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GONE WITH THE WIND
AND ITS ENDURING APPEAL

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ABSTRACT

The white antebellum woman has occupied an evolving archetypal status in American culture throughout the twentieth century. In 1936, Margaret Mitchell published *Gone with the Wind* and extended the tradition of featuring Southern belles in novels. However, Mitchell chose to alter stereotypical depictions of her heroine and incorporate a theme of survival. Her main character, Scarlett O'Hara, was a prototypical Southern woman of her day. Scarlett was expected to conform to rigidly defined social boundaries but, through acts of defiance and independence, she forged new paths for herself and her family along her route to survival.

This thesis investigates the 1939 film adaptation of Mitchell's novel and the contributions of David O. Selznick, Vivien Leigh, and Hattie McDaniel to the story that chronicled Scarlett's transformation from stereotypical Southern belle to independent survivor. This analysis demonstrates that Scarlett depicted the new Southern Woman whose rising to define a diversity of roles embodied the characteristics of the New Woman. The film's feminist message, romantic grandeur, ground-breaking performances, themes of survival through times of crisis, and opulent feminine appeal all combined in *Gone With the Wind* to create an American classic with enduring appeal.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

At the time when Margaret Mitchell's book *Gone With the Wind* was first published in 1936, America was in the midst of trying to recover from the Great Depression (Dodd). The threat of another war in Europe also placed fear in the hearts of Americans that had recent memories of World War I (*Gone With the Wind: The Making of a Classic*, 1939). The Depression officially began when the United States' stock market crashed in October 1929 and lasted until America entered World War II in December 1941 (Collins 352). Women of the 1930s looked for a way to temporarily escape from the daily troubles in their lives, fantasize about a happier past, and look forward to better days to come.

In her book, Margaret Mitchell gave her readers this means of escape with her glorification of the Old South and its palatial plantation myth. The book also provided strong female role models with a message of survival. These women effectively challenged traditional societal restrictions as *Gone With the Wind* wrestled with the nature of the New South, the tensions of social change, and the shifting female roles in America (Fox-Genovese 392). In the 1939 film adaptation of *Gone With the Wind*, David Selznick, Vivien Leigh, and Hattie McDaniel each made significant contributions to Margaret Mitchell's original vision. They brought the characters to life in vivid Technicolor and produced a vehicle for the strong female portrayals of Scarlett O'Hara and Mammy. Selznick consciously gave McDaniel a degree of artistic freedom to create

in Mammy an admirable and resilient matriarchal figure that was no longer limited by Mitchell's typecasting. McDaniel's Mammy clearly could have positively influenced the brazen Scarlett O'Hara as she was being raised. Vivien Leigh embodied all of the determination and endurance that the novel had given Scarlett, but her portrayal made audiences feel empathy towards her situations and she became even more relatable to their own circumstances. In "Southern Belle Brought to Life by Vivien Leigh," Hannah Betts observed that *Gone With the Wind* taught its audience that strong, ambitious women could become the heroine of their own story.

Roger Dooley has acknowledged that *Gone With the Wind* seems never to have lost its hold on the public's imagination since the novel was published in 1939 (611). It has been widely recognized that *Gone With the Wind*, both as a book and a film, have been continuously popular due to its grandeur, cultural themes, and faithful female audience. Perhaps less recognized has been the lure of the strong female role model that is capable of surviving against all odds. The final version of Scarlett O'Hara, as performed by Vivien Leigh and complemented by Hattie McDaniel's performance as Mammy, gave the 1940s audience a heroine with which women could identify as they struggled with the challenges of their daily lives. This appeal has endured through the decades, as each new era finds women who connect with the film's message of individualism and survival.

Background

Before the Civil War changed traditional female roles in America, white Southern women had typically accepted their subordinate roles in society and they devoted themselves to the care of their home and men (Antolini 23). The ideal Southern woman's commitment to socially accepted values, and the idea of self-sacrifice, represented the legitimacy of the social system in the Old South (Kovacs). George Britt wrote in "Women in the New South" that the lady was the social product of the Old South's "solidly established community" (409). Southerners believed that the lady was the epitome of their refined and "noble" civilization (Seidel 401). Britt saw her as "the topmost ornament of this unstable slave-supported economic structure" (408). Antebellum women were often an integral part of every working plantation, but they did not permanently assume the more masculine roles of family head or business manager (Antolini 29-30).

After the Confederate defeat in the Civil War, images of women as morally pure and self-sacrificing creatures often sent these Southern women back to their homes and to their "natural roles" as housewife and mother (Kovacs). In the article "The New Era and The New Woman," K.A. Clements acknowledged that women's roles within "separate spheres" had evolved and eroded in most of the United States between the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century (426). But in the South, female awareness and feminism developed along a later time frame and along different lines than in the rest of the United States (Perry 234). The South held onto its long standing tradition of graceful leisure through Reconstruction, while the North pursued more "purposeful" activities that

also extended to their women (Britt 412). As the Northern women were laying the foundation for emancipation, Southern women continued to devote themselves to romance and nostalgia (Britt 413).

Historically, a woman's destiny had been to become a wife and mother, while merely existing behind the shadow of a man (Britt 411). American women in the 1930s experienced both continuities and changes during the decade, but the one thing that remained constant was the clear division of roles within most American households (Ware 13). Typically, a woman was what man said she should be and her life was restricted by the rules that man created for her (Calverton and Schmalhausen xi). V. F. Calverton and Samuel D. Schmalhausen wrote, "A good woman was one who respected these rules and regulations; a bad one was one who did not" (xi). Krisztina Kovacs found that the paradox between what was considered to be a "good woman" versus "bad woman" served as a control over female sexuality. Instilled societal restraints and expectations kept women in their "place," the home.

The traditional roles of the man as "breadwinner" and the woman running the household were not unique to the 1930s, but a few challenges to these definitions emerged (Ware 13). The Depression drove many women into new patterns of behavior that might not have occurred otherwise (Ware 17). While women continued to have complete responsibility of the domestic sphere, many American women did not limit themselves to their homes (Ware 17). Lois Scharf wrote in *To Work or to Wed* that the Depression reinforced the familial values of home, marriage, and children but required that many wives find employment as a means of achieving financial security (160). Family incomes were stretched to the breaking point and a mid-1930's survey of incomes

revealed that the median income of American families was \$1,070, with only one-fifth of all families having incomes over \$2,000 per year (Scharf 147). Some unemployed or underemployed men even forbade their wives to seek work, preferring to financially struggle instead (Scharf 141). When a wife did work, the temporary nature of her job was usually emphasized because it represented less of a threat to her husband's authority and self-esteem (Scharf 140). The facts that working wives were willing to perpetuate the notion of the male-dominated household and that most Americans opposed the idea of a working wife were both often related to anxiety over family stability and social order (Scharf 142). The Depression intensified the physical burden and emotional conflict between the dual roles of wife and worker (Scharf 146). These problems continued to worsen as more women sought employment and families were caught in the transition from old traditions to new necessities (Scharf 146). Women suffered from severe cases of cultural lag and received very little support when their parents, educators, and religious establishments only intensified her problems by refusing to recognize the societal changes that were going on around them (Scharf 146). Changing times forced the re-definition of the Southern notion of a "woman's sphere" and these old ideas began to be questioned in the form of the women's movement and the pursuit of a woman's right to vote (Britt 413-16).

While the suffrage movement was not limited to white women, female African American participation was not always welcome. In 1913, when Alice Paul decided to use Woodrow Wilson's presidential inauguration as an opportunity for a great suffragist parade, she announced that there would be no black women in the march in an effort to placate Southern suffragists (Collins 314). During that time, African Americans were

being confronted with newly rigid segregation rules and urban riots in the North (Collins 315). In the South, Gail Collins noted that the lynchings that had begun after Reconstruction had turned into “a permanent weapon of political and social intimidation” (315). While many of the white suffrage leaders would have been happy to participate with African American women, they were often seen as a liability to the cause and had virtually no political power (Collins 315). Collins found that to ensure the success of the suffrage movement, leaders had to acknowledge Southern whites had the power to stop a constitutional amendment (315). In response, women like Alice Paul did their best to avoid reminding the South that black women were also participants in the active pursuit of suffrage (Collins 315).

The ultimate result of the women’s movements during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a new social definition of what it meant to be a woman in the United States (Clements 428). Lou Henry Hoover, the wife of President Herbert Hoover, contended that “women could and should fulfill both public and private roles in the 1920s” (Clements 426). The passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, which granted women the right to vote, and the relaxed economic restrictions that came with other reforms, allowed women to finally “claim full equality with men” (Clements 428). But the slow increase in the number of married working women in the early decades of the 1900s suggested that there were difficulties in altering long-standing attitudes about what was considered to be socially acceptable for women (Clements 441). Opportunities that were once closed to women were slowly opening and they made possible a new life, new vision, and finally a “New Woman” (Calverton and Schmalhausen xi-xii).

