



Lorri Glover. *Southern Sons: Becoming Men in the New Nation.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007. x + 250 pp. \$50.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8018-8498-6.



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Published on H-NC (December, 2007)

Moving beyond Southern Honor in our Understanding of Southern Manhood

In *Southern Sons*, Lorri Glover convincingly revises the long-held thesis that honor is the best paradigm for investigating young Southern men's identities in the early national period. Citing the growing field of literature on men's and masculine studies and noting that the South and Southerners in the early national and antebellum periods are distinct from one another, Glover asserts, "it is time to revisit the honor thesis, to treat the early South with greater chronological specificity, and to analyze the effects of gender values on the lives of the region's leading men" (p. 2). To accomplish this, Glover proposes to use the less static concept of manhood as her framework for exploring the journey Southern sons took to become men in the young Republic.

Central to understanding this journey to manhood is not only Southern sons' focus on their regional identity and their protection of the "Southern way of life," but also their identification of themselves as patriotic Americans. The key to Glover's chronological specificity is the pressure placed on Southern sons to maintain the Republic that their fathers had fought to create. Ultimately, it was this pressure that would prove their undoing in the

years that preceded the Civil War as Southern sons' understanding of what that Revolutionary legacy entailed was central to how they defined and defended the South and its "peculiar institution." Thus, it is not at all surprising that Southern sons justified secession and eventually war by hailing their Revolutionary heritage and understanding their own actions in the context of "upholding the Republic" their fathers had created.

Glover has delineated her study into three parts that roughly correspond to three different stages in a Southern son's life: childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. Part 1 explores Southern sons' childhood and Southern parents' early attempts to school their sons in what it meant to be a Southern son and an American. Part 2 focuses primarily on the education of Southern sons, both their formal schooling and their instruction in the social arts of becoming gentlemen. Part 3 follows Southern sons in their final steps to manhood—finding wives, choosing professions, and becoming slave masters. Whatever the stage of their journey, Glover convincingly illustrates how Southern sons approached life and experienced the process of becoming men as a bal-

ancing act with family and community always present to chastise them if they moved too far in one direction or another. Parents, siblings, and extended kin most often relied on the threat of withholding love and approval if boys failed to fulfill their family obligations or to live up to family and community standards of appropriate behavior. The more powerful threat of withholding monetary support was less often employed, but far more effective.

Glover begins by examining the education of Southern sons in their “sacred duties.” Southern parents, especially fathers, instructed their sons from early childhood that they had certain obligations they must live up to if they were to become proper Southern men. The first of these obligations was to live up to the standards of their Revolutionary “fathers,” whether these fathers were biological or simply symbolic. Their second obligation was to their families. Family loyalty was of the utmost importance, and Southern gentry readily recognized that “without dutiful, accomplished sons, families foundered” (p. 9). Glover closes her analysis of “sacred duties” with a discussion of religion. Although mothers celebrated and encouraged religiosity among their children, fathers often saw the values of religion as effeminate and contradictory to the values of manhood they were trying to instill in their sons. Instead, they encouraged a secular morality based on accepted communal values, like honesty and autonomy.

Although their “sacred duties” were certainly important, Southern parents considered autonomy among Southern sons equally important in terms of their transition to manhood. This is not surprising when one considers the lack of autonomy possessed by women, slaves, and poor whites. One of the keys to defining manhood, as Glover so adroitly emphasizes, was to describe manhood in opposition to others. The most complicating factor in this encouragement of autonomy is that it was contradictory to the sacred duties. As Glover notes, “families in essence tried to raise sons who were at once deferential to societal expectations and assertively autonomous” (p. 23). Though parents could cajole and try to educate their sons to behave in certain ways, ultimately, the emphasis on autonomy relegated them to turning their boys loose and hoping they made the right choices in life to not only establish their independence and success but also to win public approval, which was key to a boy being recognized by his community as a man.

Part 2 focuses primarily on the formal and social education of Southern sons. Attending college, whether a

Southern institution or a school in the Northern states or abroad, was the first real test of manhood for the South’s sons and not surprisingly, their parents as well. Although their academic studies took up some of their time, Glover asserts it was their extracurricular activities that figured most prominently in their lives and in their notions of manhood, despite what they told their families in letters home. Whether pulling pranks, drinking, or gambling, Southern boys apparently excelled at hedonistic pursuits. More important, as Glover points out, these Southern sons began to move beyond their own individualism to unite with one another for a variety of reasons. College provided young Southern men with an arena for acting in concert to achieve an end, a skill they would employ as adults when “the Southern way of life” was threatened. In particular, Southern students at Northern schools often rebelled in the name of their Southern distinction. Southern students at non-Southern schools were not only likely to room, spend school breaks, and form friendships with other Southern boys, they were also disposed to pit their Southern masculinity, especially in terms of racial mastery, against the defects they perceived in Northern masculinity.

