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Cavaliers and Capitalists: The Transatlantic South from Mercantilism to Mercedes

Reporting on his visit to Austria in 1854, Virginian John R. Thompson complained that “the moment we got into the dominions of the two-headed eagle, I began to feel like a negro.” Not only was he forced to surrender his passport at the border, but before he could enter Vienna, Thompson had to secure “a pass, exactly such a one as Pa gives Lewis to go to Mrs. Jenkins’s, permitting us without molestation to enter the Austrian capital.” Rather than greater empathy with those whom they held in bondage, however, by the 1850s southerners like Thompson were more likely to interpret their encounters with the repressive and undemocratic aspects of European life as a troubling foretaste of what awaited them if they allowed themselves to be crushed beneath the boot heel of Yankee despotism. On the other hand, in words and logic reminiscent of their defenses of slavery, other antebellum southerners actually praised Austria’s rigid dominion over northern Italy for bringing order and elevation to a people who had once been enslaved by their own “ill-regulated and debasing passions” but were now, under Austrian rule, “rising to be a highly intelligent and moral people.” European social and intellectual currents have encouraged some notable southerners to think innovatively and subversively about their region, but at crucial junctures throughout their region’s history, white southerners have, as often as not, looked to Europe hoping to bolster and affirm the controversial values and institutions that have set the South apart from the rest of America.¹

Likewise, although their travel accounts and comments on things European often seemed to mark antebellum southerners as the products of regional culture that was decidedly provincial, from the seventeenth century to the twenty-first, significant and sustained economic interaction with Europe has often helped to shape and even to sustain the South’s differences with the rest of the United States. Jack

P. Greene has suggested that until they began their agitation against the mercantile policies of the British Crown, each of the American colonies remained “a discrete and largely self-contained political environment” more closely connected to London than to “any of its immediate neighbors in America.” Greene’s observation was especially pertinent for Britain’s southernmost North American colonies, which accounted for nearly two-thirds of the value of the exports of all thirteen colonies between 1768 and 1772, and were thus not only squarely “in the mainstream of British-American development,” but, more broadly, as Peter Coclanis put it, a vital “expression of the outward expansion of the European economy during the early modern period.” In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Coclanis observed, these “exemplary mercantilist entities” drew “sizable . . . intercontinental flows of labor, capital, and entrepreneurship into the region and, with the establishment by Europeans and European Americans of institutions and production platforms conducive to plantation slavery, impressive product flows out.”²

The plantation actually emerged as a unit of proto-industrial agricultural production in the Mediterranean basin before it was transplanted to the New World by the great colonial powers of Europe, and the allure of European export markets played a pivotal role in making it the centerpiece of the southern economy. Slavery arose in the seventeenth century Chesapeake in response to the realities of a rapidly expanding demand for labor and a dwindling supply of Englishmen willing to work as indentured servants on the region’s tobacco plantations. As Winthrop Jordan has shown, part of the cultural baggage that English settlers brought to the new world was a predisposition to view blacks as different from and inferior to themselves. Fueled by religious as well as scientific influences, this prejudice could be traced as far back as the medieval era, and it became notably more apparent after sixteenth-century British encounters with West Africans opened up a Pandora’s box of the sexual and moral anxieties captured so brilliantly in Shakespeare’s *Othello*. In the face of the rapidly shifting economic and demographic realities they encountered in the New World, the English colonists fell rather unreflectively into an incremental process of African enslavement that was eventually institutionalized in the Virginia slave code of 1705.³

With plantation slavery duly installed as the dominant component of southern economic, and ultimately, social and cultural identity as well, the southern colonies were set on a decidedly different develop-

mental path than the one taken by their northern neighbors. Both the concentration of wealth in the hands of slaveholding planters with little interest in economic diversification and community development and the attendant dispersal of the population across the countryside clearly discouraged the development of a broad public sector emphasizing education, communication, and transportation such as developed in the northern colonies. With its European economic orientation and its closely related social and cultural eccentricities, plantation slavery all but foreordained the South as the least American part of America even before the process of constructing America's national identity had gotten under way.⁴

