Law and Lawlessness: Government Response to Riots in Southern Cities during the Civil War

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Introduction

"There are lamp posts and rope enough to cure this worse than treason—and the remedy will be supplied by an outraged people."[1] This ominous observation was made in a poster which some disgruntled citizen posted in a public place in Mobile, Alabama before May 9th, 1863. The sentiment described could have been articulated by upset citizens in many urban centers during the Civil War. In the wartime South, cities were often the scene of violent crowd passions. From outrage over food prices to violent political passions, moments of lawlessness swept through cities, raising questions over the role government played in leading to those riots and how they dealt with such moments of lawlessness.

Historians of riots in southern cities during the Civil War have focused on bread riots in particular and their characteristics, causes and gendered elements.

Andrew Smith's *Starving the South: How the North Won the Civil War* predictably argues that hunger was the deciding factor in the Civil War.[2] Smith covers Northern and Southern agricultural production before the war, the impact of the Confederate cotton embargo, the reasons the Confederacy failed to grow more food over the course of the war, and touches on the Confederate government response to food scarcity. In his chapter on the Confederate bread riots, Smith gives a broad overview of their characteristics, causes and gendered elements. He recounts the events of various riots while largely focusing on the Richmond riot. He covers how several governmental policies contributed to the riots, and touches on how local, state and federal officials responded to riots as they happened and afterward, and finally argues that though rioting women won several concessions, the larger governmental response was a failure.

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[1] "The Volcano Smoking in Mobile," *Prairie Farmer: Devoted to Western Agriculture, Mechanics & Education* 11, no. 19 (May 9, 1863): 299.

[2] Andrew F. Smith, *Starving the South: How the North Won the Civil War* (1st ed. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2011).

William Warren Rogers' *Confederate Home Front: Montgomery During the Civil War* is a microhistory providing valuable examples of food scarcity and its impact on poor women, the demands placed on local government, and solutions implemented by the local government that created riotous conditions.[3] Teresa Crisp Williams' and David Williams' "'The Women Rising': Cotton, Class, and Confederate Georgia's Rioting Women" examines the deteriorating conditions that led to the bread riots and argues that the riots happened because lower-class women were not protected by Southern men, specifically by planters that grew too much cotton and not enough food, leading to speculation, outrage and riot.[4] Eugene M. Lerner's "Money, Prices, and Wages in the Confederacy, 1861-65" illuminates the problem of inflation and the ineffective measures taken by the Confederate government to control it, arguing that the money supply increased as the real output of the Confederate economy decreased, leading to popular outrage.[5]

Because most of the rioters were women, much of the historiography of riots focuses on how gender shaped them. One notable center of historiography examines the injustice women felt at being subjected to conditions of rising prices, speculation, and governmental neglect. In *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore,* Laura Edwards examines the lives and contributions of Southern black and white women in the 19th century, using the framework of several women's writings.[6] Edwards focuses on the household as the center of Southern society and draws on primary sources to explore the actions and experiences of Southern women in their social context. Edwards claims that poor white women in Confederate cities during the war rioted because of

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[3] William Warren Rogers, *Confederate Home Front: Montgomery During the Civil War* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2014).

[4] Teresa Crisp Williams and David Williams, "'The Women Rising': Cotton, Class, and Confederate Georgia's Rioting Women," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 86, no. 1 (2002): 49–83. JSTOR 40584640

[5] Eugene M. Lerner, "Money, Prices, and Wages in the Confederacy, 1861-1865," *Journal of Political Economy* (1955): 20–40. JSTOR 1826773

[6] Laura F. Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

the lack of accessible food, and because of the injustice of being left to starve while the army and the rich were well-fed. She notes the frequency of these riots during the war, and that mobs sometimes targeted government officials and stores.

Drew Gilpin Faust's *The creation of Confederate nationalism: ideology and identity in the Civil War South* examines the creation of public identity during the war and argues that Evangelicalism and Republicanism proved a weak, conflicting basis for nationalism.[7] She shows that the elite became more dependent on the lower classes to maintain the war effort, giving them greater bargaining power. Faust argues that women rioted out of a belief that speculative prices were illegal and out of the desire to be able to buy necessities at prewar prices. Michael B. Chesson's "Harlots or Heroines? A New Look at the Richmond Bread Riot" is an in-depth examination of the riot seeking to correct historiographical errors and resolve as best as possible the conflicting evidence about the riot.[8] Chesson asks about the causes of the riot, the actors in it, how it was suppressed, whether news of it spread, and why it was not repeated. After closely examining the role specific women and women in general played in the riots, Chesson concludes that rioting women were "neither harlots nor heroines, but simply individual human beings whose lives had been blighted by war."[9]

Another center of women's historiography looks at the violation of gender roles. Faust's *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* examines how the upheaval of the Civil War required elite women to re-invent themselves, and argues that the destruction of the social order dissuaded attempts to challenge the patriarchy.[10] It gives a

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[7] Drew Gilpin Faust, *The creation of Confederate nationalism: ideology and identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988).

[8] Michael B. Chesson, "Harlots or Heroines? A New Look at the Richmond Bread Riot," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 92, no. 2 (1984): 131–175.

[9] Chesson, 174.

[10] Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 245.

women's history interpretation of the bread riots, using class analysis to compare the riots to upper-class revelry and assert that both were responses to violations of paternalistic social norms and statements of female assertiveness, as well as explicitly rejecting sacrifice ideology. Katherine Titus' "The Richmond Bread Riot of 1863: Class, Race, and Gender in the Urban Confederacy" argues that Confederate legislative and treasury policies amplified resentment and prompted the breaking of gender roles and traditional social norms.[11]

A third center of women's historiography considers what effect the gendered nature of riots had on how the government moved to eliminate riots and the conditions leading to them. In *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Confederate South,* Stephanie McCurry argues that the Confederacy was defeated from the inside, by the ignored—by women and slaves.[12] She argues that women practiced a "politics of subsistence" and that there was a "massive slave rebellion."[13] McCurry devotes a chapter to the bread riots, arguing that direct action of poor white women forced the Confederate government to improve their welfare strategy. In *Confederate Cities: The Urban South During the Civil War Era*, Keith S. Bohannon writes an essay entitled "'More like Amazons than starving people': Women's Urban Riots in Georgia in 1863". [14] Bohannon also argues that Georgia women rioted out of necessity and encouraged government to provide relief, but in contrast to McCurry's claim, Bohannon insists the Georgia government acted to provide relief before the riots.

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[11] Katherine R. Titus, "The Richmond Bread Riot of 1863: Class, Race, and Gender in the Urban Confederacy," *The Gettysburg College Journal of the Civil War Era* 2, no. 6 (2011): 86–146.

[12] Stephanie McCurry, *Confederate Reckoning: Power and Politics in the Civil War South* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012).

[13] McCurry, 259.

[14] Keith Bohannon, "'More like Amazons than starving people': Women's Urban Riots in Georgia in 1863," in *Confederate Cities: The Urban South During the Civil War Era,* ed. David Goldfield and Andrew L. Slap (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 147-162.