There were many different versions of the New Woman in early twentieth century America, but they shared an independent competence that some women found terrifying (Collins 281). In their introduction to *New Woman Hybridities*, Ann Heilmann and Margaret Beetham saw the New Woman as a subject of history and fantasy (1). The authors observed that the New Woman challenged accepted views of femininity and female sexuality, the right to earn a decent living, and was an ambiguous figure that was the focus of media debate (1). This woman was the subject of “intense anxiety as well as hope in the decades spanning the end of the nineteenth and start of the twentieth century” (1). The New Woman appeared in different nations and cultures where she was identified as modern and by challenging existing structures of gendered identity (Beetham and Heilmann 2). During the last decades of the nineteenth century, women had increasingly tried to combine their traditional domestic responsibilities as wives and mothers with their new options in the workplace (Kohler 167). Facing discrimination in the job market, along with the continued responsibility of domestic life, women could visualize their goals but the path was often filled with obstacles (Showalter 14).

The 1930s witnessed new images rising in women's literary texts that voiced their author's frustrations. The femme fatale, the Southern belle, and the flapper all emerged to expose fears and fantasies about female sexuality and their potential power (Kovacs). George Britt observed that World War I influenced the changing female roles in society by “supplanting the belle by the flapper” (416). In America, the word flapper had become the universal label for “the girl of the hour” who was energetic and courageous, but often self-absorbed (Collins 329). American feminism after 1920 was more often about the individual rather than collective goals (Scharf 21). Southern feminine voices

through literature, images, and icons have demonstrated the enduring power of the Southern woman and have celebrated women's contributions to the energetic and evolving culture in the South (Taylor, *Women* 860). These women needed a role model that would help her to find a way of life that was compatible with her needs and new responsibilities.

Chapter 2

Gone With the Wind, the Book

Margaret Mitchell began writing *Gone With the Wind* in 1926 and it was completed before the Great Depression crippled the nation in 1929 (Pyron 568). Helen Taylor noted in her article “Women and Dixie,” Margaret Mitchell followed in many female footsteps and owed her story, characters, and emotional drive to these women (848). Mitchell acknowledged some of the writers whose work inspired and informed her novel (Taylor, *Women* 848). These women included Myrta Lockett Avary, Eliza Andrews, Mary Johnston (a schoolmate of her mother's), and Eliza Ripley (Taylor, *Women* 848). Taylor observed that although there were male role models for Mitchell, most notably Thomas Dixon whose *The Clansman* (1905) was a great favorite, it was the women's writing with which she engaged more closely as it was women who Mitchell cited most often in her letters and notes (*Women* 848).

As one of the notable female authors emerging from the 1920s, Mitchell joined in the encouragement of women's active participation in American society and the end of female subjugation (Freedman 377). Most of these authors' works (including pieces by Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Carrie Chapman Catt) were published in the early 1930s and their literary settings reflected the social tones of the years prior to the stock market crash (Freedman 378). An element of disappointment and frustration dominated much of the work done by female writers of this era, but the women's movement produced a

"pervasive sense of newness" and the redefining of women's roles in society (Clements 428).

Kathryn Seidel wrote that the woman's role in plantation novels could also be seen as a response to the women's rights movement (391). Seidel deduced that Southern authors, whose social and economic heritage had been under attack by the industrial North, often wrote their works with a "defensive attitude" (390). The idealized Southern plantation life produced a subgenre that embodied many of the traditional Southern values, and it was in these novels that the first literary Southern belles appeared (Seidel 390). The New Woman was often condemned by these authors who, in response, gave their women the "higher offices" of home and hearth (Seidel 391). This domestic pedestal supposedly offered their heroines the highest possible achievement and satisfaction in life over obtaining the jobs, or the votes, that were pursued by the woman's movement (Seidel 391). When Margaret Mitchell wrote her plantation novel, she chose to portray her female protagonist in a very different light that appealed to struggling American women during the Depression era of the 1930s.

The book was published in the summer of 1936 at the price of three dollars, the equivalent of nearly \$50 in 2011 (Cloud). Despite the high price tag, *Gone With the Wind* was number one on the *New York Times* bestseller list for forty weeks, and it remained on that list for an additional forty weeks (Dodd). The book was celebrated in the *New York Times Book Review* as "the best Civil War novel that has yet been written" (Vertrees 24). It was also awarded the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1937 (Taylor, *Scarlett's Women* 2). One month after the initial publication, copies of Mitchell's novel continued to sell at an astonishing pace (Vertrees 23). "Going with the Wind," Malcolm Cowley's short book

review from 1936, introduced chronological data of the publication history of the novel and Cowley concluded that the novel's high sales indicated a larger trend (Kovacs). According to Cowley, romantic bestsellers written from a woman's perspective, like *Gone With the Wind*, changed the book market as women were emerging as the market's chief consumers (Kovacs). These women were looking for stories with which they could identify and be absorbed.

Gone With the Wind retold a great crisis in American history through a woman's point of view (Collins 368-69). Margaret Mitchell emphasized that survival was the main theme of her novel, and most of her critics accepted that point (Kovacs). The critics did seem to overlook the fact that it featured a woman who survived only by disobeying the boundaries that governed the society in which she lived (Kovacs). Scarlett survived these hardships and prospered by participating in the predominantly male arena of business by using both feminine and masculine rules (Kovacs). In recreating the decline of the 1860 Southern culture and the construction of a strong and independent woman, Mitchell responded to historical events that were occurring during the early 1900s.

Paula Farca observed that Mitchell's story of a woman who survived the Civil War, and adapted to the economic situation that followed, became a role model for the survivors of the Great Depression and World War II (Farca 73). Scarlett's fate was like that of millions of American women for whom frugality became a way of life during the Depression (Morton 53). Marion Morton found that reduced family incomes changed the lives of every family member, but felt that women probably bore the brunt of the change (53). Although about 25 percent of the women in America worked during the late 1930s, they were still restricted by their role in the family and in society (Chadwick 223). Their

responsibility was managing the reduction of food, clothing, and services in addition to accommodating other family members in smaller, cramped living quarters (Morton 53). The fact that the lives of many of the novel's readers in the 1930s were affected by the stock-market crash, and the resulting poverty and unemployment during the Depression years, undoubtedly explains much of the public empathy with Scarlett's tumultuous situations (Vertrees 25). *Gone With the Wind* told its readers that the world could become orderly once more, not by restoring wealth and power but by putting strong women, like Scarlett, in places of authority (Morton 55). In Scarlett's behavior, women could indulge fantasies of anti-social and unacceptable behavior in pursuing wealth and out-succeed their husbands (Morton 55). They dared not behave like Scarlett, so women loved Scarlett for representing their unspoken feelings (Chadwick 223). Stella Ress noted in "Finding the Flapper: A Historiographical Look at Image and Attitude," that women had typically exhibited very little personal power in their own lives but they were beginning to share authority with men (118). This emerging woman (the "flapper") was first introduced by American writer F. Scott Fitzgerald and his characterization became what many Americans pictured when they heard the word "flapper": a girl who was stubborn, young, unconventional, and often times dangerous (Ress 118).

Krisztina Kovacs' research found that Scarlett O'Hara had many flapper qualities that were evident in the young women of the 1920s. As discussed in the documentary *The Making of a Legend: Gone With the Wind*, Mitchell was considered a flapper herself. These traits undoubtedly inspired Mitchell's writing, and she gave these traits to her Scarlett, who Kovacs saw as "eternally young and androgynous in transcending the stereotypical gender binarisms" (Kovacs). Similar to the rebellious attitudes of the

American flapper, Scarlett felt trapped and depressed when she was forced to conform to the traditional roles of wife, mother, and widow. Darden Asbury Pyron saw Mitchell's use of corset lacing as the forced conformation to the conventional society when Mammy bound Scarlett (579). In her novel, Mitchell wrote that Scarlett, "wasn't a girl who could dance and flirt and she wasn't a wife who could sit with other wives and criticize the dancing and flirting girls. And she wasn't old enough to be a widow" (172). Paula Farca saw Scarlett's acceptance to dance in front of the horrified Atlanta community as marking her revolt against the "imprisonment" of her mourning (Farca 79).

"In presenting Scarlett as so personally immune to the normal emotional responsibilities for her socially inappropriate behavior," Elizabeth Fox-Genovese wrote that Mitchell questioned, "the psychological foundations for socially prescribed roles" (409). In the South, tradition and "the old way" had maintained an overwhelming authority and even as young dissenters and intellectuals sought to break with tradition, the past still exerted tremendous influence in their lives (Pyron 569). Pyron wrote that Mitchell undermined this aristocratic ideal when Scarlett questioned the concepts of war profiteers, draft evasion, romantic patriotism, and protested a "wider set of Southern values relative to rigid gender roles and social mores" (578). According to Fox-Genovese, Mitchell resented the constraints that the role of "lady" imposed on women and remained unresolved on the social possibilities of "the free expression of female nature" (408-09). Mitchell's book became the vehicle for telling the story of one woman's struggle against the confines of Southern womanhood (O'Brien 163).

