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European Influence on Pre-Civil War Southern Culture: The Case of South Carolina

On the eve of the American Revolution, South Carolina was the wealthiest of Great Britain's North American colonies and its capital, Charleston, arguably the most sophisticated colonial American city. What was it that made this semi-tropical, agricultural-based colony the crown jewel of British North America? As in most things – be it empire or murder mysteries – follow the money.

In terms of imperial trade, South Carolina was unsurpassed in British North America. At the turn of the eighteenth century, the colony produced only three percent of the exports from North America. However, by 1770, its share accounted for twenty-nine per cent. Charleston and the Carolina lowcountry were not only the richest portion of the Empire in North America, but some economic historians surmise that it may have been the single wealthiest area within the entire Empire – the mother country included.¹

If you had visited Charleston in 1774, as did a modern economic historian named Alice Hanson Jones, you would have found a society with a greater aggregate wealth than many nations of the world today. In her examination of colonial America, Jones compared the wealth of New York City; Philadelphia; Suffolk County, Massachusetts; Virginia counties; Anne Arundel County, Maryland; and Charleston District. In 1774, the mean aggregate wealth of estates in Charleston District was \$235,738 (in today's dollars). Next was Anne Arundel County, Maryland at \$66,639; followed by the Virginia counties at \$56,928; Philadelphia at \$40,056; Suffolk County, Massachusetts at \$31,559; and New York City at \$28,039. This means that Charleston's wealth was three and a half times that of the next wealthiest area; nearly six times that of Philadelphia; about seven and a half times that of the Boston area; and more than eight times greater than that of New York. Nowhere else in British North America did such a large percent-

age of the population live so well. And, before we leave Jones's analysis of colonial wealth, she included numerous tables in her work. In the list of the ten wealthiest colonials on the eve of the Revolution, Peter Manigault of South Carolina was number one. The second person on the list was from Massachusetts and the remaining eight were all South Carolinians.²

According to Governor James Glen (1738-1756) in a report to the Board of Trade, some twenty percent of the population enjoyed "plenty of the good things of Life;" twenty percent had "some of the Conveniencys of Life;" forty percent had the "Necessariys of Life." The remaining twenty percent of the free population lived on a "bare subsistence." Even for those living on the margin, South Carolina was considered "a good poor man's country."³

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the wealth generated by the export of agricultural products, trade, and investment income provided the means for Carolinians to create a cosmopolitan society on the edge of the empire. They traveled frequently to other colonies, to England, and to the continent. They sent their sons abroad to be educated. They explored the natural world around them and related their findings to correspondents abroad. They welcomed new people, new fashions, and new ideas. Charleston was, in fact, their window on the world. It was as the city's biographer, George C. Rogers, Jr., has written: "The Open City" where "opportunity was ever plentiful."⁴

Carl Bridenbaugh, a New England-trained scholar of colonial America, had little affection for the Southern colonies and virtually none for South Carolina. In his book *Myths and Realities: Societies of the Colonial South* he dismissed as "myth" the assertion that South Carolinians had more contact with the mother country than any other group of colonials.⁵ Bridenbaugh's dismissal of the frequency of contact between South Carolina and Great Britain, we now know to be the real myth. And, unfortunately, because of either ignorance or bias, he also denigrated those craftsmen who were there. He cited a 1767 Philadelphian who erroneously reported that in Charleston "they have very few mechanic arts of any sort and [a] very great quantity of mechanic utensils are imported *from England* and the Northern Colonies."⁶ Bridenbaugh then added "Because of the ruinous competition from Negroes and the rage for things imported, artisans found it difficult to support themselves by their crafts alone." When craftsmen such as Thomas Elfe and John Rose succeeded and turned to planting or retired, Bridenbaugh gets huffy because they

did not remain in their place. And, he fails to address the question of why Charlestonians had such a rage for things English. How did they know about the latest fashions – even the names of individual cabinetmakers – if not by regular trans-Atlantic contacts?⁷ Research over the past half-century has underscored the many linkages – especially in the area of the decorative arts, travel, science and medicine, and education.

