consensus, on the structure and working of antebellum planter families. This study of the close relations that existed between the Fishers, the Middletons, and their social circles further complicates this picture. Their family life affords insight into a number of important issues historians have raised about planter families, including patriarchy, ethics and behavior, and the existence of a women's culture. The Middleton-Fisher relationship suggests that social class could be a more powerful influence than section in defining group identity among elite families in the antebellum period. Eliza's mother was born in Jamaica and raised in England. She and her family spent much time away from South Carolina—ten years in St. Petersburg while Henry served as minister plenipotentiary to Russia and extensive periods in Newport and Philadelphia on their return. Several of the Middleton children were born in Europe, and all of them were educated and traveled extensively there. The Fishers may seem more firmly grounded in the North than the Middletons in the South, but class-based behaviors just as surely distinguished them from ordinary northern families. Raised by his widowed mother at the home of his wealthy, socially connected aunt and uncle, Fisher's family life little resembled that of ordinary northerners. His family enjoyed a mode of living that "respectable" people, to borrow Richard Bushman's phrase, condemned as self-indulgent and immoral. Moreover, the family identified closely with the South. In his "Reminiscences," Fisher described the "refined people from" the South with whom he socialized for the interests of his children, who "naturally are of Carolina descent."⁴

If the Middletons seem like a planter family in some respects, in most ways their behavior was rooted in their membership in an Atlantic upper class. Eliza's relations with her brothers, which were governed by reciprocity and equality rather than authority, were typical of sibling relations among the South Carolina planter elite. And the family's bonds more closely resemble the southern kin-based model rather than the northern, nuclear family organization.⁵ On other issues, the evidence for sectional influence is more ambiguous. Henry and Mary Hering Middleton's marriage was notably patriarchal, yet Eliza and Fisher's union resembles the ideal of companionate marriage that spread throughout the young republic. Yet the privileged women like Eliza Fisher enjoyed rendered some of them less sensitive to gender-based inequalities.⁶ Other facets of their lives also illustrate the controlling influence of class ideals. Eliza's life in Philadelphia affords at best qualified support for the argument that a "women's culture" existed apart from and in opposition to that of men. She withdrew into the company of women in the periods immediately preceding childbirth. But she and Fisher seem to have been

devoted to each other, and as one of Philadelphia's leading hostesses, she led a social circle in which women and men socialized together.⁷ Class ideals, more than sectional norms, determined the contours of family life for both the Fishers and the Middletons and explains their close relations before, during, and after the Civil War.

It might be objected that the marriage of Eliza and Fisher is a poor prism through which to examine planters' family practices because, after all, they lived in Philadelphia. Clearly, however, the family felt strong identification with the slave regions—to the extent that they supported South Carolina's secession in 1860 and hoped for their own nation's defeat during the Civil War—at the same time they lived, worked, and established family ties in the North. Not only do intersectional marriages like the Fishers' confound the neat categories of “northern” or “southern” families,⁸ but even for planter families without kin ties to the North, the close relations between the Philadelphia Fishers and the Carolina Middletons throughout a time of acute sectional tension points to other influences on planter families. First among them, in the case of this marriage, was social class. The ease with which the Middletons circulated in Philadelphia and Newport calls attention to the urbane—and urban—culture of many planter families, one that could transcend sectional differences.

Hence, the importance of memory. When J. Francis Fisher devoted himself to writing his recollections and urged his brother-in-law to do the same, he stressed its importance by reminding him of the connection between class, family, and identity. Their reminiscences would represent not the history of a marriage, or a family, but that of an entire social class that, they believed, the Civil War had destroyed. Members of this elite circle were united not by section but by their aristocratic aspirations. They quite openly referred to themselves as an aristocracy—as did their critics—because they tended to be socially conservative and extravagant. They were also bound together by eastern seaboard connections. As a Georgia gentleman explained, Savannah planters were “much better acquainted with Boston, New York, and Philadelphia than with our interior towns and counties.” Some traits historians have identified as southern, such as patriarchal attitudes, may actually have been more prevalent in families of lesser social status, and also in the Southwest, than in elite eastern families like the Middletons and Fishers. The family's aristocratic way of life should foster an appreciation of the complexity and diversity of family arrangements across divisions of region and class within the South and even between the South and other regions.⁹

The foundation of the Middleton-Fisher connection was established long before Eliza and her husband wed—indeed, before they ever met. First, privileged women and men in the Northeast and the seaboard South established close family and social connections in the post-Revolutionary period. These social relationships, fostered in Philadelphia parlors, ballrooms, and resorts in Long Branch and Newport, eroded local peculiarities that had developed in colonial times and helped establish a national (or eastern seaboard) leisure class based on a common standard of refined conduct. In his “Reminiscences,” J. Francis Fisher paid a warm tribute to one of the concrete manifestations of this culture, the so-called “Carolina Row” of Philadelphia's Spruce Street. In the early years of the nineteenth century, Alice Izard, widow of planter-patriot Ralph Izard, and her daughter Margaret Manigault, along with several of their relations, bought properties on the fashionable thoroughfare where they entertained their Federalist friends. Mary Hering Middleton and Margaret Manigault were close friends whose identities were rooted in class, not section. The former once mocked poor southern whites to her friend by joking that all a backcountry woman needed to know was “the curing of bacon & making soap. You will allow that these accomplishments are incompatible with studying Montaigne.” They promoted these cosmopolitan and reactionary attitudes at their social affairs, which J. Francis Fisher attended with his uncle. Their homes were “the resort of all the intellectual and refined society of our city.” The women of the “Row” were “singularly agreeable in conversation,” accomplished, and conservative, and their “taste for literature made her house the centre of all the educated men and women of [the] time.”¹⁰

Second, Eliza, her siblings, and Fisher shared remarkably similar upbringings

because elites in cities from Newport to Savannah subscribed to a common code of refined conduct. Most important, Fisher and the children of Henry and Mary H. Middleton enjoyed wealth that few Americans of their generation could imagine. Fisher's wealthy aunt and uncle, Sophia and George Harrison, raised him as if he were their own son. George Harrison made his fortune as a wine merchant in the early nineteenth century, and by the time of his death in 1845, his estate was worth almost \$470,000. The Harrisons and their circle constituted a leisure class, aspiring to adopt a style of life modeled after the eighteenth-century English gentry. They did not glorify work, thrift, self-control, or self-sacrifice.¹¹ Nor were these families devoutly religious. In fact, they had little but contempt for evangelical Christianity. Mary Hering Middleton was a diligent Episcopalian, and she raised her daughters accordingly. Few of her sons were more than indifferent to religion. Angry over how his father's relations treated his mother, Fisher had no use for the Friends, though he too attended Episcopal services. To his mind, religion's most useful function was social control. While in France, he even found himself in an argument with Lafayette over the subject. Fisher insisted that "religion was necessary for the base people, to keep them in good order & preserve their morals." In this respect, as in many others, the families distinguished themselves from ordinary people in both the North and South. Moreover, their latitudinarianism set them apart from an increasing number of planters as well.¹²

As Fisher's dispute with the Revolutionary hero attests, some of the antebellum gentry found religious devotion distasteful precisely because they associated it with low social status. The poor needed religious faith to protect them from vice; elites possessed virtues like "honour, generosity, & patriotism" that allowed them to enjoy dissipation without becoming vicious. Would-be aristocrats found religion's moral strictures to be too confining. Fisher, his Philadelphia circle, and the Middletons enjoyed social habits that seemed little more than debauchery to middle-class social critics. Both families participated in an array of activities that would have shocked such sensibilities: card playing, unsupervised courting, waltzing, social drinking, and late-night entertaining. In 1822, Mary H. Middleton told Septima Rutledge that families—hers included—went "night after night to balls which lasted till 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning." This posh style of entertaining, too, was considered lavish by the respectable standards of the day. During the winter of 1838 Sidney George Fisher attended a party at George Cadwalader's house,

whose rooms are very sumptuously furnished & are decidedly the handsomest in town. The walls are beautifully painted in fresco . . . the chairs white & gold, and there was a profusion of splendid candelabra, vases, etc, so that the effect when lighted was very rich and beautiful.¹³