The present study treats the role of government in creating conditions for rioting and examines what actions government took in responding to riots as they happened and afterwards. It asks, how was government responsible for these riots? How did government respond to these riots, and why? Finally, this study sees a gap in scholarship on riots in southern cities that were held by the Union during the Civil War.

Causes of the Riots

While the Union's sea blockade of the Confederacy grew increasingly more effective as the war dragged on, it was the Confederate government's food policies that played the major role in sparking bread riots throughout the South.[15] The food supply began to be strained as the Confederate government instituted a 10% tax on all produce, but in a city like Richmond, for example, there was plenty of food.[16] Richmond was not under siege; food existed at government warehouses and stores, but it was simply too expensive. [17] The manner of impressment led to food scarcity and extortionate prices in the city. Federal agents did not seek out food at the source, on farms; instead, they would simply wait on the roads leading into the city to seize goods farmers were bringing to the Richmond market.[18] Naturally, farmers refused to take the risk of bringing food into Richmond. In fact, they began to grow only "'so much corn as will suffice for their own use,'" according to Robert Garlick Kean, a Confederate official.[19] Kean was right to believe that impressment caused withholding of food, "'surplus-secreting and non-

[15] Smith, 50-52.
[16] McCurry, 179; Smith, 49.
[17] Smith, 49.
[18] Smith, 53.
[19] Smith, 53-54.

production. The army will be starved, and famine will ensue in cities unless the Secretary changes his policy and buys in the market for the best prices.'"[20]

The frustration and desperation of poor women was building. Historian Michael Chesson describes how "the salaries of most Richmonders did not keep pace with inflation. Many women with men in the army were struggling to support families on one income, if indeed they were fortunate enough to have jobs."[21] According to a refugee from Richmond who supplied information for a story on the riot published in the *New York Herald*, "Considerable excitement had prevailed for some time in consequence of the exorbitant prices, and rumors of a popular movement had been in circulation for several days."[22] Exorbitant prices is no overstatement. As the population of Richmond tripled from its prewar size and war, loss of farm labor, increasingly inefficient transportation and military impressment reduced the available food supply, food prices in Richmond spiked: "By February 1863 the price of flour had more than doubled. Bacon, which cost $1.25 per pound in 1860, sold for $10, while the price of sugar increased more than fifteen-fold and coffee cost forty times what it had previously."[23] It was this pricing, not the actual lack of food, that pushed poor Richmond women into desperation.

Prices were increasingly exorbitant in part because of inflation. Confederate newspapers recognized that inflation was happening and that it needed to be dealt with. The *New York Herald* reprints two stories, one from the *Columbia Carolinian* in South Carolina and one from the *Richmond Enquirer* discussing the inflation problem and possible solutions. The *Carolinian* reports on the cause of inflation: "The depreciation of the currency has been caused in a great

[20] Smith, 53-54.
[21] Chesson, "Harlots or Heroines?", 134.
[22] "Interesting from the South. The Food Question," *New York Herald,* April 17, 1863.
[23] Smith, 52-53.

degree by its excess over the wants of the people."[24] The story lists the reasons for its excess: "The blockade of our ports caused a demand for coin and exchange to import merchandise, and as the premium on coin and exchange advanced, and as imported merchandise advanced in price all home articles—'the necessaries of life'—correspondently advance."[25] Finally, the article notes that the focus should be on "what is now to be done to remedy the evil and give confidence to our people."[26] The *Enquirer* story notes how many government officials are engaged in remedying inflation: "Mr. Secretary Memminger begins to 'catch at straws.' He asks Mr. Wm Gregg for the remedy against our financial troubles. How? Mr. Lupus, too, is working at this problem, and so is Senator Wigfall and others."[27] It also notes the urgency of the issue: "the whole sinking country demands a remedy. The soldier and his wife, the rich man and his wife, 'everybody and his wife,' want 'a remedy.'"[28] Inflation was one reason that poor women could not afford food and felt desperate enough to riot for bread; though the government set people to work on it, the issue was not solved.

In Salisbury, North Carolina, the governmental failure that led to rioting had less to do with impressment and more to do with how welfare funds were managed. According to the local newspaper, it was the county government's fault. The *Carolina Watchman*, Salisbury's newspaper, writes that the county Board of Commissioners had $50,000 in relief for soldiers' families. It did not criticize the women for rioting, but blamed solely the commissioners. In fact, the editor wrote that they should ought to be 'blushing with shame for the scene enacted in our streets.'"[29]

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[24] "Additional from the South," *New York Herald,* November 05, 1863.
[25] "Additional from the South," *New York Herald,* November 05, 1863.
[26] "Additional from the South," *New York Herald,* November 05, 1863.
[27] "Additional from the South," *New York Herald,* November 05, 1863.
[28] "Additional from the South," *New York Herald,* November 05, 1863.
[29] Smith, 51.

Rioting for food was not a necessary outcome of these conditions. In stark contrast with Richmond, Charleston had no riots during the Civil War. *The Charleston Mercury* explained that in Charleston, too, "the necessaries of life have reached the very exorbitant rates."[30] Charleston's local government handled it proactively. The *Mercury* reports that Charleston's City Council has "been most zealously laboring for the benefit of the citizens at large" and the "thousands who are now daily supplied with flour, rice, &c., at less than half the current market prices, can gratefully testify" to their success.[31]

Rioting was not the first option women took in the face of failed impressment policies and unchecked speculation. A Northern newspaper, the *Detroit Free Press*, predictably sides with the rioters in giving the reason for the Richmond bread riot. According to a refugee who just arrived in Detroit, "The women were the heads of families of the working class, and were actually starving, many having been compelled to beg on the street." According to *New York Herald* story, "Females had begged in the streets and at the stores until begging did no good, and many had been driven to robbery to sustain life."[32] Other women were forced even farther, into prostitution.[33] The government of Richmond failed to rescue these women, and made things increasingly worse by impressing food that was coming into the city, discouraging farmers from bringing food in at all.[34] Starvation and outrage at the injustice of being dismissed by their government was the underlying motivations for the Richmond riot, as it was for other bread riots. Poor women felt they had no choice but to riot. They were on the brink of starvation thanks to

[30] "Additional from the South," *New York Herald,* November 5, 1863.
[31] "Additional from the South," *New York Herald,* November 5, 1863.
[32] "Interesting from the South. The Food Question," *New York Herald,* April 17, 1863.
[33] Smith, 53.
[34] Smith, 53-54.

the government's practice of impressment, failure to suppress speculation and inflation, and failure to provide adequate welfare. These women felt wronged by their government.

