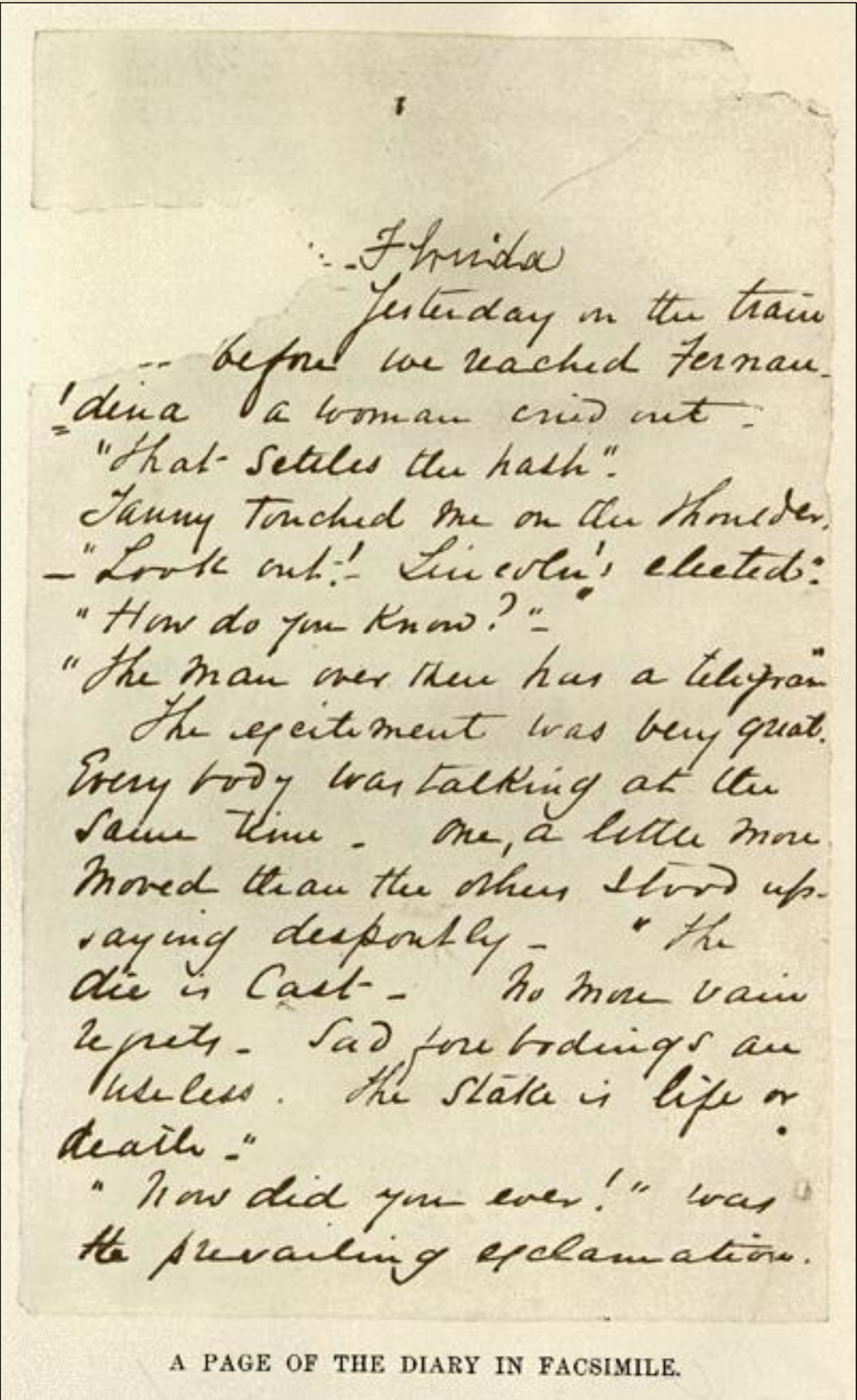
