

Patriarchy and Masculinity in Antebellum America: Andrew Jackson and His Male Wards

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The life of Andrew Jackson has been understudied by historians. Some, perhaps many, of you likely disagree with that statement, but hear me out. Certain facets of Jackson's life have received extensive treatment: his attitude toward Native Americans, his expansion of executive power, and his economic policy, for example. Other parts of his life have not: his interaction with and treatment of the enslaved who worked on his plantations; his personal financial dealings, including land and slave transactions; and his relationship with his extensive kinship network.

To attempt to further the conversation about the lesser-known aspects of Jackson's personality and life and how they relate to larger historiographical themes, I want to examine briefly Andrew Jackson's advice to his male wards, and his conception of patriarchy and masculinity encapsulated in that advice. Jackson was not shy about telling people what he thought they should do, and his kin often bore the brunt of his sometimes extensive missives. Among the male relatives and kin with whom Jackson corresponded, several of his wards were particular targets of his wisdom. One was Andrew Jackson, Jr. (1809-1865), 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). Another was his nephew, Andrew Jackson Donelson (1799-

1871), son of Rachel's brother, Samuel. A third was Andrew Jackson Hutchings (1811-1841), Jackson's great-nephew through Rachel's sister, Catherine.¹

For the sake of time, I will briefly address only Jackson's advice regarding morality, interactions with females, and slavery, although one could also examine his advice on other subjects, including education, honor, and money. What emerges from Jackson's advice is the portrait of a patriarch who attempted to shape his wards' masculinity to make them successful members of the southern gentry, which he, in turn, expected to reflect well on himself.²

¹ 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. Cheatham, *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.

² Mark R. Cheatham, "Masculinity and Familial Relations in the Early Republic South: A Study of Andrew Jackson's Advice to His Male Wards," unpublished paper presented at Society for Historians of the Early American Republic, July 2011, available at <http://mcheatham.wordpress.com/2011/07/07/shear-2011-andrew-jackson-his-wards-and-masculinity/>; Michael P. Johnson, "Planters and Patriarchy: Charleston, 1800-1860," *Journal of Southern History* 46 (February 1980): 45-72; James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Random House, 1982; pbk. ed., New York: Vintage, 1983), 201-204; Lorri Glover, *Southern Sons: Becoming Men in the New Nation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 3.

While by no means a comprehensive list, some of the more important books addressing masculinity and patriarchy 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); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Dilemma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters: Young Women in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North

Perhaps because of his racism or his statements that politics and established religion should not mix, Jackson's views on morality have received little scholarly attention. He believed in a moral code, however, one that was a mixture of republican virtue, religious fatalism, and southern honor, and he consistently preached it to his male wards. Unlike Steven Mintz's "moralists and modernizers," Jackson's moral code was intent on preserving a hierarchical order. While this placed him squarely within the expected norms of much of southern planter society, Jackson was out of step with the changes wrought by the market revolution, which was breaking down that hierarchy throughout the antebellum period.³

Carolina Press, 2007); Jennifer R. Green, *Military Education and the Emerging Middle Class in the Old South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Lacy K. Ford, *Deliver Us from Evil: The Slavery Question in the Old South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Craig Thompson Friend and Anya Jabour, eds., *Family Values in the Old South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010); Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Fatal Self-Deception: Slaveholding Paternalism in the Old South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

For scholarship on these six topics related specifically to Jackson, see Arda Walker, "The Religious Views of Andrew Jackson," *East Tennessee Historical Society Publications* 17 (1945): 61-70; Robert V. Remini, *The Legacy of Andrew Jackson: Essays on Democracy, Indian Removal, and Slavery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 83-111; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "Andrew Jackson's Honor," *Journal of the Early Republic* 17 (Spring 1997): 1-36; Matthew S. Warshauer, "Andrew Jackson: Chivalric Slave Master," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 65 (Fall 2006): 203-229; Mark R. Cheatham, "'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.

