"Commodification and the Cultural Economy of the Household"

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In Fall 1864, the authors of essays entitled "Our Domestic Affairs" and "A Great Social Problem" put the argument to northern readers of the New York journal *Continental Monthly*: one of the nation's highest priorities should be to reform the "evils which attend our domestic service." Never mind that sickening casualty figures from the summer's military campaigns and the stalemate of siege operations around Petersburg threatened the re-election chances of President Abraham Lincoln and the continued prosecution of the Republicans' policy of slave emancipation (both of which the *Continental* supported). With an earnestness borne of true sacrifice, these authors came very close to suggesting that the central issue of the Civil War was the impending crisis of the bourgeois household: there were "no good servants" anymore and very soon there might be "no servants at all."[1]

The current reality and future prospect were awful to contemplate. How did it come to this? Irish domestic workers, knowing full well that the demand for their services was intense, exhibited too much "independence." Having inculcated the radical idea that their interests differed from those of their employers, they mouthed off and sought other positions at the slightest provocation. Native-born poor women could not be convinced that household service was respectable labor. Instead, they chose to be seamstresses and loom tenders—a veritable "slavery" if these commentators ever saw it. Moreover, scheming proprietors of intelligence offices—employment agents who sold labor-market information—routinely duped housewives into paying fees for dishonest, disobedient, and haughty employees and reaped additional reward when mistresses returned to their offices in a search for more promising workers. Bourgeois women were themselves to blame, neglecting the precepts of good management that would ensure balanced household accounts and failing to demonstrate the "*sovereignty*" over their staff that would make households run more efficiently. Then there were the changes the war had wrought: soldiers had gone off to fight, so those in search of male workers inevitably

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[1] [George Wurts], "Our Domestic Affairs," *The Continental Monthly* 6, no. 3 (September 1864): 241, 243; G. V. [probably Gulian C. Verplanck], "A Great Social Problem," *The Continental Monthly* 6, no. 4 (October 1864): 441.

encountered "*labor famine*." Moreover, as those soldiers marched South, they "destroyed the last lingering type of the servant post: the faithful black."[2]

And yet, there was a silver lining in emancipation. Abolishing slavery was an absolute necessity, the *Continental* had argued in the early months of 1862, because slavery fostered a class of arrogant slaveholders who believed labor and capital were at odds with each other. Poor southern whites did not, as a result, appreciate the inherent value of hard work. The Irish servant women in northern cities who shared these ideas about class were impediments to the progressive tide of civilization, "Republicanism," and the harmony of interests that the policy of emancipation was designed to ennoble. The purpose of this war was to reconstruct a free republic from the household up. What, pray tell, would that process look like? While the *Continental*'s writers were in favor of equality of opportunity and equality before the law for all Americans, they believed that the "subordination" of workers should define wage labor relations. The end of slavery in the South, they hoped, would temper the saucy independence of northern domestic workers. When white southern women began to do work in their own homes, "there will be a swarming out from the kitchens of the South of Dinah and Phillis *et als*., and many of these superfluous servants will find their way North" to be employed by urban mistresses. "The trained house-servants of the South are the best in the world," the *Continental* informed its readers. "They are docile, cleanly, quickwitted, and respectful to humbleness." The implication was that competition from formerly enslaved women would bring intractable Irish domestics to heel. Slave emancipation—mediated, so these authors hoped, by "model" intelligence offices directed by honest proprietors who cared about employers' interest—promised to liberate northern employers most of all.[3]

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[2] [Wurts], "Our Domestic Affairs," 241-253 (for "independence," see 248; "*sovereignty*," 249; and "slavery," 252); G. V., "A Great Social Problem," 441-444 (for "destroyed the last," see 441-42, and "*labor famine*," 442).

[3] For the antislavery ideology of the *Continental*, see Alice Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 159, 345n14; "Our War and Our Want," *The Continental Monthly* 1, no. 2 (February 1862): 113-117 ("Republicanism" on 117); "Among the Pines," *The Continental Monthly* 1, no. 1 (January 1862): 35-46; "The True Basis," *The Continental Monthly* 1, no. 2 (February 1862): 136-138; [Wurts], "Our Domestic Affairs," 245, 252, 253 ("subordination," "there will be a swarming out," and "the trained house-servants"; and G. V., "A Great Social Problem," 444 ("model"). For more on the ways northern employers framed slave emancipation as opportunity for themselves in the labor market, see Brian P. Luskey, "Special Marts: Intelligence Offices, Labor Commodification, and Emancipation in

The crisis the Civil War posed to the household was, of course, not the elite's special struggle. Neither was the crisis new. The authors of the *Continental* essays would not acknowledge early American capitalism's brutal lessons: some people's ability to realize their ambitions rested on others' desperation; some people's success imperiled others' survival. Commodification was a process that defined slavery and the slave trade in Early America, and it shaped wage labor as well. Historians of working people have shown that elite Americans did a great deal of cultural work to obscure what Seth Rockman has called the "hard work of being poor," suggesting that poor people were shiftless and lacking the spirit of "go ahead" to improve themselves and their station in society. The *Continental*'s critique was cut from this cloth. Many Americans also believed that the Civil War, as Scott Sandage has contended, was a "war for ambition." Striving was the sole explanatory factor for people's success—and striving, in an era of emancipation, was now supposedly possible for everyone.[4]

Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 3, no. 3 (September 2013): 360-391. In my current book project, entitled *Men Is Cheap Here: The Intelligence Office and the Cultural Economy of Nineteenth-Century America*, I examine intelligence offices because they help us understand how Americans thought about wage labor, the dissemination of information, and slave emancipation during the Early Republic and Civil War. As profit-minded mediators between workers and employers, antebellum intelligence office proprietors resided at the center of cultural debates about business ethics, the bourgeois household, and the process of commodification at the heart of wage labor relations. Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, and other commentators also found intelligence offices good to think with because they helped illuminate the challenges that capitalism and the anonymous city posed to citizens seeking reliable information. Intelligence offices, even though they were widely despised, proliferated during an era of slave emancipation because reformers, bureaucrats, and northern employers identified them as the best means to funnel populations of Union soldiers, Confederate deserters and refugees, and southern freedpeople into waged work during and immediately after the Civil War.

