MUTED BELLES

A MONUMENT TO WOMEN OF MEMPHIS

by Gail Rothschild

"Southern lore has it that the belle is a privileged white girl at the glamorous and exciting period between being a daughter and becoming a wife. She is the fragile, dewy, just-opened bloom of the southern female: flirtatious but sexually innocent, bright but not deep, beautiful as a statue or painting or porcelain but, like each, risky to touch. A form of popular art, she entertains but does not challenge her audience. Instead, she attracts them—the more gentlemen callers the better—and finally allows herself to be chosen by one.

Then she becomes a lady, and a lady she will remain until she dies—unless of course she does something beyond the pale. As a lady she drops the flirtatiousness of the belle and stops chattering; she has won her man. Now she has a different job: satisfying her husband, raising his children, meeting the demands of the family's social position, and sustaining the ideals of the South. Her strength in manners and morals is contingent, however, upon her submission to their sources—God, the patriarchal church, her husband—and upon her staying out of public life where she might interfere in their formulation."

From "Belles and Ladies" by Anne Goodwyn Jones in The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture

A Visual Arts Supplement to The Daily Helmsman
A Conversation...

Dr. Margaret M. Caaffrey, President of History, The University of Memphis
Dr. Peggy Boye Jensen, Instructor, History, The University of Memphis
Dr. Joan Weathersby, Professor of English, The University of Denver
Dr. Selma L. Lewis, Professor, University of Southern California
Leslie Lieberth, Director, University of Memphis
Gulf South Regional, Artistic Director, New York City

GR: Thank you all for coming here to talk about Memphis women. Maybe you should start by explaining the project. "Moted Belles" is a public sculpture for the University of Memphis. It is intended as a monument to MemPhis women who could not be considered "belles" in the traditional sense because of their race, economic or social position, or politically incorrect behavior or views. The sculpture contains several visual themes. As you can see from the model, the basic form is a reference to traditional Southern neo-classical plantation architecture, but the Greek temple form is also commonly used in monuments which usually celebrate the achievements of men. There is a column at each of the four corners and around the bottom half of each column is a shape that looks like a cross between a bell and a hoop skirt: bells and belles. This piece literally places these figures on a pedestal. That is, the Louisiana pedestal is right in front of the University Gallery. Around the columns, the top portion of this monument will be written the names of eight notable Memphis women, eight "moted belles." Our mission for this afternoon is to introduce these eight names.

SL: And you want us to help you decide?

GR: Right. But there is a second important part of the project, and that is the publication which will be distributed as a booklet in the campus paper, "The Daily Memphis," next Friday, the day of the opening. That way it will get into every hand on campus. My hope is that it will express some of the voices and opinions of the community on the issues raised by the sculpture. Where I was here in January, I visited Peggy Caaffrey's History of Women in American class, Peggy Jensen's American History class, and Rose Paxon's Gender and Society - Rose wanted to be here today but unfortunately she had a sick child to attend to - and I asked the students to think about the project and respond with their thoughts on "Moted Belles" in History and in their lives. The publication will include some of their writings. The main text will be a transcript of our conversation here. Since we cannot include everyone on the sculpture, this will be an opportunity to enter into the records all the women that we consider.

PJ: Who are the predestined names so far?

GR: An initial list came from a video about MemPhis women that we taped in our class and from one that I got: Julia Hooks, Ids. B. Wells, Clara Conway, Lina Warner, Elizabeth Avery Meierweath - who we can certainly talk about. Lida Austin, Caaffrey, Edith Maasey Selldon, Sophie Goldberger Friedman, Camille Kelley, Cora P. Taylor, Phoebe Omile. After class one of the students ran up and said, "what about Annie Cook?" Peggy also suggested taking a look at Mother Jones the great labor organizer - I never knew she spent six years in Memphis during the Yellow Fever epidemic - but now I'll save her for a different project. Then Leslie suggested Joan Turner Belfor.

SL: Has anyone mentioned Francis Wright?

PC: I forgot about her, I forgot to tell you about her...

GR: But she was such a fascinating...

SL: (Forces a smile) She was an outrageous person.

GR: Who was Francis Wright?