In the last decade or so before the Revolution, despite its relatively small white population, the colony had more of its sons studying in England than any other colony. And at the Inns of Court, there were twice as many Carolinians studying law as residents of the remaining twelve colonies combined.⁸ And, when it came to moving in the upper echelons of London society, the South Carolinians had few rivals. In the 1750s the Charles Pinckneys were entertained by the Prince and Princess of Wales at Kew Palace and Peter Manigault was invited to attend an installation ceremony of the Knights of the Garter at Windsor Castle. Miles Brewton had his portrait painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds. In the 1770s, Alice DeLancey Izard was presented at court and was one of only two Americans to have her portrait painted by Thomas Gainsborough.⁹

As a result of the numerous commercial, cultural, and personal associations with England, Carolinians tended to follow the latest London modes. Eliza Lucas Pinckney (who lived in London from 1753 to 1758 and visited with Augusta, the Princess of Wales) wrote to a friend that Charleston was “a polite agreeable place . . . [where the] people live very Gentile and very much in the English taste.”¹⁰

Having regular contact with English trend-setters and taste-makers led quite naturally to a colonial society which was *au courant*, rather than *démodé*. For example, the home that Miles Brewton built for himself on King Street in Charleston, has been described as “the most nearly perfect gentry home in Charleston, and certainly one of the most distinguished in America” and as “one of the finest colonial town houses in America.” Its ballroom featured a vaulted ceiling that was painted blue and edged with gold paper-mâché borders. The ceiling was installed when the house was built in 1769 – the same year the style became popular in London. Peter Manigault, the wealthiest man in British North America, ordered that his furniture and silver from England be “the plainer the better so that they are fashionable.” And, an English visitor noted that many side tables in Charleston homes were “furnished in such a manner as wou’d not disgrace a nobleman’s

dining room.” The city’s artisans followed the latest English styles and produced similar items for local consumption. The city’s cabinet-makers in the late colonial period would have sneered at the flamboyant – and old-fashioned highboys from Philadelphia and New England.¹¹

This rapid transfer of interior decoration was not a singular occurrence. South Carolinians expected the most recent and the best. Robert Pringle, a Charleston merchant asked his brother, a London merchant, to forward him “the most material News Papers by all Conveyances,” – and he did, along with pamphlets and other reading matter. Robert Wells owned the “Great Stationary and Book-Store on the Bay,” the largest American bookstore south of Philadelphia. His advertisements noted that he had the most recent issues of English periodicals shipped out regularly on vessels bound for Charleston.¹²

Because of the wealth of the colonial Carolina society and the sheer volume of activities, it is sometimes thought to date South Carolina’s strong trans-Atlantic ties from either mid-century or the years following the Great War for the Empire.¹³ However, while it is true that the pace and scope of trans-Atlantic ties increased considerably in the last decades prior to the American Revolution, in reality, they had begun much earlier.

One of the often overlooked facts of colonial demographic history is that South Carolina – not New York or Pennsylvania – was the most ethnically diverse of Britain’s mainland colonies. By 1775, only 36.7 per cent of the European settlers were of English descent. Thus the English were not even a majority of the white minority of the population which included a heady ethnic stew of Germans, French, Dutch, Scots, Irish, Welsh, Swedes, and Jews. And, even within these groups there were differences. The English were not only from old and New England, but were also Anglo-Caribbean. The French were from metropolitan France and the French-speaking cantons of Switzerland. The Germans from the innumerable states of Germany and Switzerland. The Jews were Ashkenazim and Sephardim.¹⁴

Correspondence with relatives and friends back home or in other colonies was a regular occurrence. Despite wars, fires, and hurricanes, there is a wealth of primary material still extant. Probably the best known collection is the sixteen published volumes of the correspondence of Charleston merchant Henry Laurens. Laurens was clearly a man of the Atlantic world. And, when it came time to educate his sons, he took them abroad: first to England and then to Geneva.