Historian Laura Edwards explains that Richmond poor women felt a sense of injustice at not being provided access to the food at reasonable prices. She argues that it was this sense of injustice that led to rioting.[35] A few hundred poor women met at the Belvidere Hill Baptist Church in Richmond to demand action from the governor because they could not feed their families, even though they and their husbands were employed. These soldiers' wives believed stores were deliberately price gouging food. They also believed that speculators were keeping some food off the market so it would sell for greater profit as food prices continued to soar.[36] At one point in the riot, a portion of the mob entered a German and Jewish area thought to be a place of speculators. Major Daniel, a witness, noted that "'certain people down there were credited with great wealth. It was said that they had made barrels of money out of the Confederacy, and the female Communists were at them without a qualm of conscience.'"[37] Here is another demonstration that rioting women felt morally justified: at the perception of speculating, rioting women immediately leapt at the supposed speculators.

According to historian Stephanie McCurry, bread riots can be read as a political statement expressing the belief that "a social contract with soldiers' wives . . . had been brutally violated."[38] Read this way, the bread riots express "soldiers' wives' mass politics of subsistence: the means by which, in written protest and direct action, poor white women registered, contested, and reshaped the insupportable demands of the wartime state."[39] Indeed, as historian Drew

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[35] Edwards, 93.
[36] Smith, 49.
[37] "Statement of Daniel," *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, as quoted in Chesson, "Harlots or Heroines," 146.
[38] McCurry, 179.
[39] McCurry, 179.

Gilpin Faust describes, these poor women who rioted did so because in their deprivation they rejected the Confederate "ideology of sacrifice."[40] Instead, these women in desperation collectively demanded the relief they believed the state owed them.[41] This belief, in being owed the bare minimum of subsistence, speaks to "the South's paternalistic social order," and its violation as the government failed to provide for women.[42] Feeling wronged, these poor white women turned to rioting.

One final injustice was the proclamation Confederate president Jefferson Davis issued, an insult to those struggling to keep themselves fed: a day of fasting. Jefferson Davis declared March 27, 1863 a "day of fasting, humiliation and prayer."[43] Asking his citizens to fast while so many city dwellers, like those in Richmond, went without food was insult to injury and could have contributed to the rioters' sense of injustice and belief that the government had failed them."[44] Confederate policy created the conditions for rioting in those cities where it occurred; not only did impressment backfire, but speculation went unchecked, inflation soared, and the government neglected and insulted struggling women.

Riots in Southern cities under Union control were largely politically motivated—anti-Union sentiment, accusations of treason, and racial tension all prompted riots in occupied cities. The government's role in motivating anti-Union or treason riots was simply existing; in prompting race riots, the government took an active role by upholding Black equality. Missouri was a border state, a slave state, and thus St. Louis experienced conflict of unionist and secessionist passions. But though "Union and disunion forces angrily faced each other

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[40] Faust, *Mothers of Invention,* 245.
[41] Faust, *Mothers of Invention,* 245.
[42] Faust, *Mothers of Invention,* 245.
[43] "Important from the South.; Jeff. Davis Appoints March 27 as a Day of Fasting and Prayer.REBEL REPORTS FROM VICKSBURGH. An Attack by Gen. Grant's Forces Believed to be Imminent. ROSECRANS ADVANCING. PROCLAMATION OF THE PRESIDENT," *New York Times,* March 4, 1863.
[44] Smith, 55.

throughout all her borders . . . she remained securely anchored to the Union." These political passions manifested in a violent riot on May 11, 1861. The Union captured and began to occupy New Orleans in 1862. Before coming under military control, the city was "the headquarters and focus of all Southern rowdyism" and "an immense crowd of 'loafers,' many without regular occupation or means, infested the streets, controlled the ballot-boxes, nominated the judges, selected the police, and affected to rule every one except a few immensely wealthy planters, who governed them by money."[45] Under this mob, New Orleans had become "the most blood-thirsty city in the world; a city where every man went armed, where a sharp word was invariably answered by a stab, and where the average of murdered men taken to one hospital was three a day."[46] This mob, being intensely pro-slavery, saw Union occupation as a challenge.

On Saturday, July 8, 1865, a riot in Charleston broke out between white and Black soldiers. *The Daily Picayune* reports that "the doctrine of negro equality was proclaimed throughout the city as the corollary of negro freedom" and "the consequence was inevitable." Poor women rioted for bread because the Confederate government failed them. Citizens in occupied cities rioted out of political rancor, because the wrong government was in control or because the government upheld equal rights. Whatever the role government played in prompting them, riots forced the government to respond.

Response

Richmond is exemplary of how the Confederate government responded to the outbreak of rioting. Police and city officials knew in advance of the riot but disregarded the reports and

[45] William Wells Brown, *Negro in the American Rebellion: His Heroism and His Fidelity* (Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1867), 86.

[46] Brown, *Negro in the American Rebellion* (Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1867), 86.

rumors. Mary Jackson, outspoken at Belvidere and supposed to be a leader of the riot, went to the market on the day of the riot and was observed with a pistol loaned to her and a knife she used to cut meat. She told the market clerk James P. Tyler and policemen Washington A. Griffin and William N. Kelley there was to be a demonstration and the women would seize food if none was provided. These officials and policemen warned Mary but did not take her seriously. Testimony indicates that Richmond mayor Joseph Mayo knew about the demonstration before it happened, and in fact many people throughout the city had heard of the demonstration before it occurred.[47] Government officials in Richmond had a chance to prepare for the demonstration; either by displaying overwhelming force or preferably by supplying food to the needy women, the protest could have stayed a protest and the riot could have been avoided.

Even on the day of the riot, and moments before it broke out, Confederate officials could have prevented it. On the morning of April 2nd, the morning of the Richmond riot, "A large meeting, composed principally of the wives and daughters of the working classes, was held in the African church, and a committee appointed to wait upon the Governor to request that articles of food should be sold at government rates."[48] Historian Andrew Smith says a few hundred women gathered at this meeting, and they were joined by hundreds more as they marched to the governor's residence.[49] The *Herald* story explains that "the functionary declined to take any steps in the matter, and upon urging the case the ladies were peremptorily ordered to withdraw."[50] Smith explains that this functionary was Governor Letcher's aid, S. B. French, who met with the crowd in his place and dismissed the crowd with no solutions.[51] Abrupt dismissal

[47] Chesson, "Harlots or Heroines," 143.
[48] "Interesting from the South. The Food Question," *New York Herald,* April 17, 1863.
[49] Smith, 55.
[50] "Interesting from the South. The Food Question," *New York Herald,* April 17, 1863.
[51] Smith, 56.

inflamed the crowd and "a body of females, numbering about three hundred, collected together and commenced helping themselves to bread, flour, meat, articles of clothing, &c."[52] According to Colonel Stewart, of the Second Indiana regiment who had just been released from imprisonment in Richmond by the Confederates, this number of rioting women might have increased to three thousand.[53] The breaking out of this massive riot greatly disturbed the townspeople and the government.