The South retained strong economic ties to Europe throughout the antebellum era, its principal crops of cotton, tobacco, and rice accounting for 55 percent of the value of American exports between 1815 and 1865. It was surely no mere coincidence that in 1825, the year that the first permanent white settlers began to transform the swampy alluvial wilderness of the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta into America's premier cotton producing region, 171,000,000 pounds of said staple had been exported to Great Britain to feed the insatiable looms of a rapidly expanding textile industry. By the end of the 1850s, the whirl of these looms could be heard in the background as a prominent geologist predicted that within a century "whatever the Delta of the Nile may once have been will only be a shadow of what the alluvial plain of the Mississippi will then be. . . ."⁵

The South was the world's primary source of cotton at the middle of the nineteenth century. More than one of its orators proclaimed, "Cotton Is King," and one even crowed that without the fleecy southern staple, "England would topple headlong and carry the whole civilized world with her, save the South." As Confederate emissaries eagerly sought London's all-important diplomatic recognition, however, they quickly came face to face with the reality that their region's economic ties to the British textile industry had strengthened its dependence on slavery and thus placed it at odds with the rising tide of abolitionist sentiment not only in Great Britain but elsewhere throughout Europe as well.⁶

Still, one need not minimize the importance of anti-slavery feeling in ultimately thwarting Confederate diplomatic overtures to note that these overtures came at a time when, unbeknownst to those who were still celebrating his coronation, King Cotton's reign was already coming to an end. The South had once supplied nearly 80 percent of

England's cotton imports, but overall British demand for southern cotton was already cooling down by 1861. Moreover, the previous year's bumper crop helped to cushion the impact of the drastic reduction of transatlantic cotton flows during the early years of the war until increases in cotton production in India and elsewhere began to make up some of the supply deficit in a slackening market. The wartime loss of southern cotton still hurt England's economy, but it was offset, at least in part, by expanded northern demand for arms and other goods and England's continuing need for northern wheat. Finally, the annual volume of pre-war commerce between England and the northern states had to be considered, as did longstanding marketing and shipping arrangements virtually guaranteeing that, after the war as before, England's access to southern cotton would still depend more on remaining in the good graces of New York than of Charleston.

England's diplomatic rebuff carried a particularly sharp sting for many upper-crust southerners who had long claimed a spiritual kinship with the English aristocracy, a sentiment that some of their English counterparts actually seemed at times to reciprocate. The South's economic ties to European textile manufacturers may have emboldened its secessionists and warmongers, but it was an earlier, largely imagined, pre-industrial Europe that encouraged southerners to see themselves as deeply, and ultimately, irreconcilably, different from their northern counterparts. The efforts of southern colonists to adapt the fashions, furniture, and life styles of the mother country to their new frontier circumstances fostered a sense that, as a Virginian put it, southern life was "as far as would permit, a continuation of English society." As the nineteenth century unfolded, southerners also eagerly embraced the exceedingly dubious notion of southern planters' supposed descent from the aristocratic cavaliers who had fled England in the wake of their defeat in the English Civil War by the Puritan 'Roundheads.' Not coincidentally, meanwhile, the descendants of the Roundheads had reputedly settled in New England, whence by the 1830s came a steadily expanding stream of criticism directed at slavery and other aspects of southern life as well. Although the claim to Cavalier descent arose originally in Virginia, where it may have contained the tiniest kernel of truth, that kernel quickly swelled and burst into glorious mythical bloom across the entire region, showing special appeal among over-proud South Carolinians and even cropping up in depictions of plantation society in Louisiana.⁷