PJ: She was a Scotswoman who came to this country...what are the dates?...1812-1881...I have an excerpt on her from Peter Magnes who writes for "The Commercial Adj." and has done a series on MemPhis women.

PC: When I told her about this project, she pulled up everything she had.

GR: Oh, wasn't she the woman who was influenced by Jeremy Bentham and Robert Owen, the Social Utopians?

PJ: She wanted to create an ideal, a Utopia in Hades, which was a firm that she brought out called "The Angel of Hades Street."

SL: And she was six feet tall?

PJ: She took her first trip when she was 21 to the U.S. (reading from Peter Magnes' text) "she meant to come over to America of the evil of slavery."

PC: She met Jefferson and she was supposedly an intimate friend of Lafayette.

GR: How intimate?

PC: Let's just say there was a little bit too much free love going on to suit the MemPhisians. Intercourse, I mean...

PJ: She spent at least fifteen years, didn't she?

SL: Filed for divorce in Shelby County.

PC: Yeah, she was really outrageous, and she was outrageous in public.

GR: I'm not all for women who are outrageous in public. (Beguiling)

GR: Well, I think she's very interesting. We should certainly consider her. Now to go back to the list that I had worked out last week: Julia Hooks, "the Angel of Hades Street." I'm reading your book, Selma, and it brings up some very important issues about blacks and the Civil War, for instance, equality right after the Civil War. It's a very vivid description of the life of a talented and determined African-American woman in the post-war South. As far as I'm concerned she stays.

SL: She was marvelous.

GR: I was considering Camille Kelley, and then somebody said, "well, there's the whole problem about the adoption scandal."

SL: She certainly shows up in the literature about women lawyers and women judges in America.

PC: You would have a problem with her.

PJ: I'll let you all hear from Linda Austin who may be coming today, she is writing a book about Judge Kelley. She feels that you really should consider her. "She was one of the most outstanding women in Memphis history. She was appointed in 1920 to the bench and served in that capacity until her retirement from that position in 1950. She was the first woman judge south of the Mason Dixon Line. She was a tireless champion of children. She was, however, a political pension and she was a member of Ed Crum's cabinet." It goes on and so forth... Now there is the problem of selling children...

PC: I think she probably played a large role in babies for sale...

PJ: (Reading)..."In the meantime, attorney Robert Taylor began investigating the Kelley scandal," Taylor claimed that Judge Kelley was linked to the scandal; however, there was never an indictment or a trial. Without a trial or a thorough investigation, the charges remain only charges and are not a certainty. She remains an important

Anne Cook

Anne Cook (1860-1890), a prosperous Memphis, was celebrated for her social work in the Yellow Fever epidemic of 1878 and for the subsequent sacrifice of her life while nursing victims.

On August 26, 1878, the Memphis Appeal ran an item on Cook's "hospital," stating that "Anne Cook, who kept the noted demitasse establishment, the Mason House, was "thrust as an expert in the management of the disease" and that she had taken fever patients into her "elegantly furnished rooms" where she "personally nursed them." She had also opened her house during the long severe 1873 epidemic. On August 20, 1878, she received a note from "the Christian women of Memphis" who assured her that "an act of generosity" and "撕tiful unselfish should not be passed over without notice." From a group of Louisville, Kentucky, women, she received a letter stating that "every hand in the whole country responds with affectionate gratitude to the noble example you have set for Christian men and women."

The Appeal reported on September 5 that Cook, "the keeper of a bogglon on Gayoso Street, who has most heroically devoted herself to the care of the sick...is down with a bad case of the fever..." and expressed hope for her recovery since "no one has done better service this year than she during the epidemic."

On September 12, The Appeal reported her death with the following tribute: "Anne Cook, the woman who after a long life of shame, ventured all she had of life and property for the sick, died yesterday at 7 o'clock of yellow fever...Surely the sire of the woman must have been forgotten... Out of sin, this woman in all tenderness and truefulness of her wretchedness emerged transformed and purified to become the healer and at last to come to the Healer of souls... She is at peace."

Dr. Joan Weathersby

I think of my mother as a type of southern belle. She was too poor to have a coming out party, but she carries herself with the dignity of the rich and hoop-skirted. She taught us to work on our appearance, together, hold our hands a certain way (preferably in gloves) smile and laugh oh-so-gently, talk with the young men with just the right amount of flirting, never giving away what they should have to purchase later.