[4] On the need for more scholarship on "cultural economy" that "blurs the line between slavery and freedom," illuminates "the historical process by which the boundaries between slavery and 'freedom' were drawn," and explores the ways Americans created the social relations and practices of markets and the idea of "the market" simultaneously, see Amy Dru Stanley, "Wages, Sin, and Slavery: Some Thoughts on Free Will and Commodity Relations," *Journal of the Early Republic* 24, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 284; Walter Johnson, "The Pedestal and the Veil: Rethinking the Capitalism/Slavery Question," *Journal of the Early Republic* 24, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 306; Stephanie Smallwood, "Commodified Freedom: Interrogating the Limits of Anti-Slavery Ideology in the Early Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* 24, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 298; and Rosanne Currarino, "Toward a History of Cultural Economy," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 2, no. 4 (December 2012): 577. For the connections between "prosperity" and "privation" in Early Republic capitalism, and for the "hard work of being poor," see Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 2-3, 158-193. For the "war for ambition," see Scott Sandage, *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 189-225.

How did ordinary Americans navigate the economic crisis of the Civil War? What work—manual, nonmanual, and cultural—did they do to safeguard their household economies and even try to give voice to or realize their ambitions? I try to answer these questions by examining the correspondence of a few Civil War soldiers and their wives and the testimony taken down by government investigators seeking to stop the practice of recruitment fraud, a market in men masterminded by a nefarious class of brokers. The experiences of these ordinary men and women differed from those of elite household heads and bad businessmen, and yet the cultural economy of Early America connects them: the narratives and practices of aspiration, credit, management, and commodification that soldiers and their wives deployed to deal with economic challenges and give shape to their dreams brought them into conversation with the *Continental*'s assertions, brokers' calculations, and earlier generations' ideas about household economy. Exploiting and experiencing the process of commodification—the reference to the "swarming out . . . of Dinah and Phillis *et als*." was merely one evocation of it during the Civil War—was as central to the gendering of the household economy when slavery was coming to an end as it had been during the colonial era and the Early Republic. In this conversation, Americans reached back in time for tried-and-true strategies that heralded achievement, measured the spaces between failure and survival and between survival and success, and clashed with each other about the boundaries of moral legitimacy in the market. I hope that, even though the Civil War is very, very, late in Early America, the evidence here might start a conversation of our own about the connections among older historiographical debates concerning household survival, the social effects of slave emancipation in the Atlantic World, and domesticity and newer ones about cultural economy and commodification.

Let me introduce Henry Walker, a laborer from Remsen, New York, just north of Utica, who enlisted as a private in the 117th New York Infantry in August 1862. He agreed, according to his enlistment papers, to "bear true faith and allegiance to the United States of America" and to "serve them honestly and faithfully against all their enemies or opposers whomsoever." He took these contractual obligations to heart, writing to his family a few weeks later that his purpose as a soldier was to "defend your rights to the best of my abilities" and uphold "the best government that ever was." He would be an

exemplar of the manhood demanded of volunteers who would, through discipline and self-sacrifice, help to save the Republic. But once President Lincoln had issued the Emancipation Proclamation, Walker also incorporated the rights of slaves—whom he called the "thousands of poor soles that never new what freedom was"—into the cause of defending the Union. Walker's statement about rights and his willingness to consider an expansive view of who deserved those rights corroborate the evidence that historians have culled from thousands of soldiers' diaries and letters to understand why soldiers fought in the Civil War. These were men of steadfast principle who nevertheless periodically reconsidered those persuasions in light of conversations and experiences with comrades, interactions with African American slaves, and the war's rapidly shifting circumstances.[5]

And yet, for Henry Walker, the Civil War created an economic, as well as an ideological, crisis, unsettling both the material basis for his family's survival and how he thought about success. His household was imperiled by the demands the war placed upon it. The 1860 Federal Census for Remsen shows that Walker owned land valued at $500. The economic panic early in the war likely played a role in driving him from the rank of "farmer" into that of "laborer"—the occupational designation on his enlistment contract. And it may be that he went to war because he had no options that were better than soldiering, which promised thirteen dollars per month. By 1862, with he and his son Albert off fighting, his wife Persis and their six daughters (the oldest was fifteen years old and the youngest was six) resided on rented land. Henry's letters home, overflowing with references to delinquent paymasters and quartermasters, reveal the frustrations of a

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[5] "Enlistment Form of Henry Walker, 117th New York Regiment," Digital Collections, Hamilton College, Hamilton, New York, accessed September 18, 2014, at http://contentdm6.hamilton.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/civ-117/id/332/rec/1; Henry Walker to Persis Walker, September 3, 1862; April 5, 1863; in Henry Walker Correspondence, Library of Congress. For the manhood of Civil War soldiers defined as sacrifice for the "family" of comrades and the nation at large, see Reid Mitchell, *The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3-18, 155, 158, 166. For soldiers' motivations for fighting, see James McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Chandra Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007); Aaron Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought: Family and Nation in Civil War Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); and Gary Gallagher, *The Union War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011). Sheehan-Dean discusses the ways Confederate soldiers understood their soldiering work in terms of their contractual obligations in *Why Confederates Fought*, 51.

man who was hemmed in. Far from home, earning low wages as an enlisted man and despairing of obtaining the state bounty owed to him, he found it difficult to help his family make ends meet. While he manfully struggled on behalf of his country and on behalf of slave emancipation, he risked defaulting on his obligation to ensure his family's competency.[6]

Henry wasn't the only soldier to be frustrated in his efforts to scrape by. In the early months of 1863, another Union soldier named Charles Bowen wrote home to his family to complain about a pressing concern—he and his comrades had not been paid for months and they were "starving for the money." He suspected that the government withheld wages to keep the men from deserting, and implied that, when they were paid, many of his fellow soldiers *would* desert. It is wise that we not overstate the freedoms associated with the labor contract in Early America. Certainly, wage laborers were not slaves: they could walk when they wanted to look for higher wages and better working conditions. But employers often responded to waged workers' threats of leaving by refusing to give them back pay. That counter-threat usually dissuaded laborers from finding new jobs. Army service was waged work and it was coercive. Enlisted men signed contracts to serve their respective governments, and the yoke was made more