Education was the final shared experience that established the foundation for the families' close relationship. The upper ranks in the North and South continued to patronize private academies and elite colleges and universities, where they learned habits of mind that crossed sectional boundaries. Social bonds formed outside the classroom became intersectional friendships after graduation. Eliza's brother Arthur graduated from Harvard in 1814, where Fisher graduated eleven years later. Harry Middleton graduated from West Point in 1815, and Princeton graduated John I. Middleton in 1819. Southern parents were mindful that their sons might encounter sentiments hostile to the peculiar institution, but these fears were minor compared to considerations of educational quality and social connections to be made. Besides, well-traveled planters were likely to be staunch nationalists until quite late in the ante-bellum period.¹⁴

Many of the same expectations regarding education held for privileged women in the North and South, as Eliza Middleton's education illustrates. Her schooling did not prepare her to engage in productive activities outside the home. Like her brothers, she learned French, drawing, dancing, voice and musical instrumentation, and other "accomplishments" in her youth. They also received instruction in formal subjects such as literature, history, and the sciences, not so much for their application in the workplace (Henry's experience at West Point being the exception) but because they were essential skills with which to shine in "select companies."

Eliza trained as a vocalist and played several musical instruments with considerable skill. She was well-read, sociable, and a gifted conversationalist—the latter a particularly prized accomplishment. In fact, it was her cosmopolitanism that won Fisher's affection. As he told his uncle, Eliza had "none of the habits of a Southern woman," whose "indolent helplessness & languid carelessness" came from being "bred up among slaves." Fisher's first view of Middleton Place, which bore "more of the signs of civilization than any thing I have seen in America," confirmed that his early impressions of Eliza were correct.¹⁵

Finally, all the Middletons and J. Francis Fisher as well spent extensive time during their youth in Europe. Overseas travel ought to be understood as an educational endeavor—an exercise in "enjoyment and improvement," as one European traveler was advised in 1820. Perhaps more than any other aspect of their education, European travel helped transcend regional differences to promote membership in a national (and nationalistic) privileged class. Several of Eliza's brothers attended universities in Edinburgh and Paris. All the children learned from private tutors in England and Russia while their father served as minister from 1820 to 1830. All save Catherine later enjoyed extended travel on the continent as "grand tourists," spending months and sometimes years in major European cities, where they mingled with wellborn Europeans and other visiting Americans. Several served in diplomatic posts, and three of her brothers—Arthur, Harry, and Edward—took European brides. More important, their travels intensified both their elitism and their identification with America. While on his grand tour in 1838, Henry Middleton complained about the "incurably underbred habits and vulgar tone" of Americans in Paris, which he attributed to the paucity of "*gentlemen* and men of education" from the States. "It is in fact that very feeling of patriotism which suggests what I say," he explained. "It is because I feel proud of America that I wish to see her well represented." At his uncle's insistence, Fisher toured England, France, Switzerland, and Italy from 1830 to 1832. Travel affected him in the same way as it had the Middletons. He criticized Judith Rives, wife of the American minister to France, for being a "little *too* American, & wants ease & tact. When you see her in private she is very pleasing—when she appears in publick you are mortified at her ignorance of the world." Overall, his affection for his native land intensified. "I have seen in Paris no more elegant men or women in dress, manners, or mind that I have met in America," he wrote home in a typical passage.¹⁶

These youthful experiences, which were common among women and men at the upper echelons of American society, established the foundation for the warm relations between the Fishers and the Middletons once Eliza and her husband wed in 1837. Over the next twenty-three years, they only intensified. Marriage provided the families increased opportunities to mix together in Philadelphia, Newport, and South Carolina. This social intercourse deepened their attachment to each other at the same time that mounting political tensions over the expansion of slavery strained relations between the North and South. Eliza made the transition from the South Carolina low country to Philadelphia with very little difficulty. Indeed, her greatest source of tension in her marriage seems to have been her mother-in-law, who opposed the match.¹⁷ In fact, Eliza was to find that her old and new worlds were not so different. Her transition to wife and, as was typically soon the case, mother, was jarring to be sure. But her adjustments were less traumatic as they might have been because of some differences and several continuities from southern practice that Eliza found in Philadelphia. First, the Fishers' marriage, while far from equal, was more equitable than that between her mother and father and many, perhaps most, planter marriages. Second, her relations with her brothers remained close and informal, marked by a rough equality rather than patriarchy. Moreover, in contrast to the loneliness that her mother often felt at Middleton Place while her husband and sons visited Charleston or their other land-holdings, Eliza found herself at the center of a lively social circle in a culturally rich northern city. This was not much of a departure for Eliza, but it certainly did not comport closely with the experiences of most planter-class women. These social affairs fostered a close connection between the South Carolina and Philadelphia families. This intimacy was both the product of and a cause of the conservative and prosouthern tone of high society in the Quaker City.

Eliza's marriage to Fisher was quite different from many planter unions, which tended to be marred by emotional distance between the partners. Mary H. Middleton had prepared her daughters about what to expect from matrimony when the girls were not yet ten years old. Restraint, she admonished, "is what [women] will certainly experience when they marry, so it is better they should become accustomed to it betimes." Not surprisingly, Eliza was deeply concerned about her loss of autonomy, imperfect as it was. She joked—nervously, one suspects—to Fisher that he did not mind wives expressing opinions that differed "from her Liege Lord's." She even referred to her wedding as "the dreaded ceremony" in her letters to her betrothed. Eliza had good reason to be worried, anticipating separation from her family, relocation to a house full of strangers, and the likelihood of pregnancy and its attendant dangers. She also knew what a patriarchal marriage was like, seeing it every day in the relations between her father and mother.¹⁸

But her intuition about Fisher—that he combined an "affectionate disposition" with "the best temper and the warmest *heart*"—turned out to be right. He was a loving, even indulgent husband and an attentive father.¹⁹ He gave Eliza broad latitude to plan entertainments, travel, and make household purchases. She likened her marriage to that between Sophia and George Harrison, a high compliment indeed. In fact, Eliza's own experience of marriage, as well as her own character, gave her the courage to urge her mother to challenge her father's dominance. She became indignant when he refused her mother's wishes to be with Eliza during her 1844 confinement. "Assert yr. independence for once," she implored her mother. She was confident enough to challenge her father herself, not fearing that "transgressing his commands in this instance" would invoke his fury. She was right, for Henry relented. But Eliza's independence should not be exaggerated. For all the affection and latitude she enjoyed, she and Fisher were not equals. The freedoms she enjoyed were her husband's to grant, as the divorce of her friend Fanny Kemble Butler reminded her. The Fishers' relationship shows how the companionate ideal could actually expose women's inequality. One winter night in 1844, Eliza took great pains to prepare for a musical party, "when Fisher's great anxiety lest I shd. take cold prevailed over my love of music" and she remained home. "I was fully repaid for the sacrifice I made," Eliza pronounced in the best tradition of true womanhood, "by seeing Fisher's extreme satisfaction at the change of plans."²⁰