Everything was one step forward and two steps back: be proud of yourself, but treat everyone else, especially the men as if they can do it better than you. Dress your best, but put down all compliments. Talk with your mother only if asked, and then make sure you do not disagree with your date or hostess.

Never did my Mom ever consider that I might not already marry, that I might have a life on my own, by my own will. My grandmother, Mom's mother, was my modeling example. She started her own business after her husband died, leaving her six children to raise. She was up every morning at 4:00 and walked two miles to her own little coffee shop, I would meet her after school, help serve pie and coffee, and walk home with her after we washed down all the tables and counters.

For survival, she gave up the stockings and gloves her contemporaries wore. My mother was ashamed, rather than proud, to have a working mother. So, as my Mom tried to mold me, the pendulum swung far to the upright side.

Grandmother retired and, to Mom's horror, an old man was allowed to live with Gran without benefit of marriage. She liked to talk to this old fellow and he had a car! They loved to go for drives and get ice cream cones. He was funny and kind. My mom succeeded in driving him away. Gran was placed in an old folks home but Mom spread the story that the old man was run off with another old lady, thus Moss can hold up her head in the small town where gossip is the main export.

Pat Milton, student
woman because she served juvenile court for 30 years. She gave the court needed stability which had been lacking in its early years. Also, she helped to gain much-needed appropriations and legitimacy for the juvenile court.

KELLEY must also be admired for pioneering a new role for women, that of becoming a judge when most women were limited to a domestic sphere.

Pj: The person that I had overlooked that I would really like to consider is Frances Cov.
Pc: I really don’t know who she is...
Pj: She’s still alive, but she was on the Board of Education when integration came. And she took the heat. And she did it in a pretty outstanding way.

Sl: Frances was one of the people who began the Association of University Women here.
Pj: And, well, a minute, there was something else... The League of Women Voters, that’s what she was so active in.
Pj: (reading from Pierre Magness text) “In 1936 she decided to run for the school board. It was an open election; 16 candidates ran for four places. Her platform was the need for kindergartens, and she was one of the four elected... She served on the school board for twenty-four years before retiring in 1960. They were years of turmoil and crisis: integration of the schools...”

Sl: Frances was one of the fighters for all the good causes.

JW: Elizabeth Phillips wrote something on Cenway back. She’s someone we should consider.

LW: Well, tell us about Elizabeth Phillips.

JW: She taught in the English Department and she received the first Martha Luther King award for her work in civil rights. The thing that she did, when she died, was to give her whole estate for a black English major’s scholarship. She wrote several books on black writers, and she published on Faulkner. But it was mainly her work in the civil rights movement. So many people thought she was outrageous, all the conservative people.

Sl: Did we have anything on Suzanne Sneggis?

Pj: Martha Wedell sent this paper to me. Martha got her PhD, in History from The University of Michigan.

Gr: I’ve been reading her book, Elite Women and the Reform Impulse in Michigan, 1875-1915.

Pj: She think she is the best for our list. (reading) “Suzanne Sneggis, tireless in her pursuit of what she clearly saw as Right, provided Memphis with a social vision and direction which transformed the city in important ways.” That’s from Martha.

Gr: I wish she could have been here.

Pj: And the one I have not mentioned is from Selma. When she was thinking about a Jewish woman who made great contributions, she felt that Myra Dreibelis should certainly be considered.

Gr: Who was Myra Dreifus?

Sl: Well, she was a person who witnessed children who were hungry in our public schools and she began to do something about it. The struggle was enormous because the public school system was unprepared, first of all, to admit that they had hungry children and if they did it wasn’t a problem. There were over 40,000 children in poverty— that is family income of $3,000 or less.

Gr: When was that?

Sl: 1965 about. There were just a thousand children on the free lunch program even though the money was available. That was the thing. There was a federal program set up but we were not taking advantage of it. It finally became a caseload that was taken up by people. Peggy, were you part of it?

Pj: No, not really, but certainly supportive...