The Cavalier legend found its first full-blown literary expression in John Pendleton Kennedy's 1832 novel *Swallow Barn*, which described life on the grand estate of one Frank Meriwether, an exceedingly appealing sort beloved by slave, kin, and neighbors alike. Like many subsequent literary treatments of the Cavalier, however, *Swallow Barn* conveyed a certain ambivalence, for while the amiable Meriwether is surpassed by none in manners or congeniality, he is also in some ways a sad figure, one who seems more a man of the past than the present, much less the future. His memory of facts is far keener than his facility with new ideas and concepts, and he seems generally ill-suited for the rough and tumble of a world where manners and congeniality matter far less than competitiveness, cunning, and a good head for figures. No such head, certainly, rested on the shoulders of Colonel Cuthbert Dangerfield, who, in James Kirke Paulding's *Westward Ho!*, refuses to keep books, has no idea of how much he earns, owns, or owes, and shows no hesitation whatsoever in confessing himself "utterly incapacitated" to manage his own affairs.⁸

While many southerners crossed the Atlantic seeking affirmation of their self-styled role as the standard bearers of an enduring aristocratic tradition, what they found was sometimes more troubling than reassuring. Michael O'Brien has argued that European romanticism captivated so many of the southern gentry because of its "special appeal for those who thought themselves on the periphery." Feeling more than a little peripheralized as the democratizing impulses of the 1830s fueled the rising influence of the upstart yeomen of an expanding and an increasingly populous backcountry, they saw in contemporary Europe what William R. Taylor called "a mirror which threw back a distorted image of what was happening to the South, an image which threatened revolution, class warfare, and the extinction of polite culture."⁹

Prone both to melancholy and exaggeration, such southerners often grew fearful that what they perceived as the fruits of several centuries of European decline might be compressed into the span of a few years in the South, asking themselves if the Cavaliers and other aristocrats had hardly survived, much less prevailed in Europe, how could they be expected to fare any better in America? Thus, in the mind's eye, the ruins of Rome became a Williamsburg in decay and contemporary Venice, the neglected port of Charleston. Charlestonian Hugh Legaré likened the disunionist radicals who provoked the Nullification Crisis of 1832 and challenged the primacy of the old low-

country planter elite in his home state to the Jacobins of the French Revolution. After visiting Versailles, Legaré wondered why should “a society so charming and accomplished [as our lowland aristocracy] . . . be doomed to end so soon, and, perhaps, so terribly. . . . I see nothing before us but decay and downfall.”¹⁰

Not only did contemporary Europe provide distressingly little affirmation of the viability of their supposedly genteel and aristocratic identity, but it actually confronted members of the South’s antebellum agricultural elite with a jarring portrait of industrial modernity, as it might one day play out in their own region, which was actually industrializing faster than any western society, save for Great Britain and the northern states. Southerners who traveled to England typically sailed from New York to Liverpool, the city where the price of southern cotton was thought to be set. South Carolina’s James Henley Thornwell was impressed by the docks and public buildings, but he found Liverpool and other European cities too “smoky” and “dingy” for his taste. He was shocked by the “immense poor population, ragged and dirty and begging for alms at almost every term.” Policemen were everywhere, he noted, “so as to be within a moment’s call for the purpose of suppressing mobs, riots and all disorders.”¹¹

Surely, this was a world where the Cavalier had no place, but as sectional tensions mounted, concerns about his dysfunctionality in a modern setting gave way to strident boasts about his prowess as a warrior, a prowess presumably inherited from the Norman barons who had conquered England in 1066. Claims that the Cavaliers were generally of Norman descent were, if anything, even less credible than claims that southerners were generally of Cavalier descent, (As one wag observed, had the participants in the Civil War been limited to the actual American descendants of both the Cavaliers and the Roundheads, the entire affair could have been accommodated by a single circus tent) but historical accuracy is hardly a priority when there are identities to be built, and as James McPherson has observed, the notion that white southerners were lineal descendants of the bold, fierce Norman Cavalier knights became “the central myth of southern ethnic nationalism.”¹²