If the Fishers' married relationship lays bare the tension between authority and affection in antebellum marriages, her relations with her brothers reveal a clearer continuity with southern practice. Eliza was five years the junior of her youngest brother Edward and twenty years younger than the oldest, Arthur. Yet she communicated with them seemingly as equals, offering advice, criticism, praise, and disdain with little reservation. She openly disparaged Edward's surprise marriage to Edwarina de Normann, a young Italian woman who claimed aristocratic ancestry, in 1845. She fully endorsed her husband's opinion of Edwarina as a "vile little hussy" and, when confronted with her shocking conduct, admonished her brother to maintain the family's honor by issuing a personal statement to counter Edwarina's disparaging accounts of their marriage. She was particularly close with her second youngest brother, Williams (b. 1809), but she also corresponded warmly with Henry, eighteen years her senior. Both Eliza's opinions toward Edward and her actions on behalf of the family during and after the Civil War suggest that the close ties that have been found between Carolinian siblings in the eighteenth century can also be found well into the next century.²¹

Eliza exercised considerable influence with her brothers, and she also wielded power in Philadelphia social circles. Eliza did not merely take part in entertainments in Philadelphia and Newport, she orchestrated them. Soon after her arrival in the city, she emerged as one of its leading hostesses, a responsibility that took up a considerable part of her time. The Fishers' entertainments combined sophistication with opulence. Fisher hosted "Wistar Parties"—social affairs linked to the American Philosophical Society and named in honor of their founder, Dr. Caspar Wistar—that included a small number of Philadelphia gentlemen and distinguished visitors to the city. An accomplished pianist and vocalist, Eliza supported visiting musicians, and they often performed with her. Managing her own social events and attending others' proved to be an

exhausting yet thrilling regimen, one completely out of the reach of all but a few women, North or South. One Monday in 1842, she attended a concert at the Masonic Hall, joined a tea party, returned to the Masonic Hall for the early evening performance, and came home to race through her toilette in preparation for a ball from which she returned home well after midnight. That Friday morning, she began composing more than eighty invitations for an upcoming party, and later that evening she attended a “very handsome” gathering. Altogether a busy week, but not an exceptional one. “But only think of my dissipation!” she boasted to her mother.²²

As in other areas of Eliza’s life, the scale of her social intercourse illustrates how class could transcend sectional influences. Her circle’s elitism and extravagance distinguished them from middle-class people everywhere, including the South. After attending a party at their home in 1843, Sidney Fisher reflected that “fortunately there are yet left a few houses from which vulgar people are excluded.” But it also was becoming exceptional among wealthy people in the North, especially New England, where evangelical and middle-class culture made inroads against aristocratic self-indulgence.²³ Visitors to Philadelphia noted that its upper crust maintained its lavishness in the face of these forces. They also typically observed the southern overtones of the city, both as a cause and an effect of Philadelphia’s conservatism. The journalist Charles Godfrey Leland recalled that “everything Southern was exalted and worshiped” in antebellum Philadelphia, and William Chambers, an English traveler, attributed Philadelphia’s combination of enterprise and sociability to its citizens’ “happy blending of the industrial habits of the North with the social usages of the South.” As social authorities, women controlled much of the tone of polite society. Eliza no doubt benefited from the conservative, southern orientation of Philadelphia society when she entered it in 1839, but as a hostess, she was also responsible for making it even more reactionary and prosouthern.²⁴

Just as Eliza’s social leadership could be matched by only the most privileged southern women, her daily routines distinguished her from all but a few plantation mistresses. Here, again, the complicating influence of social class is starkly evident. For most slave-owning women, daily life was marked by tedium, loneliness, and child care. Eliza’s life could not have been more different. She performed little physical labor. Her experience of motherhood—supported as she was by a battery of servants and governesses—was far from the norm in any region, except among the very wealthy. When she visited Newport during the summer of 1845, she and Fisher left their daughters Lily and Sophy with their nurse Mrs. Putnam for a full month. When she sat down to write her mother her first full letter upon her return, she noted that her three children were in the garret with Mrs. Putnam, their nurse, she “having preferred taking charge of them together.” Her mother-in-law ran their household until her death in 1855, which freed Eliza to mind the children as she chose. She spent some time with them every day, but often she was occupied paying social visits, writing letters, answering and drafting invitations, or reading. Her leisured existence was a product of neither the North nor the South. Rather, it emerged from the confluence of wealth, aristocratic aspiration, and residence in a thriving urban center.²⁵

The opulence of her daily life shut Eliza off from the company of women she deemed her inferiors. Though she shared many of the joys and sorrows common to all women, she looked down on the working poor. Moreover, like most white women, North and South, she was openly racist. In one of her very few references to the Middleton slaves, she referred to them as “the people,” but another time she admitted she found African Americans “hideous.” She had little use for them except for the services they could render for her, which was exactly the attitude she took toward working-class white women. She hired a wet nurse when she had difficulty breastfeeding her new daughter Mary Helen in 1844, but she became indignant when she discovered the woman recommended to her had a newborn of her own who needed her care. Eliza recommended helpfully that she find a relation with whom she could leave the child. And when it seemed that the baby “love[d] her Nurse so much better than me,” she lashed out at the young woman as an “Alderney”—a breed of cow.²⁶

But she certainly did participate in a separate sphere of activity with women of her social station—even those with whom, like Fanny Kemble Butler, she had deep political disagreements.

They were close companions despite Eliza's southern roots and proslavery convictions. One morning when they "nearly got drawn into a discussion on Abolition," their argument was averted by Fanny's confession that she only published her 1835 *Journal*, which revealed her antislavery beliefs long before her better-known *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation* (1863), because her husband would not pay a long-standing debt. Eliza had no sympathy for Pierce and, what is more, recognized in Fanny's situation the dilemma of women in an unequal society, raging that she was expected to "bear patiently the provocations & trials" to which the dissolute slave owner subjected her.²⁷ Consider by contrast the views of Sidney George Fisher, who conceded that Pierce's treatment of Fanny was "cruel & tyrannical to an inconceivable degree." He condemned Pierce and his brother John for their violent temperaments and disdain for intellectual pursuits. Yet he still enjoyed their society and praised the Butlers for their "great taste in dress, house, & equipage." Such comments certainly testify to a deep gap in sensibility separating women from men in the privileged ranks. Yet Eliza and her female friends circulated frequently in the company of men at their entertainments, conversed on a wide variety of subjects, and enjoyed their company. Eliza's failure to empathize with women of lesser status despite sharing much in common with them illustrates the power of social class in limiting the sphere of women's culture in this period.²⁸

Eliza adapted quickly to her husband's world, as wives were expected to do. Yet her quick ascent to the pinnacle of Philadelphia society was facilitated by some key similarities between upper-class life in the urban South and North and also by the prosouthern leanings of that city's upper crust. While Eliza's closest girlhood friends, Sophia Thorndike and Julia Ward, hailed from Boston and New York, respectively, it is difficult to imagine how she could have met with similar success in those cities. Her marriage became the occasion for a steady stream of Middleton visitors to Philadelphia, whose gentlemen saw in Eliza's kin men exactly like themselves. Indeed, five years before their marriage her brother John Izard Middleton visited the city, telling his uncle that "Philadelphia is the only genteel place I have seen since" he left Charleston. Sidney George Fisher dined with Eliza's mother and Williams in the summer of 1840, finding him to be very refined, with "tastes that agree with my own." He also took an instantaneous liking to Eliza's eldest brother, Arthur, who visited Philadelphia upon returning from Italy with his new wife, Paolina Bentivoglio. The Middletons' gentility and their conservative attitudes found a close match in their Philadelphia counterparts. Fisher became close friends and correspondents with Eliza's brother Williams. In fact, the latter referred to the Fishers' friends as "our circle in Philadelphia" and badgered Fisher and Sidney to visit Middleton Place. But he preferred coming to Philadelphia, whose society he relished.²⁹

