Masculinity and Familial Relations in the Early Republic South: A Study of Andrew Jackson's Advice to His Male Wards*

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Scholarship on white southern masculinity and familial relations has become ubiquitous over the past few years. Historians such as Carolyn Earle Billingsley have examined the kinship ties that bound together white southerners, while other historians, including Craig Thompson Friend and Stephen Berry, have reinvigorated the study of white southern masculinity and its consequences for social, economic, and political advancement.[1]

Another historian, Lorri Glover, has been at the forefront of this scholarship. Her recent book, *Southern Sons: Becoming Men in the New Nation*, offers the most comprehensive treatment of the relationship between older male patriarchs and their younger male wards in the Early Republic. I will be using Andrew Jackson's advice to

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[1] While by no means a comprehensive list, some of the more important books on these topics published in the last eight years are Stephen W. Berry II, *All That Makes a Man: Love and Ambition in the Civil War South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Carolyn Earle Billingsley, *Communities of Kinship: Antebellum Planters and the Settlement of the Cotton Frontier* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004); Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover, eds., *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2004); Robert F. Pace, *Halls of Honor: College Men in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004); Lorri Glover, *Southern Sons: Becoming Men in the New Nation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007); Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters: Young Women in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Jennifer R. Green, *Military Education and the Emerging Middle Class in the Old South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Craig Thompson Friend and Anya Jabour, eds., *Family Values in the Old South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010).

three of his male wards to test several of her contentions. The first dependent, Andrew Jackson, Jr. (1809-1865), was the nephew whom Jackson and his wife, Rachel, adopted from Rachel's brother, Severn. (For the purpose of clarity, Andrew Jackson, Jr., will be referred to as Junior). The second ward was another nephew, Andrew Jackson Donelson (1799-1871), son of Rachel's brother, Samuel. The last was Andrew Jackson Hutchings (1811-1841), Jackson's great-nephew through Rachel's sister, Catherine. I chose these three young men because of the frequency and depth of their correspondence with Jackson, as well as their responses to his advice. For the sake of time, I will briefly address only Jackson's advice regarding education, honor, and money, although one could also examine his advice about other subjects, including morality, interactions with females, and slavery.[2]

Glover's arguments are important and many, but I would like to focus on her analysis of the father/patriarch-son/dependent relationship. Central to achieving the reputation of "genteel manhood," Glover proposes, was the guidance of an older male role model, who often expected "formal education to turn their boys into self-conscious and eminent Americans." Southern patriarchs, she suggests, used their male dependents' college attendance to test their young relatives' ability to demonstrate independent thinking and practice leadership, often using guilt trips and pleading letters to push the young men in the right direction. Glover briefly addresses the role of honor, which has

[2] For background on the three male wards, see Linda Bennett Galloway, "Andrew Jackson, Jr.," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 9 (September 1950): 195-216; idem, "Andrew Jackson, Jr.," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 9 (December 1950): 306-43; Mark R. Cheathem, *Old Hickory's Nephew: The Political and Private Struggles of Andrew Jackson Donelson* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007); John H. DeWitt, "Andrew Jackson and His Ward, Andrew Jackson Hutchings: A History Hitherto Unpublished," *Tennessee Historical Magazine* 1 (January 1931): 83-106.

been the central paradigm for explaining southern masculine behavior since the publication of Bertram Wyatt-Brown's *Southern Honor* in 1982. Another issue to which southern patriarchs paid close attention was their male dependents' management of money. As Glover notes, southern sons needed to practice "fiscal responsibility" in order to "acquire a proper reputation . . . [and] protect the fiscal futures of their families."[3]

Jackson was adamant that his male wards receive an education. All three boys—Junior, Donelson, and Hutchings—were taught by private tutors and attended Cumberland College in Nashville. As they grew older, Jackson ensured that they received the best schooling that he could afford. With his uncle's help, Donelson received an appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point, then later studied law at Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky. Junior and Hutchings both attended the University of Nashville, with the latter also spending a short time at the University of Virginia.[4]

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[3] Glover, *Southern Sons*, 1-5, 89-91, 40-50, 107-111, 132-146; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982). See also Glover's "'Let Us Manufacture Men': Educating Elite Boys in the Early National South," in *Southern Manhood*, 22-48.

