ESSENTIAL CIVIL WAR CURRICULUM

Kate Stone and Her Journal: The Words She Burned Into Our Hearts[1]

Kate Stone's historical significance is rooted in the words she left to history, specifically in the diary she contributed to the literature of the Civil War era. *Brokenburn* traces the evolution of gender identities before and during the war. It also illustrates the upper-class values of plantation society and explores the resilience of those values as war shatters the world they governed. Stone's narrative complements other contemporary white female voices to illustrate a larger historical drama of Southern women witnessing the end of their slave-based civilization and their own fall from the pinnacle of that empire.[2]

Readers may view the memoir as a prism of gender. Stone represented in its pages the men and women who met her wartime masculine and feminine standards against those who did not.[3] Her diary captures the evolving gender expectations of an intelligent and educated upper class Southern woman, which contributes to a broader history of how the Civil War challenged gender identities of an entire generation of Southern women.[4]

Also, Stone's memories of life in Tyler, Texas, between 1863 and 1865 illustrate the clash between her upper-class moral/social values and the realities of material destitution in wartime.

[1] When Stone learned in mid-May 1865 that Gen. Robert E. Lee surrendered his forces at Appomattox Court House, she wrote: "'Conquered, submission, subjugation' are words that burn into my heart, and yet I feel that we are doomed to know them in all their bitterness … The degradation seems more than we can bear." See footnote 29.
[2] Kate Stone, *Brokenburn: The Journal of Kate Stone, 1861-1868*, John Q. Anderson, ed., 1995 ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972).
[3] Drew Gilpin Faust, *Southern Stories: Slaveholders in Peace and War* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992); Anne Sarah Rubin, *A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861-1868* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005). Rubin explains that many Southern women like Stone encouraged men to prove their masculinity by joining the military. If they refused, women would drape dreaded veils of femininity of such men. Faust writes, for example, that young women in Texas sent "hoop skirts and bonnets" to men who refused to go to war.
[4] In 1861, Stone could look forward to a life of gendered roles hardly different from her mother's when she was young. But Stone's father died in 1855, when Stone was in her teens, and her mother took over management of the Brokenburn plantation. Patriarchal figures typically managed plantations. But Stone lived under the example of a strong, intelligent, and respected woman, and Stone's diary was written from a self-assured perspective within the context of that stable matriarchal administration. For more on gendered expectations of women from Stone's class during wartime, see Jean Mullin Yonke, "Faulkner's Civil War Women." *Faulkner Journal* 5, no. 2 (Spring, 1990) and Laura F. Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1989). Yonke argues that the patriarchal dominance of plantation society was suspended when the men left for war. Regardless of the Stones' unique matriarchal situation, that larger social system upon which "plantation mistresses [like Amanda and Kate Stone] derived enormous class and personal benefits" would wait for the men to return home.

Stone's expectations and values -- both before and after the war stripped away her trappings of privilege -- transformed her linear narrative into a multi-level vantage point from which students may examine how privileged Southern women came to realize what was painfully required to become resilient Confederate women.[5]

Stone's diary also stands alongside other journaled histories of the Civil War era, specifically works by Sarah Morgan Dawson, Emma Holmes, Francis Hewitt Fearn, Mary A.H. Gay and Catherine Ann Devereaux Edmondston.[6] Her voice becomes truly resonant when compared to her contemporaries, who recorded in their works variations of Stone's journey from proud Southern woman to defiant and humbled Confederate patriot.[7] Together, their voices weave together a tapestry of wartime memory, intricate and literate analysis of the ravaged home front, and Confederate nationalist fervor.

Sarah Katherine "Kate" Stone was born in Mississippi Springs, Miss., on Jan. 8, 1841. She lived most of her early life at Brokenburn, a 1,200-acre cotton plantation in northeastern Louisiana, near the Mississippi River, about 30 miles northwest of Vicksburg. Stone lived there with her widowed 37-year-old mother, two uncles, five brothers and a younger sister. Her father died in 1855. The family enslaved about 150 men, women, and children, who labored in the house or in the fields. Stone documented her life and experiences mostly during the Civil War, from 1861 to 1868, in a diary she named after the plantation.

[5] Yael A. Sternhell, *Routes of War: The World of Movement in the Confederate South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012). Sternhell argues that Stone joined other Southern men not simply in their defiance of the North and defense of the South – she also joined a new political space that "allowed them to showcase … their Confederate patriotism." Also see Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) and Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore*. Edwards explained that when Stone's family fled to Texas and lived among less privileged people, Stone, who detested them, used her clothing to express both traditional femininity and superior social standing. But as wear and tear over time diminished the quality of her wardrobe, Stone feared that the loss of those outward symbols meant she was just like "the common women she so loathed."