Williams and other southerners felt at home with Philadelphia's best families, who were staunchly prosouthern in manner and politics. Sometimes it seemed as if the Philadelphians were even more southern than the Middletons. When Edward and his first wife separated over her sexual indiscretions—Sidney Fisher hinted that she "flirted desperately & most imprudently in all directions"—Edward's ensuing conduct shamed the Fishers. First, he sought a reconciliation so sheepishly that Fisher told him "the only thing for him to do would be" to go to her "& assume the romantic name of de Normann"—that is, to unman himself by taking his wife's name. Eliza berated her older brother for "dishonouring us all" and reminded him that they were prepared to defend their reputations by exposing Edda's vices if he would not. And when her affair with Harry McCall came to light, the Fishers expected the cuckold to demand a duel. Sidney doubted that Edward could keep the respect of his naval colleagues or other gentlemen unless he challenged McCall. Most northerners viewed dueling as a "barbarous" custom, he admitted, but under the circumstances, "except perhaps in Boston, a duel would be quite necessary." But the southerners disagreed. Edward, reinforced by his brother Arthur's insistence that dueling was "destructive of the very foundation of Christianity," refused to budge. Though dueling was condemned everywhere as brutal and unchristian, it also enjoyed an aura of romance. One Philadelphia tabloid embellished a gentleman's reputation with the rumor that had killed a man in a duel. As Sidney's endorsement and Arthur Middleton's objection suggest, we ought to recognize that dueling was an aristocratic practice rather than a strictly southern one.³⁰

The Philadelphia establishment's southern manners were matched by its politics. Like most of their friends, Fisher and Eliza were sympathetic to the South during the sectional conflicts of the 1840s and 1850s, although their views lagged well behind those of Eliza's brothers. When she and Fisher suggested that the South should not press for the annexation of Texas in 1844, Arthur admonished them that southern interests were best looked after "in the hands of her own Children." In light of his reactionary politics, Fisher's moderation on sectional issues seemed like hypocrisy to Williams. He reminded his brother-in-law of his complaints about the potential evils "of a wild, proscriptive, unbridled democracy." Why, then, could the South "find no favour in your sight for contending against the reality?" But the slavery issue did not disrupt their friendship, nor Philadelphia's networks with planting families, because elites seem to have compartmentalized politics from other concerns until the very eve of hostilities. Correspondents moved easily from angry discussion of politics to friendly exchanges of social gossip and family news. "I will say no more now upon this subject," Williams promised, and in one of his letters Fisher decided not to "write much about politics foreign or domestic as we do not altogether sympathize."³¹

Secession put an end to Fisher's ambivalence. The Civil War forced the couple to make a choice, and the Fishers chose the South. After the Palmetto State seceded, Fisher tried to strike a middle course—a position that both his Unionist friends and his secessionist in-laws found pusillanimous. "Fisher belongs to the conservative class," his cousin observed acidly, "he is willing to sacrifice the right & the truth, to yield to all the demands of the South." When Fisher told Williams that he felt compelled to support the government despite his personal feelings, he found himself mocked from the other side of the political divide. "I think that such resolves on the part of the educated & respectable & of such men as yourself & friends will only the more surely result in disaster to you all," Williams told him. Eliza's husband agonized over his position. He could not support secession, yet neither could he "sympathize with the Puritanic fanaticism in the North," he wrote his Rhode Island cousin as 1860 drew to a close. To influence public opinion, he published a pamphlet in which he lamely recommended repealing statutes interfering with the fugitive slave law, a maximum tariff rate of 20 percent, and other measures.³²

If Fisher sought compromise, many other gentlemen did not. The city's strong economic ties to the South, its geographic proximity, and the orientation of its social elite gave rise to powerful antiwar and secessionist sentiment during the winter of 1860-61. In January, a meeting of conservatives recommended that Pennsylvania secede, arguing that the state belonged not "with the north and east, whose fanaticism has precipitated this misery upon us," but "with our brethren of the south, whose wrongs we feel as our own." The city even supported a secessionist newspaper, the *Palmetto Flag*, which sought to win recognition for the Confederacy and undermine support for coercion. The bombardment of Fort Sumter rendered such views tantamount to treason literally overnight. Sarah Butler Wister saw a mob seeking out "the leading Loco Focos who have of course been especially odious in the last few days." Southern sympathizers hung American flags from their houses. The *Palmetto Flag* was shut down, and the upper crust was divided. Young men who had uttered fashionably prosouthern sentiments just days before were seen volunteering for Union service.³³

By late 1861, the Fishers had become ardent supporters of the Confederate cause. Three influences seem to have been crucial in settling their minds. First, Eliza was in Charleston with her children at the time of Fort Sumter's shelling, which inspired her with the righteousness of the Confederate cause. She wrote her husband that "I cannot but admire the noble spirit of self-sacrifice which animates them—it seems to be felt universally." Second, Fisher's conviction that the war was not merely the product of, but a catalyst for, increasing democracy contributed to his mounting support for the Confederacy. Fisher took special umbrage at Lincoln's speech of July 4, 1861, which characterized the conflict as "a people's contest." Fisher believed the president sought to elevate what was fundamentally a political crisis into an ideological struggle pitting democracy against slavery. "How can one expect the South to yield unless they are thoroughly *crushed*?" he wondered. Williams fed Fisher's elitism by laying the blame for the sectional crisis squarely on the

ignorance of the northern masses. “Democracy,” he wrote his brother-in-law, “has driven *us* into the present confederate government; it has driven you into your present illegal & irresponsible despotism; *whence* to be *carried*, God only knows.” Fisher even convinced himself that Union actions would stigmatize democracy and prompt the northern public to petition for a restriction of their rights. In an 1863 pamphlet, he recommended the restoration of property qualifications for voting and office holding as well as other reforms that only demonstrated how alienated the Fishers had become from northern society.³⁴

Third, rumors of the Middletons’ suffering, which were confirmed by letters they received from Williams in 1865, led Fisher to see the Union cause as a vindictive struggle to break the planter class, a group he admired deeply. Middleton related how his wife and children had barely escaped Columbia with their lives as Sherman’s troops razed the city. His human property disregarded his “protection” to seek freedom in the Yankee columns. Worse, behind enemy lines, the former master found himself a fugitive. “I was not able to rejoin my family until nearly a month later,” he wrote his sister in May 1865, “during a portion of which time, I, with three or four friends, was hunted like a wild beast.” Newspapers and personal communications fed Fisher’s depression. “My heart is bleeding for our friends at the South,” he told his cousin, “reduced from comfort to *starvation*.” Even the South’s friends in Philadelphia had abandoned her, it seemed.³⁵

During the war, Philadelphia’s prosouthern establishment self-destructed. They marginalized themselves by wishing good fortune to rebel armies, lauding Confederate leaders, and hysterically criticizing the Lincoln administration. Their social influence also eroded. Sectional divisions broke up the city’s two main aristocratic societies, the Wistar Association and the Philadelphia Club. The former suspended meetings in 1861 after Unionists accused southern sympathizers of uttering treasonous sentiments at what turned out to be their final wartime gathering in 1861. At the Philadelphia Club, supporters of each side segregated themselves into two adjoining rooms, as the writer Owen Wister, Pierce Butler’s grandson, recalled. When a Union man remarked how “the place reeks of” traitors, a Confederate supporter knocked him down, resulting in his expulsion.³⁶ The former established the Union Club (the Union League) in 1861, which remade Philadelphia society with two reforms: limiting opulence and excluding southern sympathizers. As the League’s historian observed, ante- bellum “society had been ruled by rigorous distinctions . . . and those who made the distinctions were in general Southern in their leanings.” So they adopted new codes for entertaining that proscribed sumptuous entertainments. Social exclusion, political irrelevance, and military defeat humiliated the old establishment. For the Fishers and their circle, the war represented much more than a political struggle. It heralded the end of an aristocratic way of life based on an intersectional alliance of like-minded gentry families.³⁷