By the mid-nineteenth century, it was fashionable among both southerners and Europeans as well to use religious, cultural, class, and linguistic distinctions interchangeably with race. Thus, eager to shore up the shaky notions of vast and irreconcilable cultural differences with the North, southern polemicists were quick to describe their pre-

sumed Norman ancestors as “a race . . . renowned for its gallantry, chivalry, gentleness and intellect” and to insist that “the Saxonized Maw-worms creeping from the Mayflower have [no] right to kinship with the whole-souled Norman British planters of a gallant race.”¹³

Much has been written on the popularity of novelist and poet Sir Walter Scott among educated antebellum southerners, and Mark Twain famously blamed the Civil War on the South’s affliction with the “Sir Walter disease,” with its “sham grandeurs, sham gauds, and sham chivalries of a brainless, and worthless long-vanished society.” Scott’s stirring depictions of dashing and chivalrous, honor-obsessed knights clearly brought out the warrior-wannabe in the southern congressman who announced his readiness to meet the Yankee foe “with helmet on, with visor down, and lance couched.” Scott’s novels also encouraged southern readers to see parallels between Scotland’s struggles against English oppression and their own troubles with a North that was populated by the descendants of the same Saxons who had abused the Scots so terribly. For the most part, southerners who read Scott did so uncritically, not because they wanted to lose themselves in his romantic tales but because they wanted to find themselves there, because of what they wanted to believe about themselves as a noble and distinctive people. Hence, after devouring Scott, they even took merrily to describing themselves as “Southrons,” despite the frequent usage of this term by Scots themselves as a derogatory reference to the Englishmen who lived south of their border.¹⁴

When the Civil War began, of course, Europe offered a number of contemporary examples of struggles over ethnic nationalism, such as the Greeks vs. the Turks and the Hungarians vs. the Hapsburgs. Meanwhile, Poland’s uprising against Russia in 1863 struck a Richmond editor as “the same cause for which the Confederates are now fighting . . . against that crushing, killing union with another nationality.” When that fight was finally over, however, defeated and embittered white southerners turned once again to Walter Scott. Scott’s depictions of the ‘Lost Cause’ of restoring the Stuart monarchs of Scotland to their rightful position as rulers of England as well doubtless encouraged southern whites to seek emotional comfort and regional affirmation in a pervasive cult of their own courageously pursued and honorably relinquished ‘Lost Cause’ of southern independence.¹⁵

The white South’s ‘Lost Cause’ was no mere romantic flight of fancy, however, for beneath its melancholic surface pulsed a never-extinguished hope that it might yet somehow be regained. Committed

to restoring, insofar as possible, the traditional southern racial order, the founders of the Ku Klux Klan appeared to draw some of their inspiration from certain rites of the old Scottish clans. The practice of cross-burning did not actually become common, however, until the KKK was revived in 1915. At that point, theatrically-minded Klan leaders adopted the ritual of using a 'fiery cross' to summon the clans that had been lifted from Scott's poem "The Lady of the Lake," incorporated into Rev. Thomas Dixon's 1905 novel *The Clansman*, and then broadly popularized in 1915 in "The Birth of a Nation," D. W. Griffith's phenomenally influential cinematic adaptation of Dixon's work.¹⁶

European influences also shaped the efforts of those who sought to transform the South's postbellum economy without undermining the region's racial and political traditions. As Daniel Singal has argued, the postbellum crusade to construct a vibrant, dynamic, even dominant industrial New South out of the ashes of the old agrarian order drew heavily on Victorian ideals, not as they manifested themselves in Victorianism's declining years of the 1880s, but in a time-warped version of the so-called British middle Victorianism of the 1850s. The Victorian insistence on maintaining a rigid separation between the civilized and the savage offered an ideal rationale for the late nineteenth-century South's emerging Jim Crow racial system. Meanwhile, the old Victorian optimism, the absolute conviction that diligence, discipline, and moral superiority could lead only to material advancement, provided the ideal complement to the New South gospel of progress.¹⁷