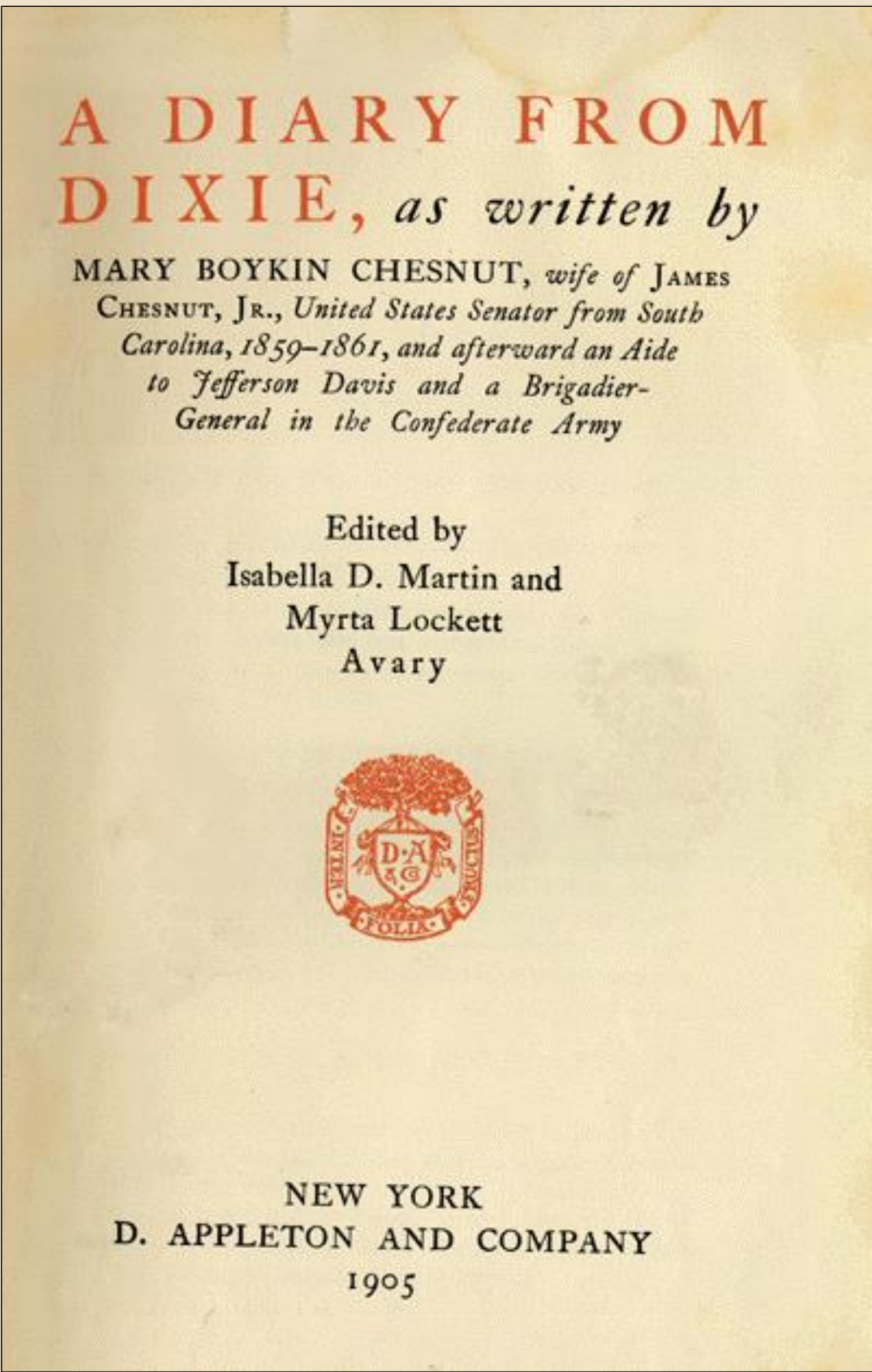