As expected, government officials responded with force, attempting to quell the riot and restore order. The local Richmond police force was ineffective in suppressing the Richmond bread riot of 1863. Historian Michael Chesson makes this claim, quoting Major Daniel and the merchant James Sinton as insisting, "'from the time the mob started down Main Street from the St. Charles Hotel [northeast corner of Fifteenth or Wall] there was not an officer, civil or military, who interfered or attempted to stay the progress of the mob, although they passed the First police-station [rear of Old Market at Seventeenth, between Main and Franklin]. The only attempt was by the owners of the stores, which in most cases proved unavailing.'"[54]

As the destruction spread out from Carey Street and started "becoming general in that section of the city," the "City Guard, with fixed bayonets, arrived at the scene of operations. A few individuals attempted to resist the women, but without success. One man who struck a female was wounded in the shoulder by a shot from a revolver, and the threatening attitude of those armed with hatchets, &c. intimidated others from attempting force."[55]

The governor stepped in at this point; he mounted a vehicle and addressed the crowd, "characterizing the demonstration as a disgrace and a stigma upon the city, and announcing that

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[52] "Interesting from the South. The Food Question," *New York Herald,* April 17, 1863.
[53] "Important News," *New York Herald,* April 8, 1863.
[54] Chesson, 151.
[55] "Interesting from the South. The Food Question," *New York Herald,* April 17, 1863.

but five minutes would be given them in which to disperse."[56] Virginia's Governor Letcher "ordered out the Public Guard and Richmond's mayor read the unruly mob the 'Riot Act.'"[57] Accounts of what happened next conflict. Jefferson Davis, Governor Letcher, and Richmond mayor Joseph Mayo all have been reported as the one who ordered the mob to disperse under threat of fire from the Public Guard.[58] Whoever gave the order, it is clear that local, state and federal government all shared the impulse to dismiss the mob under threat of military force. Historian Andrew Smith claims that "whoever gave the order, it was enough to persuade the mob to disperse. Two hours after the women had entered Capitol Square, the riot ended."[59]

The Richmond police may not have stood up to the rioters and attempted to disperse the crowd, but they did arrest women trying to leave the riot. For example, a woman was trying to drive a cart loaded with goods away from the riot:

> She had scarcely gone one hundred yards from the crowd and turned a corner when a policeman, emerging like a big spider from his ambush, pounced upon her and her commissary supplies and captured the whole concern without the firing of a gun. The cart and contents thus left standing without a proprietor soon attracted attention and a new-comer coolly took possession, but no sooner had she gathered up the reins for a start than forth came the inevitable policeman and she followed her predecessor to the cage.[60]

In addition, the police force had assistance from merchants and prominent citizens. Most of the arrests made after the riot were actually made by these citizens. Arrests targeted leaders. Mary Jackson, one of the women organizers of the riot, was arrested for her role and likely tried for a misdemeanor; it would have been difficult to prosecute her for stealing, as there was no actual

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[56] "Interesting from the South. The Food Question," *New York Herald,* April 17, 1863.
[57] Smith, 57.
[58] Smith, 57.
[59] Smith, 57.
[60] *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, 30 Dec. 1888, as cited in Chesson, 151.

proof that she did steal.[61] Minerva Meredith, another woman prominent in organizing the riot, was given six months in jail for her role in organizing the riot.[62]

The day after the riot, the Richmond government had the City Battalion march the streets to disperse crowds and prevent further disturbances.[63] The use of military force, the threat inherent in the parade of the City Battalion, was effective in preventing further bread riots. The root cause remained: In Richmond, prices of food articles and speculation remained a problem even after the bread riot. *The Richmond Sentinel* reports that "Onward and upward is the course of the markets. Articles of food grow scarcer and higher each day in this city. Since the defeat of the maximum this has been the natural result."[64] Price caps had not been enforced, so the natural market mechanisms continued to operate: as supply dwindled, demand increased and prices rose. Naturally, merchants took advantage: "Those having articles for sale are holding them back for the rise. They will not sell for fifty dollars this week what may bring seventy-five dollars next week."[65] An article from *The Richmond Enquirer* exposes two merchants engaged in this speculation: "We understand that two of the most soulless of these speculators live on Broad Street—one of whom has no less than seven hundred barrels of flour purchased for $11 per barrel, stored away in the cellar, closet, parlor and garret of his store and residence. The other is

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[61] Chesson, 153-154.
[62] Chesson, 154-155.
[63] Chesson, 146.
[64] "Additional from the South: The Currency Question The Remedy Meeting of Southern Bankers The Hight Price of Food The Military Riots at Raleigh The Question of Gen. Bragg's Removal Rebel Martyrs Life in Richmond, &c., &c., &c. Davis Refuses to Remove Gen. Bragg The Rebel Currency The Currency Remedy Meeting of Representatives of Southern Banks High Price of Food Extensive Hoarding Dearth at Charleston Rebel Martyrs Garroting in Richmond Rebel View of Affairs at Menaced Points The Military Riots at Raleigh State Journal Indebtedness and Assets of Georgia The Rebel Press on Mexican Affairs Decease of Rebel Officers The Very Latest Signs of Starvation in Richmond—No Meat in the City," *New York Herald,* November 5, 1863.
[65] "Additional from the South," *New York Herald,* November 5, 1863.

said to have also a very large quantity of flour similarly hoarded, which he purchased at $8 per barrel."[66]

In response to these increasingly harsh conditions, the articles' authors insinuate threats: "We suppose we shall get to the snapping point after awhile, and probably very soon, as we are traveling very fast . . . if the persons engaged in [speculation] had their deserts they would be hung to the nearest lampposts."[67] Despite these threats, there was not another bread riot in Richmond during the Civil War. The lack of another bread riot despite continued increases in price and continued speculating shows that in Richmond, the Confederate government's response was sufficient to maintain order. Cracking down on rioters with prosecution and military force confined anger over food conditions to angry newspaper articles.

In cities throughout the Confederacy, governments responded to rioting by calling out the military or local militias. Military force successfully quelled the riots and maintained order in some cases; in others, the military refused to side against the women. In April 1864, a bread riot in Savannah, Georgia broke out: up to a hundred and fifty women, armed, marched through Savannah, crying "'bread or blood.'"[68] As they marched, women "'seized food wherever it could be found.'"[69] In response, the Savannah government called out the military. There was a "brief conflict," and the riot was over.[70] In other Confederate cities, the military could not or would not shut down rioting.

In October, 1863, a mob in Wilmington, North Carolina took the cargo from a blockade runner.[71] The government called out the local Home Guard, but the Guard chose inaction, not

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[66] "Additional from the South," *New York Herald,* November 5, 1863.
[67] "Additional from the South," *New York Herald,* November 5, 1863.
[68] Smith, 64.
[69] Smith, 64.
[70] Smith, 64.
[71] Smith, 64.

firing a shot.[72] In Mobile, it was the army that refused to fire on protestors. On September 4, 1863, six hundred women marched down Dauphine Street armed with anything from clubs to knives to hatchets. As they marched, they held banners reading "'Bread or Blood.'"[73] In response, as the women took food and clothes from stores, the government called out the Seventeenth Alabama regiment to quell the riot. [74] The soldiers would not disperse the women, saying "'if they took any action, rather assist those starving wives, mothers, sisters and daughters of men who had been forced to fight the battles of the rebellion.'"[75] These soldiers sympathized with the rioting women, saying they would do nothing or they would help the women. The sympathetic plight of the women rendered state use of the army to quell rioting impossible in Mobile. The local militia, the Mobile Cadets, tried to substitute for the army, but were "'driven from the field, or rather streets, by the infuriated women.'"[76] Whether through holding the sympathy of the armed forces brought out to suppress them or defending themselves, women invalidated the government's attempt to forcibly suppress rioting.