Sl: It became something that the schools could no longer ignore. They could not ignore this little— you know she was four feet ten and she had to stand on a stool or a box. So something reached the podium, and they spoke a lot...

Pj: Tell the story that you mentioned.

Sl: A very fine principal of a black school didn’t want his kids to have free lunches because it would make them dependent. Myra talked to him and she said, “I’ve never provided my own lunch in my life. My father provided it first and now my husband does; it has not made me dependent.” (laughs)

And you know who he became her

JULIA HOOKS
Musician educator, Julia Britton Hulkes Hooks ('the angel of Beale Street’ and grandmother of Benjamin Hooks) was born in Frankfort, Kentucky, in 1897, and in 1927, she moved with her minister husband Samuel Work— who died yellow fever—in Greenville, Mississippi, where she assisted him in the free school he established there and where she was instrumental in the election of Blanche Bruce as Mississippi’s only black US senator; she moved to Memphis in 1876 to teach in the city schools.

Considered a musical prodigy from childhood, Julia Britton enrolled in Berea College in 1893 where, from 1890-1822, while still a student, she was also listed with the faculty as instructor of instrumental music, thus becoming the first black to teach white students in Kentucky History (Black Memphis)?

One of the first women to earn a college degree, Hooks was named principal of the Virginia Avenue School in Memphis, but unhappily with the quality of public education, she established the Hooks Cottage School.

Hooks was founder and a charter member of the Orphans and Old Folks Home Club and, in three years, her concerts paid for the property the club bought to set up a home for the aged and orphaned. She was founder of the Hooks School of Music, an integrated school whose pupils included students of all races who sang from W.C. Handy’s standards. In 1927, she was chosen to head the detention home set up by the newly established juvenile court for blacks, her commitment to the home remaining firm even after one of the juvenates murdered her husband Charles Hooks.

The 1855 New American Encyclopedia featured Hooks’ essay, “Duty of the Hour,” a paradigm for the magnificent life of philanthropy led by this woman who once had to pass as her mother’s slave during some of their travels for the presentation of musical performances. She died in 1942.

Dr. Joan Weatherly

MYRA DREIFUS

From her height of barely four feet ten inches, Myra Dreifus had to stand on a stool to reach the podium, but her message—“You cannot educate a hungry child”—was eloquent and her crusade for funding “Nursery School Children” eventually brought school lunches and other crucial programs to Memphis.

Born (1904) Myra Feinstein, to German-Jewish parents in Detroit, Michigan, she married Fred Dreifus, and they moved to Memphis in the 1930s to start a jewelry business. In Detroit, she had an important volunteer job at the head of a Big Sisters Agency, where she learned to manage volunteer groups. When she moved to Memphis, she continued working as a volunteer, establishing a summer camp for children at Ridgeway County Club. Notably, that there was no mental health association in the city, she re-established an old agency that had languished for years. Always involved in learning, in the 1950s Dreifus organized a women’s group—informally named with tongs in her cheek, “Culver”—to study topics of general interest. Her interest in children and the arts led her to become chairman of the Memphis Symphony Orchestra’s Children’s Concerts.

Dreifus led the group which created Riverwood Day Care Center and worked with OAP to provide supervised after school activities for inner-city factory children. In 1968, after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., she led the fund for Needy School Children Steering Committee to mobilize the city in the creation of a summer job and scholarship program for teens, months of intense lobbying prompted the City Council and the County to fund a $200,000 grant which paid off at least a hundredfold in a quiet summer and effective education programs.

Before her death in 1987, Dreifus received many honors, among them, the Humanitarian Award by the National Conference of Christians and Jews, the prestigious Harsh-G. Solomon award, and an honorary doctorate from Rhodes (then Southeastern College, where she served on the President’s Council).