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[6] According to an 1860 survey made by the *New York Tribune*, wages for farm laborers in New York State were similar to soldiers' pay. See "Wages of Farm Laborers," *New York Daily Tribune*, February 18, 1860, 5. As a point of comparison, the *Tribune*'s examination of Manhattan's labor market found higher wage rates. For instance, bakers averaged $6 per week, coopers earned $7.50 per week, and retail dry goods clerks took home roughly $10.50 per week. See "Labor and Wages," *New York Daily Tribune*, March 31, 1860, 5. 1860 Federal Census for Remsen, Oneida County, New York, Roll M653_825, page 755, image 680, accessed at ancestry.com. Walker also informed the census enumerator that he owned $25 worth of personal estate. In the 1850 census, Walker is listed as a farmer who owned no real estate. See 1850 Federal Census for Plainfield, Otsego County, New York, M432_580, page 74A, image 152, accessed at ancestry.com. The Walkers' loss of their land likely put them in good company in New York state. As Nancy Grey Osterud has argued, "by the Civil War many farm families were working mortgaged or rented land." See Osterud, *Bonds of Community: The Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 205. While soldiers were supposed to be paid monthly, the challenges paymasters faced in linking up with armies, soldiers' absences on picket duty and other special assignments, and mistakes made in filling out descriptive rolls and other paperwork meant that soldiers (and thus their families) often went without pay for several months at a time. See Persis Walker to Henry Walker, May 1, 1863; Henry Walker to Persis Walker, September 3, October 17, 1862; both in Henry Walker Correspondence; and the correspondence in Boxes 2-4, (1863-1865), of paymaster Chambers Baird, of Ohio, in Baird Papers, Rubenstein Library, Duke University.

galling for soldiers because army discipline called for wage forfeiture as punishment for a variety of infractions and a much harsher punishment for desertion—execution.[7]

Soldiers often interpreted this coercion in gendered terms. Bowen had to clean his own clothes in the cold water of a stream near Falmouth, Virginia. What a "vexatious" task, he complained to his wife, Katie, who, we may presume, understood just how tedious washing was. Charles announced to her that he wasn't doing such work any longer: "I have for the last two months paid one of the men thirty cents to do it for me." That soldier, Bowen wrote, "is an industrious fellow & picks up a great many shillings in this way, & many of the boys employ him." Bowen picked up the pervasive cultural narrative that hard work would yield steady gains so that he could praise this man who did women's work. "He needs all he can earn for he has a wife & five children up in St. Paul, Minn[esota]. who depend on him for support. How hard it is for some who have large families to support to be kept out of their pay for six months [and] more at a time & keep receiving letters from home begging for money to buy bread & meat for their starving little ones. This man I speak of is one of those unfortunates." For Bowen, the suffering of a Minnesota family, and the degradation that a father and husband must have felt while he bent over a washboard for a few shillings, was what made this conflict a "cruel heartless <u>bloody</u> war, that starves the innocent & enriches the guilty. Oh!," he exclaimed, "that the government would exert its mighty power in the right direction & end the unholy strife & its horrors." We're not apt to emphasize these "horrors" of the Civil War—we have so many other horrors to focus on. From Bowen's perspective, the coercive labor of soldiering demanded manly sacrifice on behalf of the nation and also made it difficult for men to provide for their families. Bowen watched in horror as a man did degrading laundry work that he, lucky enough to have thirty cents, did not have to do

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[7] As Amy Dru Stanley has argued, slave emancipation enshrined the contract as "a model of social relations among free persons." See Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), ix. Charles T. Bowen to Dear Friends at Home, January 23, 1863, Charles Bowen to Katie Bowen, January 27, 1863, in *Dear Friends at Home: The Civil War Letters and Diaries of Sergeant Charles T. Bowen, Twelfth United States Infantry, First Battalion, 1861-1864* ed. Edward K. Cassedy (Baltimore: Butternut & Blue, 2001), 219, 223; Robert J. Steinfeld, *Coercion, Contract, and Free Labor in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 9-10, 12-13, 291-292. Also see Lorien Foote, *The Gentlemen and the Roughs: Violence, Honor, and Manhood in the Union Army* (New York: New York University Press, 2010); and Mitchell, *The Vacant Chair*, 30.

any longer. But from the Minnesotan's vantage point, doing women's work was one way a coerced laborer could fulfill a man's responsibilities to his household dependents.[8]

While Henry Walker complained to his wife about his plight, he certainly did not mourn his fate like Charles Bowen did the Minnesota soldier's. Faced with the challenge of alleviating his family's economic struggles with small wages, Henry Walker resolved to work harder, dispensed advice to his family, and envisioned a future in which he and his loved ones were in control of their economic destiny. Despite his circumstances, he did not believe that mere survival would be his lot—he was looking to make something of himself. He believed he controlled his destiny. He sent as much of his wages as he could to his family, accompanied by letters in which he instructed his wife and daughters to save that money. Buy pork instead of frivolous daguerreotype "likenesses" to send to him, he pleaded. He wrote in the spirit of ambition and earned achievement that was at the core of Early America's ideology of upward mobility. Hard work and self-discipline were obligatory: "I wish you to prosper," he told his family, "rem[em]ber your life is just what you make it." Stick-to-it-iveness was also a must: "our coars in life depends on our own ener[g]y[.] persevere their is nothing like try try agan." Henry Walker was like many other soldiers when he told relatives at home how to live.[9]

Yet for all of the Franklinesque platitudes and trust in their efficacy, men's anxieties festered in Civil War correspondence. They understood that the boundary separating them from the man who stooped to launder was unclear. Soldiers repetitively explained their ambitions, lifted the curtain on their many fears, and vented their frustration to women readers. Henry's letters are a monument to mansplaining: do this, don't do that, listen to what I have to say, don't forget to follow my instructions, and write to me explaining how you've followed my instructions. They sound a lot like the *Continental* essays, which insist upon women developing skills for household survival and success because they were husbands' "most important business partner[s]." Such mansplaining illuminates the cultural process through which the economy was gendered

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[8] Charles T. Bowen to Katie Bowen, February 7, 1863, in *Dear Friends at Home*, 232.

[9] Henry Walker to Persis Walker, October 6, 1862; March 29, July 26, 1863; all in Walker Correspondence. For the "go-ahead" spirit and "ideology of achieved identity" of the times, see Scott A. Sandage, *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 18, 22-43.

and it misleads us when we try to determine both what women's economic skills were and what men thought about those skills. Other evidence from soldiers' writings shows that men knew their wives were familiar with a variety of economic transactions, practices, and strategies, that they worked very hard to benefit households without being told to do so, and that their keen insight into household management had emerged from their own experience. Housewives were actually present in the household and able to react to the situation on the ground in ways that soldiers could not possibly do from hundreds of miles away. Phrases in Henry's letters reveal his trust in Persis, even if he was quite fond of telling her what to do. In one instance, she had apparently asked whether he thought she spent money frivolously. He replied, "I do not think that you spend more than just what you nead." That might seem like a back-handed compliment, but in other letters, he encouraged her to "use your own judgment" and do as "you think best." It seems evident to me that husbands and wives relied on the practice as well as the ideal of companionate marriage to get by. Soldiers didn't need to read the *Continental* to consider their wives trustworthy "business partners": they already relied on them as such.[10]