In cities occupied by the Union, the immediate response to rioting was largely the same: call out the military and forcibly suppress the riots. In these cases, the use of military force succeeded in crushing the riots. In St. Louis, where anti-Union sentiment flared up into several riots against Union forces, a crowd began pressing a company of German Union soldiers.[77] According to the St. Louis *Republican,* which actually aligned with the Democratic Party, upon "receiving some blows from them," the Germans "turned and discharged their pieces."[78] Nobody

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[72] Smith, 64.
[73] Smith, 63.
[74] Smith, 63.
[75] Smith, 63.
[76] Smith, 63.
[77] "Another Riot at St. Louis. Dreadful Loss of Life. Particulars of the Capture of Camp Jackson. Proclamation by Gen. Harney," *Weekly Pioneer and Democrat,* May 17, 1861.
[78] "Another Riot at St. Louis," *Weekly Pioneer and Democrat,* May 17, 1861.

was injured and the soldiers who fired on the crowd were immediately arrested. Then, "volley after volley of rifle reports were suddenly heard from the extreme rear ranks, and men, women and children were beheld running wildly frantically away from the scene. Many while running, were suddenly struck to the sod, and the wounded and dying made the late beautiful field look like a battle ground."[79] According to the St. Louis *Democrat,* the Republican paper, "The mob grew larger, fiercer, and began hurling rocks, brickbats and other missiles at the soldiers. This style of treatment was taken as patiently as possible, the victims having no mode of defense but the dread and awful one of bullets."[80] When the mob started to "discharge pistols, daring the soldiers to fire," and "a soldier of corps H was shot dead, others were wounded, and the captain received a ball in the leg," the captain quit hesitating and "gave the order" to fire.[81] The Union soldiers fired a volley "level into the crowd, and persons fell in every direction. The multitude fell back with a desperate rush, by which many were trodden down and much injured. When the field was cleared, some twenty dead and dying were stretched out upon the grass and in the road."[82] In response to this initial riot, order was maintained "owing to the efficiency of the police,"[83] for a moment.

When a regiment of the Union Home Guard made largely of Germans enlisted and armed that day and marched through St. Louis, a group of "fiery secessionists ascertained the route that the regiment would take on its return march, and for the purpose of harassing and attacking it, hid themselves behind the pillars of a Presbyterian Church, at the corner of Fifth and Walnut

[79] "Another Riot at St. Louis," *Weekly Pioneer and Democrat*, May 17, 1861.
[80] "Another Riot at St. Louis," *Weekly Pioneer and Democrat*, May 17, 1861.
[81] "Another Riot at St. Louis," *Weekly Pioneer and Democrat*, May 17, 1861.
[82] "Another Riot at St. Louis," *Weekly Pioneer and Democrat*, May 17, 1861.
[83] "Another Riot at St. Louis," *Weekly Pioneer and Democrat*, May 17, 1861.

Streets. [84] In dwelling-houses opposite the church were some of their allies. They had planned to attack the regiment simultaneously on both flanks."[85] As the soldiers marched past the church, "ladies among the spectators began hooting, hissing and otherwise abusing the companies."[86] Then "missiles of various kinds, from both sides of the street, were hurled into the ranks of these new, undisciplined volunteers."[87] Finally, chaos broke out:

> a boy, about fourteen years old, discharged a pistol into their ranks. Part of the rear company immediately turned and fired upon the crowd, and the whole column was instantly in confusion, breaking their ranks and discharging their muskets down their own line and among the people on the sidewalks. The shower of balls for a few minutes was terrible, the bullets flying in every direction, entering the doors and windows of private residences, breaking railings, and even smashing bricks in the third stories. The utmost confusion prevailed, spectators fleeing in all directions, and but for the random firing of the troops, scores of people must have been killed.[88]

As the shooting stopped, "six men lay dead on the pavement: four of their own regiment, three of whom they themselves had killed, and two unarmed citizens; while several innocent passers-by were wounded."[89] *The Philadelphia Weekly Union* reports that

> Jerry Switzler, a river engineer, John Garvin and Mr. Cady, all citizens, were killed. Charles H. Woodward was wounded in the shoulder. His entire arm will have to be amputated. J. Godfrey working in the garden of Mr. Cozzens, received three Minie balls in his body. Michael Davis had an arm shattered. James F. Welch was badly shot in the foot. Several others were less seriously wounded . . . One of his daughters was struck by a spent ball.[90]

In response, Union General Harney "issued a proclamation . . . pledging himself to do all in his power to preserve peace . . . He says the military force under his command will only be

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[84] Galusha Anderson, *The Story of a Border City during the Civil War* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1908), 106; "Riot in St. Louis," Philadelphia Weekly Union 1, no. 35 (May 22, 1861): 3. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=h9k&AN=79514917&site=ehost-live

[85] Anderson, 106.

[86] "Riot in St. Louis," 3.

[87] Anderson, 106.

[88] "Riot in St. Louis, 3.

[89] Anderson, 107.

[90] "Riot in St. Louis," 3.

used at the last extremity, and hopes he will not be compelled to resort to martial law, but simply states that the public peace must be preserved, and the lives of the people protected."[91] General Harney sent "a battalion of regulars" to the city "under the direction of the Police Commissioners, to act as a military police corps."[92]

In New Orleans, the anti-Union mob "surrounded the St. Charles Hotel, threatening an attack on the building, then the general's headquarters; and Gen. Williams, commanding the troops around it, reported that he would be unable to control the mob."[93] General Butler was not willing to surrender to the mob; he chose military force instead: "'Gen. Butler, in his serenest manner, replied, "Give my compliments to Gen. Williams, and tell him, if he finds he cannot control the mob, to open upon them with artillery.'"[94] The military did not have to fire the artillery to repel the mob; the efforts of Lieutenant Kinsman in leading an armed party against the mob ended the riot. Once the riot had been quelled, General Butler acted decisively to establish control and eliminate riot-inducing conditions. The general "at first retained the municipal organization; but, finding the officials incurably hostile, he sent them to Fort Lafayette, and thenceforward ruled alone, feeding the people, re-establishing trade, maintaining public order, and seeing that negroes obtained some reasonable measure of security."[95]

In Charleston, a New York regiment engaged in "several severe beatings" by which they attempted to check "the manner of the blacks."[96] One Black man was killed, and several other people were wounded. As the chaos continued sporadically until Monday, the commanding general of the port of Charleston, General Bennett, issued a proclamation requiring citizens to

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[91] "Riot in St. Louis," 3.
[92] "Riot in St. Louis," 3.
[93] Brown, *Negro in the American Rebellion,* 86.
[94] Brown, *Negro in the American Rebellion,* 86.
[95] Brown, *Negro in the American Rebellion,* 87.
[96] From South Carolina: Fearful Progress of the Irrepressible Conflict Bloody Riots in Charleston Stringent Military Orders," *Daily Picayune*, July 30, 1865.

hand in firearms, to stop gathering on the street, and to follow an 8:00 o'clock curfew.[97] In addition, General Bennett ordered that "Upon the creation of any disturbance during the day or night, the commanding officer of the district of the city in which it may occur will at once send patrols, under commissioned officers, to arrest all persons found in the streets in the vicinity of the disturbance, except persons on important business, who will be required to report at the nearest guard for an escort."[98] Whether in response to an attack on the Union military, mobbing a hotel housing Union officers, or the beating of Black people by Union soldiers, the military governments of these cities responded with force and tight crackdowns. As no reports of further riots in these cities could be found, it appears that military force and strict enforcement of peace-keeping measures effectively maintained order.