³ Harry L. Watson, *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America*, 2d. ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), 45-46; Wyatt-Brown, "Andrew Jackson's Honor," 1-36; Walker, "The Religious Views of Andrew Jackson," 61-70; Steven Mintz, *Moralists and Modernizers: America's Pre-Civil War Reformers* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), xiii-xv; Daniel Walker Howe, "The Market Revolution and the Shaping of Identity in Whig-Jacksonian America," in Melvyn Stokes and Stephen Conway, eds., *The Market Revolution in America: Social, Political, and Religious Expression, 1800-1880* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1996), 270-271.

Junior was a frequent recipient of his father's unsolicited advice. During his son's early adolescence, Jackson told him always to think through his decisions and keep the promises that he made. Lying was wrong; acting justly and pursuing an education were right. Keeping to these dictates would allow him to "be esteemed by all." The advice continued into adulthood. "You are young, and now for the first time distant from me," Jackson reminded Junior shortly after taking over the presidency in 1829, "but I have confidence that you will steer clear of evil company, & all disipation." Two years later, the refrain was similar: "It is now time to settle yourself and your mind to business."⁴

One particular episode in the mid-1830s seemed to justify Jackson's earlier concern about his son's morality. In early 1835, he cautioned Junior about his excessive drinking. Jackson held up examples of two young men who had lost standing in the community because of their "intoxication" and reminded Junior that people watched the president's son to ensure that he followed "the rules of strict decorum and propriety." Political enemies would use Junior's intemperance against the president, but, Jackson warned, he also needed to consider the effect on his wife and children. Additionally, Jackson was concerned about how his son's conduct would reflect on his own legacy. He proclaimed himself pleased with Junior's decision not to drink from the "poisonous

⁴ Andrew Jackson to Andrew Jackson, Jr., [c11 December 1823], 31 January 1827, 27 November 1827, 14 July 1829, 20 July 1829, 22 July 1829, 18 August 1829, 19 August 1829, 20 August 1829, in *PAJ*, 5:326-327, 6:272-273, 402-403, 7:333-334, 336-337, 340-341, 374, 384-385, 386-387; Andrew Jackson to Andrew Jackson, Jr., 5 January 1824, 5 April 1824, in Samuel G. Heiskell, *Andrew Jackson and Early Tennessee History*, 2 vols. (2d. ed. 1920), 2:394, 400; Andrew Jackson to Andrew Jackson, Jr., [14 May 1831], 18 May 1831, 3 July 1831, Andrew Jackson Papers, Scholarly Resources, Inc., Wilmington, Dela. (hereafter cited JSR).

Volumes of *The Papers of Andrew Jackson* are cited *PAJ*, followed by the volume and page numbers.

c[h]alice” because “in your reputation, my future fame depends.” The early nineteenth century United States was an alcoholic republic, but in Jackson’s household, drunkenness was verboten.⁵

While Junior tended to ignore his father’s recommendations, Donelson usually heeded Jackson’s advice. In 1817, Jackson wrote a missive to his nephew, newly admitted as a cadet to West Point, that advised him on how best to maintain his “morality & virtue.” He recognized Donelson’s willingness to “part with existence, before you will tarnish your honor, or depart from the paths of virtue & honesty.” This determination was important, he warned, because Donelson would face “many snares” intended to take advantage of his inexperience. Individuals would put on a façade of morality, while at the same time “deriding morality & religion as empty hypocritical shows” in order to lead him slowly into “disipation, vice & folly.” Jackson reassured his nephew that practicing caution would not condemn him to a life of isolation. Instead, Donelson simply had to ensure that he only spent time “with the better class of society, whose charectors are well established for their virtue, & upright conduct.”⁶

Donelson’s involvement in a dispute between several West Point cadets and their drill instructor over alleged mistreatment gave Jackson the opportunity to see his

⁵ Andrew Jackson to Andrew Jackson, Jr., 14 April 1835, 29 April 1835, 16 May 1835, in John Spencer Bassett and J. Franklin Jameson, eds., *Correspondence of Andrew Jackson*, 7 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1926-35), 5:335-336, 341-342, 347-348 (hereafter cited *CAJ*); Andrew Jackson, Jr. to Sarah Yorke Jackson, 25 April 1835, 10 April 1836, Andrew Jackson to Andrew Jackson, Jr., 2 May 1835, 9 May 1835, Andrew Jackson Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited *JLC*); W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