[10] Henry Walker to Persis Walker, December 14, September 3, 1862; both in Walker Correspondence. For the "go-ahead" spirit and "ideology of achieved identity" of the times, see Scott A. Sandage, *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 18, 22-43. On companionate marriage during the Civil War, see Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought*. [Wurts], "Our Domestic Affairs," 249; Persis Walker to Henry Walker, May 1, 1863, July 11, 1863, in Walker Correspondence. Scholarship on women and the economy during the Civil War hasn't adequately addressed this gap between what men said and what women did. Nina Silber, for instance, finds that soldiers came to depend on women's management of the household economy and that women could experience "empowerment" in the market, but she also contends that women faced "new economic activities" and "new commercial relationships" during the war and were often "victims" due to their "inexperience and ignorance" of the economy. See Silber, *Daughters of the Union: Northern Women Fight the Civil War* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 11, 42-43, 47-49, 54, 64-65, 71. I agree that many women were economically vulnerable, but my research also speaks to how experienced and savvy they were in their economic affairs. My argument here is more akin to that of Jeanie Attie, who contends that women's "warwork" was so important to the aims of the nation-state that it confounded the ideology of domesticity and forced national organizations such as the United States Sanitary Commission to assign monetary value to women's labor. See Attie, *Patriotic Toil: Northern Women and the American Civil War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998). Given the recent works that examine women's economic activities and worldviews and the cultural economy of the household (or houseful), it's hard to accept that Civil War women were encountering the economy for the first time or that refined domesticity was the cultural rubric around which most American women structured their lived experience. As Jeanne Boydston and Amy Dru Stanley have shown, these cultural fictions devalued and often obscured women's housework, and were useful devices to

It is true that the Walkers' correspondence reveals that the credit relationships that Persis relied upon were ones that Henry had forged with other male household heads in their neighborhood. Bonds of credit linked men on the homefront with those on the battlefield, and men expected that their dependents would draw on these communal bonds to help them survive. To hear the Walkers tell it, Mr. Blake had agreed to pay the family's rent for them while Henry and Albert were away. Henry had done work for other neighbors before he left for the war that would provide credit for Persis to draw on in his absence. Henry always sent his pay to a Mr. Hough, who served as banker for Persis and an advocate for her in any disputes she might have within the community. The war also created new credit sources outside the community that potentially gave soldiers' wives more purchase in their transactions with male neighbors. Henry encouraged Persis to "trade on that State bounty," a promise from the State of New York to pay Henry for enlisting that Persis could repurpose in her own daily transactions as a promise that she and Henry would pay a variety of producers or sellers once they received the bounty. Households that sent no soldiers to the front were thus bound up in extralocal credit networks that the process of recruitment created.[11]

The Civil War, strange to say it, offered intermittent opportunities to soldiers' households. Henry took advantage of one such opportunity while stationed at Fort Ripley on the outskirts of Washington, D. C., in the winter of 1862. "I have bought some

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distinguish "free" society in the antebellum North from that of the slave South. But Boydston and Stanley also take pains to illuminate the work and economic experiences of nineteenth-century women that such ideological constructs had hidden. See Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); and Amy Dru Stanley, "Home Life and the Morality of the Market," in *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expressions, 1800-1880*, ed. Melvin Stokes and Stephen Conway (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1996), 74-96. Important recent books that force us to rethink our reliance on ideologies such as domesticity or "therapeutic" consumption when we examine the economic practices and strategies of women include Ellen Hartigan-O'Connor, *The Ties That Buy: Women and Commerce in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); and Susan Porter Benson, *Household Accounts: Working-Class Family Economies in the Interwar United States* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

[11] Letter from Persis Walker to Henry Walker, May 1, 1863; Letters from Henry Walker to Persis Walker, January 4, March 12, May 8, June 21, July 11, August 5, 1863; January 10, 12, and 31, 1864; Henry Walker Correspondence. While the Walkers' letters do not illuminate the credit networks among women in the community of Remsen and Forestport, New York, letters between other soldiers and their wives illustrate that women depended on the credit offered and labor done by neighboring women as well. See, for instance, the correspondence between William and Mary Lewin in William Henry Lewin Correspondence, Virginia Historical Society. For more on these networks, see Hartigan-O'Connor, *The Ties that Buy*.

Shoom[a]ker tooles and so I mend Shooes when I can get a Job[.] I get 75 cts for tapping shooes[.] I have just begun[.] my lether cost 35 cts per lbs in george tow[n].” Close to the city, he took advantage of his proximity to a supply of leather that he could use to repair the well-worn taps, or soles, of soldiers’ shoes. Soldiers were not given uniforms or shoes—they had to pay for them out of a monthly clothing allowance. So an entrepreneur who had tools and raw materials could make money from soldiers who, out of necessity, needed to repair old items because they could not buy new ones. But opportunity alone was not enough to create a market. Henry needed jobs from paying customers, and they were a finicky bunch because soldiers rarely had money. Here was another way in which household credit networks expanded and overlapped in wartime. Because soldiers were continually indebted to Henry, he could not always forward as much cash to Persis as he desired to help her buy necessary commodities or pay debts. The ways these extensive credit networks might work to his household’s disadvantage did not stop Henry from dreaming big: “[W]hen the men get their pay I shall pick up a good meny dollars a mending for the rigament.” But dreams were not equivalent to dollars. His letters reveal that Persis often asked when he would be sending funds home, so he put her off: “you must get along as well as you can until I get some money,” he explained. “[U]se eny meanes that you can to get along that you have.” Henry’s hard work and strategy for making money in camp put the cultural script of persevering hard work into practice, but a new credit network might not pay immediate dividends for a household whose members at home needed more tangible sources of income to survive.[12]

Persis dealt not only with the sporadic nature of Henry’s trade but also with neighbors who threatened their household economy. A comrade by the name of Pash stole forty dollars out of a letter Henry was getting ready to mail to Persis. Henry suggested that his wife have Mr. Hough nose around to see if Mrs. Pash was all of a sudden flush with cash. Mr. Blake walked back his promise to pay the family’s rent, explaining to Persis that “he thought” Henry “got larg pay enough.” Persis gave as good as she got, telling her husband that “I told [Blake] if I had to pay rent I should try to get another house I will not gratify the old Rebel to pay rent if I can find another house,” questioning her neighbor’s loyalties for imperiling the household economy of one of the

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[12] Henry Walker to Persis Walker, December 14, 1862, Walker Correspondence.

nation's stalwart defenders. Persis explained to her husband that she thought Blake was actually angry because she had "sold the manure" on the Walkers' rented property. Unable to obtain a steady flow of cash from her husband, she had made this decision because she "wanted some money to help to buy some meal." Henry was furious with Blake when he heard the news, because his refusal represented an affront to his expectation of what male household heads owed to each other. But this episode also shows how Persis persisted: she made independent decisions about buying goods in her husband's absence, choices with which men like Blake could find fault.[13]