Public Perception

The wartime governments, especially the Confederacy, depended on the compliance of the citizenry to continue fighting. As the war dragged on and conditions on the home front worsened, the balance of power tilted away from state governments and towards the people. The people knew this, and when their needs were not met, they began to threaten violence. A poster put up May 6, 1863, exemplifies the violence threatened against the state. The poster contained two threats: one to the war effort and one of direct violence against government officials. It opens with the first threat: "Bread or peace—it has not yet come to a question of bread or peace with us, but we are fast coming to it."[99] Starving citizens often used this bargaining tactic of threatening to cause an end to the war if their basic needs were not met; in the Mobile bread riot

[97] Melinda Meek Hennessey, "Racial Violence during Reconstruction: The 1876 Riots in Charleston and Cainhoy," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 86, no. 2 (1985): 100-12.
[98] "From South Carolina," *Daily Picayune*, July 30, 1865.
[99] "The Volcano Smoking in Mobile," 299.

that happened just a few months later on September 4, 1863, bread or peace was "emblazoned on one side" of the banners "Mobile's army of women waved in their rough procession through city streets."[100] The second threat concludes the poster: "Our wives, sisters, little ones are crying for bread! Beware! lest they cry for blood also! . . . The people will rise sooner or later! There are lamp posts and rope enough to cure this worse than treason--and the remedy will be supplied by an outraged people."[101] This poster, these threats, were accompanied by specific requests:

> If our government can compel a man with a family of children to fight for it at $11 per month, it can compel, and must, those who stay at home and enjoy their ease now . . . to feed the children of poor fathers; the widows, whose only sons are fighting the battles and enduring the terrible hardships . . . We have had enough of extortion and exploitation; it is time the strong arm of the law was extended.[102]

When these requests were not met sufficiently, an outraged people rioted and provided the necessaries themselves.

The threats and actions of citizens gained bargaining power when the community supported them—the instances where soldiers would not suppress riots exemplified the paralyzing effect community support for rioting women could have on the government's response. Government officials knew that the public eye was upon them, and that perception of the rioting women was positive, and women's need was seen as legitimate. This knowledge constrained their use of military force, and encouraged them to meet the needs of the women. Rioters' actions were often, but not always, supported by their communities, whose members might have agreed that the state had broken its social contract with soldiers' wives and poor women, and that the women were right to take provisions when the government would not provide them their due. The *Richmond Whig* wrote in support of citizens, who they claimed were

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[100] McCurry, 180.
[101] "The Volcano Smoking in Mobile," 299.
[102] "The Volcano Smoking in Mobile," 299.

being "'gouged by heartless extortioners and robbed by official rogues.'"[103] As we have already seen, in Salisbury, the rioting women were supported by the *Carolina Watchman,* which indicted local county Board of Commissioners that failed in distributing $50,000 in relief for soldiers' families.[104] They were also supported by their community, as "the mayor of Salisbury and the city justices just watched 'dispassionately'" and the women were never prosecuted.[105] Community support likely materialized because the women were seen as soldiers' wives, a sympathetic audience.[106]

Still, there is a layer of complexity: rioters were not universally supported by their communities. For example, when women raided a government supply center in Sander's Mill, North Carolina,[107] the community was less supportive, according to the newspaper account. The *Greensborough Patriot* called the rioters "unchaste females who 'wage eternal war against society,'" and declared that "'society must wage eternal war'" on like women.[108] After the Richmond riot, the *Southern Confederacy* published the observations of an observer who wrote to the *Richmond Whig.* According to this account, "The mob, which was got up under the name of a woman's bread riot, was in reality, a man's plundering riot. The females, a fraction of whom were respectable, were all comfortably clad, and many of them were bedizened out in finery . . . The indications were that they were acting, not by want, but by the thousands of ruffians who stood around them, and who hoped to secure, by means of them, both safety and plunder."[109] The account acknowledged that "Hunger was the ostensible cause of the riot," but argued that "neither the butcher nor the baker suffered. Stores containing provisions escaped, while those

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[103] Smith, 53.
[104] Smith, 51.
[105] Smith, 51.
[106] McCurry, 178.
[107] Smith, 51.
[108] Smith, 51.
[109] *Southern Confederacy*, April 12, 1863.

containing dry goods, boots and shoes, and above all, fancy articles, were sacked. It was not a rising against extortion, but for plunder and open robbery."[110] Whether women were supported by their communities or not, they acted. Pushed by hunger and especially by the actions and inactions of their government, they expressed need and anger through threats and riots, and their governments were forced to listen.

Another pressure on the Confederate government came from public perception. Women rioting for basic necessities was a terrible image for a government fighting for legitimacy and seeking recognition from possible European supporters. Southern officials must have known that accounts of riots in the Confederacy would be published in the northern press, and likely wanted to prevent that unfavorable information from making its way there. For example, after the Richmond riot, Confederate officials asked the Richmond telegraph company to avoid sending news of the riots, and a "'special appeal' was made directly 'to the editors and reporters of the press at Richmond, and earnestly to request them to avoid all reference directly or indirectly to the affair . . . Any other course must tend to embarrass our cause, and to encourage our enemies in their inhuman policy.'"[111] This same desire to prevent news of riots from making it to the North must have pressured Confederate officials to act to prevent riots from happening in the first place. This effort was wholly unsuccessful.