Thus, it is no surprise that Fisher responded with near-hysteria to the first three years of the war. He “absolutely raves incoherently,” Sidney recorded after meeting his cousin on the street in 1863. Over time, Eliza’s poise seems to have given strength to her husband. While not engaged in spying, smuggling, or any of the other pro- Confederate activities that landed some of their companions, Pierce Butler among them, in prison, they did dedicate themselves to helping her relations recover from wartime devastation. After calling at his house in May, 1865, Sidney Fisher found his cousin “much more moderate in his manner & language than heretofore. The logic of recent events,” he proposed, “has no doubt had its effect on his mind.” But it was not the inevitability of Union victory that jolted the couple out of their consternation. Rather, the Middletons’ distress in the helter-skelter days surrounding the demise of the Confederacy rekindled the Fishers’ somnolent sense of class obligation. Both, in their own way, lashed out at defeat and social alienation: Eliza by throwing herself into a round of self-indulgence and Fisher by withdrawing from society to memorialize the antebellum leisure class.³⁸

Early accounts of Union activity in South Carolina led to anxiety over the fate of Eliza’s relations. By 1864, however, stories of the burning and looting of Middleton Place and of deaths on the field snapped the Fishers out of their self-pity. Realizing Eliza’s family depended on them, the Fishers set out to restore the confidence and economic foundation of the Middleton clan. In

1864, Eliza comforted her nephew Bentivoglio Middleton, serving in the Marion Artillery and Signal Corps, in language that anticipated the rhetoric of the “Lost Cause” later in the century. “Their noble deeds sanctify the soil upon which they rest,” she assured him after noting several deaths in their circle. Indeed, during the war the Fishers made every effort to give aid to their Middleton relations, including assisting Nathaniel R. Middleton in securing his son’s release from a Union prison.³⁹

More troubling to the family than deaths in combat was Williams’s loss of mastery, the core of the planter class’s social identity. No one in the North, he complained to the Fishers in 1865, could appreciate how the war had overturned “our institutions, rules, regulations, habits & opinions & indeed everything.” He told of the broken health of his wife Susan and the plunder of their estates by Yankees and freedmen. He also felt a crushing sense of responsibility for leading the South into a war whose “result . . . was to bring ruin to four of five millions of whites, misery to almost an equal number of blacks, & loss of liberty to a whole continent full of human beings.” Williams’s loss of mastery—the sense of authority crucial to planter-class identity—deeply moved Eliza and her husband. Though a northerner, Fisher shared his brother-in-law’s conception of a gentleman. The image of the noble Williams brought low filled them with purpose in the early years of Reconstruction. The Fishers devoted themselves to restoring the Middletons’ spirits and finances. They also set out to preserve the memory of their class as an inspiration to future generations of the family.⁴⁰

Eliza and Fisher suffered no financial hardship during the war and so were not only willing, but able, to assist the far-flung Middleton clan. The task of restoring morale—their included—was another matter, however. Betrayal and alienation weighed heavily on them, yet each responded to these feelings differently. Some of the Middletons set off for Europe, as did other wealthy Confederates. As if to defy their changed circumstances, Eliza hurled herself into the social whirl at home, attending parties, balls, and visits. As Fisher told Williams in 1868, over several weeks Eliza had given several parties, attended a number of operas and concerts, and spent much time shopping. By contrast, Fisher refused to reenter polite society. “If she has enjoyed all this,” he wrote Williams, “I certainly have not. I did not go the Assembly and excused myself on plea of health from our own soiree.” It is tempting to suggest that Eliza responded to Confederate defeat in much the same way as other privileged southern women in the last days of the war. Having sacrificed only to experience failure and humiliation, Eliza and other planter women indulged in the “reckless revelry” of opulent entertainments, behavior that, according to one scholar, “represented an assertion of class privilege in the face—and in defiance—of its rapid erosion.”⁴¹

It seems that Fisher took a different tack from his wife in the postwar years. While Eliza’s sociability represented an expression of “dissent from the ideology of sacrifice,” her husband accepted his diminished social position. Republican party affiliation and Victorian manners replaced southern sympathies and self-indulgence among many members of the city’s social elite. Withdrawing from society represented simultaneously a statement of resistance and resignation. But Fisher also dedicated himself to preserving the memory of privileged society in antebellum times.⁴² Unwilling to circulate in society, and unable to read because of his failing eyesight, he found solace in recording his reminiscences. Family history—the practice of memory—was a political act, not an antiquarian pastime. It was their responsibility, he lectured Williams, to leave to their children an account “of the times before the Deluge, and teach them the principles they ought to hold & the noble ends they ought to aim at.” As he, Frederick Douglass, and the architects of national reconciliation and the South’s “Lost Cause” understood, memory is hardly a private act or mere invention of the imagination. It is, rather, as one scholar maintains, “the prize in a struggle between rival versions of the past, a question of will, of power, of persuasion.” Fisher’s recollections, therefore, represented his efforts to forge a weapon to be used in a future struggle between competing versions of American history.⁴³

Memory was so important because Fisher did not believe that the march of democracy was

inevitable. Privilege had reigned before; perhaps it would rise again. He hoped that by the time his children reached adulthood, “the political tornado through which we are passing may have spent its force.” The democratic revolution would have its Thermidor. “We have the example of the French Revolution,” he explained, “and I am not without hope that I may live to know the names of Sumner & Stevens & Stanton & Wade as much excoriated as Danton’s [and] Robespierre’s.”⁴⁴ A critique of middle-class culture, which threatened to render American society puritanical and colorless, was an important part of his memorial. “The times are long past, when a dashing widow could lead a cortege of beaux through Watering places . . . with a body of gay fellows behind her, and keeping the whole party alive by wit or even practical jokes,” he lamented. “I only mean to cite this lady as proof of what women in those days dared do—while the great families of this country still retained their prestige.” Women like his wife had no place in a culture that glorified them not as social leaders but as domestic drudges. Thus, he wished not merely to remind his children of their southern roots but to provide them with aristocratic role models, as it were, for what he hoped might be a less democratic future.⁴⁵

Fisher died in 1873, so he never saw the Radicals’ design for Reconstruction defeated, though it seems unlikely that he would have taken much solace in that fact. Williams Middleton’s inability to restore his plantations to profitability under new labor arrangements guaranteed continued financial difficulties. Nor did Williams’s social fortunes improve as Reconstruction drew to a close. He came to accept his reduced position, searching for alternatives to rice and cotton to pay off debts and reclaim profitability. Until his death in 1883, he tried renting to Yankees and freedmen, producing phosphates, and managing his own holdings. As he did so, his identity as a planter—as a gentleman, as his brother-in-law understood the word—began to melt away. Eliza continued to live in Philadelphia among her children and, eventually, grandchildren, until her death in 1890.⁴⁶

Though their identities and behaviors seem to owe more to social class than to regional affiliation, sectional influences were by no means negligible in the Fishers’ marriage. In some ways, of course, they were clearly southern—as their choices during the Civil War and Reconstruction make clear. Eliza and her husband circulated within a social set profoundly rooted in southern connections and behaviors. Not only did they maintain ties with her Carolina relations, but they intensified them during the period leading up to the Civil War. To these same kin, however, the family often seemed too northern. Eliza’s and Fisher’s moderation during the 1850s—which seemed prosouthern in the North—“suit your latitude & atmosphere well enough, but not ours,” Williams wrote testily. If their marriage is to be measured against accounts of planter families in the historical literature—diverse as those interpretations are—the results are also ambivalent. Their way of life has little in common with the bourgeois ethic espoused by some planters. While their marriage did not conform to the standards of the companionate ideal, it was not patriarchal by the standards of the day. The companionship Fisher and his wife enjoyed was rare in relations between planter couples. Eliza’s warm, empathetic relationship with the women of her circle does resemble those into which southern women entered in some respects, though this behavior was not demonstrably sectional.⁴⁷