Persis was the one who found a new place for her family to live. Henry encouraged her to buy "the plase"—using the money he sent and credit she could obtain in their community—in order to "make us a home." Even though these wages were his, he expected her to help decide what to do with them. Henry asked Persis to do what he had lost the ability to do by the beginning of the war—buy a farm and make a home. The potential for household independence was exhilarating, but it also put great strain on the family's finances and on Henry's fledgling shoe mending enterprise, which was increasingly difficult to carry on when his regiment moved from Washington to Virginia and then to the South Carolina coast. Buying the "home" would rest on both Henry's and Persis's hard work and commercial acumen. His soldier-customers were deeply indebted to him and, lacking capital to allocate for the purpose, he needed Persis to replenish the supplies he couldn't get at the front. Persis came through with the goods to give his business venture new life. He increased his tapping fee to $1 and announced an increase in profits that he evidently kept track of in an account book: "I earn from $1 to $3 per day when I am off duty," he told her in March 1864:

> I have $33.35 cents on book. I have sent you $10 since pay day[.] I have sold my Watch for $6[,] so that will make $39.35[.] if I get it all next pay day and our pay $26 to 39.35
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> 26
>
> $65.35

[13] Persis Walker to Henry Walker, May 1, 1863, Henry Walker to Persis Walker, May 8, 1863; January 14, 1864, all in Walker Correspondence.

> [plus] the $10 that I sent you maide the $75 that I spoke of[,] but I said if we got 4 months pay[,] I would send $75[,] but we got 2 months pay so you se[e] I am a head of what I told [you] I would do[.] we shal get our pay now soon I think[.] this is the money that I speak of now that I want you to save $25 of to pay on the contract[,] 65 or $70 in all yet to come to save from[,] so yo[u] see that shoe mending yet has some money.

Henry and Persis counted the dollars and cents because accounting—even in this primitive form—was the language of ambitious people. In itemized inventories of tools, supplies, and profits, Henry Walker made a market legible and tried to live up to the cultural narratives of self-making and "try, try, again." He was not alone in doing so, for Henry's letters reveal that Persis was asking questions and making statements about their shared economic destiny. Despite the fact that he continually advised her what to do, Persis's activities at home as purchaser of land, a house, and supplies for his business, and her market savvy as a negotiator with neighbors about access to credit, capital, and land, made her an equal participant in the creation of that market.[14]

Everyone needed to be a good manager and a good accountant, not only to "generate family income," as Mary Ryan has argued, but to "consolidate" it. It was Persis who informed Henry that re-enlistment bounties at home had risen to $900. In April 1864, he told her that he would re-enlist to earn the princely sum that would make their dreams of household independence possible. Unfortunately, before he could do so, the Walkers discovered that life itself was as precarious for soldiers as economic survival. I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad news. Henry was wounded during the Union Army's initial assaults at Petersburg, Virginia, and died in a Philadelphia hospital in July 1864. Persis's quest for survival wasn't over. She spent almost three years petitioning for a widow's pension from the federal government to support her and their children. She

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[14] Henry Walker to Persis Walker, January 31, March 6, March 17, March 31, 1864, in Walker Correspondence. For the importance of accounting practices—what Caitlin Rosenthal has termed "highly calculating modes of management"—in establishing cultures of control and legitimacy, see Caitlin C. Rosenthal, "From Memory to Mastery: Accounting for Control in America, 1750-1880," *Enterprise and Society* 14, no. 4 (December 2013): 732-748 (quotation on 735); and Michael Zakim, "Bookkeeping as Ideology," *Common-place* 6, no. 3 (April 2006), accessed September 26, 2014 at http://www.common-place.org/vol-06/no-03/zakim/.

succeeded in her application and earned eight dollars a month, plus two dollars additional per month for each of her five children under the age of sixteen until they turned that age. Her lawyer won, too, collecting $18.68 for his services, swallowing in one gulp more than one month of the pension funds that Persis would put toward the management of her household.[15]

Such were the horrors of war. Men died horrible deaths, and in Henry's case they died just as they seemed on the cusp of achieving success in what President Lincoln called, in an 1864 speech to the soldiers of the 166th Ohio, "the race of life." Was the Civil War an opportunity for men to succeed? Indeed, it was. But even Henry Walker had known that ambition alone didn't make people successful. In camp outside of Yorktown, Virginia in July 1863, as he struggled to engineer his family's comfort from far away, he dreamed of another way he and Persis could achieve independence through "*sovereignty*," much as the *Continental* imagined. After spending a day "garding" the property of a Virginia plantation owner—an "old se[ce]sch" on the Peninsula who had sworn allegiance to the United States—he mused upon the value of the African American women he called "wenches" who toiled in the planter's berry garden and cabbage patch. "I am a going to . . . bring home one to do the work for you," he told Persis. "[T]hey are so black and shiney that you would like to have one to work for you." Walker hated southern slaveholders for bringing on the war and for hypocritically claiming the fruits of allegiance to the United States. But, despite his support for emancipation, he joined southern slaveholders in thinking like a predator in the labor market. Black women, according to this logic, were things, potential commodities that would underwrite his ambitious vision of household independence.[16]

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[15] Henry Walker to Persis Walker, April 25, 1864; Chaplain James Shrigley to Mrs. Mary Walker, July 24, 1864, in Walker Correspondence; and Persis D. Walker, Application WC52101, Case Files of Approved Pension Applications of Widows and Other Dependents of Civil War Veterans, National Archives (accessed at fold3). Mary Ryan makes this argument after citing an Oneida County soldier's letters in which he sent wages to his mother. See Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 202.