Dr. Joan Weatherly
JW: She got her degree at Michigan right about '61. She was one of the first black women from the South to get a doctorate. I guess at that time she probably couldn't have gotten one around here. She just slipped away and died last summer, before I started to set things down, like this story of when she went out on the boat for the Cotton Carnival they got the little black children to hold up swords. She had this wonderful sense of humor about this thing. She actually wrote a story about it, but she's best known as a linguist. In fact, I first heard of her when I was still in graduate school in the '50s. So, of course, she published in linguistics, but she also would make wonderful speeches at the WHIM conference on humor. She worked that story up there. But the funniest thing I ever read wrote this because it's such a funny story and this is so typical of her—we were once at the Conference of College Composition and Communication, which is the big writing conference. She was walking along and she said those different caucasian things, she knew. She said, "Look at that! Now, I'm going to tell you my own causes. And I'm going to call it "Black Women Virgins Who Didn't Want To Be Virgin." (Laughter)" It's just so typical. That's how I remember her. The other thing is, she really was a southern belle, she only taught here for about twelve years. She lived all her life right around LeMoyne. She really was very well off. She would've moved anywhere she wanted to in Memphis, but she stayed right there for years and walked the distance. She couldn't go...she couldn't travel her place. We tried to get her to come to Memphis State, they tried to get her to go to UT, they tried to get her to go to Atlanta University, but she stuck right there at LeMoyne all those years. And really in a crucial sense held it together.

GR: What was her first name?

JW: Juanita, Juanita V. Williamson. I never knew her to march in civil rights protests but she would get into things. She went to the Peabody in the '50s...she decided that she would go there and eat one day...and she did. I mean this was back in the early '50s.

GR: And one didn't do that?

JW: But somehow she did it.

SL: She was wonderful.

PJ: And she did seminal work in linguistics.

JW: And she would get up at a conference and she would have these young pigs in their place just immediately she loved to get them going on southern black vernacular—that was her subject—and she would get them all saying, "breakfast," "breakfast." Oh, that was good to talk about because...I mean she misses just a friend. She was over the years almost my best friend...

GR: When I spoke with Peggy Coffey on the phone last week she said, "Maybe you want to think about a blues singer like Alberta Hunter."

JW: I was going to say, you know she was from Memphis...

GR: I've got a lot of biographical material on her. She didn't live her life here, but she grew up in Memphis and she was just such an interesting person. Anyone have any feeling about that? I heard her sognos. Talk about belted!

SL: She was still alive when we wrote HISTORIC BLACK MEMPHIANS so we couldn't include her.

GR: Here's a quote from Hunter, "Many people think a woman sings the blues only when she is in love with a man or a girl...I've never had the blues about no man, never in my life, honey. If a man beats me, I'll take a broomstick and beat him to death."

JW: She was a nurse for about 20 years there wasn't one.

GR: I found a really nice appreciation at the New York Public Library called AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN. I was particularly interested in the fact that she was a lesbian, and that is certainly one type of "Motivated Belle" I'd like to recognize.

SL: I think she would be a good one.

PC: Ida Wells didn't live her whole life here in Memphis either.

SL: Hardly anybody did...

JW: Except Juanita Williamson ...

GR: There's a quote from The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture, and I should have written down who wrote this...

PC: It was Anne Goodwyn Jones...

GR: (reading) "The recent ones have rejected the necessarily evocative and confining forms, have radically criticized their society, and have even left the South, in body or in mind. The Charleston Gningen sisters moved North—Syracuse in 1921, and Angelina in 1820—and, from that religious, at times addressing the southern white women at home, directly attacked the assumptions upon which southern society based its image of women, inculcating, of course, slavery. Sara Evans has shown that the 1960s feminist revival found its roots, too, in the South. Once again southern white women—from this time in the civil rights movement—saw the connection between racial and sexual oppression, thus providing the initial impetus toward contemporary feminism."

GR: We talk about these women who are left, and that's one of us being muted. The more common way was to be quiet. The most difficult thing to do was to stay and refuse to be silent, but the official historical record has muted them too by simply omitting them.

SL: Absolutely.

GR: So, some of these women that we've just been talking about, who are now ten, I think are very, very important.

SL: Wow, Gail, what will you have us do? Do you have enough space?

GR: I think we've got to discuss a few more.

PJ: One thing is, to decide whether you're going to have living people or not because there are other people who come to mind...

GR: As long as we're sitting together and doing this as a group, I would like to defer to the group...

PC: As a historian, my preference is always for the dead.

GR: Clara Connaway stands out strongly.

SL: She started a school didn't she?

PJ: Right. Had her own school. And when I spoke to Martha and Pierre, Martha was stronger for Clara than Perre. Pierre said, "Okay, no problem," but just didn't find her...