[4] See footnote 2 for sources on the three wards' educational careers.

For more on education among the southern elite, see Jane Turner Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 42-64; Jon L. Wakelyn, "Antebellum College Life and the Relations between Fathers and Sons," in *The Web of Southern Social Relations: Women, Family, and Education*, eds. Walter J. Fraser, Jr., R. Frank Saunders, Jr., and Jon L. Wakelyn (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1985), 107-126; Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 128-157; Stowe, "The Rhetoric of Authority: The Making of Social Values in Planter Family Correspondence," *Journal of American History* 73 (March 1987): 916-933; Pace, *Halls of Honor*. For education and the southern middle class, see Jennifer R. Green, "'Stout Chaps Who Can Bear the Distress': Young Men in Antebellum Military Academies," in *Southern Manhood*, 174-195; and Green, *Military Education and the Emerging Middle Class*.

Jackson made his reasons for supporting education clear. He told Donelson that his purpose in placing him at West Point was to acquaint him with "the theatre of the world" and help him become "a professional man." When Donelson was at Transylvania University, Jackson explained why he recommended his nephew's move there: "One of my objects in placing you at Lexington was that you might become acquainted with the young gentlemen from various part of the south & west," he wrote, "that when you enter in to professional life, . . . you may then be known—for I will not disguise, I look forward, if you live, to the time when you will be selected to preside over the destinies of america."[5]

Jackson was not as ambitious for his other wards as he was for Donelson, but he still emphasized the importance of education to their future. To Junior, he wrote that the benefits of education would allow him to "attain a proper standing in society . . . [and] enable you to fulfil the duties through life with honor to yourself & usefulness to that society with whom you may be placed." Jackson gave Hutchings similar advice. Only if the young man would "apply himself diligently to his studies with a view to excell his

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[5] Andrew Jackson to Andrew Jackson Donelson, 24 February 1817, 17 September 1819, in Harold D. Moser, David R. Hoth, and George H. Hoemann, eds., *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume IV, 1816-1820* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 91-92, 322-323; Andrew Jackson to Andrew Jackson Donelson, 12 April 1822, 2 May 1822, Andrew Jackson Donelson Papers, Library of Congress, Washington , D.C. (hereafter cited DLC); Andrew Jackson to Andrew Jackson Donelson, 20 May 1822, in Harold D. Moser, David R. Hoth, and George H. Hoemann, eds., *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume V, 1821-1824* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 188-9.

Following their introduction, volumes of *The Papers of Andrew Jackson* will subsequently be cited *PAJ*, followed by the volume and page numbers.

fellows" would he be able to "become respectable in society & useful to himself, & country."[6]

In pursuing their education, the three wards sometimes found themselves involved in volatile situations that required honorable responses. For example, while at West Point, Donelson joined a group of cadets protesting their treatment at the hands of the new commandant, Captain John Bliss, who publicly humiliated and physically assaulted a cadet. From Donelson's reports, Jackson could only conclude that the commandant's "conduct" had been "inconsistant with the feelings of a man of honour." He applauded his nephew's support for Bliss' removal and encouraged him to "aid injured innocence when & wheresoever you meet with it." Jackson especially wanted Donelson to protect his own honor. "Suffer death before you will dishonour," he advised. "If the superior attempts either to strike or kick you, put him to instant death the moment you receive either—never my son, outlive your honour—never do an act that will tarnish it."[7]

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[6] Andrew Jackson to Jean Baptiste Plauché et al., 26 May 1826, Andrew Jackson to Junior, 27 November 1827, in Harold D. Moser and J. Clint Clifft, eds., *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume VI, 1825-1828* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2002), 175-176, 402-403.

[7] AJ to AJD, 20 October 1817 and 3 August 1818, DLC; AJD to AJ, 23 November 1818, Cadets' Petition, [November 1818], Andrew Jackson Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (herafter cited JLC); AJD to AJ, 29 November 1818, AJ to AJD, 28 December 1818, in Moser, Hoth, and Hoemann, eds., *PAJ*, 4:253-5, 262-263.

Besides Wyatt-Brown, other historians who have added to our understanding of southern honor include Edward Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th-Century American South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984); Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor & Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing As a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, & Gambling in the Old South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Joanne B. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2001).