Mary Chesnut: A Southern Woman

Jade Gordon

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WHO WAS MARY BOYKIN CHESNUT?



During the Antebellum era in the southern United States, women had a distinct, defined place in society. The typical southern woman was expected to be at the full will of their husbands, obey their every demand, act in a presentable manner and know their turn to talk. On top of being expected to uphold womanly duties like caring for children, the home and the slaves they would take

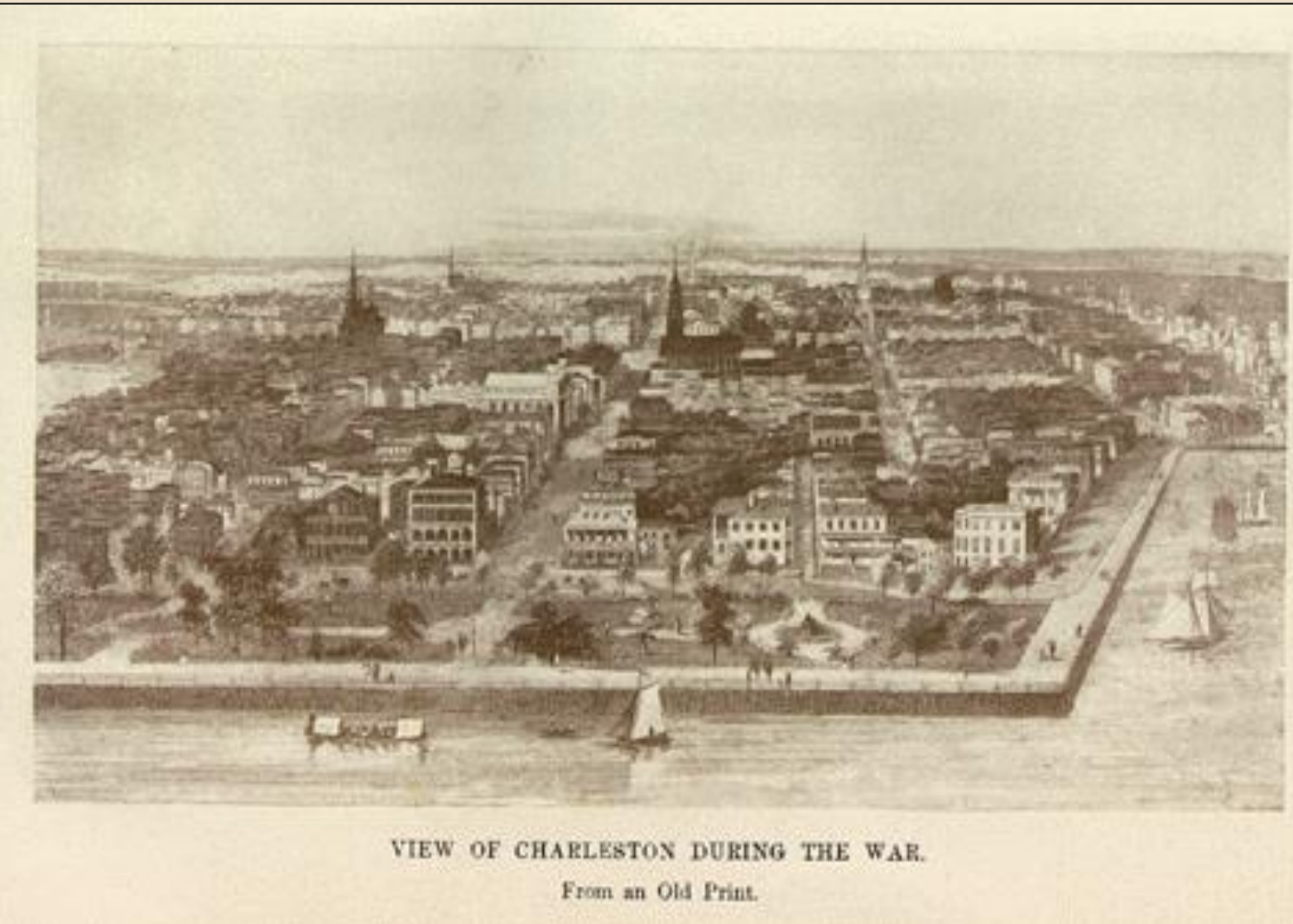
care of the man's business in his absence. For many women today, this would seem oppressive, and they wouldn't stand this treatment, but women at this time were expected to assimilate to that way of life. Mary Chesnut was one southern woman in particular who experienced the ways of southern life for women, and she documented it in her Civil War Diary. Mary Chesnut was a southern woman who grew up on a plantation with many slaves and eventually married a wealthy slaveowner who went into politics leading up to the Civil War. Her husband was elected as a senator from South Carolina and served until the secession of the state, and during this period of time Mary advised her husband, as she was extremely smart.



MRS. JAMES CHESNUT, JR.
From a Portrait in Oil.