[16] Abraham Lincoln, "Speech to the One Hundred Sixty-Sixth Ohio Regiment," August 22, 1864, in *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Volume 7,* ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953), accessed September 21, 2014, at http://quod.lib.umich.edu/l/lincoln/lincoln7/1:1119.1?rgn=div2;view=fulltext;q1=race+of+life. Henry Walker to Persis Walker, July 26, 1863; in Walker Correspondence. Walker was not alone in considering the possibilities of bringing home an African American woman to do domestic work for

Commodification, as Stephanie Smallwood has argued, unfolded through "representational act[s]" like this one, in which Henry envisioned a life for Persis in which she did no labor. Henry joined a multitude of others who desired to turn people into things in Early America. But his fantasy was not one of slave ownership—that would not be possible in Civil War New York. Like the *Continental*, though, he believed that emancipation would make it easier for white northern families to live the good life, propped up by the waged work of southern freedpeople. Unfortunately, we cannot know from the extant correspondence whether Persis would have "liked" this arrangement as much as Henry thought she would, but the records of the intelligence office of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society show that Philadelphia employers were excited about the opportunities made available by the commodification of newly freed laborers. One eager housewife told the Society she wanted a domestic servant who was "as black as can be." White northerners fixated on African American women's skin because the commodification of race was an integral part of the commodification of labor. Aspiring white men and women saw black laborers as symbols of bourgeois domesticity and Republican political commitments that would help them accrue cultural capital in an era of slave emancipation.[17]

Just as Henry Walker earnestly dreamed of the possibilities offered by a market in African American women to make his wife more comfortable, substitute brokers created a market in soldier-hire in which drafted men could contract with other men to do their soldiering work for them. Substitute brokers shared Walker's predatory mindset. Unlike him, they had the capital, connections, and up-to-date market information that would help them reap rewards beyond Henry's imagination. Persis's quotation of the $900 re-enlistment bounty reflects the extent to which this market was spiraling out of government control and into the hands of businessmen who hoped prices would soar. The investigations that Colonel Lafayette C. Baker made at the end of the war into the

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their wives. The lawyer and paymaster Chambers Baird asked his wife if she wanted him to bring a "contraband girl" from his post in Louisville, Kentucky to their home in Ripley, Ohio. See Chambers Baird to Judy Baird, September 3, 1863, Box 2, Baird Papers.

[17] For the "black as can be" quotation, see Silber, *Daughters of the Union*, 231-232. For a Confederate soldier supporting proposals for legislation that would allow southern privates to "capture" runaway slaves for their own use and thus, as he put it, "speculat[e] . . . in 'human flesh,' as the Abolitionists say," see Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought*, 113. Also see Smallwood, "Commodified Freedom," 292-293.

fraudulent dealings of bounty and substitute brokers who operated in New York City and Brooklyn reveal the inner workings of this market. It would be a mistake to read the pages of brokers' confiscated letters and the testimony of soldiers' wives and come away merely with an understanding that nefarious middlemen preyed upon defenseless citizens. This market, just like the one that Henry and Persis Walker envisioned and wrote into being, took shape around soldiers' and families' dreams as much as their suffering, even as brokers, armed to bear with prices current, telegraph wires, and money to grease palms, nimbly directed that ambition and despair to serve their own efforts to move commodities—men—over large distances at speedy rates. Soldiers' wives knew they had a friend in Baker, and their writings show them strategizing, preparing, and clawing their way in an economy in which they had limited access to resources.[18]

The armies of the United States needed live bodies by 1864 and 1865: casualties were mounting in a variety of combat theaters, volunteers were harder to come by, and the draft was deeply unpopular. Recruitment efforts in the war's later years were two-pronged. One track focused on enticing men to volunteer for service in hopes of earning ever-escalating monetary rewards, called bounties. The other sought to enroll substitutes for drafted men. Entrepreneurs smelled profit, positioning themselves as indispensable assistants to drafted men looking for substitutes, town and county commissioners tasked with filling local quotas in distant cities, and ordinary men and women who calculated that soldiering, a desperate choice among desperate choices, was a way to earn money. That brokers routinely swindled this assembly of petitioners is not as surprising, I think, than that the records about this market reveal so many intertwined errands of ambition and survival.[19]

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[18] The process of commodification shaped Confederates' outlook on the market in substitutes as well. Abner Ford, a Confederate artillerist, wrote frantically to his wife about the rising prices of slaves in the Richmond market and his desire that she sell the family's slaves in Lynchburg so that he could pay a substitute to replace him in the ranks. See Abner Ford Correspondence, Virginia Historical Society. For more on Confederate soldiers trying to navigate the substitute market, see Sheehan-Dean, *Why Confederates Fought*, 51, 97, 102, 143. For narratives that frame the brokerage of bounties and substitutes around the narrative of the nefarious middleman, see the *New York Times* coverage of Baker's arrests in February 1865; and Michael T. Smith, *The Enemy Within: Fears of Corruption in the Civil War North* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 127-153.

[19] For more on the draft in the North, see Eugene C. Murdock, *One Million Men: The Civil War Draft in the North* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1971); and James W. Geary, *We Need Men: The Union Draft in the Civil War* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1991).

The brokers created a market in men that radiated out from Manhattan, with city firms such as Fay & Dalton supplying and being supplied by distant agents in the hinterland of New York and Connecticut. Fay & Dalton received a steady stream of information about prices and the numbers of men needed and available, all leavened with a hearty dose of rumor that the government would make calls for more men and thus unsettle prices and supply. The chatty agent George Northrup wrote the firm in January 1865 from Troy, New York, to inform its principals that "Men is cheep here to Day[.] 3 Years Sub[stitutes] 700. to 800. Dollars." The brokers liquidated men into financial instruments only to reanimate them as commodities for sale. Telegrams called urgently for New York firms to deliver credits—scraps of blank paper and printed military recruitment forms—with names of recruited men scrawled on them. These credits could be sold to town commissioners who would fraudulently count these names against their draft quotas. This was a market of fast-moving paper exchanges, reminiscent of other early American markets, above or below board. Substitute brokers hid evidence of disease and physical deficiencies as often as slave auctioneers did by adopting the tactics of runners of counterfeit currency. They took men who had failed medical examinations in one location from town to town until they found doctors willing to vouch for their health and provost marshals willing to accept them. Whether "rejected men" were underweight or suffering from a "very bad case of Clapp," broker-alchemists who were willing to go the distance submitted them as "healthy" soldiers. They boasted to one another that they "could put anything in" the army "in the shape of man." We shouldn't be surprised that the partners of Fay & Dalton took their profits from this lucrative trade and plowed them back into another market—in United States bonds. The circle was perfect, from a business perspective: take men, repurpose them as commodities for the substitute market, turn their identities into credits and cash, and launder newly acquired wealth in patriotic paper. This was Henry Walker's "persevere" and "try, try agan" on a plane soldiers could not hope to attain.[20]

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[20] George Northrup to Fay & Dalton, January 5, 1865; W. W. Mosher to Richard Dalton, November 28, 1864; Telegram from George Satterlee to Fay & Dalton, January 14, 1864; handwritten statement of Henry E. Smith, January 6, 1865 (crediting William Cheeks to the town of West Farms, New York); United States Army Recruitment Form, January 5, 1865 (crediting Patrick Ennis to West Farm); Testimony of George H. Sitterley, April 1, 1865; Mackenzie & Mitchell to Richard Dalton, January 24, 1865; all in Box 1, Papers of Lafayette C. Baker, 1862-1866, RG 110, National Archives.