On Jackson and honor, see Wyatt-Brown, "Andrew Jackson's Honor," *Journal of the Early Republic* 17 (Spring 1997): 1-36 and Andrew Burstein, *The Passions of Andrew*

These volatile situations sometimes brought chastisement from Jackson when the ward was acting dishonorably, though. For example, Hutchings was suspended from the University of Nashville in early 1829 for throwing a chair at a professor. No reason for the attack was recorded, but every indication is that it was simply an act of violent petulance. After the incident, Hutchings returned to the Hermitage, where family friend Charles J. Love reported that he was "very much in the way." Jackson's brother-in-law, John Donelson, told him that relatives were at their wits' end with Hutchings. "He was asked some time ago what he intended" to become, John Donelson relayed. "His answer was a D[amn] rich old farmer like the rest of his kin Folks." An exasperated Jackson wrote his kinsman and close friend, John Coffee, that he had "lost all hope of making Hutchings a classic scholar" but would try to get him a place at Nashville's Harpeth Academy. To Hutchings, Jackson wrote, "I must again i[m]press upon your mind the great [value] of an education," reminding him that he had spent too much of his "time in idleness & folly." When Hutchings refused to attend a school in nearby Franklin, Tennessee, Jackson considered enrolling him at the Catholic college in Georgetown, where he would "be able to controle him & convince him of the impropriety of his ways."[8]

Jackson (New York: Knopf, 2003). I have discussed the honor relationship between Jackson and Donelson previously in "'The High Minded Honourable Man': Honor, Kinship, and Conflict in the Life of Andrew Jackson Donelson," *Journal of the Early Republic* 27 (Summer 2007): 265-92. Glover mistakenly claims that Donelson was dismissed from West Point in 1818 (*Southern Sons*, 107).

[8] DeWitt, "Andrew Jackson and His Ward, Andrew Jackson Hutchings," 83-106; William Donelson to Andrew Jackson Donelson, 13 March 1829, Bettie M. Donelson Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tenn.; Andrew Jackson to John Coffee, 19 March 1829, 22 March 1829, 21 July 1829, Andrew Jackson to William Donelson, 22 March 1829, John Donelson to AJ, 19 May 1829, Andrew Jackson to

By late 1829, Hutchings was in Washington at Georgetown College, but within a few months, Jackson sent him back to Tennessee to study at a school in Columbia. Jackson admitted to Coffee that his presidential duties made it impossible for him to keep track of Hutchings from Washington. The young man soon ran into trouble in Middle Tennessee, a pattern that continued in 1832, when he was dismissed from the University of Virginia for not attending classes.[9]

Jackson was no different from many southern patriarchs when it came to money management. He freely dispensed financial advice to the three young men, whether they wanted it or not. During the Panic of 1819, Jackson cautioned Donelson to be prudent and efficient in his use of funds while at West Point and repeatedly asked him to acknowledge the receipt of bank notes. Jackson's concern, however, was not simply personal. He advised Donelson to "draw a true distinction, between aeconomy and parsimony, the latter I wish you to shun," a recommendation that was born out of personal experience shaped by southern culture. A southern gentleman needed to look and act the part of an elite, a life that required spending money and depended on loans

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Andrew Jackson Hutchings, 13 June 1829, in Daniel Feller et al., eds., *The Papers of Andrew Jackson: Volume VII, 1829* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2007), 104-105, 108-109, 337-338, 109-110, 229-231, 279-280.

[9] Charles J. Love to AJ, 15 April 1829, Andrew Jackson to Robert J. Chester, 14 February 1830, John Coffee to AJ, 2 March 1830, Andrew Jackson to John Coffee, 10 April 1830, [8 May] 1830, in PAJ, 7:159, 8:73-74, 111-112, 183-184, 248-249; Andrew Jackson to John Coffee, 26 May 1831, 6 September 1831, Andrew Jackson to Andrew Jackson Hutchings, 3 November 1833, in John Spencer Bassett and J. Franklin Jameson, eds., *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 7 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1926-35), 4:285, 348-349, 5:223-224 (hereafter cited *CAJ*); Andrew Jackson to Andrew Jackson Hutchings, 11 February 1832, Andrew Jackson to John Coffee, 19 February 1832, Andrew Jackson Papers, Scholarly Resources, Inc., Wilmington, Dela. (hereafter cited JSR); DeWitt, "Andrew Jackson and His Ward, Andrew Jackson Hutchings," 90-96.