In her novel, Mitchell wrote that it was "a man's world," and therefore she rejected the feminine model (O'Brien 163). To succeed within the Southern social

structure, Scarlett had to disguise her "sharp intelligence" and appear "demure, pliable, and scatterbrained" (Mitchell 42). At "no time before or since," wrote Mitchell, "had so low a premium been placed on feminine naturalness" (80). As Scarlett continued to defy the social and moral order when she obtained the money for Tara by marrying her sister's suitor, she also gained a prosperous career as a businesswoman. Paula Farca observed that her husband, Frank, lacked business sense and was too lenient with those who owed him money (81). Scarlett took control of the business and expanded into lumber for the rebuilding of Atlanta. By collecting the money from their debtors, hiring more efficient workers, and by eliminating her competitors, Farca found that Scarlett succeeded in a male dominated environment (81). Erasing the boundaries between genders, Scarlett acted as a feminist when she proved to be man's equal (or perhaps stronger) partner and spouse (Farca 81).

Mitchell's Scarlett was portrayed as an enterprising and "coquettish" woman who redefined the concept of the stereotypical southern lady (Farca 73). In moving outside the accepted social boundaries of the traditional southern lady, Scarlett excelled at activities that were not traditionally associated with women (Farca 74). Throughout the novel, Farca observed that Mitchell presented Scarlett's conflict between "her strong and rebellious personality and her nostalgia for her traditional upbringing and innocent past" (76). Scarlett continuously rejected the restrictive demands that had been imposed by society and, in doing so, Farca maintained that Scarlett O'Hara was, indeed, a feminist (Farca 76).

After Scarlett challenged the notion of gender limitations, she found that her success in a man's world was not enough. She also strove to become a strong wife and

mother, two positions that feminists of the time applauded (Farca 74). This was quite reminiscent of the 1925 writings by Elizabeth Breuer about a modern woman's life that was split between a career, "through which woman can express herself as an individual in a world of masculine standards," and her family and children, "which she cannot leave behind if she is to be happy as a woman" (Clements 427). Dorothy Dunbar Bromley echoed Breuer in 1927 by declaring that the "new style" of feminist believed that a full life called for marriage and children, in addition to a career (Clements 427). Both Bromley and Breuer saw this updated concept of feminism as fulfillment for the individual (Clements 428). Through Scarlett's decisive actions, she embodied all of these strong feminist ideals. Scarlett was a heroine with whom Mitchell's contemporary and future readers could easily identify (Dodds). Farca asserted that by anticipating the radical and liberating feminist movements, and by creating a female protagonist who exemplified the purpose of those movements, Margaret Mitchell taught her readers that a woman's happiness depended on her strength, individualism, and public success (74). Women were drawn to Mitchell's message and began to dream about what the characters and settings of *Gone With the Wind* might look like. It would take several years, but these images would be realized in vivid Technicolor.

Chapter 3

David O. Selznick's Film Adaptation

Kay Brown, the New York aide to film producer David O. Selznick, had acquired an advance copy of Mitchell's novel and was moved by the novel's deep emotional majesty (Watts 148). Brown wrote to Selznick, "I think this is an absolutely magnificent story and it belongs to us" (Griffin 21). She urged Selznick to option *Gone With the Wind* as quickly as possible and, in the summer of 1936, he procured the film rights for the historic price of \$50,000 (Watts 148). This high purchase price was a record for the time (Chadwick 188). Selznick's decision to take on the film adaptation was also possibly influenced by the fact that the novel was continuing to break records as a national bestseller. By optioning the film rights, Selznick went against the film industry's superstition of avoiding stories that were set during the Civil War and Reconstruction eras (Vertrees 24). Selznick began preparing to bring *Gone With the Wind* to the screen, but knew that certain elements of the book would need to be modified in the screenplay.

The most obvious alterations to Mitchell's story were based on racial concerns (Cronin 400). As a book, *Gone With the Wind* had portrayed the Southern plantation myth from the perspective of the "White Southern Planter class" (Mayland 249). In "David Selznick's 'Gone With the Wind': The Negro Problem," Leonard Leff saw Mitchell's treatment of postwar blacks as dividing the race between "the 'good' Negroes who stayed loyal and servile to their former owners and the 'bad' ones who ran wild from either perverse pleasure in destruction or simply because of their ignorance" (146). For

many African Americans, the novel's use of 'nigger' and 'darkey' was as offensive as its "white point of view" on the reconstruction of the South (Leff 150). By early 1937, African Americans began writing to Selznick's production company with their concerns over the depiction of blacks in the film (Leff 151). In response to their letters, Selznick said, "I feel so keenly about what is happening to the Jews of the world that I cannot help but sympathize with the Negroes in their fears about material which they regard as insulting and damaging" (Cronin 400). These concerns, when combined with the fear that organized black resistance could jeopardize the film's successful reception, led Selznick to design the screenplay to be less offensive to the black population than the novel had been. "I think we have to be awfully careful," Selznick wrote in a memo to screenwriter Sidney Howard, "that the Negroes come out decidedly on the right side of the ledger" (Leff 147). Bruce Chadwick felt that despite Selznick being "a prisoner of Hollywood's conventional depiction of blacks as retainers and fools," he gave them more character and presence than they had in any other movie to that point by not portraying them as "marauding thugs, murderers, rapists or dancing fools" (198).

Another alteration that Selznick made was the omission to all references to the Ku Klux Klan. In the book, Mitchell had Scarlett attacked by a freed black man while riding through Shantytown. This attack led her husband and other community leaders to lead a Klan raid in an act of vengeance (Juddery 39). Selznick wrote a memo to screenwriter Sidney Howard dated January 6, 1937: "I personally feel quite strongly that we should cut out the [Ku Klux] Klan entirely. There is nothing in the story that necessarily needs the Klan" (Vertrees 33). Selznick stated, "The revenge for the attempted attack can very easily be identified with what it is without their being members of the Klan. A group of

men can go out to 'get' the perpetrators of an attempted rape without having long white sheets over them and without having their membership in a society as a motive" (Vertrees 33). For the filming, Scarlett was still attacked, but by a white man, and a raid was still held on Shantytown, but it was identified as a "political meeting." In addition to Selznick's deletion of all references to the Klan, he eliminated the idle black freedmen from the postwar Atlanta street scenes (Leff 158). Selznick also completely removed the word 'nigger' from the script (Leff 159). Having made these changes, Selznick believed that African Americans would be depicted in a much more favorable light than in the book (Leff 161).

Selznick gave Scarlett O'Hara an even stronger vitality in the film. Specifically, Scarlett's dramatic oath that was made in the novel after she returned to Twelve Oaks and saw the pitiful remains of its destruction was altered for the film (Vertrees 36). In the script, Scarlett would deliver her speech at Tara, and it was at this point that Vertrees felt that most of the film's viewers experienced Scarlett's true spirit of endurance (36). In her monologue, Scarlett proclaimed: "As God is my witness, they're not going to lick me. I'm going to live through this and when it's all over, I'll never be hungry again! No, nor any of my folk. If I have to lie, steal, cheat, or kill, as God as my witness, I'll never be hungry again!" (*Gone With the Wind*). The addition of the line: "If I have to lie, steal, cheat, or kill," suggested Scarlett's increased sense of determination. Bruce Chadwick felt, "the masterstroke for Scarlett's portrayal on film came from Selznick himself" (223). Selznick transformed Scarlett from Southern belle, to an independent woman, to shrewd businesswoman, and then finally into opulence as the wealthy Mrs. Butler. Selznick took the Southern beauty and made her a fierce, independent woman which then attracted

another audience that admired Scarlett's qualities (Chadwick 223). These women were politically involved, buying books about successful women, voting for FDR (because of Eleanor Roosevelt), and rushing to see films starring strong women like Joan Crawford and Bette Davis (Chadwick 223). One of the reasons why Selznick had initially been hesitant to purchase the film rights was that he couldn't imagine any current Hollywood actress who could bring Scarlett to life (Haskell 60). From the beginning, Selznick felt it should be someone new, and he would search to find the right actress to play her (Haskell 60).

Vivien Leigh as Scarlett O'Hara

A perfectionist, Selznick sought the perfect casting for each one of the *Gone With the Wind* characters and launched a nationwide talent search to find them. He was obsessed with finding the ideal performers that would make Margaret Mitchell's story as vivid on screen as it had been in the imaginations of the novel's readers (Watts 150). Selznick's search for Scarlett caused such publicity that it became a national pursuit to be cast. Almost every top Hollywood actress was invited to make a screen test for the role (LaVine 92). During the three years between optioning the film rights and finishing the movie, Selznick interviewed 1,400 different actresses for the part of Scarlett O'Hara (Griffin 21). In addition to the professional actresses, the studio ran auditions in America, Mexico, and Canada (Chadwick 187). Despite the extensive search, Selznick never felt the women who auditioned were quite right for the part (Chadwick 187). In danger of

losing Clark Gable as Rhett Butler, Selznick arranged for shooting to begin on the “burning of Atlanta sequence” without having cast the lead female role (*TV Guide* 35).