When J. Francis Fisher began drafting his “Reminiscences” in the year preceding the Union’s victory, his words lamented not the sundering of bonds between southerners, nor those of an upper class, but those of a gentry class that spanned sectional boundaries. For these people, as for one Mississippi planter, the postwar period truly must have seemed “sadly out of time.” If it seems difficult to categorize the Fishers’ marriage as southern, it is well to remember that it was hardly northern, either. They and their circle grew closer to the South in antebellum times partly because the rules of cultivated behavior prevailing there were more congenial than those to be found in the North. Their family values combined a southern orientation with class ideals best described as aristocratic and cosmopolitan.⁴⁸

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NOTES

1. Joshua Francis Fisher to John Brown Francis, June 23, 1863, box 18, J. Francis Fisher Section, Brinton Coxe Collection (Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia).

2. Nicholas B. Wainwright, ed., *A Philadelphia Perspective: The Diary of Sidney George Fisher Covering the Years 1834-1871* (Philadelphia: 1967), 59 (entry for September 12, 1838). Eliza and Fisher's portraits are in private collections but are reproduced in Eliza Cope Harrison, ed., *Best Companions: Letters of Eliza Middleton Fisher and Her Mother, Mary Hering Middleton, from Charleston, Philadelphia, and Newport, 1839-1846* (Columbia: 2001), after 96.

3. David W. Blight, " 'For Something Beyond the Battlefield': Frederick Douglass and the Struggle for the Memory of the Civil War," *Journal of American History* 75, no. 4 (March 1989): 115678.

4. Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: 1992), 207-447; "Reminiscences of Joshua Francis Fisher," box 10, J. Francis Fisher Section, Cadwalader Collection (Historical Society of Pennsylvania). Landgon Cheves, "Middleton of South Carolina," *South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine* 1 (1900): 246-51. On the Fishers, consult Fisher, "Reminiscences"; also Harrison, ed., *Best Companions*, 13-15. Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: 1981); Philip Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (New York: 1977); John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven: 1979).

5. Lorri Glover, *All Our Relations: Blood Ties and Emotional Bonds among the Early South Carolina Gentry* (Baltimore: 2000), 23-86. Joan E. Cashin, "The Structure of Antebellum Planter Families: The Ties That Bound Us Was Strong," *Journal of Southern History* 56, no. 1 (February 1990): 55-70; Edward E. Baptist, "The Migration of Planters to Antebellum Florida: Kinship and Power," *Journal of Southern History* 62, no. 3 (August 1996): 527-54; Robert C. Kenzer, *Kinship and Neighborhood in a Southern Community: Orange County, North Carolina, 1849-1881* (Knoxville: 1987).

6. Works stressing the prevalence of patriarchy include Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: 1982); Joan E. Cashin, *A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier* (New York: 1991); and Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: 1982). A larger body of work suggests that the spread of ideals of companionate marriage had significantly eroded patriarchy by the nineteenth century. Jane Turner Censer, *North Carolina Planters and their Children* (Baton Rouge: 1984); James Marten, "Fatherhood in the Confederacy: Southern Soldiers and Their Children," *Journal of Southern History* 63, no. (May 1997): 269-92. For ambivalent accounts, see Sally McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South: Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Infant Rearing* (Baton Rouge: 1990); Drew Gilpin Faust, "Epilogue," in *In Joy and Sorrow: Women, Family, and Marriage in the Victorian South*, edited by Carol Bleser (New York: 1991): 253-59; Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: 1987); and especially Anya Jabour, *Marriage in the Early Republic: Elizabeth and William Wirt and the Companionate Ideal* (Baltimore: 1998). On the privileges of social class, see Cynthia Kierner, "Hospitality, Sociability, and Gender in the Southern Colonies," *Journal of Southern History* 62 (August 1996): 450.

7. Works finding evidence in support of the existence of a women's culture include Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth Century America," *Signs: A Journal of Culture and Society* 1, no. 1 (1975): 1-31; Carol Lasser, " 'Let Us Be Sisters Forever': The Sororal Model of Nineteenth-Century Female Friendship," *Signs: A Journal of Culture and Society* 14 (1988): 158-81; Nancy A. Hewitt, "Beyond the Search for Sisterhood: American Women's History in the 1980s," *Social History* 10 (October 1985): 290-321; and in the South, see in particular Susanne Lebsack, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town* (New York: 1984); Anne Firor Scott, "Women's

Perspective on the Patriarchy of the 1850s,” *Journal of American History* 61, no. 1 (1974): 52-64 (Scott did not use the term “women’s culture”); and Christie Ann Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South* (New York: 1994). Skeptical views include Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: 1985); Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*; and Jean E. Friedman, *The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South, 1830-1930* (Chapel Hill: 1985). The following works offer a more nuanced judgment, with qualifications for race and class: Joan E. Cashin, “‘Decidedly Opposed to the Union’: Women’s Culture, Marriage, and Politics in Antebellum South Carolina,” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 78, no. 4 (winter 1994): 735-59; Cashin, “The Culture of Resignation,” in *Our Common Affairs: Texts from Women in the Old South* (Baltimore: 1996), 1-26; Victoria Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: 1992).

8. For example, see two volumes in the series *Women’s Diaries and Letters of the South*, edited by Carol Bleser: *A Northern Woman in the Plantation South: Letters of Tryphena Blanche Holder Fox, 1856-1876*, edited by Wilma King (Columbia: 1993), and *Between North and South: The Letters of Emily Wharton Sinkler, 1842-1865*, edited by Anne Sinkler Whaley LeClercq (Columbia: 2001).

9. Joshua Francis Fisher to Williams Middleton, January 14, 1868, box 6, folder 11, Middleton Place Collection (Middleton Place, SC); Lollie Belle Wylie, ed., *Memoirs of Judge Richard H. Clark* (Atlanta: 1898), 94. I thank Charles J. Johnson for bringing this source to my attention. On the significance of patriarchy in yeoman families, see in particular Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: 1995), esp. 208-38.

10. Mary H. Middleton to Margaret Manigault, n.d., box 5, Fisher Section, Cadwalader Collection; Fisher, “Reminiscences”; Daniel Kilbride, “Cultivation, Conservatism, and the Early National Gentry: The Manigault Family and Their Circle,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 19, no. 2 (summer 1999): 221-56.

11. On Harrison’s fortune, see Harrison, *Best Companions*, 15. Self-control and industry as central elements of the middle-class conception of gentility are treated in Bushman, *Refinement of America*, 298-302; Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: 1992), 278-86; C. Dallett Hemphill, “Middle Class Rising in Revolutionary America: The Evidence from Manners,” *Journal of Social History* 30 (winter 1997): 317-44; Jacquelyn C. Miller, “An ‘Uncommon Tranquility of Mind’: Emotional Self-Control and the Construction of Middle-Class Identity in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia,” *Journal of Social History* 30 (fall 1996): 129-48. Differences between urban upper classes are usefully elaborated upon in Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (Cambridge: 1989), 236-37.

12. J. Francis Fisher to Elizabeth P. Fisher, November 5, 1830, box 1, folder 1, Fisher Section, Cadwalader Collection. On antebellum wealth and inequality, the invaluable source is still Edward Pessen, *Riches, Class, and Power before the Civil War* (Lexington, MA: 1973); see also the essays in Robert E. Gallman and John Joseph Wallis, eds., *American Economic Growth and Standards of Living before the Civil War* (Chicago: 1992). On evangelicalism, see Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: 1990); Jan Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson’s Virginia* (Cambridge: 1983), 40-68.