[6] Sarah Morgan Dawson, *A Confederate Girl's Diary* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), accessed March 30, 2022, http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/dawson/menu.html; Emma Holmes, *The Diary of Miss Emma Holmes, 1861-1865*, ed. John F. Marszalek (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994); Francis Hewitt Fearn, *Diary of a Refugee* (New York: Moffat, Yard and Co, 1910), accessed March 30, 2022, http://docsouth.unc.edu/fpn/fearn/menu.html; Mary A.H. Gay, *Life in Dixie During the War*, ed. J.H. Segars (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), and Catherine Anne Devereux Edmondston, "*Journal of a Secesh Lady": The Diary of Catherine Anne Devereaux Edmondston*, eds. Beth Gilbert Crabtree and James Patton (Raleigh: University of North Carolina Press, 1979).

[7] Clara Juncker, "Writing (in) the Contact Zone: Kate Stone's *Brokenburn*." *Nordlit*, 1, no. 1 (February, 1998). Juncker claims that Stone's text – rendered in the classically feminine diary form -- creates "a 'contact zone,' " where opposing classes, outlooks, and cultures meet. She overcomes self-doubt. She loathes then learns to love Texas. She struggles to reconcile gendered expectations of her life while also wishing for feminist "independence and self-determination."

Stone studied at Nashville Female Academy in Tennessee. She considered herself tall. "Not quite five feet six," Stone wrote in 1861, "and thin, have an irregular face, a quantity of brown hair, a shy, quiet manner, and talk but little."[8] Stone, then 20 years old, enjoyed an antebellum life of leisure typical for a young woman whose family stood in the upper echelons of Southern plantation society. She played the piano, picked fruits and berries in the surrounding fields and forests, entertained friends and relatives, attended church regularly and rode her beloved horse, Wonka.

Stone considered herself intelligent, sarcastic and romantic. She loved literature, and she filled her diary with the names of her favorite authors—including Victor Hugo, Alfred Tennyson, Edgar Allen Poe, Walter Scott, and William Shakespeare—along with occasional short reviews of her latest reads.

The 1860 presidential election and Abraham Lincoln's victory a few months before cast a growing shadow of concern over the thoughts Stone recorded in her diary. The Confederate bombardment of Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor sent waves of war fever across much of the South, including at Brokenburn.[9] "Throughout the length and breadth of the land," Stone wrote in May 1861, "the trumpet of war is sounding ... men are hurrying by thousands, eager to be led to battle against Lincoln's hordes ... willing to meet death in defense of the South. ... Never again can we join hands with the North, the people who hate us so. … Our Cause is just and must prevail."[10]

Stone's brothers and her uncle Bo joined the Confederate army, and they fought in Virginia. She admitted a twinge of guilt in her journal. "They go to bear all hardships," she wrote, "while we whom they go to protect are lapped safe in luxurious ease."[11]

The family's confidence and excitement over war was tempered by intensifying fear of potential revolt of the enslaved population. Stone's journal entries captured her view of slavery, which was typical of her time and class. She generally described the enslaved people warily, from a distance, or with amusement or pity. But they also represented an existential threat that the culturally and economically tectonic forces of war could possibly unleash upon the South. Rumors of a possible insurrection—she worried invasions of Northern legions might inspire the enslaved population—haunted her waking hours, especially when one rumor specified that a revolt may finally take place on July 4, 1861.[12]

[8] Stone, *Brokenburn*, 35.
[9] Gary Gallagher, Stephen Engle, Robert Krick and Joseph Glatthaar, *Civil War: Fort Sumter to Appomattox* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Osprey Publishing, 2014), 31-33.
[10] Stone, *Brokenburn*, 14-19.
[11] Ibid., 17.
[12] Ibid., 28. On June 19, 1861, she wrote, "The runaways are numerous and bold. We live on a mine that the Negroes are suspected of an intention to spring on the fourth of next month. The information may be true or false, but they are being well watched in every section where there are any suspects. Our faith is with God."

During the war's first two years, Stone felt alternating waves of optimism and dread as news from battlefields ranging from Kentucky to Virginia flowed in. "The manner in which the North is moving her forces, now that she thinks us surrounded and can give us the annihilating blow," Stone wrote in January 1862, "reminds me of a party of hunters crowded around the covert of a deer, and when the lines are drawn and there is no escape, they close in and kill."[13]

The uncertainties of war swirled through Stone's life and inspired her to focus on her domestic world—the only arena over which she felt she had any control. She saved seeds from the family's garden for later use, anxiously scanned the mail and newspapers for fresh updates on the war, sewed clothing, studied French and picked fruit from the orchards around the plantation.[14]

Stone also fought her restlessness with activity, particularly by helping the war effort. She sewed gloves and uniforms for soldiers. She used grass and straw to make hats. The design of socks puzzled her, however. "It is too complicated for my head," she wrote. By late 1862, she was weaving, and she resorted to using linen sheets to make underwear. "Clothes have been a secondary consideration," she concluded glumly. "Fashion is an obsolete word, and just to be decently clad is all we expect."[15]