In 1864, the *Philadelphia Enquirer* published a story that begin with this explanation: "The Philadelphia Enquirer publishes the following extract from a prisoner in Richmond, and smuggled through the lines in the early part of October."[112] The prisoner in question was a Union soldier held as a prisoner of war. His is one of multiple accounts of that particular bread riot,

[110] *Southern Confederacy*, April 12, 1863.
[111] Smith, 58.
[112] "Prison Life in Richmond--Riots, etc.," *Daily Picayune*, Nov 05, 1864.

marking a clear trend: Northern newspapers published accounts of Southern riots. Just as the many accounts of the New York draft riots or other Northern riots in Southern newspapers helped further public opinion against the Federal government as tyrannous, accounts of Southern riots published in Northern newspapers propped up public opinion in favor of the war by showing the Rebel states as weakened.[113] Southern officials must have known that accounts of riots in the Confederacy would be published in the Northern press, and likely wanted to prevent that unfavorable information from making its way there. For example, after the Richmond riot, Confederate officials asked the Richmond telegraph company to avoid sending news of the riots, and a "'special appeal' was made directly 'to the editors and reporters of the press at Richmond, and earnestly to request them to avoid all reference directly or indirectly to the affair . . . Any other course must tend to embarrass our cause, and to encourage our enemies in their inhuman policy.'"[114] This same desire to prevent news of riots from making it to the North must have pressured Confederate officials to act to prevent riots from happening in the first place.

Northern newspapers emphasized the rioters' desperation. A *Philadelphia Enquirer* story reads, "Old men, women and children turned out, armed with clubs, axes, brooms, &c., rushing frantically up and down the streets, crying for bread."[115] The account also calls the crowd "poor

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[113] For Southern articles on the New York draft riots, see "Riots in the North More of the Riots," *Memphis Daily Appeal*, July 20, 1863; "Latest from the North: Great Riot in New York The Conscription Resisted The Hundred People Supposed to be Killed Destruction of Houses a Colonel Hung to a Lamp-Post Another Riot at Hartford, Conn Proclamation of Gov. Seymour—Address of Archbishop Hughes—Attack on the Tribune Office—Negroes Beaten-and Killed by the Sears—The Draft Suspended—Buildings Burnt, . . . The Opening of the Riot Destruction of the Building Assaults on the Police Assault on a Tribune Attache The Mob on the Increase A Virginian Leading the Men Private Property Destroyed Arrival of the Regulars Provost," *Daily Dispatch*, July 18, 1863; "The Great Northern Riots: The Conscription Resisted--two Hundred People Supposed To Be Killed--destruction Of Houses--a Colonel Hung To A Lamp-post--proclamation Of Gov. Seymour--address Of Archbishop Hughes--attack On The Tribune Office--negros Beaten And Killed By The Score--the Draft Suspended, Etc. The Opening Of The Riot Destruction Of The Building Assaults On The Police Assault On A Tribune Attache The Mob On The Increase Private Property Destroyed Arrival Of The Regulars Provost Marshal Kennedy Beaten Attack On The Tribune Office The Riot Of Tuesday Speech Of Gov. Seymour The Very Latest," *Charleston Mercury*, July 21, 1863; "The Riot in New York Successful," *Charleston Mercury*, July 27, 1863.

[114] Smith, 58.

[115] "Prison Life in Richmond--Riots, etc.," *Daily Picayune*, Nov 05, 1864.

wretches."[116] This story lists not just women but children and old men among the rioters and uses language favorable to them. This empathetic treatment of the crowd highlights a trait of Northern characterizations: the crowd is pitiable, so the government is to blame for pushing them to riot. These accounts may have prompted public opinion against the way the Confederate government handled the food situation, or it may have led to emphasizing the effect the Northern blockade had on the people of the Confederacy. In case of the latter, the Confederate government was still being held accountable by Northern public opinion for entering the war. The *Philadelphia Enquirer* story lists rioters being so desperate they come for prison provisions, and furthers its characterization of the crowd's desperation by recounting threats they made: the crowd "swore they would burn the city unless the authorities removed the prisoners."[117] The account of the riot does emphasize the ability of the Confederate government to subdue the riot, saying "The militia or home guard soon put a quietus on the poor wretches and everything was again apparently quiet."[118] However, it ends with supposing that Jefferson Davis was scared: "Old Jeff., however, was more frightened than he would have liked known, for on that night we were all ordered to prepare to leave for this place, and transported here as secretly as possible."[119] Emphasizing Davis' fear and use of secrecy sends a message that the Confederate government is weak and scared of losing control.

Accounts of the Richmond riot in Northern newspapers asserts the weakness of the Confederate government by giving a different account of how the riot was suppressed. The *Boston Herald* claims that "The militia were ordered out to check the riot, but failed to do so."[120]

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[116] "Prison Life in Richmond--Riots, etc.," *Daily Picayune*, Nov 05, 1864.
[117] "Prison Life in Richmond--Riots, etc.," *Daily Picayune*, Nov 05, 1864.
[118] "Prison Life in Richmond--Riots, etc.," *Daily Picayune*, Nov 05, 1864.
[119] "Prison Life in Richmond--Riots, etc.," *Daily Picayune*, Nov 05, 1864.
[120] "Great Bread Riot in Richmond: Government and Private Stores Broken into by Starving Women The Military Unable to Check the Riot Skirmishes with Guerrillas in Kansas Political," *Boston Herald*, April 8, 1863.

They claim instead that when "Jeff Davis and other high officials made speeches to the infuriated women and told them that they should have whatever they needed," then the rioting women "became calm and order was restored."[121] The *New York Herald* makes a similar claim. The report states that "Gov. Letcher then appeared, and, mounting a vehicle in the centre of the street, addressed the throng, characterizing the demonstration as a disgrace and a stigma upon the city, and announcing that but five minutes would be given them in which to disperse. If in that time the order was not complied with, the troops would be called upon to act."[122] This threat broke up the immediate crowd, but "in a few moments" the mob again "burst into the stores of Franklin street." This threat only temporarily quelled the riot, which flared up again in Franklin Street. However, "little damage was done" in this second wave and the riot ended. Still, this account shows that threat of military force alone was not enough: "the riot finally subsided; but not until after the arrest of about forty of the women, and the promise of the Governor to relieve the wants of the destitute."[123]

According to these accounts, the various levels of Confederate government did respond with military force, but that was simply insufficient. What calmed the mob was arrests and promises that the government would provide for them. In other words, promises to give in to the women's demands ended the violence. *The Detroit Free Press* reports that the bread riot had "caused the greatest consternation among the authorities" and that "a repetition of the demonstration was feared, and every precaution was being taken to avert it,"[124] another example of asserting the weakness of the Confederate government. Rumors of another riot in Richmond confirm that this was in fact the truth, making it the most effective form of propaganda. Officials

[121] "Great Bread Riot in Richmond," *Boston Herald,* April 8, 1863.
[122] "Interesting from the South. The Food Question." *New York Herald*, April 17, 1863.
[123] "Interesting from the South. The Food Question." *New York Herald*, April 17, 1863.
[124] "Yesterday's Afternoon Edition," *Detroit Free Press,* April 14, 1863.

ordered a display of military power: “the City Battalion marched down the streets of Richmond at midday, and cannons were placed on city streets.” In response to rumors of further riots, the Public Guard was augmented by the military, but no further riots happened.[125] This show of force was accompanied by giving into women’s demands: public officials supplied women standing on street corners clamoring for food.[126]

The *New York Observer and Chronicle* reports that returned prisoners from Richmond saw that “The rioters were composed of about 8,000 women, who were armed with clubs, and guns and stones.”[127] These women “broke open the government and private stores, and took bread, clothing and whatever else they wanted.”[128] In response, the *Observer and Chronicle* claimed, the government ordered out the militia, but this was not enough to quell the riot. Only when “Jeff. Davis and other high officials made speeches to the infuriated women, and told them they should have what they needed,” did the rioters calm down.[129] Only promises from the government that their needs would be cared for ended the riots, more evidence that Northern newspapers seized on to demonstrate the dire straits of the women and the weakness of the Confederate government.