Less well known, but perhaps more interesting, was Charleston merchant/jurist Robert Pringle. His mercantile letterbooks and other papers reveal another man who was very much a citizen of a trans-Atlantic community. He ordered clothing for his wife and himself tailor-made in London and made a visit home to Edinburgh where he was elected an honorary member of the Council of Edinburgh Merchants and Guild Bretheren. Like many Carolinians, he was always interested in seeking out potential sources of new wealth which led him to correspond with the Royal Society for the Promotion of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (known today as the Royal Society of Arts).¹⁵

Yet, Laurens and Pringle were Carolinians of the later colonial period. Nearly a century earlier, before the end of the first decade of settlement in the 1670s, members of the Temple Coffee House Botany Club (an informal off-shoot of the Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge) encouraged colonists to send specimens of flora and fauna back to England. However, it was not until the 1690s that something resembling regular correspondence became established. One of the more colorful correspondents was a woman planter, Hannah English Williams, who forwarded to England snakes, insects, shells, and an Indian “Queens Petticoat made of moss.”¹⁶

Mark Catesby’s explorations of 1722 to 1725 were supported by South Carolina Governor Francis Nicholson, the Royal Society, and the Temple Coffee House Botany Club. The magnificent publication, *The Natural History of Carolina, Florida, and the Bahamas* was the result.¹⁷ The first volume of Catesby’s two volume elephant folio appeared in 1731 and the second in 1743. Some years later in 1752 and 1753, full-page plates appeared almost monthly in *The Gentleman’s Magazine*.¹⁸

Marion B. Smith’s study of the first fifty-one years of *The Gentleman’s Magazine* led him to conclude that “Even a cursory survey of the material suggests that South Carolina in particular was of interest, no doubt partly because of the potential wealth and productivity, but possibly because of personal connections between prominent figures in the colony and certain London groups.” Smith’s study, however, was more than simply cursory. Given the space devoted to South Carolina – and the lack thereof to New York and Pennsylvania, it appears that the magazine’s editor and readers were much more interested in South Carolina than other colonies. Only Massachusetts received coverage similar to South Carolina’s. Of all the illustrations of buildings that

appeared after 1746, only two American colonial structures merited inclusion: the State House in Philadelphia and St. Philip's Church in Charleston. Of course, including the Catesby drawings and other incidental illustrations, those with a Carolina connection number more than two dozen.¹⁹

A number of the articles related to South Carolina deal with scientific, nature, or medical topics. There was quite an active group of gentlemen-naturalists in the colony as well as a relatively distinguished coterie of European-trained physicians. Among the former was Lieutenant-Governor William Bull II, who was the first native-born American to obtain a medical degree in Europe. He received his degree from Leiden where his thesis topic was the Poitou Colic. Bull never practiced medicine, but like many planters in the colony, he took a keen interest in the natural world. Thomas Dale translated four medical treatises into English and corresponded with Gronovius in Leiden. Lionel Chalmers, whose publications modern historians of science consider "impressive," was the author of a number of works, including *Essay on Fevers* which was published locally and in London and Riga. He also corresponded regularly with John Fothergill in London and Robert Whytt in Edinburgh. John Lining, another physician-naturalist, kept meticulous records on local weather conditions and the impact of the climate on bodily functions. He was a regular contributor to *The Gentleman's Magazine* and there were often favorable responses to his contributions. His observations were published in the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* of London in 1742, 1743, 1753, and 1761. In 1756 he published in Edinburgh, "A Description of the American Yellow Fever." However, as medical historian Peter McCandless has noted, Lining's work, while important, was not the first such treatise. Seven years earlier, South Carolinian John Moultrie, Jr., had written his dissertation at Edinburgh on the same subject.²⁰

The most noted of Carolina's colonial naturalists was Alexander Garden, a Scot, who immigrated to the colony in 1752. A surgeon by profession, he quickly moved into the study of the natural world – especially botany – and corresponded with scientists on both sides of the Atlantic, including Benjamin Rush, Benjamin Franklin, John Bartram, William Shipley, John Frederick Gronovius, Stephen Hales, and John Ellis. He was a correspondent of the great Swedish botanist Carolus Linnaeus who named the gardenia after his Carolina correspondent. Due to his diligence and widespread correspondence, Garden was elected a member of the Royal Society of Arts, the Royal