⁶ Andrew Jackson to Andrew J. Donelson, 24 February 1817, in *PAJ*, 4:91-92.

nephew's virtue in action. He applauded Donelson's attempt to protect "innocence unjustly injured," but he warned him to ensure that "the subject of abuse is innocent, and the treatment unjust." If those conditions were met, then it was Donelson's "duty to aid injured innocence." He had to make sure, however, that he still respected his superiors; to do otherwise was "criminal." While protecting his honor was paramount, requiring Donelson to kill if he were physically assaulted, Jackson also instructed him to "never deviate from a Just subordination to your superiors," a lesson of which his wards were well aware.⁷

Jackson's advice about morality held special significance for his male wards' interaction with women. An overview of his counsel on male-female relationships reveals a man who believed in the power of female sexuality to build up or tear down a man's character. Interestingly, it also demonstrates that Jackson sometimes acknowledged his inability as a patriarch to compel moral conduct from his male wards, instead relying on women to do what he could not.

In warning Cadet Donelson to spend time only with individuals of character, Jackson specifically identified "virtuous females" as part of that "better class of society." A moral woman was one who "enobles the mind, cultivates your manners, & prepares the mind for the achievement of every thing great, virtuous, & honourable." Her antithesis, he warned his nephew, was one whose acquaintance "engenders corruption, & contaminates the morals, and fits the young mind for any act of unguarded baseness."

⁷ Andrew Jackson to Andrew J. Donelson, 28 December 1818, in *PAJ*, 4:262-263.

The Eaton affair of Jackson's presidency, in which Donelson played a central role, eventually revealed the irony of this advice.⁸

Jackson's belief in the redeeming qualities of women also manifested itself in his advice to his wards about marriage. Submissive wards such as Donelson failed to elicit his concern, but recalcitrant ones made clear that Jackson saw wives as their best hope for taking the straight and narrow path. When Junior began looking for a wife in his early twenties, Jackson cautioned his son about his courtship manners, which were apparently uncouth at times. In 1829, for example, Junior set his sights on neighbor Flora Dickson. His attempts to woo her fell flat, leading Jackson to observe that "she has give herself up to coquetry." Junior was better off without her, "as I seldom ever saw a coquett, make a good wife." The following year, Junior had another unsuccessful courtship, this time failing to win the heart of Mary Frances Trigg Smith. Jackson was forced to write her father when Junior failed to indicate "his honorable intentions." Jackson asked pater Smith to forgive his son's "error" and "ascribe it to his youth, diffidence and inexperience." This courtship, too, failed, Jackson noting later in the fall of 1830 that he believed that Junior's "dulcinea is coquetting him." During this period, he reminded his son that "my happiness depends much on the prudence of your choice" of a wife. As late as September 1831, Jackson was hinting that Junior should consider pursuing Mary Ann Lewis, daughter of his friend and political advisor, William B. Lewis, as a potential mate. "You know she is a great favorite of mine, and that she was also of your dear deceased mother," he wrote, suggesting that Junior's decision needed to take into account his

⁸ Andrew Jackson to Andrew J. Donelson, 24 February 1817, in *PAJ*, 4:91-92.

father's preference. By all accounts, his marriage to Sarah Yorke in late 1831 met with Jackson's approval.⁹

Hutchings, who defied Jackson's advice about numerous things for years, found salvation only in matrimony. Early on, Jackson warned him that only a "[g]ood education, accompanie[d] with religion morality, & sobriety of conduct" would help him "become respectable in society." Over the next few years, Hutchings was dismissed from Cumberland College and the University of Virginia, confirming Jackson's fear that "he may do something that may disgrace him, or lessen his respectability in society." Hutchings settled down only once he married John Coffee's daughter, Mary, in October 1833. Mary proved to be the "good affectionate wife" that Jackson had recommended to his former ward, one whose "amiable temper, good sense and economy" tamed the wild youth who consistently challenged Old Hickory's paternal authority.¹⁰