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

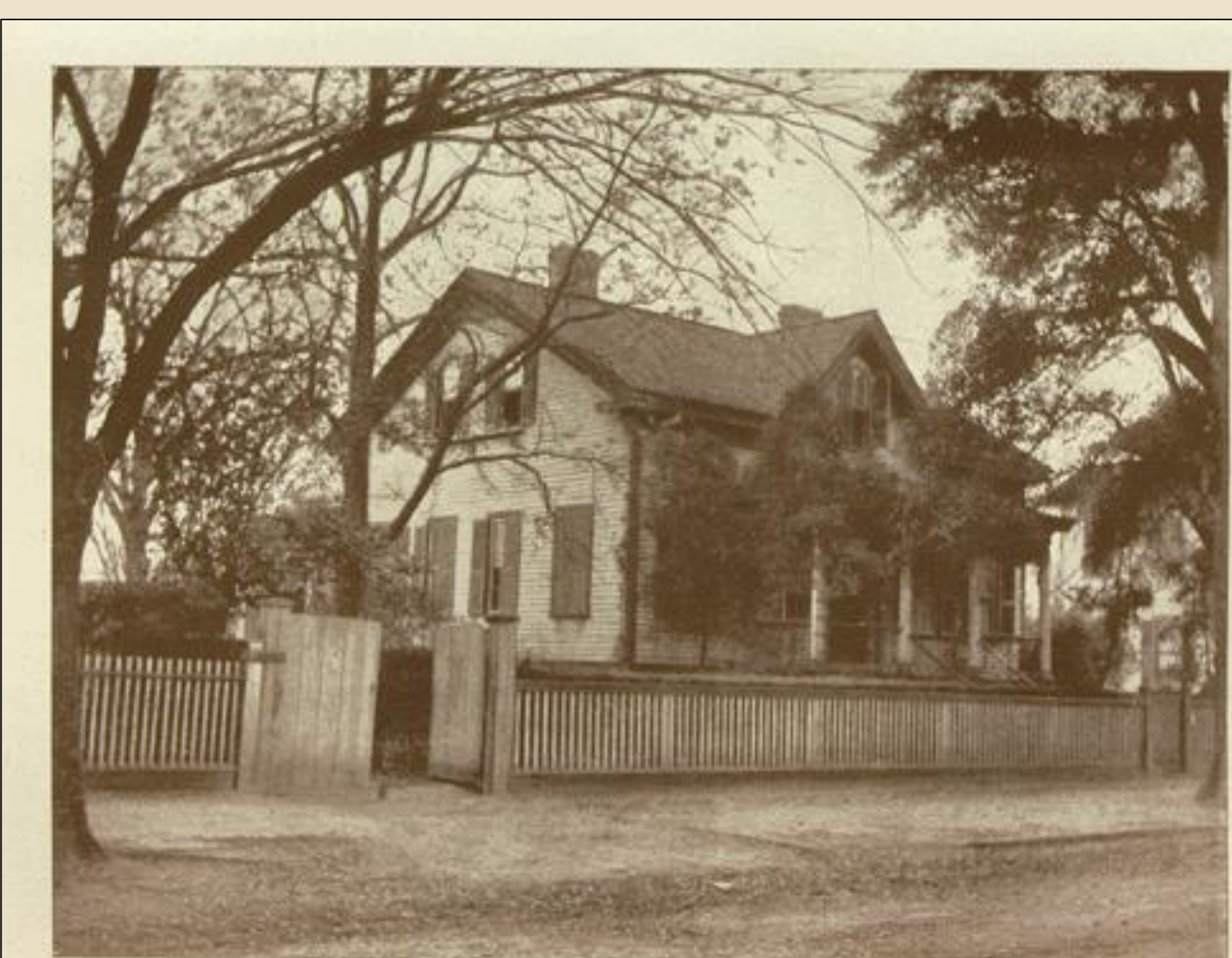
Mary Chesnut was much like other women in the Antebellum south in her acceptance of the ways of the southern lady and she displays these traits throughout the entirety of her diary. Most of her diary consisted of accounts of her observation of men talking and discussing the Civil War. This quiet observation is one of the key principles of a Southern Lady; to be seen and not heard. Her reconciliation with her status as a southern lady defined her, as she was unwilling to socially exile herself by speaking her truth aloud and instead channeled it into her diary. While Chesnut did fit into the norms



VIEW OF CHARLESTON DURING THE WAR.
From an Old Print.

of a southern woman, she did not do it without complaint and commonly mentioned her struggles and frustrations with the patriarchal society. The most important thing about Mary Chesnut that really sets her on the same level as the other southern women of the time is her opinions on slavery. This is a highly refuted point. Many historians neglect to notice all of the of instances where she countered her occasional dissention with slavery with prejudice.

CONCLUSION



MRS. CHESNUT'S HOME IN COLUMBIA IN THE LAST YEAR OF THE WAR.
Here Mrs. Chesnut entertained Jefferson Davis.

Mary Chesnut's diary is cited as a fantastic historical document and contributes to historians understanding of

the Civil War as a whole with the day-to-day narrative. Not only is her work important to the Civil War but it is also essential to looking into the perspective of elite southern society and norms through the eyes of a woman who actively participated and documented it regularly.

Mary Chesnut noticed the contradictions of the southern way of life, yet she never did anything about it, nor did she do anything beyond pointing it out.