On December 10th, Director George Cukor called the first "Action!" and filming for *Gone With the Wind* finally began as the doubles for Rhett and Scarlett made their escape past the blazing former sets from *King Kong* and *The Garden of Allah* (Lambert 136). By burning the old sets and then filming the fire as the spectacular burning of Atlanta sequence, David Selznick hoped to satisfy Metro Goldwyn Mayer and the other financial backers who had threatened to withdraw further monetary support if there were any more filming delays (Capua 89). David Selznick’s brother Myron brought the British actress Vivien Leigh to the burning set that evening and grandly announced, "David, I want you to meet your Scarlett O'Hara!" (Lambert 136). David Selznick later reflected upon that moment: “When he [Myron] introduced me to her, the flames were lighting up her face ... I took one look and knew she was right—at least right as far as my conception of how Scarlett O'Hara looked ... I'll never recover from that first look" (Capua 90). That week, Selznick arranged for screen tests to finally determine who would play Scarlett O’Hara (*The Making of a Legend*). The day after the fire sequence, Selznick wrote to his wife and said that the final contestants for the role were Joan Bennett, Jean Arthur, Paulette Goddard, and the newly introduced Vivien Leigh (*The Making of a Legend*).

Screen tests took place over the next few days and Leigh acted scenes with Hattie McDaniel as Mammy and Leslie Howard as Ashley Wilkes (Lambert 137). With coaching, Vivien Leigh mastered the Southern accent in just a few days (Haskell 74). Director George Cukor had said that he was looking for someone to play Scarlett that was

"charged with electricity" and seemed "possessed of the devil" (Lambert 137). In "Studies in Scarlett," Gavin Lambert wrote that Leigh clearly exhibited all of these qualities (137). In the tests, which have been subsequently released to the public, Vivien Leigh transformed into Scarlett with an amazing boldness, passion, and confidence. Looking back on the audition process, Cukor said: "Leigh's Scarlett was never timid, cautious, or nervous in her performance and instead of playing her first scene with Ashley as a schoolgirl with a trivial 'crush,' she was direct with her desires. There was an indescribable wildness about her" (Lambert 137).

The final decision to cast Vivien Leigh as Scarlett O'Hara was made on December 22nd, after Selznick and his wife viewed Leigh's last screen test in their private screening room (Capua 54). Three weeks after Christmas, David Selznick issued a press release declaring that Vivien Leigh had been signed to play the part (Capua 93). Shortly after the announcement, Vivien Leigh sent Margaret Mitchell a telegram that was published in the *Atlanta Constitution* on January 14th: "Dear Mrs Marsh [Mitchell's married name]: If I can but feel that you are with me on this, the most important and trying task of my life, I pledge with you with all my heart I shall try to make Scarlett O'Hara live as you described her in your book, Warmest regards" (Mitchell, *Margaret* 245). Leigh's efforts to meet those promises were evident in her working eighteen-hour stretches for 122 days and often on less than four hours' sleep (Betts).

The name Vivien Leigh was not well-known in Hollywood before she was cast in *Gone With the Wind*, since the actress had made both her stage and film debuts in London (*TV Guide* 36). In his research on films of the 1930s, author Robert LaVine discovered that Selznick's selection of the British stage actress caused protests in America (92).

LaVine found that a movie magazine of the 1930s that wrote, “America's fans muster for a new revolution,” (LaVine 92). Several chapters of the Daughters of the Confederacy also threatened to boycott the film (Chadwick 188). Margaret Mitchell wrote to Vivien Leigh in January 1939: “I have read that some people have protested your selection because they believe that an American girl, and not an English girl, should portray Scarlett. You will be pleased to know that I have encountered none of this sentiment in Atlanta and very few letters of protest have come to me from other places. Most of the letters I receive are favorable, and the people who stop me on the streets to talk about you seem very pleased with your selection and charmed by your appearance in your photographs” (Mitchell, *Margaret* 245). The general sentiment in the South had concluded that it was better a British girl be cast as Scarlett than a Yankee (*The Making of a Legend*).

The introduction of Vivien Leigh in the film's opening scenes came with a classic movie star entrance in the way she was slowly revealed to the audience's awaiting eyes (Brown 169). That moment was the culmination of the long anticipated results in Selznick's search for Scarlett that ended in Leigh's “discovery” (Brown 170). Scarlett O'Hara began the film with an egocentric attitude that was clearly demonstrated with her self-absorption, steadfast denial of the inevitable war, and her obsession with social events and fashion (Brown 174). Scarlett's tumultuous journey addressed the current public debate about female identity, proper societal roles, and female sexuality that was prevalent in American minds in the early twentieth century (Fox-Genovese 393). Throughout the story, the audience was included in Scarlett's personal conflict between her strong and rebellious personality and her traditional upbringing (Farca 76). Professor

and author Camille Paglia felt that Scarlett displayed feminist qualities in her defiance of the Southern code (*Gone With the Wind: The Legend Lives On*). Farca wrote that Scarlett continuously dismissed “the restrictive exigencies her hypocritical society imposes on women,” and, in doing so, Scarlett became “a feminist” (76). However, postfeminists appreciated Scarlett's interest in her appearance and this led women to rediscover their desires for physical beauty and fashion (Farca 82).

In addition to emphasizing her feminine qualities through wardrobe, Robert LaVine saw how Scarlett's procession of gowns expressed her character's transformation from Southern belle to abandoned matron (Brown 170). LaVine described Walter Plunkett's designs for Scarlett as masterpieces that “underlined her complex character with subtlety and originality” (92). Plunkett's costumes perfectly reflected the changes in Scarlett's life (LaVine 92). These changes began with Scarlett's initial image of purity and innocence in her white organdy and tulle dresses that fit the typical Southern belle image (LaVine 94). These frills gave way to the refinement of taffeta, as seen in Scarlett's black mourning dress. Later, Scarlett was transformed from the rags of poverty when she was dressed in the luxurious green velvet gown that Mammy constructed from the dining-room curtains to snare the rich Rhett Butler (LaVine 92). The gown did not help Scarlett to win Butler at that time, but it was instrumental in allowing Scarlett to dazzle Frank Kennedy (her sister's beau) into becoming her second husband, which saved her plantation. Plunkett continued to dress Scarlett in velvet, signifying her rise to affluence (LaVine 92). These increasingly ornate costumes included an emerald-green velvet dressing gown with exquisite gold embroidery, sapphire-blue velvet dress trimmed in black fur, and scarlet-red velvet evening gown decorated with sparkling paste rubies

and feathers (*Gone With the Wind*). In contrast with the organdy and tulle dresses that were worn by Scarlett in the early scenes of the film, LaVine saw the procession of gowns as “dramatic devices that were integral in the film's unfolding action” (LaVine 93). Paula Farca felt that Scarlett's interest in style and elegance also encouraged women to accentuate their own femininity (82). Women could be assertive and independent while also being fashionable.

Susan Ware wrote in *Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s*, that Scarlett “had the qualities of a spoiled Southern belle, but at the same time was a strong and independent woman who knew exactly what she wanted and went after it” (186). She had opposed the societal restrictions that had been placed on her gender, and she was forced to face the grim realities of war, childbirth, marriages of convenience, and the deaths of her loved ones (Taylor, *Scarlett's Women* 79). In Selznick's conclusion, Scarlett's belief in "tomorrow" clearly demonstrated her overall elasticity and endurance (Wood 126). Ware saw Vivien Leigh's portrayal of Scarlett as an “example of the strong women's roles offered by Hollywood films in the 1930s” (186). Robert LaVine found it difficult to imagine any other actress of the time bringing more vivacity to Scarlett than Vivien Leigh did (92). Tom Brown wrote that Vivien Leigh's Scarlett was “no unwitting decorative object; instead she consistently exploits her 'to-be-looked-at-ness' as a means of controlling the men around her” (170). In “Studies in Scarlett,” Gavin Lambert found that Vivien Leigh became Scarlett with a striking passion and that her boldness and confidence, combined with her firm grasp of a role with hardly any preparation at all, was “extraordinary.” Vivien Leigh carried the film with her commanding performance that set

high standards by which *TV Guide Magazine* said “all female heroines continue to be measured today” (36).

Hattie McDaniel as Mammy

Competition for the role of Mammy in *Gone With the Wind* was almost as fierce as the one for Scarlet O'Hara. Even the President's wife, Eleanor Roosevelt, wrote to Selznick asking him to consider her maid, Elizabeth McDuffie, for the role (Classic Cinema Gold). Selznick rejected the idea of casting Mrs. Roosevelt's maid as Mammy, preferring to audition experienced actresses such as Hattie McDaniel, Louise Beavers, and Hattie Noel (Cripps 143). Hattie McDaniel's first movie appearance was in 1932's *The Golden West*, and it was the first of many films in which she was cast as a maid (*TV Guide* 31). Clark Gable was good friends with Hattie McDaniel and wanted her for the role (Classic Cinema Gold). When McDaniel arrived for her audition dressed as a maid, she was instantly given the part after an impressive performance (Classic Cinema Gold). Hattie McDaniel used typecasting to her advantage and accepted the role, despite the reservations that many in the black community had about *Gone With the Wind* and the perpetuation of black stereotypes in Hollywood (Watts 167). McDaniel was confident that once critics saw her work, those concerns would end, and she would alleviate their fears in her portrayal of Mammy (Watts 167).