There is little question that Jackson believed that living morally would produce success for his wards. He told Donelson in 1817 that if he studied, obeyed, and was

⁹ Andrew Jackson to Andrew Jackson, Jr., 22 July 1829, 26 July 1829, 20 August 1829, Andrew Jackson to Francis Smith, 19 May 1830, Andrew Jackson to Samuel J. Hays, 2 October 1830, in *PAJ*, 7:340-341, 345-346, 386-387, 446-447, 8:268-269, 538-539; Andrew Jackson to Andrew Jackson, Jr., 16 September 1831, JLC; Julia Ward Stickley, "Catholic Ceremonies in the White House, 1832-1833: Andrew Jackson's Forgotten Ward, Mary Lewis," *Catholic Historical Review* 51 (July 1965): 192-198; Marriage license, 25 November 1831, JSR; Galloway, "Andrew Jackson, Jr. [Part 1]," 215-216.

¹⁰ John H. DeWitt, "Andrew Jackson and His Ward, Andrew Jackson Hutchings: A History Hitherto Unpublished," *Tennessee Historical Magazine* 1 (January 1931): 83-87, 90-96; Andrew Jackson to Andrew Jackson, Jr., 27 November 1827, Andrew Jackson to John Coffee, 10 April 1830, [8 May] 1830, in *PAJ*, 6:402-403, 8:183-184, 248-249; Andrew Jackson to John Coffee, 26 May 1831, 6 September 1831, Andrew Jackson to Andrew J. Hutchings, 3 November 1833, in *CAJ*, 4:285, 348-349, 5:223-224; Andrew Jackson to Andrew J. Hutchings, 11 February 1832, Andrew Jackson to John Coffee, 19 February 1832, JSR.

dutiful, he would gain “the friendship & esteem of the good & great” and would “become a great, good, and usefull member of society.” Practicing economy was a virtue and would bring the “approbation of all good men;” parsimony was a vice and would “disgrace” him “in the eyes of good & bad.” “Morality is the basis of Virtue,” he wrote on another occasion. “It is alone by building all your acts upon this foundation that you can become great, respectable, and happy.” There is also no doubt that Jackson believed that his own reputation was at stake, signifying that southern patriarchs saw their male wards as personal projections of themselves.¹¹

One of the most neglected areas of study regarding Jackson’s life is that of the enslaved communities on his plantations. The two historians who have paid the most attention to Jackson as a slaveholder, Robert Remini and Matthew Warshauer, have arrived at the same conclusion: at some point, Jackson became a less severe master. Without explanation, Remini gave 1833 as the turning point in Jackson’s cruel mastery. Warshauer located the change six years earlier, following the death of a runaway male slave, Gilbert, who was killed by Jackson’s overseer while trying to avoid a whipping in front of the other Hermitage slaves. Jackson may truly have had an epiphany that changed his approach to slave mastery; there is no evidence that I have seen of the severe cruelty that he occasionally authorized earlier in his life as a planter continuing into his presidential and retirement years. However, Jackson’s advice to his wards, especially

¹¹ Andrew Jackson to Andrew J. Donelson, 29 April 1817, 4 August 1817, 24 November 1818, 6 August 1819, Andrew Jackson Donelson Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Junior and Donelson, reflected his continued support for the system, even if paternalism at some point replaced patriarchy as his motivation.¹²

Jackson's advice to his male wards about the position and treatment of enslaved people is revealing. Early in his presidency, he ordered Junior to ensure that his overseer followed his contractual obligation to treat the Hermitage slaves "with great humanity, feed & cloath them well, & work them in moderation." At the same time, Junior was forbidden from admonishing another overseer in order to assist the hired help in maintaining control over the enslaved community. Hutchings was particularly troublesome when it came to the Hermitage slave community. After leaving Georgetown College during Jackson's first year in office, the young man returned to the Hermitage, where he soon ran into trouble with Jackson's overseer at the time, Graves Steele. The overseer objected to Hutchings' "misuse" of the Hermitage slaves. The two men fought, prompting Jackson to order Hutchings to leave the slaves' management and discipline to Steele. When Andrew Donelson reported in 1833 that two Hermitage slaves had died and a number seemed "as tho they were entirely abandoned by their owners, and in a state of despair," Jackson instructed Junior to visit the slaves and "encourage [and] convince

¹² Robert V. Remini, *Andrew Jackson*, 3 vols. (Harper & Row, 1977-1984), 1:133-134, 2:250-251, 3:50-51, 452-453; Matthew S. Warshauer, "Andrew Jackson: Chivalric Slave Master," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 65 (Fall 2006): 203-205, 210-213, 224.