Ordinary men and women might have been excused if they exhibited reluctance to engage in this economy, with its quick pace and power players. When the scandal broke in February 1865, the newspapers crucified substitute and bounty brokers as they had done shoddy manufacturers at the beginning of the war. How dare businessmen seek profit while their nation was imperiled? They missed a crucial point, I think. These markets existed not only to serve the brokers but also because ordinary people desperately needed the substantial funds up for grabs in these exchanges for their households' survival. Bounty money might strengthen the household economy in the short term and help families pay off creditors and third-party debts. It offered survival for them even as it offered success to the brokers. For a class of men labeled bounty jumpers, it might offer pecuniary success as well, as they enlisted, obtained the bounty, deserted, and enlisted again. And yet my research suggests that these jumpers were often the subordinate agents of a broker who allowed them to keep only part of these funds. Parties to these transactions were taking tremendous risks because they seemed worth it. Baker repeatedly heard from people who had tried to bend this market to their benefit but who had come away chastened by the experience. Their assertions that they had been cheated should be understood as a crucial aspect of the cultural economy of this crisis that was as much about meaning as material distress—these were narratives that obscured ambitious motive, justified conduct, and sought second chances. Town supervisors, communicating with each other before visiting the city brokers' depots, believed that they could secure the services of men to fill their quotas on the cheap. When streetwise brokers tricked them into paying higher prices, supervisors complained to Baker, trying to hide the fact that, by trying to staff their recruitment lists with the names of non-residents, they were circumventing the spirit of the Enrollment Act.[21]

What stories did soldiers' families tell, when met with the cold impersonality of this market in men? They are heart-wrenching stories, for sure. Wives and mothers called

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Also see Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life in the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999); Edward E. Baptist, "Toxic Debt, Liar Loans, Collateralized and Securitized Human Beings, and the Panic of 1837," in *Capitalism Takes Command: The Social Transformation of Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Michael Zakim and Gary J. Kornblith (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 69-92; and Stephen Mihm, *A Nation of Counterfeiters: Capitalists, Con Men, and the Making of the United States* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007).

[21] Testimony of Isaac M. Twitchings, April 8, 1865, Box 1, Baker Papers.

on paternalistic aid from Baker and the government, resorting to narratives of imperiled household dependents not only because those stories were true but also because those stories worked. Women knew, from talking with other deponents and from experience, that these were the scripts that would convince the clerks and officers who listened to them that they were worthy of assistance. These women told Baker's men that they lived by what their husbands and sons could earn and without their support they had nowhere else to turn. Boston widow Margaret Bennett told Baker about her son John, whom scheming substitute brokers had plied with drink and shuffled aboard a ship bound to Augusta in order to enlist him in the 11th Maine. Trying to get him—and herself—out of this predicament, she pleaded: "I have depended on him for assistance. I am poor, and need his help." The boy's guardian, who was trying to prepare him to be a "[ship]master's mate," sought government officials' regard for his paternalistic prerogatives—he had "never consented" to the boy joining the army. Margaret Bennett, a neighbor said, was a "respectable, industrious poor woman" who, with two young children at home, would be at sea without the earning power of her sixteen-year-old son. It was unjust that bad things could happen to good people.[22]

The testimony that Baker's clerks took down reveals that women struggled for survival against a variety of men—brokers, army officers, and relatives—who had the ability to make their lives difficult. Women and their allies coupled stories of "destitute circumstances" and appeals for help with stories about ne'er-do-well male relatives who withheld husbands' bounty money from them. One woman feared that her husband's $500 bounty was lost forever, drowned at the bottom of her brother-in-law's whiskey bottle. Other bounty stealers met destitute women's requests for restitution of those funds with "profane language." Nefarious brokers challenged women to prove that they were in fact married to soldiers who were owed bounty payments; they hid behind vague assertions about what the "law" said they owed to wives. Both were stall tactics that worked to imperil the welfare of wives and children in the absence of breadwinning

[22] Testimony of Margaret Bennett, Edward H. Dingley, Patrick Murphy, and John Furey, January 28, 1865; Box 1, Baker Papers. These narratives, making claims to officials' paternal regard, are similar to those appeals made by southern soldiers' wives to statesmen. See Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010).

husbands and fathers. Ambitious sons might do the same thing, their heads turned by the prospect of earning sums that vastly exceeded their yearly wages. Making decisions about their careers without the knowledge or permission of parents could separate young men from their protectors and devastate the household economy all at once. Mothers had to take the responsibility for appealing to the government for their safe return.[23]

Women appear to have learned about the substitute market second-hand, after receiving a letter from a husband or son informing them that they had enlisted or had been duped into enlisting. This fact is surprising, given how regularly many soldiers communicated with their wives about their households' survival, which was often predicated on men's, women's, and children's combined earning power. Women who received letters about the substitute market not only were in danger of losing their menfolk's wages but also lost their own work time as they retraced the steps of husbands and sons back through that market to track down a bounty payment or to obtain men's release from military service. Jacob Wilsey, for instance, telegraphed his wife Jane, telling her to venture from their home in Brooklyn to Trenton, New Jersey, where he had been sent after joining the army in Newark as a substitute. He hoped she would "get my money, for I can't draw it myself" after being sent to the "front" in Virginia three days after enlisting. Upon arriving in Trenton and speaking to an officer there, Jane Wilsey discovered that the army would not let her have the money, either, since her husband "could draw it in the army himself." Undeterred by being given the run-around, she tracked down the man who had paid $900 to a broker named Mead to hire a substitute for him and confronted Mead's brother-in-law, who claimed not to "know who it was that brought her . . . Husband to that office." She suspected that "some foul play and great wrong [had been] committed," though, and after further sleuthing put the argument to Baker that Mead had not only taken her husband across state lines as a substitute, "contrary to the Laws of the Enlistment Bureau," but had pocketed $400 that should rightly be her family's. While Jane's husband thought of the bounty as his money, she

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[23] J. B. Auld to Lafayette C. Baker, March 27, 1865; Testimony of Bridget Lehey, March 27, 1865; Testimony of Mary Vogeltest, March 21, 1865; Testimony of Pauline Steinberger, March 8, 1865; Handwritten Note in regard to William White, May 9 [no year]; Testimony of Henrietta Theileman, April 21, 1865; Testimony of Sarah C. Waters, March 23, 1865; Testimony of Mary Shea, April 3, 1865; Testimony of Ann Lamey, March 27, 1865; Testimony of Julia Sullivan, March 3, 1865; Box 1, Baker Papers.