The Union capture of New Orleans—Stone called it the "greatest city of the South"—and the collapse of any significant military defense of Louisiana left her disgusted. She wrote that the state "lies powerless at the feet of the enemy". Confederate military commanders urged Louisiana plantations to burn their cotton to keep it out of the enemy's hands. "As far as we can see," Stone wrote, "are the ascending wreaths of smoke … we hear that all the cotton of the Mississippi Valley … is going up in smoke." Stone's mother ordered $20,000 worth of Brokenburn's cotton to be destroyed. Stone reported the massive fires burned for two days.[16]

As Northern armies targeted Vicksburg, a key city on the Mississippi River, the war moved closer to Brokenburn, at times only 30 miles away from the fluctuating frontlines. By May 1862, Stone could hear the cannons blasting the city's defenses. In June, during a visit to a friend's riverside home, Stone personally spotted Union forces for the first time. Federal gun boats, which she described as "dark, silent and sinister," sailed past them.[17]

[13] Ibid., 85-92.
[14] Ibid., 18.
[15] Ibid., 51, 109, 147. For greater contextual consideration of Confederate women's contributions on the home front, see Faust, "Altars of Sacrifice: Confederate Women and the Narratives of War," In *The Journal of American History* 76, no. 4 (March 1990), 1200-28. Also see Faust's *Mothers of Invention* and Stephanie Jones Rogers, *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019).
[16] Ibid., 100-101.
[17] Ibid., 105.

Nearby slaveholders, Stone observed, were concerned the Union Army offensive operation would entice their enslaved workers to escape. Several plantation owners marched the enslaved westward—far enough to dim the hopes of any enslaved individuals contemplating joining the Northern forces. Her mother planned to do the same.[18]

For Stone, 1863 began with mixed feelings. Her brother was recovering from his recent battle wounds, which brought her relief. Newspapers cheered Confederate victories at Fredericksburg and the enduring resistance of Vicksburg, now besieged by Union forces, and that brought her hope. But she also worried, ironically, that Confederate victories may inspire demoralized and bitter Federal troops to "lay this whole country [to] waste [and] send out bands of Negroes and soldiers to burn and destroy".[19]

Union troops flooded the community around Brokenburn in late January. On Jan. 26, she wrote in her diary, "Preparing to run from the Yankees. I commit my book to the bottom of a packing box with only a slight chance of seeing it again." After six weeks, in early March, Stone opened her journal and explained that the presence of many federal troops inspired her frightened mother to pack up the family and prepare to flee westward. But the roads were clogged with other panicked people, and she changed her mind.[20]

Stone watched enslaved men and women take advantage of the proximity of Union forces and leave their plantations. Others left but then returned with Federal soldiers to seize the estates. In early April, Stone and her family fled Brokenburn. She explained in her diary that Stone and her mother visited a neighbor on March 26. During the visit, an enslaved person carrying a weapon startled them and herded them into one room. Other enslaved individuals entered the home and carried off the family's possessions. Thoroughly horrified, Stone and her mother raced back to Brokenburn, quickly packed, and ordered some of their enslaved individuals to accompany them. A violent evening lightning storm concealed their escape to East Texas. "So passes the glory of the family," Stone wrote.[21]

They moved from town to town, down roads clogged with other Southerners fleeing the Union troops. By July, they crossed into Texas. In September, Stone learned that her brother Coleman died of his injuries after a battle in Mississippi. "Death does not seem half so terrible as it did long ago," she mused. "We have grown used to it."[22]

[18] Ibid., 127. Also see Candice N. Shockley, "'They Call Us All Renegades in Tyler:' Elite Refugee Women in Civil War Texas, in" *Women in Civil War Texas: Diversity and Dissidence in the Trans-Mississippi*, Deborah M. Liles and Angela Boswell, eds. (Denton: University of North Texas Press, 2016), 228-56.
[19] Ibid., 168-169.
[20] Ibid., 169-170.
[21] Ibid., 183-184, 203.
[22] Ibid., 258-259. Faust, "Altars of Sacrifice," 1225. Faust categorized Stone's view on death by mid-1863 as the "erosion of the sacredness of sacrifice."

Stone hated Texas. She derided it as "the dark corner of the Confederacy". She thought the landscape so ugly that "there must be something in the air of Texas fatal to beauty". The people disgusted her, and Stone claimed that she had not "not seen a good looking or educated person since we entered the state". The fashion appalled her, and Stone wrote, "nothing looks funnier that a woman walking around with an immense hoop [skirt]—barefooted". Even the moments when Stone needed to eat revolted her. She remembered enduring one meal "with the dirtiest people we have met yet," and she lost the remnants of any appetite when she saw the servants washing the plates "at the duck pond right out in the yard".[23]

The journal also recorded Stone's slow emergence from shock and sadness as she learned how to appreciate her new life in the Lone Star State. Many other people from Louisiana had flooded East Texas. As the Stones traveled through the region in search of a new home, they encountered and appreciated these familiar fellow refugees.[24] They even found a few friends from their old neighborhood.

