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Reflective Essay

As with many research projects, in the beginning my work was unorganized and lacking in any true trajectory. Largely a foray into the vast area of study that is Civil War history, my hectic search resulted in me deciding on a new topic every couple of days. Eventually, encouraged by my instructor, Ph.D. candidate Roger Bailey, I decided to pursue an interest in social history by focusing on women spies in the Civil War. Originally, I was determined to discover the correlation between stifling gender roles in the Old South, and how this social atmosphere contributed to upper-class Southern women actively deciding to turn against their home states and become spies for the North (as several did). As it turns out, my modern feminist perspective did not reflect trends of the past. Instead, a moral detest of slavery seemed to lie at the heart of most of these women's actions. Finding this conclusion too broad, I decided to change my research to cater to a far more controversial field: Civil War memory. Why I asked myself, is the Confederacy still revered today, even outside of Southern states? Inspired by an article read as a part of instructor Bailey's course, Alice Fahs' "The Feminized Civil War: Gender, Northern Popular Literature, and the Memory of the War, 1861-1900", I resolved to continue looking at the Civil War through the lens of gender and espionage, however, I decided also to focus on how works of literature involving women spies contributed to how the Civil War is remembered in America today.

My premier source, Fahs' article, was assigned during the course, but from there I delved into other famous works about Southern women, many of which were recommended by professor Bailey. I looked to UMD libraries for most of my sources, from Drew Gilpin Faust's *Mothers of Invention* to Nina Silber's *The Romance of Reunion*. Besides books, I also used several of the library's databases to discover both secondary and primary sources. Most useful to me were the library databases, "American Periodicals Series", "American Historical Newspapers", and "Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers", which I was exposed to after a class meeting led by Eric Lindquist of McKeldin Library. Lastly, one of the most helpful services at the library that I took advantage of was the Interlibrary Loan, which allowed me to receive books from other university libraries in a timely manner.

Due in part to the easy acquisition of texts from the University library system, I found that I had a three-foot pile of library books stacked on my dorm room desk by the middle of the semester. Knowing that even a love of reading couldn't get me through all of these works by the project's due date, the process I underwent to choose sources for my work involved skimming article abstracts and book introductions. Given that my work was extremely specific, I searched for secondary sources that analyzed upper-class Southern women's roles in the Civil War, and how the Civil War has been romanticized in literature. For primary source documents, I relied largely on newspaper articles from the era which mentioned female spies (relying heavily on the aforementioned databases as well as *The New York Times*' archives) along with magazines from the era that frequently published works of fiction. For works of fiction, my primary source was *Harpers New Monthly Magazine*, which I subscribed to. I analyzed primary source documents by examining change over time. For instance, I analyzed how Northern newspapers presented female spies during the war, then how fiction authors portrayed them in their work shortly after the war, and finally, in the 1910's (when Northern newspapers revisited female spies), how their positive remarks about Southern female spies differed drastically from the newspaper reports

during the war. By doing this, I was able to map a clear change in the work written about female spies over time and was able to connect that to the general trend in Civil War commemoration.

On the whole, this project—late-night searches in McKeldin, dead-end research inquiries and all—truly cemented my belief that historic research is what I want to do with my life. Whether that means I will pursue a doctorate in the field, or work in library sciences later in life, I don't quite know yet, but I do know that I've found something that I truly enjoy in academia. It has enhanced my appreciation for my professors and especially for the university library system, without which, I could have never completed my work.

Looking back on this work, the only differences I would have made would be to visit the archives at Hornbake more frequently. In week six of instructor Bailey's course, our class gathered in the archives and received excellent instruction on how to use the archives for our research. By the time I decided upon my topic, I was so caught up in searching through online databases, that I didn't take the time to appreciate the hard historic evidence that could be at my fingertips in Hornbake Library. History cannot be found only in books or the internet. It is waiting out in the real world, whether that be in the archives at Hornbake, the monuments at Antietam and elsewhere, or the oral recollections of the participants. Because of this project, I have learned to look beyond what is on the page or in the database, and explore history as it was lived, in order to make it accessible for everyone.