

influences or predecessors (except for Aristotle, of all people). Heller's account of the figures who helped Rand develop her thought—especially Isabel Paterson, a *New York Herald Tribune* book reviewer and author with whom Rand predictably broke—helps recover an entire intellectual tradition that has mostly been forgotten.

Burns, a political scientist at the University of Virginia, makes the most of her unique access to Rand's personal papers at the Ayn Rand Institute in Irvine, California. Like Heller, she situates Rand in a rich intellectual and cultural tradition that predated the New Deal and eventually gave rise to a revitalized limited-government movement that culminated in figures such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. Burns is particularly sharp at analyzing how Cold War conservatives such as Buckley rejected Rand's rationalism but eventually benefited from her popularity with college students

during the 1960s. Since the demise of their common foe, the Soviet Union, conservatives and libertarians increasingly find themselves at odds with one another over precisely the same issues that Rand and Buckley fought over decades ago. These range from questions about the proper role of religion in a secular society to whether the state should be used to restrict alternative lifestyles to the legitimate circumstances for military action.

Individually, *Ayn Rand and the World She Made* and *Goddess of the Market* help elucidate an underanalyzed cultural figure. Together, they provide a rounded portrait of a woman who, as Burns writes, "tried to nurture herself exclusively on ideas." As Rand's biography underscores, she failed miserably in that, even as she helped create an ideological framework that continues to energize debate in contemporary America.

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#### HISTORY

## Three Weddings and a War

*Reviewed by Martha Saxton*

HISTORIAN CAROL BERKIN has written a trio of compelling biographies that portray the experiences of elite Southern women during the Civil War years. Through the war, emancipation, and its aftermath, these women arrived at very different accommodations to the laws

and customs that underpinned both slavery and marriage. Angelina Grimké Weld's girlhood in a slaveholding family led her to abolitionism and feminism—although not to an egalitarian marriage. Varina Howell Davis's passionate attachment to the values of the Confederacy and to her husband meant that many of the freedoms she claimed depended on the labor of others. And Julia

**CIVIL WAR WIVES:**  
The Lives and Times  
of Angelina Grimké  
Weld, Varina  
Howell Davis, and  
Julia Dent Grant.

By Carol Berkin.  
Knopf. 361 pp. \$28.95

Dent Grant loved the life that her Union general husband provided more than she cared about either slavery or freedom.

Angelina Grimké Weld (1805–79) publicly opposed slavery and quickly recognized its parallels with women's subjugation, causing controversy within abolitionist ranks. Ironically, her marriage to the Northern reformer Theodore Weld seems to have been the most stultifying of those Berkin studied. In part, this was because Grimké Weld sacrificed wealth and slaves in her native Charleston, South Carolina, to become a radical activist. She felt the full impact of the antebellum "second shift," as she shared her husband's moral and intellectual labors while also bearing and raising children and doing the household chores with only her sister Sarah's help. Grimké Weld stands out in three important ways from Berkin's other subjects. She was the only one who grasped that slavery was both a crime and a sin. She was the only one to connect slavery with the condition of women. And yet, because she never attempted to alter the distribution of marital



Angelina Grimké Weld

duties, she led a more typical married woman's life than Varina Davis or Julia Grant—a life of numbing domestic labor and isolation.

If the price of Grimké Weld's principles was a hard life, Julia Dent Grant (1826–1902) took life as it came. She was born in the border state of Missouri, daughter of a prosperous merchant, planter, and slave owner. As the wife of Ulysses S. Grant, the terminator of the Confederacy, Julia Grant lived through more danger and saw more carnage than Grimké Weld, yet she seems to have emerged from the war with her sense of joie de vivre unimpaired. Secure in her husband's affection, Mrs. Grant usually obeyed his lists of orders as unthinkingly as he dispensed them. She welcomed his "don't-you-trouble-your-pretty-little-head" variety of paternalism and adored the life his celebrity and success gave them. In Berkin's sometimes exasperated but always sympathetic account of this sweet woman's life, Julia Grant's inability to imagine the lives of the less fortunate blinded her to most injustices. Yet her constitutional cheerfulness kept her husband largely free of pain when his mind wandered from solving military problems toward his psychic wounds. Reluctantly, she achieved some measure of independence after his death, but she never truly wished for an identity separate from his.

The beautiful Varina Howell Davis (1826–1906), married to Jefferson Davis, the president of the Confederacy, had a sharp intellect and a wit that could sting. Despite her devotion to furthering her husband's career, their marriage was

troubled. Davis's suffocating egotism and his self-serving critiques of his much younger wife Varina fueled her insecurity. She was most fully herself when Davis was sick or absent. Then her broad construction of her wifely duties allowed her use all the vitality and intellectual power at her command, as when she protested to President Andrew Johnson and others the treatment of her husband as a prisoner of war. As a widow, she briefly found an identity and independence as a newspaper writer. She never challenged women's subordination, but her wealth and status enabled her to evade a number of its burdens.

Berkin's stories show that the domestic tyranny into which these women married differed little, North or South, reformist or traditionalist. Jefferson Davis, like Theodore Weld, wished to control his wife's mind as well as her actions, but Varina Howell Davis, unlike Grimké Weld, lacked a rudimentary feminist ideology with which to defend herself. Oddly, the general issuing his orders emerges as the least invasive of these rulers, largely eschewing moral manipulation and mind control in favor of simple command over family logistics. He seemed to like his wife the way she was, whereas Weld and Davis did not trust their wives' restless minds to produce the admiration and willing compliance they desired.

Berkin does not impose a broad interpretation upon the marital experiences of her subjects, nor does she systematically describe married women's disadvantaged legal standing or make explicit the significance of class in these stories. Instead, she allows her rich and well-selected material to bear the burden of describing 19th-century marriage and its echoes in the present. The result is readable and thought provoking, though I sometimes wished the author had imposed a sturdier analytical framework.

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Varina Howell Davis



Julia Dent Grant