13. J. Francis Fisher to Elizabeth P. Fisher, November 5, 1830, box 1, folder 1, Fisher Section, Cadwalader Collection; Wainwright, *Philadelphia Perspective*, 44 (entry for February 4, 1838).

14. Historians have contended that the growth of public schools accelerated the process of sectional distinctiveness by promoting the growth of a middle class in the North. See Carl F. Kaestle, *Pillars of the Republic: Common Schools and American Society, 1780-1860* (New York: 1983).

15. J. Francis Fisher to George Harrison, September 21, 1838, box 18, Coxe Collection; Fisher to George and Sophia Harrison, March 6, 1839, box 1, Fisher Section, Cadwalader Collection. On Eliza’s education, see Mary H. Middleton to Elizabeth and Catherine Middleton, February 20, 1822, Hering Family Papers (South Carolina Historical Society). The phrase “select companies” is Richard Bushman’s, from “American High-Style and Vernacular Cultures,” in *Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era*, edited by Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole (Baltimore: 1984), 345-83. On women’s education in this peri-

od, see Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: 1980), chap.7; Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston: 1980), chaps. 6, 7; Margaret A. Nash, "Rethinking Republican Motherhood: Benjamin Rush and the Young Ladies Academy of Philadelphia," *Journal of the Early Republic* 17, no. 2 (summer 1997): 171-91. On the South, Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, chap. 7; Anya Jabour, "'Grown Girls, Highly Cultivated': Female Education in an Antebellum Southern Family," *Journal of Southern History* 64, no. 1 (May 1998): 23-64; Farnham, *Education of the Southern Belle*.

16. Martha P. Screven to James P. Screven, December 20, 1820, Arnold and Screven Family Papers no. 3419 (Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill); Henry Middleton to Eliza Middleton, November 10, 1836, box 7; J. Francis Fisher to Sophia F. Harrison, November 13, 16, 1830; December 12, 17, 1830, box 1, J. Francis Fisher Section, Cadwalader Collection. Arthur married Paulina Bentivoglio, Harry wed Ellen Goggin of England, and Edward married Edwardina de Normann. For biographical information, see Harrison, *Best Companions*, xxxix-xli; and Cheves, "Middleton of South Carolina," 246-51.

17. Ellen K. Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (New York: 1984), 116.

18. Mary Hering Middleton to Catherine and Elizabeth Middleton, December 5, 1826, Hering Family Papers; Eliza Middleton to Fisher, January 23, 1839, J. Francis Fisher Papers. Historians certainly recognize the diversity of planter marriages. However, those who stress discord and male authority include Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*; Stowe, *Intimacy and Power*; Cashin, "Culture of Resignation"; McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*; and Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*. Scholars arguing for more affective, egalitarian relations include Jabour, *Marriage in the Early Republic*; Censer, *North Carolina Planters*; and Daniel Blake Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society* (Ithaca: 1980). Cynthia Kierner is typically sensible in this regard:

Despite the growing prevalence of patriarchal rhetoric [in the antebellum period], a spectrum of feminine ideals remained accessible to white southerners, and the lives of even the most respectable women did not always conform to the idea of submissive dependence. (Kierner, *Beyond the Household*, 211)

19. Eliza Middleton to Henry Middleton, November 19, 1838, box 1, folder 4, Fisher Section, Cadwalader Collection. Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, and McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, argue that fathers were distant, even uninterested, figures, at least in early childhood; while Censer, *North Carolina Planters*, and Marten, "Fatherhood in the Confederacy," argue for involved, affectionate fathers. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power*, argues that fathers were involved, though not necessarily emotionally, in their children's upbringing. Censer's and Marten's conclusions are not unlike those of Stephen M. Frank, *Life with Father: Parenthood and Masculinity in the Nineteenth-Century American North* (Baltimore: 1998).

20. Eliza Middleton to Henry Middleton, November 19, 1838, box 1, folder 4, Fisher Section, Cadwalader Collection; Eliza M. Fisher to Mary H. Middleton, June 14, 1844; June 12, 1844; January 13, 1844, in Harrison, ed., *Best Companions*, 392, 388, 355. Jabour, *Marriage in the Early Republic*, 3-7. Eliza's confrontation with her father is not completely surprising. As Steven Stowe argues, father-daughter relations were not uniformly patriarchal, veering from "indulgence to control," depending on the relationship and situation. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South*, esp. 164-91 and 100-14.

21. Joshua Francis Fisher to Williams Middleton, February 2, 1847; Eliza M. Fisher to Williams, February 10, 1847, box 4, folder 6, Middleton Place Collection. On sibling cooperation see Glover, *All Our Relations*, 85.

22. Job R. Tyson and Henry C. Lea, *Sketch of the Wistar Party of Philadelphia* (1846; reprint, Philadelphia, 1976), 25; Eliza M. Fisher to Mary H. Middleton, December 15, 1842, in Harrison, ed., *Best Companions*, 287-88.

23. Wainwright, *Philadelphia Perspective*, 142 (entry for November 19, 1843). On the spread of middle-class values in antebellum cities, see Frederick Cople Jaher, *The Urban Establishment: Upper Strata in Boston, New York, Charleston, Chicago, and Los Angeles* (Urbana, IL: 1982); Bushman, *Refinement of America*; and particularly Blumin, *Emergence of the Middle Class*, 235-37.

24. William Chambers, *Things as They Are in America* (Philadelphia, 1854), 317; Charles Godfrey Leland, *Memoirs* (New York, 1898), 136. Cynthia Kierner shows how sociability reinforced the gentry's sense of their superior worth in *Beyond the Household*, 45.

25. Eliza M. Fisher to Mary H. Middleton, September 5, 1845, in Harrison, ed., *Best*

Companions, 466. Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, and Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Chicago: 1970), stress the work of planter women. See also the documents in Cashin, *Our Common Affairs*, 123-66 ("Work"). Eliza's child-rearing practices resemble those followed in European aristocratic families. See Philippe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, translated by Robert Baldick (New York: 1965); and Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: 1977).

26. Eliza M. Fisher to Mary H. Middleton, December 30, 1842; March 19, 1842; September 12, 1844; December 19, 1844, in Harrison, ed., *Best Companions*, 293, 256, 401, 416. Lebsock, *Free Women of Petersburg*, and Scott, "Women's Perspective on the Patriarchy of the 1850s," suggest that women's culture crossed racial and class boundaries; Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household*, Cashin, "'Decidedly Opposed to the Union,'" Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, and Bynum, *Unruly Women*, are rightly skeptical. Cashin strikes a more ambivalent position in "Culture of Resignation" but concedes that women's attitudes were marked by "strange disjunctures and inconsistencies" (p. 24).

27. Eliza M. Fisher to Mary H. Middleton, February 10, 1845, in Harrison, ed., *Best Companions*, 427. Eliza's views were the norm among Philadelphia gentlewomen. Rebecca Gratz contrasted Pierce's personal defects with his wife's "noble qualities." Rebecca Gratz to Miriam Gratz Moses Cohen, September 13, 1845, folder four, Miriam Gratz Moses Cohen Papers no. 2639 (Southern Historical Collection). Frances Anne Butler, *Journal*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: 1835), 2:136; *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839* (New York: 1863). See also Catherine Clinton, ed., *Fanny Kemble's Journals* (Cambridge, MA, 2000): 162-89; Malcolm Bell Jr., *Major Butler's Legacy: Five Generations of a Slaveholding Family* (Athens: 1987), 288-310.