Jackson may have been undergoing the struggle over paternalistic slavery experienced by the Upper South, as Lacy K. Ford recently detailed in his *Deliver Us from Evil*; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Dilemma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 365-382.

them that we are constantly watching over them, and their good treatment, and will not permit them to be ill-treated or misused.”¹³

Examining Jackson’s advice on these issues and others offers historians the opportunity to trace the development of not just one man’s views on patriarchy and masculinity but also the geographic movement of Old South ideals from the Carolinas into the emerging frontier South. Jackson was not a Lockean blank slate when he moved to Middle Tennessee in the late 1780s. His early life was shaped by kin, peers, and mentors who owned slaves and passed on their assumptions and expectations about what constituted notions of genteel status. By depicting Jackson as a frontier ruffian, historians miss the chance to examine the emergence of the plantation society of the Upper South, with Jackson advising his male wards in much the same way as the Charleston planters analyzed by Michael Johnson, for example. Jackson’s male wards then passed on to their sons the same advice, sometimes verbatim, that Old Hickory gave them about vice and virtue, money and marriage. I find this especially significant, because all three of the

¹³ Charles J. Love to Andrew Jackson, 15 April 1829, Andrew Jackson to Andrew Jackson, Jr., 14 July 1829, 20 July 1829, Andrew Jackson to Robert J. Chester, 14 February 1830, John Coffee to Andrew Jackson, 2 March 1830, Andrew Jackson to John Coffee, 10 April 1830, [8 May] 1830, in *PAJ*, 7:159, 333-334, 336-337, 8:73-74, 111-112, 183-184, 248-249; Andrew Jackson to John Coffee, 26 May 1831, 6 September 1831, Andrew Jackson to Andrew J. Hutchings, 3 November 1833, Andrew Jackson to Andrew Jackson, Jr., 2 April 1833, 8 April 1833, 25 May 1834, 5 November 1836, in *CAJ*, 4:285, 348-349, 5:223-224, 48-49, 54, 266, 435-436; Andrew Jackson to Andrew J. Hutchings, 11 February 1832, Andrew Jackson to John Coffee, 19 February 1832, Andrew Jackson to Andrew Jackson, Jr., 16 April 1833, 24 March 1834, 18 June 1834, 1 October 1834, 6 November 1836, Andrew Jackson, Jr. to Andrew Jackson, 4 October 1833, *JLC*; Andrew Jackson to Andrew Jackson, Jr., 8 December 1832, 2 September 1833, 6 October 1833, *JSR*; DeWitt, “Andrew Jackson and His Ward, Andrew Jackson Hutchings,” 90-96.

male wards mentioned in this paper eventually moved into the Deep South, transferring planter ideals to the cotton frontier.¹⁴

I want to make one last observation. As I have argued elsewhere, I am convinced that there is a lost generation that historians have overlooked. The book on southern sons written by this panel's commenter 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 patriarchal expectations concerning masculinity affect them, and how did they respond?¹⁵

¹⁴ 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).

¹⁵ Cheatham, "Masculinity and Familial Relations in the Early Republic South"; 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.

This paper is only suggestive, but I hope for three things. First, I hope that it encourages further exploration of the less understood aspects of the lives of Jackson and those surrounding him. Second, I hope it stimulates some thought about the complexity of the South that Jackson helped to create. Finally, I hope that my thoughts, particularly those about the geographic spread of planter expectations about patriarchy and masculinity and a “lost” antebellum generation, are not harebrained speculations influenced by too much holiday eggnog.