The United States government, in the form of Union occupation, was in a much stronger position than the Confederate government. The citizens under their governance were not forced into desperation and thus had no protection of being perceived as justified. The riots came out of political passions, which the military government had the strength to repress. The strength of the Union occupation government and the less sympathetic position of the rioters allowed the United

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[125] Smith, 57.
[126] Smith, 57.
[127] "Bread Riot in Richmond,” *New York Observer and Chronicle*, April 9, 1863.
[128] "Bread Riot in Richmond," *New York Observer and Chronicle*, April 9, 1863.
[129] "Bread Riot in Richmond," *New York Observer and Chronicle*, April 9, 1863.

States government to respond solely with force, not bending to the rioters' will. This solidified the United States' image as a strong, stable government in contrast with the Confederacy. In response to political passions breaking out in deadly riot in St. Louis, the federal government of the United States through General Harney, held off on enforcing martial law, wanting to use as little government power as necessary. Though using the minimal level, still the government used military force to maintain order and prevent further violence.

In this volatile city, public perception was split along party lines. A newspaper account originally published in a paper that supported the Democratic Party sympathized with the rioters. An account originally published in a paper that supported the Republican Party portrayed the government in a sympathetic light. Curiously, the St. Louis *Republican* aligned with the Democratic Party. In its account of the initial riot at St. Louis, the language employed obviously sympathizes with rioters and finds fault with how the government responded. It failed to mention that the mob attacking Union soldiers shot at them, instead asserting that "on being pressed by the crowd, and receiving some blows from them," Union soldiers "turned and discharged their pieces."[130] This account said the following of the aftermath:

> the wounded and dying made the late beautiful field look like a battle ground . . . a more fearful and ghastly sigh is seldom seen. Men lay gasping in the agony of death, and staining the green grass with their blood as it flowed from their wounds. Children of eight or ten years of age were pale and motionless as if asleep under the trees, and women cried in pain as they lay upon the ground. One, a girl of fourteen, present a mournful picture, as she reclined against a stump, her face cold and white from the sudden touch of death.[131]

The account acknowledged that "It was reported that the Arsenal troops were attacked with stones, and a couple of shots discharged at them by the crowd before they fired," but emphasized that "Whether this be true or not, a more reckless act has never been

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[130] Another Riot at St. Louis," *Weekly Pioneer and Democrat,* May 17, 1861.
[131] Another Riot at St. Louis," *Weekly Pioneer and Democrat,* May 17, 1861.

committed than an armed body of troops discharging those terrible instruments of war--Minie Rifles--among a crowd of defenseless spectators."[132] It concluded that "The most of the people exposed to the fire of the soldiers, were citizens with their wives and children, who were merely spectators, and took no part in any demonstration whatever."[133]

A Republican account of the riot displayed the opposite sympathies. It emphasized the nature of the crowd and the forbearance of the Union troops: "a fierce crowd of disunionists began hostile demonstrations against Company H. Derision, insults the worst that tongue could frame . . . were thrust upon the troops, who bore it, as duty required, with uncomplaining forbearance."[134] It continued to emphasize how the "treatment was taken as patiently as possible," even as "the mob grew larger, fiercer, and began hurling rocks, brickbats and other missiles at the soldiers."[135] The account told how "the rocks fell heavier and thicker, smashing muskets, breaking limbs, and variously and dangerously wounding a number of troop."[136] It insisted that "a soldier of corps H was shot dead, others were wounded, and the captain received a ball in the leg," and that only then, "on seeing his men fall and finding himself going down," the captain gave the order to fire.[137] The account blamed much of the injuries on the panic of the mob retreating, and praised "the efficiency of the police," by which "good order prevailed."[138] Because the government was in a strong position, not relying on the goodwill cooperation of all the public but simply employing military force, and because public perception was split along

[132] Another Riot at St. Louis," *Weekly Pioneer and Democrat,* May 17, 1861.
[133] Another Riot at St. Louis," *Weekly Pioneer and Democrat,* May 17, 1861.
[134] Another Riot at St. Louis," *Weekly Pioneer and Democrat,* May 17, 1861.
[135] Another Riot at St. Louis," *Weekly Pioneer and Democrat,* May 17, 1861.
[136] Another Riot at St. Louis," *Weekly Pioneer and Democrat,* May 17, 1861.
[137] Another Riot at St. Louis," *Weekly Pioneer and Democrat,* May 17, 1861.
[138] Another Riot at St. Louis," *Weekly Pioneer and Democrat,* May 17, 1861.

political lines, public perception played a small role at best in shaping the United States' response.

General Butler established firm control over New Orleans, showing the mob he was willing to use armed force to maintain order, and then moved to govern for the benefit of the people, emphasizing benefits to welfare, the economy, and the rights of Black people. Though his response shares similarities with that of the Confederate government's, in bettering welfare, General Butler was not forced into it. Additionally, in upholding the rights of Black people, General Butler risked further angering the anti-Union mob, a move too dangerous for the fragile Confederate governments; his willingness to risk angering anti-Union mobs demonstrates the powerful position of the military governments. In Charleston, too, a general of the United States military responded to rioting with direct, heavy-handed governing aimed at eliminating the pressing conditions leading to riots.

Conclusion

Riots in Southern cities during the Civil War occurred because poor white women were struggling and felt as though the government abandoned them, or they happened in Union-occupied cities because of political tensions. In either case, the government responded with attempts at military force. Because of the public perception of rioting women as soldiers' wives with a legitimate need, Confederate governments were only sometimes successful at quelling riots with military force and had to bend to meet rioters' needs. By contrast, the United States government was the picture of strength in Union-occupied cities. Public perception was split along party lines, weakening a force already weak by virtue of the government's military strength. Cooperation was not necessary for the military government to maintain order; coercion

sufficed. The United States successfully quelled riots in occupied cities using military force, and addressed conditions that led to the riots with heavy-handed governance. The tension between public perception of legitimacy and the military power of the state echoes through American history from the Civil War to the present. In 1968, as in 2020, the military strength of the United States' police force balanced the demands of protesters/rioters. Splits in public perception along party lines, with some deeming the events protests and others riots, lends power to the state, and makes military force easier to justify. Successful military repression forces protesters/rioters to depend on the goodwill of government officials, like the rioting women had to depend on the Confederate government to start listening and take effective action to relieve their suffering, and like citizens of occupied cities had to depend on the good will of generals to eliminate the conditions leading to riots. As Confederate women experienced, that goodwill may not manifest itself in significant material changes or policies that fully satisfy their demands.

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