GR: From what I've read, she had an extraordinary influence on her students.

SL: I think she did.

GR: (reading from Bette Womans and the Reform Impulse in Memphis, 1875-1919) "A large manish woman...never married." Isn't that often code for lesbian? "A proponent of higher education...Nineteenth Century Club," now that was from Martha's book. Here's a quote I like from Clara Connaway. "The male, worn-out argument that higher education de-

Alberta Hunter

Singer, composer, nurse. Alberta Hunter was born April 1, 1905, in Memphis where she lived until she was sixteen. She ran away (left with a teacher, without telling her mother) to Chicago. But remembered for her "DownHearted Blues" and as Greta Garbo opposite Fred Roberson in Showboat, she worked with many of the world's greatest musicians in the USA and in Europe where she was a great favorite.

After a brief stint in Chicago as a police pader and maid, she began singing at Dago Frank's where she worked until it closed in 1912. She worked in two other clubs, and in 1915 she began working at the Panama Cafe, as well as several other night clubs. In a few months, her popularity had grown to the point that composer Mezco Walter and WC. Handy employed her to sing new compositions, "Sweet Georgia Brown" and "Saint Louis Blues." By the late 1920s, she was launching songs like "BooBoo Sweet Blues" and "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," as well as playing in such shows as Cabin Clogging and in Los Angeles in How Come. Her long and successful career as a recording artist began in 1931 with the Black Swan label in New York. In 1922 she switched to Paramount, soon recording her own "Downhearted Blues." Moving back and forth between Europe and the US from the late 20s until the outbreak of World War II, Hunter recorded, played in shows, and in 1937, began performing nationally and internationally on radio. A wireless and popular USO volunteer, she performed at Eisenhower's victory party for the Russian Marshall Stalin and was one of many recipients of the Alice Prize. The Cordis: Pacific Campaign effort. In 1952, she was elected to ASSAE, for women or African-American.

In 1952—after setting her age back twelve years to enter a nursing program—she was licensed as a nurse, practicing quite successfully until she was forced to retire in 1957. Later that year, she launched an astonishing comeback, which lasted until the year of her death in 1984.

Dr. Joan Weatherly
suean Conway, 50 years of service, 1943-1993.

JW: Yes, that's what I meant. She was a teacher at Memphis High School.

GL: ...but she taught in the city's public school system.

JW: And she retired in 1978.

GL: And she was a great teacher. She was very dedicated to her students.

JW: And she was always very fair and impartial in her assessments.

GL: And she was very popular with her students.

JW: And she was very respected by her colleagues.

GL: And she was very loved by her students.

JW: And she was very missed when she retired.

GL: And she was very remembered for her kindness and her dedication.

JW: And she was very remembered for her intelligence and her wisdom.

GL: And she was very remembered for her sense of humor.

JW: And she was very remembered for her ability to inspire her students.

GL: And she was very remembered for her ability to challenge her students.

JW: And she was very remembered for her ability to guide her students.

GL: And she was very remembered for her ability to support her students.

JW: And she was very remembered for her ability to help her students.

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I never really did relate to the image of the southern belle. For most people the belle is synonymous with Scarlett O'Hara from Gone With The Wind. She is hoop skirts and lace and petit point and tea chatter on scarched Southern afternoons. I think most people do not acknowledge the belle image as detrimental to women. The figure has become romanticized. The idea that women should fit the role of the passive, flowery southern belle stifles women's freedom to be themselves. Furthermore, the image is atypical of most southern women.

Women gave birth to the children (often six to ten), raised for them, took care of the house and cooking in a day when modern conveniences did not exist. They often worked outside the home, usually in a field, for six or seven hours a day. I know this having grown up in the rural South listening to my grandmother's stories.

At the age of sixteen, my grandmother married a twenty-two-year-old carpenter. Since they were working class people, their economic survival depended on her working. She picked cotton, using only her hands and a burlap sack, and received only fifty cents a day for wages. After they began to have children, she carried her children with her to the cotton fields and worked from sunrise to sunset every day.

At home she cooked the meals on a wood stove. Using a rub board, she washed her family's clothes with water from a well. She made dresses for her three daughters from used flour sacks. When my grandfather died, she came to live with our family where she helped to raise us.