College was only the first test in a Southern son’s ascent to manhood, however. Next, he had to become a “refined gentleman.” Gone were the “happiest part of [his] days” filled with youthful frivolities (p. 82). It was now time for him to “grow up,” so to speak. Although a man’s reputation was important to both Northerners and Southerners, Glover asserts that “in the South, the acquisition and display of gentlemanly reputations remained more elaborate, more elite dominated, and more essential than in the North” (p. 84). Indeed, Glover adds further credence to the argument that public opinion rather than laws was the arbiter of the Southern elites’ behavior. For example, a Southern son’s engagement in extramarital sex was not generally cause for concern—unless it resulted in public scandal, as in the case of homosexuality, incest, or a loving relationship with a black woman (as opposed to rape and coerced sex, which were fine). Not surprisingly, slaveholding lay at the core of Southerners’ values of gentlemanly masculinity not only in that mastery helped determine one’s social status, but also because the behaviors most associated with a Southern gentleman—self-confidence, independence, and assertiveness—were the opposite of the behaviors required of slaves (p. 85).

The final section of Glover’s work assesses the last leg of the journey Southern sons took to manhood—the pursuit and winning of a worthy wife, choosing a career,

and establishing themselves as slave masters. Throughout this section, Glover effectively illustrates the differences in practice that existed between Southern sons and their Northern counterparts and highlights the increased effectiveness in the efforts of family and kin to influence a Southern son's decisions. Marriage, according to Glover, "more than any other event ... marked the passage from youth to manhood" for a Southern son (p. 133). Whereas before families' efforts to influence their sons' behavior had mixed results in the face of a son's individuality and assertiveness, in the achievement of a wise marital match they were more successful. Glover asserts that the reason behind this greater success lay in the sons' own knowledge that money and property were at risk in a poor match. She also credits Southern girls and their parents. Because divorce was exceedingly rare in the South and there was no accepted "place" for single or divorced women in Southern society, Southern girls were well schooled in the knowledge that marriage was "perilous for women" and that there was "little way out of an unhappy match short of the grave" (p. 118).

Having been educated and married well, the next step for a Southern son was to establish himself economically with a well-chosen career that would "determine the power he would assume in society" (p. 147). While Northern sons had a host of choices, Southern sons had only a short list from which to choose, ranging from the most esteemed career, planter, to other highly regarded choices—law, business, medicine, and the military. Each of these careers not only would allow a Southern son to support himself and his family, but could also pave the way for public service in politics. Just as they had in so many instances before, family pressure and public perception played a prominent role in a Southern son's choice of profession as well as in how he worked within that profession.

The final chapter of Glover's analysis investigates the impact that the journey to manhood had on Southern sons as they took their place as Southern political leaders. It is in this chapter that Glover's assertions about Southern manhood in the early national period take on greater meaning in terms of the sectionalism that characterized the antebellum period. Predating the pivotal

decades for politicized sectionalism, the 1820s and 1830s, Glover effectively illustrates how the founding generation of Southerners guided their sons to manhood by emphasizing a social dimension to their regional defensiveness. The feelings of mastery and empowerment she so carefully tracks in her analysis of the journey of Southern sons into their manhood reaches its climax in Southern sons' avowal that slavery and "the Southern way of life" must be defended as a societal good, rather than a necessary evil, because it was the basis of their masculinity. As Northern criticisms of the institution grew along with the crafting of a Northern identity that was free of the institution, Southern sons' commitment to slavery became even more adamant and self-conscious. After all, if Southern masculinity was superior to Northern masculinity and slavery was a primary difference between the two regions then slavery must have had a hand in producing the South's superior manhood. Glover concludes that Southern sons "entered manhood and the antebellum era committed to exercising personal autonomy and public authority, convinced of their own importance and of the necessity of defending family status, and dependent on slaveholding for wealth and power.... Their uncompromising, relentless performance of the duties of manhood set their region on a course apart from the Republic and toward a violent confrontation over the values and institutions that made them southern men" (p. 179).

Although somewhat repetitive at times, especially in dealing with Southern sons' behavioral problems in college and their pursuit of worthy wives, Glover has produced a convincing, well-written companion to Bertram Wyatt-Brown's hallmark study on Southern honor—*Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (1982). Her use of the paradigm of manhood instead of honor allows her to thoroughly explore the journey Southern sons took to become Southern men in the early national period and to explain how that journey created the generation that would help provoke the Civil War in the antebellum period. As Glover writes, "despite all their parents' anxieties, this generation [of Southern sons] learned well the lessons of southern manhood.... and they paid for it with the blood of their own southern sons" (p. 184).

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Citation: Jennifer Lynn Gross. Review of Glover, Lorri, *Southern Sons: Becoming Men in the New Nation*. H-NC, H-Net Reviews. December, 2007.

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