The stereotypical Mammy had appeared in many Civil War dramas where she spent her time washing clothes, cooking meals, supervising the kitchen staff, and directing the field hands. But Mammy's most important function in these films was the

care of the master's white children (Chadwick 86). She was often portrayed as an overweight and overwrought black woman with hands on her hips and white bandana tied around her head (Chadwick 80). Mitchell's Mammy had been a composite character of almost all of these stereotypical Mammy traits (Wallace-Sanders 126). Mitchell saw Mammy as an inferior who mindlessly mimicked her owner's reasoning, someone who accepted her place, and never aspiring to anything beyond serving her masters (Watts 149). When Mitchell formally introduced Mammy in *Gone With the Wind*, she wrote, "Mammy felt that she owned the O'Haras body and soul" and that "Mammy was devoted to her last drop of blood to the O'Haras" (Mitchell 24-25). However, Mammy only "owns" the O'Haras in her obsessive need to run their lives and in her attempts to hold Scarlett to the restrictive codes of southern propriety (Wallace-Sanders 126).

Mammy was a common character in films from 1903 through 1939, but when Hattie McDaniel played her in *Gone With the Wind*, author Bruce Chadwick felt that she permanently described the Mammy character for audiences forever (87). Jill Watts acknowledged that McDaniel had artfully constructed her character by drawing from "her early dramatic career in reciting Shakespeare and Dunbar, her rebellious satire of minstrel stereotypes, and her independent blueswoman defiance" (166). Watts wrote that "McDaniel possessed the strong and assertive presence that would counter any cinematic attempt to marginalize Mammy as a secondary, doltish, servile character" (151). McDaniel's Mammy clearly ran Tara and the O'Haras felt genuine affection for her, as did Rhett Butler (Chadwick 198). Director George Cukor had been determined to find "an especially versatile actress who must be able to express all of the emotions from pathos and sorrow, humor and broad comedy, to the dignified, commanding character

who eventually takes charge of the white family after the death of its head" (Watts 150).

Hattie McDaniel clearly met Cukor's expectations in her effective portrayal of Mammy.

Hattie McDaniel's interpretation was dependable and devoted, but she was also bossy and opinionated (Watts 170). This version was in direct contrast with what Jill Watts described as "the slow, elderly, and lumbering character of Mitchell's imagination" (170). Watts felt that McDaniel "possessed the strong and assertive presence that would counter any cinematic attempt to marginalize Mammy as a secondary, doltish, servile character" (151). McDaniel envisioned Mammy as possessing significant power and the actress believed her character had considerable influence over all of Tara's affairs (Watts 176). In an interview with the *New York Amsterdam News*, McDaniel insisted that her version of Mammy was not based on Mitchell's fantasy servant, but on Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and Charity Still who were confident black women abolitionists who had themselves been born in slavery (Watts 176). Mammy, McDaniel argued, was "the brave efficient type of womanhood which, building a race, mothered Booker T. Washington, George Carver, Robert Moton, and Mary McLeod Bethune" (Watts 176). McDaniel worked diligently to bring dignity and strength to her character, while altering the stereotypical image of Mammy with her performance.

McDaniel's Mammy was matriarchal in her disciplining of Scarlett O'Hara, but was "utterly benevolent" in pleading with Melanie for help (Leff 162). Mammy knew and kept Scarlett's secrets, but embodied the structures and norms of restrictive Southern society as she tightened the laces of Scarlett's corset and enforced "correct social behavior" (Fox-Genovese 399-410). Helen Taylor felt that Hattie McDaniel's finest scene was her last where, in her extended semi-monologue, she climbed the stairs with Melanie

and described the terrible distress that had been caused by Bonnie's death (*Scarlett's Women* 173). In *Frankly, My Dear: Gone With the Wind Revisited*, Molly Haskell acknowledged McDaniel's performance of Mammy as pivotal to the film's matriarchal theme (216). Throughout Selznick's adaptation, Mammy and Scarlett maintained a complex mother-daughter relationship that resembled the ones that sometimes existed in the "Old South" (Bogle 88). Because of the structure of plantation life in the antebellum South, Scarlett actually had two mothers, and she found an unwavering presence in Mammy (Miner 23). Mammy expressed the conservative views and values of Scarlett's biological mother, but in her own voice (Taylor, *Scarlett's Women* 172). In both the book and in the film, Mammy loved and stood by Scarlett despite any questionable behavior on her part. This was seen in the film when Mammy criticized her choice of dresses for the barbeque: 'You kain show yo' buzzum befo' three o'clock' (*Gone With the Wind*) and in the novel when she chose to marry Rhett Butler: 'Mahyin trash!' (Mitchell, *Gone* 826), but Mammy continued to stand by Scarlett regardless of her acts of defiance. As a substitute matriarch, Mammy had close daily contact with her charge and was a fixed point throughout all the turbulences in Scarlett's life (Taylor, *Scarlett's Women* 172).

Camille Paglia felt that the relationship between Scarlett and Mammy was "the most passionate of the film" and that "Mammy [was] Scarlett's true mother" (*Gone With the Wind: The Legend Lives On*). As an essential character in *Gone With the Wind*, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese found that Mammy's influence in Scarlett's upbringing and the acceptance of her actions provided the foundations for Scarlett's identity as a woman (410). David Selznick "humanized" Mammy by giving her more of a role in the film than

she had in the original novel and one that emphasized the intimacy of Scarlett and Mammy's relationship (Taylor, *Scarlett's Women* 172). In "Life in the Big House," Eugene Genovese acknowledged that the personal relationship between the mistress and her Mammy bound these women together in a relationship of mutual dependence (290-91).

Susan Myrick, a Southerner and personal friend of Margaret Mitchell, had been appointed as one of the technical advisors for the production of the film (Cronin 398). In her articles for the *Macon Telegraph*, *Macon Telegraph and News*, *Atlanta Georgian*, and *Atlanta Sunday American*, Myrick continually referred to the black actors by their screen counterparts of Mammy, Prissy, Pork, and Big Sam (Cronin 398). This was an attempt to create a seamless continuum between the book and the film's production, but it failed to give credit to the African American actors who were bringing the characters to life (Cronin 398). In a move of declared individualism, McDaniel was later quoted by the nation's premier black newspaper, the *New York Amsterdam News*, "When I read the book *Gone With the Wind*, I was fascinated by the role of Mammy, and like everyone in the position to give it professional consideration, I naturally felt I could create in it something distinctive and unique" (Watts 166). In McDaniel's portrayal, Molly Haskell saw, "the increasing power and importance of blacks and women that in itself embodies the themes of Reconstruction as a historical force, one of a tide of popular middle-class social reform movements, a spectrum of concerns widening to include equality of race and gender" (216). Author Helen Taylor felt that McDaniel's performance, "afforded the actress the opportunity to display a tragic depth and melodramatic range which none of her other 'maid' roles allowed" (*Scarlett's Women* 173).

Hattie McDaniel had pursued the part with determination and, by taking ownership of Mammy, made the part her own. When Selznick reviewed the final cut of the film, he discovered that while he was pleased with the overall performances of the actors, Hattie McDaniel's performance astonished him (Watts 167). He found that rather than sinking into the background, her version of Mammy emerged as one of the film's strongest characters (Watts 167). In a memo to Daniel O'Shea, his vice president of production, Selznick predicted that the actress's contributions would leave a "sensational impression" on the film's future audiences (Watts 167). Hattie McDaniel used the opportunity to make Mammy a complex character who was nurturing, opinionated, resilient, and disciplining. In doing so, McDaniel altered the image of the "stereotypical Mammy" into the figure that she is known as today.

Chapter 4

The Film's 1939 Release and Public Reception

Upon completion of filming *Gone With the Wind*, more than 450,000 feet of film had to be edited to 19,980 feet (Chadwick 188). During production, Selznick had fifteen hundred scene sketches drawn, ordered two hundred sets designed (actually had ninety built, including the old studio lot that was burned), and hired a cast of more than twenty-four hundred people (Chadwick 188). All of these efforts culminated in a surprise preview on September 9, 1939 for initial reactions (*The Making of a Legend*). As the film opened to an unsuspecting California audience in Riverside, it was met with thunderous applause (*The Making of a Legend*). Upon completion of the screening, almost all of the viewers saw the movie as a reflection of their own personal experiences (Haskell 11). The audience saw *Gone with the Wind* as both an escape and as a parallel to their own lives with its story of struggle and survival, but with an aura of romance (Haskell 11). Selznick had insisted that Walter Plunkett, the chief designer for RKO, design every costume for *Gone With the Wind* as historically accurate while capturing the romanticism of the original novel (LaVine 90-92). Their combined efforts were successful in capturing the grandeur that audiences had been anticipating.