My grandmother worked all her life. To true southern women such as my grandmother, the image of the southern belle is certainly a myth and even a disgrace.
Frances Wright

Frances Wright came to Memphis—population 30,000 with an occasional bear—in 1825 with a cause, and she meant to stay. She had come to establish one of the most daring social experiments of the nineteenth century—to cure America of the evil of slavery. Memphis was ideally the place one would expect to find a wealthy Scottish gaspior who had been raised in luxury and had visited Lafayette in France and Jefferson at Monticello.

Born in Dunbar, Scotland, in 1785, Wright, at twenty-one, first visited the States. Her excitement and praise for everything in the new republic was heightened by her first encounter with slavery in Washington, D.C. Returning home she wrote Views of Society and Manners in America and began planning her social experiment in the new world. In 1825, she bought a tract of land on the Wolf River about fifteen miles from the trading post called Memphis, which she named Natchez (Dicksawfor "well"). She bought ten slaves in Nashville and advertised her project publicly, asking people to donate slaves to be educated and freed, and saying that she welcomed all colors, black or white. The official groundbreaking at Natchez was held on March 3, 1825, but the actuality of communal living was distant from the dream. Neighboring planters, already suspicious at the departure of so many white companions during an absence extended by her illness, along with potential sympathizers elsewhere, lost interest or were stymied at rumors of free love and miscegenation, generated initially by the published journal of a Natchez board trustee. By 1827, she had to admit that the experiment had failed, done in by internal bickering and external ridicule.

In Haiti in 1828, Wright freed the remaining slaves, and she spent the next twenty years fighting for radical causes in Europe and America, arguing ever for sexual and racial equality. In 1853, she returned to Memphis to file in the Shelby County Court for a divorce from the man she had married in 1831. She died in Cincinnati in 1853.

Dr. Joan Woolhiser

Never known as a conformist, my coming out was no exception. Oh, it was a gala affair, alright. My family and friends were there (though not all at the same time), and I had a very attractive escort. My coming out didn't involve a white-gowned cattillion but, rather, a different rite of passage.

Imagine with me what it might be like to have proud fathers and weeping mothers (tears of joy, not shame) announce and support their daughters when coming out. Maybe the families could rent a house for the night. And there could be a theme—yes, a theme. Maybe, "Come dressed as your favorite or least favorite—lesbian stereotype." Oh, the leather the room could accommodate!

Now, we all know that lesbians come in all shapes and sizes, colors and creeds, occupations and oddities, as do all southern women. Despite snide references and media stereotypes, we still revel in our diversities. At least, that is my hope. For I am proud to be a southern woman, and I am proud to be a lesbian. I love grits and greens and iced tea and fried dill pickles. And I love the southern woman with whom I share my life.

Deanna M. Stark, student
Southern women, both Euro-American and African American, have had their voices muted in the history of the South. Of the Euro-American woman, southern intellectual Fannie Hurst wrote in 1934 that she had no voice in this way: "Women naturally shrink from public praise, and from the struggle and competition of life...in truth, woman, like children, has but one right and that is the right to protection. The right to protection involves the obligation to obey. A husband, a lord and master, whenever she should live, honor, and obey, nature designed for every woman..." [quoted in African-American Women in the South: 214-15].

A year earlier, a Miss Southern Woman, John Hartwell Cocke, wrote that Hurst's experience of the World Peace Congress, which advocated control of alcohol consumption. Women had wanted a voice there, but were denied. He called these women a "most insidious clique of unsexed females and rampant abolitionists" and said the male leadership had "put down the pacifists—at least as far as their claim to take the platform of public debate and enter into all the rough and tumble of the war of words." Hurst replied, "I must heartily rejoice with you in the defeat of those shameless amazons." [quoted in Anna Fox Scott, The Southern Lady, p. xii]

Women who desired to speak in public before the Civil War, even on such a seemingly innocuous reform as preventing drunkenness, faced ridicule and scorn in their attempts.