laid claim to it on behalf of the household in her testimony. She had done the detective work to trace the ways this market operated and determined that $400 was the sum that her family was owed. Baker's investigations into the fraudulent system potentially gave her the opportunity to obtain restitution.[24]

Even though narratives of helplessness grabbed Baker's attention, other women fashioned narratives that emphasized their presence and decisionmaking in household economies. Like Persis Walker, these women demonstrated their willingness and ability to negotiate with men. When Mary Tighe's husband Hugh enlisted as a substitute in October 1863, she accompanied him to a broker's office to collect the bounty due to him. "I was present," she explained in her testimony, "when the Gentleman at 228 Broadway promised my husband $600." The man "they called . . . Col[onel]. went with my husband [to the] Cor[ner] [of] Elm & Broome & received $100 from West the Pro[vost] Mar[shal][.] that is all I got. My Husband never received any more." By the time she told this story to Baker, she had been thinking about how to tell it for sixteen months. She could have evoked the image of the distressed housewife, unable to survive without her husband's wages. But she didn't: "he was promised $600" but $100 was "all I got." They went to the broker's office together, presumably having decided that Hugh would enlist. That money was going to go directly into supporting the household economy: it was hers as much as it was his.[25]

These stories about ambition and who to trust, about how to manage and who to manage, all went into gendering the household economy in Early America. The process of cultural economy was shaped out of what Rosanne Currarino has called the "messy minutiae of daily life." There is no clear story about a gendered economy from the papers of Henry and Persis Walker, or from the testimony recorded by the clerks of Colonel Baker. Every assertion seems to be contradicted by the messiness of lived experience. Often, the authors of these narratives tried to obscure the contradictions. In October 1863, a *Harper's Weekly* engraving titled "Service and Shoddy" proclaimed that the motives and experiences of the intrepid soldier differed completely from those of the nefarious contractor (**Figure 1**). The soldier's wife embodied virtues unknown or ignored by the

[24] Testimony of Jane Wilsey, March 13, 1865, Box 1, Baker Papers.
[25] Testimony of Kate Ryman, April 21, 1865; Testimony of Mary Tighe, February 27, 1865; Box 1, Baker Papers.

spendthrift contractor's wife. Here, the great problem of domestic affairs was not a lack of servants—it was that an ungrateful and selfish country mistreated the wives of the nation's defenders. And while the *Continental* and Henry Walker commodified African American women, *Harper's* condemned another potentially illegitimate trade in commodities: "shoddy" was the term Americans came to use during the Civil War for low-quality goods marketed to soldiers and to the *nouveau riche* who had illegitimately risen to respectable social status through its sale. In fact, the focus on the commodification of shoddy goods might work to obscure the parallel process of human commodification at the heart of wage labor. The *Harper's* image is clear: the war that made men and women rich was also the fight that made other men and women poor. Indeed, the evidence of this paper shows that access to capital and information about markets—and not the shoemaker's last, bristles, and leather—were the most reliable tools in making success achievable. Locked in stride with the narrative of emancipated and shackled ambitions, too, was an insidious counter narrative that affirmed and renewed capitalism's imperative to assign people a price. To appreciate the significance of the Civil War's economic crisis, we must continue to grapple with the fact that, the *Continental*, Henry Walker, and substitute brokers shared a common assumption that men and women "is cheep here," commodities that might help households survive or succeed. To borrow from Charles Bowen, that was, indeed, one of Early America's many horrors.[26]

[26] Currarino, "Toward a History of Cultural Economy," 575.

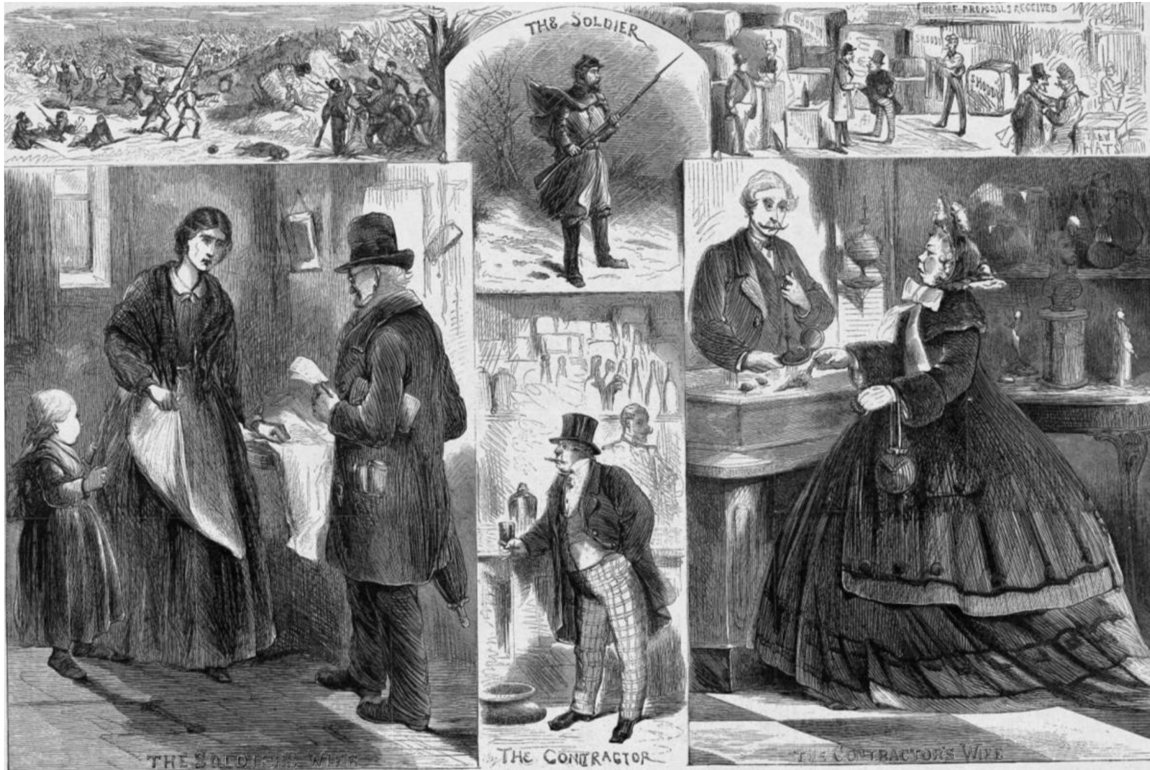

Figure 1. "Service and Shoddy—A Picture of the Times,"

***Harper's Weekly*, October 24, 1863.**