Seventy-four years after the Civil War, and a year after the final reunion of the remaining Civil War veterans at Gettysburg, the film adaptation of *Gone With the Wind* was scheduled to be released on December 15, 1939 in Atlanta, Georgia (Juddery 36). Governor Eurith D. Rivers declared a statewide holiday and Atlanta's Mayor William B.

Hartsfield proclaimed a three-day festival (*Time*). For the event, over seven hundred thousand visitors booked hotel rooms throughout Atlanta and in the small towns that surrounded the city (Chadwick 183). On December 12th, Vivien Leigh, Laurence Olivier (Leigh's beau), David Selznick, and Olivia de Havilland (Melanie in the film) landed in Atlanta for the upcoming premiere (Capua 66). Simultaneously, another flight landed with Clark Gable and his wife Carol Lombard (Capua 66). They would all be participating in the planned events that would celebrate the Atlanta premiere.

A high point of the festivities was the Junior League Ball that was held the night before the premiere. The *Gone With the Wind* ball was designed as a replica of the Atlanta Bazaar from the film and the original set pieces were shipped from Hollywood at cost of ten thousand dollars (Capua 66). Dressed in original film costumes, Vivien Leigh, Clark Gable, and Olivia de Havilland made their entrance into the gala to an awaiting crowd of fans that begged for autographs (Capua 66). The ball was attended by six thousand "celebrants" that included movie stars and the Governors of five formerly Confederate States (*Time*). Political notables, including W. Averell Harriman and Herbert Hoover, mingled with celebrities such as Billy Rose, Carole Lombard, and Laurence Olivier (Chadwick 183). Noticeably absent from the festivities were Hattie McDaniel and Butterfly McQueen, the black actresses who had played Mammy and Prissy but were not welcome in segregated Atlanta society (Worthy). The studio's advisors complied in fear of alienating white Southerners (Bourne 17).

On the following evening, *Gone With the Wind* premiered at the Loew's Grand Theatre (Kelso). The twenty-five hundred tickets, usually selling for fifty cents but increased to ten dollars for the event, had been sold out for months (Chadwick 184).

Crowds of 300,000 spectators lined up for seven miles to watch the procession of limousines that brought the stars to the theater (*Time*). The fans waved Confederate flags, tossed confetti, shouted various versions of the Rebel yell, and cheered as the motorcade passed by (*Time*). Vivien Leigh was in tears as thousands welcomed her "back home" (*Time*). In a later letter, Margaret Mitchell wrote her friend Mrs. Hugh Harding: "I wish you, as an old Atlantan, could have been here, for we will never see the town so excited again. The crowds on the streets were larger than those which greeted Lindbergh and President Roosevelt, yet everything was so orderly and well-bred and people did not mob the stars or try to snatch off their buttons for souvenirs. I was so proud of the town I nearly burst ..." (Mitchell, *Margaret* 288).

The premiere's viewing audience was extremely emotional during the screening and burst into a standing ovation as the closing credits rolled across the screen (Capua 66). Bruce Chadwick found that it tapped into the two most cherished beliefs of the American people: hardworking individuals can succeed and that family will eventually triumph (225). Many people who saw the movie also considered it a reminder that if people could retain their fierce individualism, just like Scarlett, they could successfully conquer the Depression (Chadwick 228). Chadwick also discovered that Scarlett's inability to find happiness in the love of a husband and a family was also a victory for those in the audience (225). The viewers might have been out of work, losing their homes, and wearing worn-out clothing, but they were grateful that they had loving families and Scarlett did not (Chadwick 225).

An immediate success, the film revitalized wistfulness for the antebellum South (Juddery 36-37). There was such demand to see *Gone With the Wind* that distributors

gave up their screen restrictions and permitted more than one first-run movie theater in a single city to show it (Chadwick 187). In New York City, the film was showcased for twelve months at the *Empire*, *Ritz*, and *Palace* theaters. In other cities, the film debuted in January 1940 on a reserved seat basis only (Dooley 614). Demand for tickets was so great that some theaters doubled prices and added additional showings each day. The film ran for two years in Atlanta, and a movie house in London showed it for four continuous years after it first debuted on April, 18, 1940 (Taylor, *Scarlett's Women 2*). *Gone With the Wind* was re-released several times between 1940 and 1945, and each time it got new reviews that helped to stimulate box office sales (Chadwick 187-88).

In *The Reel Civil War*, Bruce Chadwick found, “the true success of the movie lay in the riveting character of Scarlett O’Hara, a fierce individualist who [was] the ultimate survivor of a destroyed civilization” (194). Chadwick saw her as an independent woman who survived against all odds to rebuild Tara and then her own life, which he saw as “symbolic of the rebuilding of the entire South and, for Depression audiences, the United States in the 1930s” (194). Frank Nugent wrote, “Miss Leigh is so perfectly designed for the part by art and nature that any other actress in the role would be inconceivable” (Capua 67). On December 23, 1939, *The Hollywood Spectator* wrote: “Scarlett, of course, is the centre of our attention: her whims and fancies are what holds the intimate story together. Vivien Leigh does not play Scarlett. She is Scarlett” (153). *The New York Times* wrote, “Vivien Leigh's Scarlett is so beautiful she hardly need be talented, and so talented she need not have been so beautiful; no actress, we are sure, was as perfectly suited for the role” (Capua 114). Based on the media response, Selznick had made a wise decision in waiting for Leigh and casting her as his Scarlett O’Hara.

The media's reaction to the film's alterations of racial depictions from the novel was mixed. Catherine Clinton wrote, "*Gone With the Wind* may be the first plantation film to feature Afro-American characters who don't spontaneously burst into song, but the picture still reflects historian U. B. Phillip's 'plantation school' view of the Afro-American experience which portrayed happy-go-lucky 'darkies' loyal to benevolent masters" (Vertrees 51). However, while some papers criticized the African American actors for portraying stereotypical characters, others proudly charted their progress as "making it" in Hollywood (Leff 148). Author Donald Bogle offered his appraisal of the film when he wrote: "The problem with Civil War spectacles has never been that they presented Negroes as slaves—for how else could they be depicted? ... the really beautiful aspect was not what was omitted but what was ultimately accomplished by complex human beings" (88). W.E.B DuBois dismissed the film as "conventional provincialism about which Negroes need not get excited" (Cripps 145). The publication *Crisis* shared DuBois' point of view by pointing out that the film, "eliminated practically all the offensive scenes and dialogue so that there is little material, directly affecting Negroes as a race, to which objection can be entered" (Cripps 145). The NAACP's reaction was tepid and, while they agreed the production was historically flawed and unflattering to African Americans, they contended that it was not offensive enough to campaign against it (Watts 175). The trade paper *Negro Actor* ran Edward G. Perry's review in which he admitted that he "was not offended or annoyed" by *Gone With the Wind* (Cripps 145). *The Chicago Defender* found considerable "Negro artistry" in all the black actor's performances (Leff 162). Leonard Leff found that the black *Gone With the Wind* actors were able to exert their "principal influence over the production through the honesty of their performances

and their evocation of the better qualities in Margaret Mitchell's Negro characters” (Leff 157-158). In a later analysis, Bruce Chadwick wrote that David Selznick ultimately gave the African American actors “more character and presence” than they had “in any other movie to that point” (198).

Frank Nugent wrote, “some parts of this extended account have suffered a little in their screen telling, just as others have profited by it . . . Best of all, perhaps, is Miss Hattie McDaniel's Mammy, who must be personally absolved of responsibility for that most ‘unfittin’ scene in which she scolds Scarlett from an upstairs window. She played even that one right, however wrong it was.” In response to her critics, Hattie McDaniel was quoted as saying, “Why should I complain about making seven hundred dollars a week playing a maid? If I didn't, I'd be making seven dollars a week actually being one” (Bogle 82). Although the *Pittsburgh Courier* criticized Selznick for depicting blacks as “happy house servants and unthinking, hapless clods, it “had praise for Hattie McDaniel” and *Commonweal's* Philip Hartung described McDaniel’s performance as “perfect” (Leff 162). Thomas Cripps wrote that her portrayal of Mammy “brought the dignity and earnestness that made her more than a servant” (144). Donald Bogle felt that her performance brought to light a fact that white audiences had either ignored or suppressed: “Here was a black maid who not only was capable of running the Big House but proclaimed in her own contorted way her brand of black power” (92). *Cue* and *The New Yorker* indicated that the black characters in *Gone With the Wind* were dated stereotypes, but Roger Dooley found this to be untrue when he declared, “[Hattie McDaniel’s] Mammy is one of the strongest and most dignified people in the film, more than once serving as Scarlett's conscience as well as the final authority on what's “fittin’” (614). The

reviews clearly showed that Hattie McDaniel had been successful in her quest to bring dignity and honor to her portrayal of Mammy.

David Selznick's vision of *Gone With the Wind* had successfully come to fruition. His cast, screenwriters, costume designer, and set designers had produced a masterpiece and, in the process, gave the American public what they desired. They had wanted an accurate recreation of Margaret Mitchell's novel already seen as an American fictional classic (Dooley 614). Audiences received a costume picture on the most elaborate scale that was deeply nostalgic, and not just for Southerners. (Dooley 614). *Gone With the Wind* provided over three hours of escape into a world of strong women who could be independent and feminine while still managing to survive during the greatest crisis in American history (Dooley 614).