In late 1863, the Stone family settled in Tyler, Texas. Family friends were already living there. Stone made the most of it.[25] By 1864, Stone felt that she had settled into a tense, daily normality. "Everyone seems to live only in the present—just from day to day," she wrote. "Otherwise I fancy many would go crazy".[26] Minor Confederate victories in the Trans-Mississippi Theater a region that mostly included Mississippi, Louisiana, and East Texas—brightened her mood. When the Confederate conscription act lowered the age for enlistment to seventeen, in August, Stone saw a third brother join the Confederate Army. James Stone joined a Louisiana unit. When she saw black Union soldiers for the first time, she was horrified. "The Paternal Government at Washington," she wrote, "has done all in its power to incite a general insurrection throughout the South, in the hopes of thus getting rid of the women and children in one grand holocaust. We would be practically helpless should the Negroes rise, since there are so few men left at home".[27]

[23] Ibid., 226-238.
[24] For a recent study of Southern women fleeing war, see Thavolia Glymph,*The Women's Fight: The Civil War's Battles for Home, Freedom, and Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 26. She characterized the chaos of women's flight as a "rupture in the fabric of the slave South and the race and class distinctions that governed it." When upper-class white women were mixed in with black people on the roads, she writes that it "suggested a loss of the power to discipline the spaces of contact. A line had been crossed. …"
[25] Ibid., 230. Christopher Long, "Tyler, TX," *Handbook of Texas Online*, https://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/entries/tyler-tx, accessed September 3, 2021; Robert W. Glover, *Tyler & Smith County, Texas: An Historical Survey* (Denton, TX: n.p., 1976), 35-55, *The Portal to Texas History*, http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapth61117/m1/39, accessed September 3, 2021, 45-48, 55. Wartime Tyler was five times bigger than it was before 1861. Stone's mother was probably drawn to the commercial, military, and cultural center because it would most likely have a tutor for her sons, medical facilities, military protection, and a social scene for her daughter.
[26] Ibid., 279.
[27] Ibid., 298.

In 1865, Stone's determined belief in ultimate Confederate victory remained firm. She was sure independence was inevitable, no matter how many times she heard of actual Confederate battlefield defeats. Stone believed that "the darkest hour is just before the dawning," and she pilloried anyone who did not share her belief in the Cause.[28] By the spring, rumors swirled about possible Confederate surrender. She wrote that the men and women around shared her desperate doubts, and yet "over every pleasure sweeps the shadow of the evil news. It may be true. It may be true". In late April, she heard of Lincoln's assassination. "All honor to J. Wilkes Booth," she wrote, "who has rid the world of a tyrant and made himself famous for generations".[29]

By May 1865, Stone surrendered to reality. Reliable news of Robert E. Lee's surrender to U.S. Grant at Appomattox Courthouse finally reached Tyler, Texas. Stone was crushed. "'Conquered, submission, subjugation' are words that burn into my heart," she wrote in mid-May, "and yet I feel that we are doomed to know them in all their bitterness ... [W]e will be slaves, yes slaves, of the Yankee Government. The degradation seems more than we can bear".[30]

Stone grew to love her Texas home, so much so that she called 1865 "the happiest year of my life". But her mother was ready to head back to Louisiana to reclaim their plantation. When they returned, Stone was appalled at what she saw. The house was stripped of furnishings. The fields were neglected. And formerly enslaved people now expected wages for their labor. "How I fear that the life at Tyler has spoiled us for plantation life," she wrote. "Everything seems sadly out of time".[31] The plantation never recovered financially.

After the war, Stone wrote less regularly in the diary. In late 1869, she married Henry Holmes, a former Confederate officer. They had four children—William, Emmett, Katy and Amanda. Stone died in late December 1907, age 66, in Tallulah, Louisiana.

Sarah Katherine "Kate" Stone

Born	Jan. 8, 1841 at Mississippi Springs, Mississippi
Died	December 18, 1907 in Tallulah, Louisiana
Buried	Silver Cross Cemetery, Tallulah, Louisiana
Father	William Patrick Stone

[28] Ibid., 323.
[29] Ibid., 331-333.
[30] Ibid., 339-340.
[31] Ibid., 358-365.

Mother	Amanda Susan Ragan
Career Milestones	She didn't have a professional career. Women of her time and class were expected to stay at home, read poetry, fend off courters, assist her mother, look after young siblings, and luxuriate in the world created by slave-based societies.

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