and credit. At the same time, one had to avoid placing oneself in a precarious financial situation by taking on excessive debt or making superfluous purchases, which could lead to the loss of elite status. Financial economy would bring "the approbation of all good men," he wrote Donelson, but too much frugality would "disgrace you in the eyes of good & bad." Finding the balance, Jackson believed, was the key to social success.[10]

By the time he became president, Jackson worried extensively about the debts attached to his property, many of which Junior contracted while overseeing the Hermitage plantation. He warned his son "never to go in debt—a man indebted is a slave, & placed under circumstances with his creditors, that may subject his feelings to injury & insult." Jackson had been "ruined" two times by becoming security for someone else, he told his son; the lesson for Junior was never to loan money unless he was able to live without seeing the debt repaid. When Jackson asked his son to look into making a land purchase near the Hermitage, he reminded him to be "guarded." "Conclude no contract . . . without furnishing me with the propositions and have all the propositions reduced to writing before you accede to any" was Jackson's order. After Junior purchased tools that were "not fit for coarse work" by their slaves, his father admonished him to live frugally:

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[10] Andrew Jackson to Andrew Jackson Donelson, 4 August 1817, 24 November 1818, 6 August 1819, 12 October 1819, 16 November 1819, 3 December 1819, 29 February 1820, 21 March 1820 [two letters], DLC; Andrew Jackson to Andrew Jackson Donelson, 21 November 1819, in *CAJ*, 2:440-2.

For scholarship on southern patriarchs' concern with fiscal responsibility, see Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children*, 119-134; Herbert E. Sloan, *Principle and Debt: Thomas Jefferson and the Problem of Debt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Robert Tinkler, *James Hamilton of South Carolina* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 168-169, 209-214, 233-234, 246-247; Alan Pell Crawford, *Twilight at Monticello: The Final Years of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Random House, 2008), 58-61, 135-137, 229-230.

"Never buy any thing that is useless, or that you have not immediate want of—and particularly when you do not pay for it."[11]

Jackson's advice to his male wards reflects many of Glover's assertions regarding the relationships between male patrons and their male dependents, but there are some differences. For example, he encouraged all three wards to pursue an education in order to assume their role as male members of the gentry; however, he pushed only Donelson toward a military academy, an institution that defined masculinity in the early nineteenth century. Jackson's evolving career and advanced age, not changing views on what constituted masculinity, probably shaped this difference in advice. When Donelson was in his mid-teens, Jackson was still in the military and may have seen a military career as the proper course. (He also gained admittance into West Point for several of his other male wards during these years.) By the time Junior was old enough to continue his education a decade later, Jackson was a national politician and had identified his adopted son as needing experience running the Hermitage now that Rachel was dead and he was away. Attending a military academy, therefore, was not important for Junior's success; instead, preserving his father's wealth, and thereby his own inheritance, was his responsibility.

This interpretation is supported by the fact that Jackson's admonitions to Junior in his teenage and early adulthood years focused primarily on finances, even after his son was married and had children in his mid-20s. Compare this advice to that given to Donelson at the same age, which focused primarily on politics. It appears that by the time

[11] Andrew Jackson to Junior, 3 July 1831, 24 September 1833, 19 October 1833, 20 October 1833, 11 January [1834], JSR; Andrew Jackson to Junior, 8 November 1832, JLC.

Junior reached adulthood, Jackson had determined that Donelson was his political heir, while Junior was his best hope for securing economic security. Jackson's final will, written in 1843, also attests to this interpretation: Junior received Jackson's wealth, while Donelson received only a sword symbolic of Jackson's devotion to the Union. Fighting political battles was masculine theater writ large, but providing financial security for one's family was also a sign of genteel manhood.[12]

Another factor in Jackson's advice to his three wards, and their responses to his advice, likely stemmed from the generational difference between Donelson and the other two young men. Donelson was born in 1799, Junior in 1809, and Hutchings in 1811. As Junior and Hutchings were entering adulthood, not only did Jackson's advice for them change when compared to that given to Donelson, but so did the wards' reactions to his advice. Where Donelson was always deferential and respectful of his uncle as a young man, Junior and Hutchings were openly sullen and even defiant. Jackson's frequent exasperation with the latter two was also obvious in his correspondence; virtually the only time that he expressed irritation with Donelson as a young man was regarding his nephew's infrequent writing.[13]

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[12] Jackson's will, 7 June 1843, in *CAJ*, 6:220-3.