The 1939 Academy Awards

The 12th Academy Awards was held at the Coconut Grove of the Ambassador Hotel on February 29, 1940 to honor the movies that were released in 1939 (*The 12th Academy Awards*). *Gone With the Wind* dominated the event by winning eight Academy Award Oscars, which was a record that held for twenty years (Classic Cinema Gold). Among the Oscars awarded to *Gone with the Wind* were best picture, best actress to Vivien Leigh for her interpretation of Scarlett O'Hara, best supporting actress to Hattie McDaniel for Mammy, best screenplay to Sidney Howard, best direction to Victor Fleming, best color cinematography to director of photography Ernest Haller and Technicolor associates Ray Rennahan and Wilfred Cline, and best film editing to Hal

Kern and James Newcom (Vertrees 1). Additionally, the Irving G. Thalberg Memorial Award was given to David O. Selznick for "consistently high quality of motion picture production" (Vertrees 1).

In attendance with Laurence Olivier, Vivien Leigh was dazzling in her white ermine coat over chiffon evening gown with a large aquamarine necklace (Capua 70-71). She rushed up onto the stage to accept her Oscar from Spencer Tracy, winning Best Actress over the anticipated Bette Davis for *Dark Victory* (Capua 71). In her acceptance speech, Leigh said, "If I were to mention all those who've shown me such wonderful generosity through *Gone With the Wind* I should have to entertain you with an oration as long as *Gone With the Wind* itself" (Capua 71). She then thanked "Mr. Selznick, all my co-workers and most of all Miss Margaret Mitchell" (Edwards 117). Bette Davis later said: "Vivien Leigh rightfully won, and I meant it when I told her that Scarlett was one of the greatest performances of all time. I'm not sure that she believed I was sincere, but Laurence Olivier did." (Capua 71).

When Hattie McDaniel won the Oscar for Best Supporting Actress for her superb performance of Mammy, she became the first African American to win an Academy Award (Taylor, *Scarlett's Women* 2). She was also the first African American to ever attend an Academy Award Banquet as a guest and not a servant (Classic Cinema Gold). Louella Parsons, an American gossip columnist, wrote: "Hattie McDaniel earned that gold Oscar, by her fine performance of Mammy in *Gone With the Wind* ... Hattie, hair trimmed with gardenias, face alight, and dress up to the queen's taste, accepted the honor in one of the finest speeches ever given on the Academy floor. She put her heart right into those words and expressed not only for herself, but for every member of her race, the

gratitude she felt that she had been given recognition by the Academy” (Classic Cinema Gold). The black press treated McDaniel as a hero and both *Opportunity* and *Crisis* gave her cover stories celebrating "the first time a colored film actor or actress has ever been given this honor" (Cripps 147). Molly Haskell wrote in “*Frankly, My Dear*”: *Gone With the Wind Revisited*, “Most of us, whites and blacks, have come to appreciate not only many of the performances, particularly Hattie McDaniel's central and all-seeing Mammy, but the stark and groundbreaking drama of Hattie McDaniel herself, daughter of ex-slaves and one-time domestic, winning the Oscar for best supporting actress and gallantly shrugging off her critics” (19). In an interview with *The Pittsburgh Courier*, McDaniel was quoted, “I consider this recognition a step further for the race, rather than personal progress” (Watts 180). McDaniel’s interpretation of Mammy not only redefined the character, but made history by allowing audiences to witness her incredible talent. Her performance increased opportunities for African American actors in Hollywood and demonstrated that they could be much more than the stereotypes that had plagued them in the past.

Chapter 5

The Enduring Appeal of *Gone With the Wind*

Gone With the Wind created complex characters and successfully used a grand bygone era as a backdrop for a glitzy and enduring crowd-pleasing romance. Bruce Chadwick observed that the film appealed to audiences of the late 1930s and early 1940s because they “yearned for simpler times and a place of their own” (222). Chadwick saw the desire to go back to the world of “farms and country lanes” often appeared in other successful films of the Depression era (222). Marion Morton offered an analysis of *Gone With the Wind* as a phenomenon of the thirties when Scarlett returned to her dismal plantation; her fate was like millions of American women during the Depression, “for whom scrimping and cutting corners became a way of life” (53). The American public was struggling to regain some familiarity and stability in their lives, but was confronted with financial obstacles at almost every turn. Krisztina Kovacs contended that by entering the realm of business and money-making, Scarlett gained independence and freedom which all women secretly envied. Scarlett's evolution from “seductress” to assertive woman was attractive to a working woman of the 1930s (Haskell 11). These women empathized with Scarlett and felt a kinship because society disapproved of them working too, especially married women (Haskell 11).

After the Depression ended, Scarlett was seen as a symbol of social survival by those who either read or saw *Gone With the Wind* during the World War II era (Taylor, *Scarlett's Women* 100). Just three months before *Gone With the Wind* had opened in

1939, the German army invaded Poland and officially began World War II (Chadwick 228). Polls showed that many Americans did not want to become involved but worried that America would be pulled into the war (Chadwick 228). Bruce Chadwick felt that these fears resonated with the film's audience (228). Men who saw the movie in 1939 and 1940 could visualize themselves as the dead or wounded Confederate soldiers depicted in the film, and women pictured themselves in the scenes where Melanie and Scarlett waited for the lists of dead and wounded to be released (Chadwick 228).

After the war ended, Chadwick observed that *Gone With the Wind* continued to remain popular because the nation was in a state of economic despair (229). The film tapped into these related emotions and gave the public hope that they could also carry on (Chadwick 229). By 1945, the European public in newly liberated countries also began to be drawn to the story of Scarlett O'Hara (Dooley 615). Roger Dooley saw that they were also eager to identify with Scarlett and her postwar battle back to prosperity (615). Additionally, Japan's population was among the largest new audiences of *Gone With the Wind* (*Gone With the Wind: The Legend Lives On*). Fresh from their defeat in WWII, the Japanese were extremely attracted to the film's message of survival (*Gone With the Wind: The Legend Lives On*).

The young women of the 1950s and 1960s did not remember the war, but were reacting against their "war-scarred and security-minded parents" (Taylor, *Scarlett's Women* 100). Molly Haskell observed that adolescent girls saw Scarlett as "an emblem of rebellion against tradition and the hypocrisies of their elders" (13). To these girls, Scarlett's survival represented an individualistic ideology rather than a collective movement (Taylor, *Scarlett's Women* 100). When *Gone With the Wind* was re-released in

1967, it came at a time when the Vietnam War was starting to divide America and the divisions depicted in the Civil War saga presented similar feelings of anxiety and trepidation (Chadwick 230). The civil rights movement also began to stir debate about the portrayals of African Americans in historic films. Up until this point, critics were engrossed with the novel's immediate popularity, high sales, and concerns about its unique female perspective (Kovacs).

The 1970s attracted new fans and brought existing fans new opportunities to embrace their passion for *Gone With the Wind*. Three books were published, including Gavin Lambert's *The Making of Gone With the Wind*, Roland Flamini's *Scarlett, Rhett and a Cast of Thousands*, and William Pratt's and Herbert Bridges' *Scarlett Fever* (Dooley 615-16). MGM sold the rights for twenty television screenings to CBS for thirty-five million dollars, and 110 million people watched the first television release of the film (Taylor, *Scarlett's Women 2*). *Gone With the Wind* was considered the greatest soap opera that the world had ever known and, in the mid-1970s, soap operas were extremely popular and dominated American television (Chadwick 231). The television release in 1976 also coincided with the resurgence of the women's movement and contemporary women embraced the vivacious and emancipated Scarlett O'Hara (Chadwick 231).

In 1980, two television specials focused on the search for Scarlett (Dooley 616). One of these documentaries, *The Selznick Years*, included screen tests from Vivien Leigh and other actresses, including Paulette Goddard and Susan Hayward, that fans had been anxious to see (Dooley 616-17). The 1980s also saw the ownership of *Gone With the Wind* change hands when Ted Turner purchased the distribution rights in 1986 (Baker 76). This purchase helped to launch two television networks, *Turner Classic Movies* and

Turner Network Television (Baker 76). When interviewed about the purchase, Ted Turner said: "The central themes of the movie, such as coming of age, survival and the challenges of romantic relationships still ring true today. People will always be interested in *Gone With the Wind* because the characters and their struggles are relatable and inherently human" (Baker 76). Turner has also been quoted as saying, "To me, it is one of the greatest movies ever made" (*Gone With the Wind: The Legend Lives On*). Turner went on to host a fiftieth anniversary celebration of the film in 1989 (*Gone With the Wind: The Legend Lives On*). At that time, Turner re-released the film (just one of the six theatrical releases that have taken place over the years), and the screening was held at the Fox Theater in Atlanta (*Gone With the Wind: The Legend Lives On*).