While antebellum literary treatments of the fundamentally non-acquisitive Cavalier had frequently presented him as a hopelessly anachronistic figure doomed to extinction by an ascendant competitive capitalist society, New South Victorians made capitalism the means by which the Cavalier ideals of gentility, integrity, and *noblesse oblige* might be restored and preserved. Indeed, New South proponents like Henry Grady and Richard Edmonds never missed a chance to pay homage to the old Cavalier regime as "a civilization" that "has not been surpassed, and perhaps will not be equaled, among men," while novelist George Bagby saw in the old Cavalier society "a beauty, a simplicity, a purity and an uprightness . . . a charm that passes all language at my command." In short, in a pattern common to national identity-building elsewhere, the old agrarian Cavalier South became the glorious golden age of the past, which the New South's

industrial golden age of the future promised to reclaim. Where the aristocratic Cavalier had been done in by forces that he could not control or even understand, his bourgeois New South descendants proclaimed themselves fully in command of their region's destiny.¹⁸

Just as the proponents of an industrial New South drew on British antecedents to buttress and rationalize their efforts, the principal critics of those efforts would do much the same. Many critics have contended that for Allen Tate and his Nashville Agrarian colleague John Crowe Ransom, the difference between South and North was really the difference between "traditional European culture and industrialized America." In truth, of course, antebellum southern travelers had witnessed an industrialized Europe well before there was a truly 'industrialized America,' but because Tate wanted a South that represented "permanent forms of truth" that would remain "pertinent" even "under the varying conditions of time and place," he explained to Ransom in 1929 that "we must be the last Europeans, there being no Europeans in Europe at present."¹⁹

Although Tate and Ransom were fixed narrowly on a mythical pre-capitalist Europe, more contemporary Europeans had contributed significant amounts of both capital and expertise to the development of a more modern southern economy. One English syndicate acquired 2 million acres in Florida in 1881, and another whose investors consisted of "noblemen, members of Parliament, country squires" and military officers purchased 1.3 million acres in the Yazoo Delta with an eye toward "a good outlet for pauper emigration." In language that suggested a second age of mercantilism, the *London Standard* announced in 1884 that "the time of the South has come again" and reported that "company after company is being organized for the exploration of the Old Southern States." No one stoked the fires of economic revolution more ardently than Anglo-American journalists Edward L. Godkin and Frances W. Dawson, who, as C. Vann Woodward observed, "spoke with the voice of Manchester to the New South." Dawson had actually served in the Confederate Army, but by the 1880s he was boldly suggesting in the *Charleston News and Courier* that "the importation of about five hundred Yankees" was the key to making the South's most southern city "throb with life and vivid force."²⁰

Britain's demand for cotton had helped to fuel the drive to establish an antebellum cotton kingdom in the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta, and British investors figured prominently in the postbellum exploitation

of that region's timber resources. Once the Delta's lands had been cleared and drained, its planters proceeded to establish centrally supervised large-scale plantations that were, as one observer put it, easily "as efficient as any northern factory system" and therefore promised "profits without exception." However much they may have fancied themselves the heirs to the spiritual legacy of Sir Walter Scott, it was the results they achieved by adopting the hard-nosed, industrial management style of another Scotsman, Andrew Carnegie, that caught the eye of the British capitalists who purchased some 40,000 acres of Delta land in 1911. Operating as the Delta and Pine Land Company, these investors proceeded to establish the world's largest cotton plantation at Scott, Mississippi, where every facet of their sharecroppers' behavior was strictly regimented and scrutinized in excruciating detail. Although physical coercion was less a part of life on the Delta and Pine Land Plantation than some others, whether in the cotton fields, the coal mines, or the lumber camps, across the South, European capitalists showed little hesitation in embracing the economic and labor control leverage afforded by the Jim Crow system.²¹