Society, the Royal Society of Arts and Sciences at Uppsala, and the Royal Society of Edinburgh. When Benjamin Franklin corresponded with the Royal Society of Arts about the organization's cash awards for innovative colonial crops or manufactures, the Secretary replied to the Pennsylvanian that the idea had been suggested by Garden.²¹

In terms of South Carolina's role in the American Revolution, the education of many of her sons at dissenting academies and the Inns of Court may well have been a contributing factor. Of the 166 members of the colonial South Carolina bar prior to 1780, seventy-two (forty-three per cent) had been trained at the Inns of Court. Of these, fifty-six (one-third of the total bar and seventy-eight per cent of those educated at the Inns) were native Carolinians. Many of those not educated in England read law with those who had studied there. In years following the Great War for the Empire, it became imperial policy to replace native-born judges with placemen – imperial bureaucrats whose education was frequently lacking. “The South Carolina élite believed that the colonial judiciary was being trivialized by its use as a refuse heap upon which political toadies from Britain were dumped as judges when the Crown variously wished to reward or banish them.” The policy of appointing placemen whose decisions were sometimes capricious and imperious turned the colony's lawyers into vocal Whigs and later cautious revolutionaries.²²

All four of the state's signers of the Declaration of Independence had been members of the Middle Temple and three of its four signers of the Articles of Confederation had studied at the Inns of Court. In 1787 at Philadelphia, three of the state's four delegates were lawyers. Charles Cotesworth Pinckney and John Rutledge had been at the Middle Temple, and the third, Charles Pinckney – had read law in Charleston with his cousin, Charles Cotesworth Pinckney. Political scientist Clinton Rossiter, in his detailed study of the Constitutional Convention, sorted the states' delegates into eight categories ranging from “principals,” to “inexplicable disappointments.” George Washington and James Madison were among the four “principals.” The next category, the “influentials,” included eleven men – among them were three Carolinians: Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, Charles Pinckney, and John Rutledge. The state's fourth delegate, Pierce Butler fell into the third tier of delegates as a “very useful member” of the Convention.²³

The Carolinians are most often remembered for their ardent defense of the state's domestic institutions, but their Whiggish leanings helped

shape the final document. Charles Cotesworth Pinckney served on the committee that brokered the compromise over the navigation acts and the slave trade. Charles Pinckney took the floor more than one hundred times and proposed the successful amendment to Article VI: “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the authority of the United States.” John Rutledge served on five committees and was the key member of the Committee of Detail that crafted the Constitution.²⁴

The British occupation of Charleston (May 1780 - December 1782) did not diminish the affection and cultural ties that many Carolinians held for things English. However, the Napoleonic Wars and American tariffs gradually reduced the flow of English goods to Charleston. Eventually, continental decorative arts – especially what one author has described as “precious trinkets of sophistication” from France and Italy – replaced Charlestonians’ preference for English wares. Charlestonians continued to travel abroad in large numbers. Their destination was no longer just London and the English countryside, but the continent. “Europe,” argue several art historians, “remained Charleston’s cultural fountainhead, perhaps more than it did for any other American city.” And, as they had done so prior to the Revolution, Carolinians had the money and the taste to obtain the very best. In 1786, Mary Rutledge Smith and her son sat for a full portrait by George Romney.²⁵

While Carolinians traveled abroad for education as well as pleasure, they also continued to send their sons to Europe to study. Just as late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century tastes in the decorative arts and travel broadened to include the continent, so, too, did the institutions where young Carolinians went to pursue their educations. In 1800 Philip Tidyman became the first American to receive an earned doctorate. His degree was from Göttingen. Washington Allston studied in London with Benjamin West and in Rome with the German classicists Joseph Anton Koch and Gottlieb Schick. In Rome he mastered the classical landscape before returning to this country. Patrick Nelson Lynch also studied in Rome, but his education was theological and after returning home he was ordained a priest and later consecrated as the third Roman Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Charleston. There are numerous cases of other Carolinians studying abroad in the nineteenth century, but as an example of the continuation of the practice right up to the American Civil War, one only has to look at the Pringle family and their relatives. In 1861, Julius Pringle and

a kinsman were in Paris. Pringle's two brothers were at Berlin and three of their cousins at Heidelberg.²⁶