After the war women began to claim public voices but still faced tough obstacles. In 1861, when Frances Willard, the president of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, toured the South, she wrote, "It was a novelty of course, for a woman to speak..." In Georgia in 1862, she helped organize the first state WCTU convention run by women. "The people were a little shy of it," she wrote, but found they "had nothing to fear by reason of 'plain-haired women,' for there were none present, or 'platform readers.'..The ladies who had never spoken in public before were distinctly heard because of their admirable pronunciation and rich Southern voices." [quoted in H. A. Stump, King Alcohol in the States of King Cotton (1881), p. 683.]

Hurst spoke in part of her account of the opposition of ministers to women speaking in public and the opposition among women themselves toward violating this taboo. Earlier a WCTU report had cited the "timidity of Southern women" as a hindrance to temperance organization in the South. (Almosta Wedell, The Woman and the Bible in America (1971), p. 45)

The nineteenth century ideal of the Southern woman was of a soft, velvety body, a private, veiled body. This only served to keep middle-class Euro-American women in their places, but excluded entirely African American women and working-class or poor Euro-American women who became vulnerable in Southern society because they were not "ladies." The vestiges of this ideal still remain in Southern society. It is time to reclaim the idea of the "belles" and the "ladies" by looking at Southern women who did not allow their voices to be muted, who acted in ways that redefine what a lady should and could be.

A few weeks ago, Gail Rothschild visited me in Derry and shared information about her previous work and described the Muted Bells project for our campus. She encouraged student input and participation by requesting that students write their thoughts about "southern bells" imagery.

It is not uncommon in a discussion such as this for the term "southern bells" to quickly be associated with Scarlett O'Hara, the beautifully-dressed, flirtatious character in Gone With the Wind. We need to remember that Scarlett was also a strong, intelligent, courageous, Southern woman. Depending on whether or not she was submitted to the code of the "bells" her behavior was either admired or adored. Scarlett was put on a pedestal and rewarded for her seductive personality but thrown off the pedestal when she demonstrated the wild and sexual aspect of her nature. In Gail Rothschild's place, we are asked to think about this polarization. The dichotomy between the seemingly fragile, restrained "southern lady" and the independent and empowered woman is something that Southern women experience today. We should question the conflicting messages Southern women still receive with regard to "appropriate" and "inappropriate" behavior.

Rothschild reminds us, "Bells may ring to celebrate or to warn, but bells are silent." One must ask, "Why choose a silent bell when women are being celebrated?"

While one might fail to recognize the visual portion between bells and hoop skirts, one's failure to listen to Rothschild's message is dangerous, because when we have lost our voice, we have lost our ability to express our likes, our dislikes, our anger, our disgust, or our desire.

We live in a society permeated by sexism and violence against women. These problems are exacerbated by a southern culture that often treats women as property and trains them in silence and submission. Gail Rothschild's work acts as a catalyst. Her work provokes questions about who we are and encourages us to redefine ourselves. The muted bells/belles warn against the danger inherent in the codes of "ladyhood." They are symbols of women's unheard voices. And they challenge us to ask ourselves, "Do we wish to remain silent?"

Eight of our Southern sisters, representing different class, race, religious, ethnic and sexual groups, defined a culture that required them to stay on safe ground. Such women were labeled "incorrigible," "meaningless," "rebellious," and many were called "short-haired dykes." These women challenge us today, not only to voice our struggles against injustices, but to warn others of the social consequences for women who do not cry out against their own oppression.

Gail Rothschild is a creative, energetic woman who inspires us in a powerful way to think, to see, to ask, to listen, to act, and to sing. Her work denounces and debunks the negative imagery of the "southern bells" by bringing attention to strong Southern women. Her work allows us to perceive the complex set of cultural pressures, ideals, and norms that keep women silenced.

Let us, as students, faculty, administration and staff, unite to pay homage to these eight courageous women. Let us acknowledge and recognize the obstacles they all faced, as women, but also as Southerners. Let us be encouraged from using their talents in the public forum. Let us learn from the legacy of these women that we too can overcome cultural obstacles that blur our vision and dim our voices. Let us replace the negative aspects of the "southern bells" stereotype with positive images of strength and power. Then we can act towards social change and sing out together. We are no longer silenced. We are no longer muzzled. We are.

Dr. Margaret M. Caffrey, Associate Professor, History