Even if it sometimes appeared that Europeans were out to re-colonize the South, most southern leaders actually seemed to welcome the prospect. In 1956 the South Carolina legislature went into special session at a cost of \$30,000 to the taxpayers to relax the state's alien-property ownership restrictions in order to accommodate England's Bowater Paper Company. For good measure, the lawmakers also exempted Bowater from the more burdensome provisions of the state's newly enacted pollution-control statutes. As industrial pollution came under stricter regulation in their own countries, European manufacturers increasingly took note of the industry-hungry South's willingness to accept environmental damage as simply part of the cost of creating new jobs. When a German steel company opened a new plant on the South Carolina coast at Georgetown in 1969, local buildings and automobiles were soon cloaked in a thick dust that blanketed the area. Elsewhere, BASF and other European petrochemical firms also found southern officials remarkably tolerant on environmental issues.²²

Prior to the 1960s, like most industrial investments in the South, European capital was concentrated in the extraction and processing of raw materials or other low-value-added, labor-intensive industries. With the rise of a more globally competitive manufacturing economy, however, European firms higher up the manufacturing food chain be-

gan to feast on the South's cheaper, non-union labor, lower taxes, and easy access to dynamic American consumer markets. Sensing an opportunity, the southern states quickly established dozens of industrial recruitment offices throughout Europe. The most aggressive and effective pursuit of European industrial capital came from South Carolina, whose promoters could boast by the end of the 1970s that, in addition to plant investments from England, Italy, the Netherlands, Austria, Belgium, and France, there was more West German industrial capital in their state than anywhere in the world except West Germany itself.²³

In addition to seeking locations where government officials might be willing to overlook the occasional chemical spill or release of excessive sulfur dioxide, European manufacturers also worried about inflation, tighter labor markets, and the recent resurgence of leftist politics in their own back yards. Another incentive for European industrial investment in the South came in 1971 when the Nixon administration took steps to reverse America's massive trade deficit by devaluing the dollar while simultaneously imposing a 10 percent surcharge on imported manufactures. As one observer put it, for Europeans investing in the United States became not simply "more profitable," but absolutely "necessary," and the U.S. dollars that had been piling up in European banks for so long began a steadily accelerating flow back to America. It was, allowed a jubilant British investment banker, "like getting Harrod's at half price."²⁴

Meanwhile, incoming European industries experienced that fabled southern hospitality first hand. Obliging South Carolina legislators expanded the exemption from duties on imported alcohol so that international executives could drink as well abroad as they did at home. South Carolina officials built a \$1.5 million docking facility and persuaded the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to dredge a half-mile access channel for the German steel firm at Georgetown. Michelin's 1974 announcement that it would build three plants in South Carolina in and around Greenville came after the French tire giant had received a five-year tax exemption. Michelin was also drawn to the South Carolina upstate by the almost total absence of labor unions. Michelin paid its South Carolina workers more than the prevailing local wage, and like its paternalistic textile mill predecessors, offered a number of non-wage incentives. Still, Michelin's employees earned significantly less than northern workers in similar jobs, and only three years after the company began its operations in South Carolina, its officials joined

with local textile employers to protest recruitment of a Phillip Morris tobacco plant that would bring 2,500 high-paying but unionized jobs to the area.²⁵