It is also clear that there was a difference in Jackson's assessment of Donelson's and Junior's capabilities to live independent, successful lives.

[13] Glover, *Southern Sons*, 2, 4.

For Jackson's chastisement for infrequent writing, see Andrew Jackson to Andrew Jackson Donelson, 4 August 1817, 24 November 1818, 6 August 1819, 12 October 1819, 16 November 1819, 3 December 1819, 29 February 1820, 21 March 1820 [two letters], DLC; Andrew Jackson to Andrew Jackson Donelson, 21 November 1819, in *CAJ*, 2:440-2; Andrew Jackson to Junior, 27 November 1827, in *PAJ*, 6:402-403.

Donelson's deference to Jackson ended with the Eaton affair, which I detailed in "'High Minded Honourable Man,'" and *Old Hickory's Nephew*, chs. 4-5.

Observing the differences between Donelson and the two younger wards in terms of Jackson's advice and their responses, I wonder if there is a lost generation that historians have overlooked. Glover's book focuses on the men who "came of age between the 1790s and the 1820s," a cohort that roughly coincides with the "post-heroic" generation examined by George B. Forgie and the "first generation" identified by Joyce Appleby. We also have Stephen Berry's study of manhood in the South of the 1850s and 1860s. But what of the men who belong in the cohort that came of age in the 1830s and 1840s? How did expectations concerning masculinity affect them, and how did they respond? The experience of Jackson and two of his wards suggests that there may have been differences.[14]

Additionally, were there differences between the experiences of the gentry of the Upper South (Tennessee and Kentucky, for example) versus those of the emerging Lower South (Mississippi and Alabama) or the older seaboard states (Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina)? Jackson's exertion of his patriarchal will suggests that there were more similarities than differences. My own sense from studying Jackson's relationship

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[14] George B. Forgie, *Patricide in the House Divided: A Psychological Interpretation of Lincoln and His Age* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1979); Joyce Appleby, *Inheriting the Revolution: The First Generation of Americans* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000); Berry, *All That Makes a Man.* Forgie's classification of the post-heroic cohort is too broad to be useful. It includes Henry Clay (b. 1777), Abraham Lincoln (b. 1809), and Stephen Douglas (b. 1813). Forgie offers Jackson as an example of "a heroic leader in post-heroic politics" who "identified fully with neither generation," Revolutionary or post-Revolutionary (11-12).

Other scholarship that takes a broader chronological view but still offers important insights includes Michael P. Johnson, "Planters and Patriarchy: Charleston, 1800-1860," *Journal of Southern History* 46 (February 1980): 45-72; Joan E. Cashin, "The Structure of Antebellum Planter Families: 'The Ties that Bound Us Was Strong,'" *Journal of Southern History* 56 (February 1990): 55-70; Jane Turner Censer, "Southern Migration Among North Carolina Planter Families: 'The Disposition to Emigrate,'" *Journal of Southern History* 57 (August 1991): 407-426.

with his male wards is that social class trumped geography; in other words, the advice that he gave the three younger Andrews did not differ substantially from that dispensed by the Charleston planters analyzed by historian Michael Johnson, for example. I wonder, though, if planters who lived permanently in the new Cotton South states gave different advice to their sons.[15]

While not conclusive, the example of Jackson's advice to these three wards suggests that Glover is right: "further interrogation" of the honor thesis is necessary in order to provide "greater chronological specificity" in "analyz[ing] the effects of gender values on the lives of the region's leading men." Historians would do well to follow the example of Glover and other scholars of masculinity and manhood in refining and even refuting Wyatt-Brown's analysis of southern honor in order to better understand the Early Republic South.[16]

[15] For masculinity in South Carolina, see Johnson, "Planters and Patriarchy"; for Mississippi, see Christopher J. Olsen, *Political Culture and Secession in Mississippi: Masculinity, Honor, and the Antiparty Tradition, 1830-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[16] Glover, *Southern Sons*, 2.