



The Rhetoric of Rebel Women: Civil War Diaries and Confederate Persuasion (Studies in Rhetorics and Feminisms)

Kimberly Harrison

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During the American Civil War, southern white women found themselves speaking and acting in unfamiliar and tumultuous circumstances. With the war at their doorstep, women who supported the war effort took part in defining what it meant to be, and to behave as, a Confederate through their verbal and nonverbal rhetorics. Though most did not speak from the podium, they viewed themselves as participants in the war effort, indicating that what they did or did not say could matter. Drawing on the rich evidence in women's Civil War diaries, *The Rhetoric of Rebel Women* recognizes women's persuasive activities as contributions to the creation and maintenance of Confederate identity and culture.

Informed by more than one hundred diaries, this study provides insight into how women cultivated rhetorical agency, challenging traditional gender expectations while also upholding a cultural status quo. Author Kimberly Harrison analyzes the rhetorical choices these women made and valued in wartime and postwar interactions with Union officers and soldiers, slaves and former slaves, local community members, and even their God. In their intimate accounts of everyday war, these diarists discussed rhetorical strategies that could impact their safety, their livelihoods, and those of their families. As they faced Union soldiers in attempts to protect their homes and property, diarists saw their actions as not only having local, immediate impact on their well-being but also as reflecting upon their cause and the character of the southern people as a whole. They instructed themselves through their personal writing, allowing insight into how southern women prepared themselves to speak and act in new and contested contexts.

The Rhetoric of Rebel Women highlights the contributions of privileged white southern women in the development of the Confederate national identity, presenting them not as passive observers but as active participants in the war effort.

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