South Carolina's payout for landing a huge BMW automobile assembly plant in 1992 was estimated to be as much as \$150 million. It included free land and site preparation, tax exemptions and discounts, free worker training, highway construction and improvement, free lodging for key BMW personnel, and a runway extension at nearby Greenville-Spartanburg Airport. A year after BMW chose its South Carolina location, Alabama gave Daimler-Benz a subsidy of \$253 million to open a Mercedes assembly plant near Tuscaloosa that would create 1,500 jobs at a cost to the state of some \$167,000 each. At the time, although Mercedes's starting wage was well above the state average for manufacturing, it was still 30 percent lower than in Germany even without the additional benefits or, as one Mercedes spokesman put it, "the social baggage we have in Germany." Despite Alabama's dead last standing in spending for elementary and secondary education, only a threatened law suit by an Alabama teachers group prevented Governor Fob James from raiding the state's school fund to pay off a \$43 million obligation to Mercedes in 1995. In light of BMW and Mercedes's moves to take advantage of the American South's large subsidies and relatively cheap labor, it was small wonder that German workers took to calling the region "our Mexico."²⁶

Although they have not been the least bit shy about cashing in on all of the financial incentives they were offered, both Mercedes in Alabama and BMW in South Carolina have shown themselves to be, by prevailing standards at least, solid corporate citizens of their states and communities. In fact, BMW even participated in the lobbying effort to persuade lawmakers to remove the Confederate flag from atop the South Carolina State House in Columbia. The influx of European firms has also clearly influenced the local consumer culture, bringing far better selections of beer, wine, cheeses, pastries, and the like to places like the old Piedmont textile belt. Still, those who predicted that European firms investing in the South would also introduce a more socially conscious corporate attitude toward worker benefits and a more generous perspective on the industrial sector's revenue obligations to the state were soon disappointed. Why, after all, would the executives of these firms move to re-create in their new locations many of the conditions that had made them think twice about further expansion in Europe in the first place? Instead, having already enjoyed

a bit more of European welfare capitalism than they cared to, they readily adapted to the South's long-established, decidedly more business-friendly version, where the welfare flowed primarily to the capitalist.²⁷

As the global pursuit of new industrial capital has brought massive changes to the southern landscape, southerners intent on documenting an enduring regional distinctiveness continue to pick and choose their European cultural and historical lessons quite selectively. This is particularly true of certain ultra-conservative elements who, so it seems, would like to roll back most of the changes that have come to the South in the last half century. Spokesmen for the contemporary neo-secessionist League of the South have renewed the practice of invoking Scottish tradition to legitimate their reactionary racial and cultural initiatives. The League of the South's web site has noted that "unreconstructed southerners will find it difficult to miss the parallels between the Scots and our Confederate forebears," and the group's obsession with the movie "Braveheart" seems all the more appropriate in light of Braveheart star Mel Gibson's recent, widely publicized drunken anti-Semitic rant. The league's celebration of southern ties to Scotland is actually part of what is billed as a broader effort to save "true southerners" from "ethnic cleansing" and preserve "the historic Anglo-Celtic culture . . ." that has "given Dixie its unique institutions and civilizations."²⁸

In their move to promote southern independence, league representatives have insisted that "American Southerners have much in common with the Scots and Welsh in Britain, the Lombards and Sicilians in Italy and the Ukrainians in the defunct Soviet Union. All have made enormous economic, military and cultural contributions to their imperial rulers, who rewarded their loyalty with exploitation and contempt." The South is currently attracting Hispanic immigrants in huge numbers, and like some of his right-wing European contemporaries, League of the South president Michael Hill has cited the "huge influx of non-white immigrants into both Europe and America that threatens to engulf our historic populations and culture" and proclaimed his undying opposition to "the poison . . . being pumped into the West's veins" by "Third World immigration."²⁹

Just as Hill and other white southerners have done so frequently in looking at Europe, Europeans hoping to affirm their own identities and values have, on occasion, taken a selective, de-contextualized view of the South's history as well. Don Doyle has pointed out that in order

to express defiance of their northern antagonists, some in southern Italy even sport Confederate flag bumper stickers and wave the banner at soccer games. When Doyle asked if the people of the Italian South really knew what the flag meant, a professor from the University of Naples assured him, "Oh, yes, we know what it means. . . . we too are a defeated people. Once we were a rich and independent country, and they came from the North and conquered us and took our wealth and power away to Rome."³⁰