Gone With the Wind continues to be one of the most popular books and films in the world today. As of 2011, there were more than thirty million copies of the book in publication worldwide (Auchmutey). A testament to the continued popularity of the film is reflected by the more than 202,000,000 total theater admissions reported in 2002 (James). The enduring appeal of *Gone With the Wind* also includes museums, home video releases, books (including *Scarlett: The Sequel to Margaret Mitchell's "Gone With the Wind"* written by Alexandra Ripley in 1992), collectibles, and anniversary events throughout the world. *The Road to Tara Museum* in Jonesboro, GA is a popular location for tourists while in the Atlanta area, and the film's costumes that are on display there are a major attraction (Rains 279). *Scarlett on the Square*, a museum in Atlanta, has been host to several *Gone With The Wind* events and displays items from Dr. Chris Sullivan's personal collection that include the Bengaline gown that Scarlett wore on her honeymoon and personal correspondence from the film's stars (Rains 281). Ann Rutherford, who

played Caren in *Gone With the Wind*, was quoted at an event: "Who would have known the movie would still be as popular today? When we made *Gone With the Wind* we had all adored the book. We would have done anything to be in it. It never occurred to us it would last this long. Movies ran a while and that was it. This has been amazing" (Rains 267).

Atlanta continues to honor *Gone With the Wind*'s author, Margaret Mitchell. The *Margaret Mitchell House* opened to the public in 1997 (Rains 284). As the location where Mitchell wrote *Gone With the Wind*, the house is currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places by the National Trust for Historic Preservation (Rains 284). Atlanta has a street and an elementary school named after Mitchell and to show continued adoration of the author, Atlanta formally celebrates her birthday each year (Rains 284). Unable to escape the limelight even in death, visitors even visit Mitchell's tombstone in Atlanta's Oakland Cemetery (Auchmutey).

Gone With the Wind also continues to be popular overseas. The book currently has at least 155 editions in print, it has been translated into twenty-seven languages, and has been published in thirty-seven countries (Taylor, *Scarlett's Women* 1-2). When high-ranking Chinese Communist party official Zhou Qiang visited Atlanta in 2011, the *Margaret Mitchell House* was the only place that he wanted to visit (Baker 76). In North Korea, *Gone With the Wind* is one the very few books that citizens are permitted to read on their government sponsored computers (Baker 76). A digitally remastered version of *Gone With the Wind* was recently released in England on November 22, 2013 as part of a British Film Institute event to mark the one hundredth anniversary of Vivien Leigh's

birth (Betts). In 2013, British writer Hannah Betts acknowledged Leigh's enduring performance in *Gone With the Wind* as speaking to “the eternal teenager in us all.”

Fans accumulate keepsakes to affirm their special relationship with *Gone With the Wind* (Taylor, *Scarlett's Women* 26). Since the book was first released, memorabilia has been big business in catering to people's desire to own items related to *Gone With the Wind* and its characters. When the book was first published in 1936, the retail market was filled with merchandise, including fabrics in “Melanie blue” and “Scarlett green,” hats, vanity items, cologne, and wallpaper with plantation scenes (Taylor, *Scarlett's Women* 27). When four lion cubs were born at the Atlanta Zoo, they were named Scarlett, Melanie, Ashley and Rhett after the *Gone With the Wind* characters (Taylor, *Scarlett's Women* 27). When the film was released in 1939, there were dolls, children's costumes, games, and fountain pens to mark the event (Taylor, *Scarlett's Women* 27). More recently, the collectibles market has included greetings cards, “limited edition” dolls, puzzles, collector plates, books, posters, and prints that all feature the familiar images of Vivien Leigh and Clark Gable to ensure profits (Taylor, *Scarlett's Women* 27). In addition to modern collectibles, vintage memorabilia related to the original book, film, and the film's stars continue to be highly sought after. Items have sold through prominent auction houses for substantial sums of money, including signed first edition copies of *Gone With the Wind*, which have sold for as much as \$9,023 as recently as 2012 (Christie's). In 2002, a private collector sold 348 individual lots containing original items from the film for more than \$300,000 through Christie's in New York (Silverman).

Chapter 6

Conclusion

According to Gail Collins, *Gone with the Wind* has been the largest fictional success story of the twentieth century (368). Margaret Mitchell's story continues to maintain its popularity, charm, and vision because it addressed issues that continue to resonate with its fans. Some of these issues have included female stereotypes, gender inequality, and war. Film critic FX Sweeney saw *Scarlett* as a "tremendous expression of female power" (*Gone With the Wind: The Legend Lives On*). *Gone With the Wind* continues to resonate because of its finely acted characters, rich Technicolor imagery, inspirational heroine, soap opera plot, and mythology about the bygone American plantation life in the South. When these elements combined with a yearning for simpler times and the romantic story of troubled lovers who were caught in the greatest catastrophe of American history, it became an enduring classic of American popular culture. Yet, like other controversial classics, *Gone With the Wind* embodies the contradictions of the culture from which it sprang.

Tim Baker saw *Gone With the Wind* as an iconic American film that has continued to remind us of the sacrifices and hardships that people endured during one of the most crucial moments in our nation's history (75). Film historian Robert Osborne said: "Everything about the world has changed since *Gone With the Wind* was made. Morality has changed. Honor, behavior, certainly clothing, yet something in this movie still speaks to people, and they respond to it as people did in 1939. That's something of a

miracle" (Baker 77). Film critic Leonard Maltin was quoted as saying: "To explain its universal appeal, I think you have to strip away a lot of the trappings and get down to the fundamentals. It's about self-reliance, it's about the land, jealousy and rivalry and the fickle nature of love" (*Gone With the Wind: The Legend Lives On*). In an interview with Tim Baker, Charlie Tabesh (the senior vice president of programming for Turner Classic Movies) said: "It's a great, epic love story. It has high-powered actors and actresses, politics, romance, family and incredible production values. It started off so high and was produced so well it was able to maintain its legacy. The fundamental love story endures" (77). The film's qualities, as acknowledged by Tabesh, undoubtedly contribute to the continued popularity of *Gone With the Wind*.

Scarlett O'Hara took the film's audience along this epic journey and she became synonymous with *Gone With the Wind*, just as Scarlett has often been synonymous with her portrayer, Vivien Leigh (Taylor, *Scarlett's Women* 81). Elizabeth Fox-Genovese observed that Scarlett stood apart in *Gone With the Wind* and not just because she was the central character (399). Scarlett was remarkable because the years of war and its aftermath rendered the question of appropriate gender roles to be problematic (Fox-Genovese 399). The film addressed issues of gender inequality, societal restrictions, and a woman's role in achieving familial stability. As the incomparable feminist heroine of Southern literature, Scarlett proposed a variety of alternatives for women's oppression (Farca 86). These included a successful career, feminine naturalness, and courage (Farca 86).

While *Gone With The Wind* did suggest alternatives to female oppression, it did not address the subjugation of the African American woman. When David O. Selznick

first purchased the film rights to *Gone With The Wind*, he acknowledged that many of the racial depictions needed to be altered. Selznick had no choice but to keep slavery in the film because it was a historical fact that Southern plantations had slaves. Though a major aspect of the novel, Selznick reduced slavery to a relatively small part in the film and gave the African American actors more individual presence (Juddery). Additionally, by removing racist terminology and all references to the Ku Klux Klan, and by giving the African American characters more significant roles in his film, Selznick tried to make the story less racially offensive than it had been as a novel.

The most publicized accusations regarding *Gone With the Wind* as a proslavery, racist propaganda novel were primarily after the Civil Rights movements of the 1960s (Kovacs). Mitchells's *Gone With the Wind* influenced many Americans, especially when the film adaptation appeared in theaters (and later on television) and gave white Southerners back their culture and pride (Chadwick 216). In doing so, however, Bruce Chadwick noted that Mitchell "reinforced the shackles that already gripped African Americans so tightly" (216-217). John Cawleti observed that despite the fact that *Gone With the Wind* was "permeated with stereotypical characters, unlikely situations, and obsolete themes and values, they retain a hold on later generations" (19). Cawleti came to his conclusion by acknowledging that the fantasy world within was "so complete and interesting in itself that it [was] still possible to enter into an effective escapist identification with the protagonists" (19). *Gone With the Wind* was a social melodrama that combined intense structure and character with a "realistic" social and historical setting (Cawleti 261). Cawleti found that the film successfully aroused an immediate emotional response from its audience with its grandeur (264).

The film adaptation of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* chronicled its heroine's transformation from stereotypical Southern belle to feminist survivor. The contributions of David O. Selznick, Vivien Leigh, and Hattie McDaniel to Scarlett O'Hara's story produced an individual who embodied the characteristics of the New Woman. Helen Taylor noted that this fact was recognized by, "the 1940s wartime women workers and mothers, the 1960s liberationists and careerists, and the 1980s 'Me'-generation postfeminists" (*Scarlett's Women* 105). The film's feminist message, romantic grandeur, ground-breaking performances, theme of survival through times of crisis, and opulent feminine appeal all combined to create an American classic with enduring appeal.

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