28. Wainwright, *Philadelphia Perspective*, 161 (entry for April 7, 1844); 204 (entry for February 14, 1848). See note 6, above, for interpretations of congenial and antagonistic gender relations in the South.

29. John Izard Middleton to Nathaniel Russell Middleton, May 26, 1834, Nathaniel Russell Middleton Papers (Southern Historical Collection). On Williams's affection for Philadelphia, see his letter to Joshua Francis Fisher, March 25, 1848, box 19, Coxe Collection. Williams and Fisher were very much alike. Born just two years apart, they both grew up in privileged families, spent extensive time in Europe, served in diplomatic posts (Fisher under William Cabell Rives at Paris and Williams with the American Legation at St. Petersburg), and were deeply conservative politically.

30. Wainwright, *Philadelphia Perspective*, 223 (entry for April 17, 1849); 230 (entry for December 27, 1849); J. Francis Fisher to Williams Middleton, February 7, 1851; Eliza M. Middleton to Williams Middleton, February 20 [1851]; Arthur Middleton to Williams Middleton, February 11, 1851, box 5, folder 4, Middleton Place Collection; *Wealth and Biography of the Wealthy Citizens of Philadelphia, Containing an Alphabetical Arrangement of Persons* (Philadelphia, 1845), 6. It may be suggestive that support for dueling was linked to other forms of community-sanctioned extralegal violence, a connection made by Bertram Wyatt-Brown in *Southern Honor*. Thus, the same Philadelphians who regarded dueling as a necessary practice also tended to support crowd actions against threats to the social order, such as antislavery activists. When a mob razed Pennsylvania Hall during an antislavery meeting in 1838, Sidney George Fisher justified it on the grounds that laws could not be enforced in opposition to popular opinion. The abolitionists had brought misfortune on themselves by virtue of their radical beliefs. Wainwright, *Philadelphia Perspective*, 49 (entry for May 19, 1838).

31. Mary H. Middleton to Eliza M. Fisher, April 21, 1844, in Harrison, ed., *Best Companions*, 379; Williams Middleton to J. Francis Fisher, August 3, 1851, box 5, folder 5; Fisher to Williams, March 1, 1855, box 5, folder 11, Middleton Place Collection.

32. Wainwright, *Philadelphia Perspective*, 343 (entry for January 2, 1860); Williams Middleton to Joshua Francis Fisher, April 30, 1861, box 6, folder 2, Middleton Place Collection. Joshua Francis Fisher, *Concessions and Compromises* (Philadelphia: 1860), 1-2, 7, 9-11.

33. "A Singular Meeting," Philadelphia *North American*, January 17, 1861; Philadelphia *Palmetto Flag*, March 30, 1861; Fanny Kemble Wister, ed., "Sarah Butler Wister's Civil War Diary," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 102 (1978): 273-75. Philadelphia wartime conservatism is treated in the following works: William Dusing, *Civil War Issues in Philadelphia, 1854-1865* (Philadelphia: 1965); Russell F. Weigley, "The Border City in Civil War, 1854-1865," in *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*, edited by Weigley (New York: 1982), 363-416; Nicholas B. Wainwright, "The Loyal Opposition in Civil War Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 88 (1964): 294-315.

34. Elizabeth Middleton Fisher to Joshua Francis Fisher, April 4, 1861, box 1, Fisher Section, Cadwalader Collection; Joshua Francis Fisher to John Brown Francis, July 11, 1861, box 18, Coxe Collection; Williams Middleton to Joshua Francis Fisher, May 18, 1861, Middleton Place Collection. For Lincoln's speech, see "Message to Congress in Special Session," in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 7 vols., edited by Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick: 1953), 4:438. Joshua Francis Fisher, *The Degradation of Our Representative System, and Its Reform* (Philadelphia: 1863).

35. Williams Middleton to Elizabeth Middleton Fisher, May 12, 1865, box 7, Fisher Section, Cadwalader Collection; Joshua Francis Fisher to John Brown Francis, October 15, 1863, Coxe Collection.

36. Owen Wister, *The Philadelphia Club, Being a Brief History of the Club for the First Hundred Years of Its Existence, Together with a Roll of Its Officers and Members to 1934* (Philadelphia: 1934), 39-41. On difficulties at the Wistar Association, see Henry Copee to Isaac Lee, September 25, 1862, Manuscript Archives of the Wistar Association (American Philosophical Society Library, Philadelphia).

37. *Chronicle of the Union League of Philadelphia, 1862 to 1902* (Philadelphia, 1902), 50. Owen Wister was not related to Caspar Wistar, in whose honor the American Philosophical Society's "Wistar Association" was named.

38. Wainwright, *Philadelphia Perspective*, 445 (entry for January 3, 1863), 400 (entry for August 20, 1861). On Butler's legal troubles, see Bell, *Major Butler's Legacy*, 348-51.

39. Elizabeth Middleton Fisher to Henry Bentivoglio Van Ness Middleton, August 10, 1864, box 6, folder 11, Middleton Place Collection; Joshua Francis Fisher to Nathaniel Russell Middleton, November 27, 1864, Nathaniel Russell Middleton Papers.

40. Elizabeth Middleton Fisher to Henry Bentivoglio Van Ness Middleton, August 10, 1864, box 6, folder 11; Williams Middleton to Elizabeth Middleton Fisher, August 6, 1865, box 7, folder 3, Middleton Place Collection; Williams Middleton to Elizabeth Middleton Fisher, June 30, 1865, box 18, Coxe Collection. On the Fishers' financial assistance to the Middletons, see Williams to Fisher, September 21, 1865; Fisher to Williams, January 14, 1868, box 9, folder 1, Middleton Place Collection; Williams to Fisher, July 1, 1865, Hering Family Papers. Before the war, Joshua Fisher supported several of Eliza's mentally disturbed relations at Pennsylvania Hospital in Philadelphia. Wainwright, *Philadelphia Perspective*, 498 (entry for May 23, 1865).

41. J. Francis Fisher to Williams Middleton, January 14, 1868, box 9, folder 1, Middleton Place Collection; Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: 1996), 274.

42. Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 274.

43. Joshua Francis Fisher to Williams Middleton, January 14, 1868, box 9, folder 1, Middleton Place Collection; Blight, "Frederick Douglass and the Memory of the Civil War," 1159. On the lost cause and reconciliation, see Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South* (New York: 1987); Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: 1993). Fisher's "Reminiscences" were privately published at Philadelphia 1929 as *Recollections of Joshua Francis Fisher Written in 1864*. As Fisher's letter to Williams indicates, however, they were not penned in 1864 but seem to have been written intermittently during the mid-to-late 1860s.

44. Joshua Francis Fisher to Williams Middleton, January 14, 1868, box 9, folder 1, Middleton Place Collection.

45. "Reminiscences of Joshua Francis Fisher," Fisher Section, Cadwalader Collection. The connection between women's public, political action, and conservative politics in the early national period has been explored recently in a number of works, including Kierner, *Beyond the Household*; Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted*; Kilbride, "Cultivation, Conservatism, and the Early National Gentry," and particularly Rosemarie Zagari, "Gender and the First Party System," in *Federalists Reconsidered*, edited by Doron Ben-Atar and Barbara B. Oberg (Charlottesville: 1998), 118-34.

46. On the experiences of planters like Williams, see Michael Wayne, *The Reshaping of Plantation Society: The Natchez District, 1860-80* (Baton Rouge: 1983), 75-109; James L. Roark, *Masters without Slaves: Southern Planters in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: 1977), 209; Jaher, *Urban Establishment*, 250-81.

47. Williams Middleton to Eliza M. Fisher, June 30, 1851, box 5, folder 5, Middleton Place Collection.

48. Wayne, *Reshaping of Plantation Society*, 39.