As I have suggested elsewhere, William Faulkner's famous observation that "The past is never dead, it's not even past" seems even more applicable to Europe than to the American South. White southerners who are still fighting the Civil War hardly seem unusual to people in Ireland who speak of "King Billy's" great victory on "the green, grassy slopes of the Boyne" in 1690 as if it happened last week, and the Serbs who are clearly still severely chapped about the outcome of the Battle of Kosovo in 1389 make the "fergit hell" crowd of southern whites look like a bunch of historical amnesiacs.³¹

Regional distinctions clearly still matter throughout Europe, and while many Americans claim that the South is now indistinguishable from the rest of the United States, from their more detached perspective, Europeans can still see the differences, and these differences are precisely what makes the South so fascinating to many of them. Both the inexorable processes of globalization and the ongoing efforts of the European Union to shape Europe into what is effectively a single nation (and, some think, a single culture as well) make the South's historic refusal to sink quietly into the American mainstream seem not just relevant but, in many ways and however grudgingly, admirable.

Indeed, I would even go so far as to predict that, the more standardization and centralized authority that the EU undertakes to establish, the less difficult it will be for Europeans to relate to southerners' historic aversion to externally imposed regulations and innovations, even those that might well be in their region's own ultimate best interest. If so, perhaps it will not be long before we can at last stop talking about the southernization of America and begin to consider the southernization of Europe instead.

Notes

- ¹ Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860*, vol. I (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004) 146; Paola Gemme, *Domesticating Foreign Struggles: The Italian Risorgimento and Antebellum American Identity* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2005) 111.
- ² Jack P. Greene, *Imperatives, Behaviors and Identities: Essays in Early American Cultural History* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1992) 329-30; Peter A. Coclanis, "Globalization before Globalization: The South and the World to 1850," *Globalization and the American South*, ed. James C. Cobb and William Stueck (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2005) 23.
- ³ Charles S. Aiken, *The Cotton Plantation South since the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998) 4-5; Winthrop D. Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968); Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: Norton, 1975).
- ⁴ Peter A. Coclanis, "Tracking the Economic Divergence of the North and South," *Southern Cultures* 6 (Winter 2000): 83-88.
- ⁵ Coclanis, "Globalization before Globalization" 24; Stephen Yafa, *Big Cotton: How a Humble Fiber Created Fortunes, Wrecked Civilizations, and Put America on the Map* (New York: Viking, 2005) 90; Robert L. Brandfon, *Cotton Kingdom of the New South: A History of the Yazoo Mississippi Delta from Reconstruction to the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1967) 29.
- ⁶ James M. McPherson, *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1992) 218.
- ⁷ O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order* 317.
- ⁸ John Pendleton Kennedy, *Swallow Barn; or a Sojourn in the Old Dominion* (Philadelphia: Carey & Lea, 1832); James Kirke Paulding, *Westward Ho!* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1832).
- ⁹ Michael O'Brien, "The Lineaments of Southern Romanticism," *Rethinking the South: Essays in Intellectual History* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1993) 50; William R. Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee: The Old South and American National Character* (New York: G. Braziller, 1961) 52.
- ¹⁰ Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee* 55.
- ¹¹ O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order* 106.
- ¹² James M. McPherson, *Is Blood Thicker Than Water?: Crises of Nationalism in the Modern World* (New York, 1998) 5.
- ¹³ James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) 44-45.
- ¹⁴ Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi*, quoted at <<http://www.twainquotes.com/sir-walterscott.html>>; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "Shameful Submission and Honorable Secession," *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1880s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001) 181.
- ¹⁵ Cobb, *Away Down South* 45.
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- ²⁹ Cobb, *Away Down South* 335; Michael Hill and Thomas Fleming, "The New Dixie Manifesto: States' Rights Will Rise Again..." and Michael Hill, "The Poison of Multiculturalism," *League of the South* <<http://leagueofthesouth.net>>.
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