For Americans seeking the latest and best medical techniques, Paris was the place to go and Carolinians were no exception. Daniel J. C. Cain spent four years in Paris studying with some of the most renowned French clinical specialists. Upon his return to South Carolina he quickly became one of the state's leading physicians and a prolific contributor to medical journals. Julian John Chisholm studied in London and Paris before returning home to become professor of surgery at the Medical College of South Carolina. In 1859, he traveled to Milan to observe the treatment of soldiers wounded during the Austro-Italian War. Based upon his experiences in Italy he wrote *A Manual of Military Surgery* that went through several editions and was the bible for Confederate medical personnel. Louis R. Gibbes and St. Julien Ravenel were also among those who went to Paris for medical training and returned home to teach as well as practice.²⁷

In the nineteenth century, science, medicine, and the natural world continued to be important trans-Atlantic links between Europe and South Carolina. The medical links – as noted above – were certainly significant, especially in the cases of Cain, Gibbes, and Ravenel, whose teachings and writings reflect their clinical training in Paris. In addition, Chisholm's experiences in Italy probably had a more widespread influence. While he was a practitioner and teacher, it was his manual for dealing with the casualties of what was then modern warfare that influenced the treatment of literally thousands of Confederate soldiers.

It was in the natural sciences – especially botany – however, where some of the strongest links existed. In September 1786, French botanist André Michaux arrived in Charleston with a royal commission to ferret out North American plants that could be profitably grown in France. He spent the next few years exploring the state and when he had finished his expedition, he had identified 188 native species. When the French Revolution erupted, he adjusted his politics and continued his work in South Carolina. While his *Flora Boreali-Americana* (1803) was the “first systematic botanical description of eastern North America,” Michaux's influence on South Carolina and Southern gardens has been more lasting. He established an experimental nursery – called by locals the French Botanic Garden – about ten miles from Charleston and imported the camellia (*Camellia japonica*) and ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*) from China, the mimosa (*Albizia julibrissin*) from Persia, and

the crape myrtle (*Lagerstroemia indica*) from India. All of these plants have become synonymous with ‘typical’ Southern gardens – but they were first introduced into the United States at Charleston. By following Michaux’s advice, Carolina planters “turned their plantations into paradises,” among the most notable being Middleton Place on the Ashley River, one of this country’s first true landscaped gardens where one can still see some of the original camellias. So pervasive did camellias become in the state and the region that when the WPA guide to South Carolina was published, some editor in Washington wrote a blurb for the dust jacket that included the phrase, “the romantic camellia-scented South Carolina of antebellum days.” It’s an interesting image, but no real Carolina gardener would have bought it – for camellias have no scent!²⁸

While Michaux literally helped reshape the cultivated Carolina landscape, there was the continued intellectual influence of such dominant figures as Linnaeus. Thomas Walter immigrated to the colony before the Revolution and established himself as a planter on the Santee River. Like many of his fellow planters in the Carolina low-country, he was fascinated by the native flora of the area. He compiled the “first flora of a North American region to use the Linnaean system.” Published in England in 1788, *Flora Caroliniana*, was written entirely in Latin.²⁹

Arguably the single most important European naturalist with a South Carolina connection was John James Audubon. Born in Haiti, but reared and educated in France, Audubon came to the United States in the early nineteenth century to manage some of his father’s property. Since his youth he had observed and drawn birds and soon decided to embark upon the creation of a massive study of the birds of North America. For fourteen years he traversed the American countryside, bagging birds, studying them in the native habitats, and drawing them. *The Birds of America* was not completed until 1838, but mid-point in his travels, Audubon visited Charleston in 1831.³⁰

In Charleston, Audubon made the acquaintance of the Rev. John Bachman, a local Lutheran pastor and talented naturalist. The two became fast friends, and through the marriage of Audubon’s sons with Bachman’s daughters, they became in-laws as well. Through Bachman, Audubon was introduced to other Carolinians interested in American fauna and flora who sometimes directed his searches for native species. Bachman became Audubon’s closest friend: “They encouraged, praised, needled, and corrected each other – about birds, quad-

rupeds, shooting skills, painting, illegible handwriting, and other bad habits." According to Audubon scholars, "*The Birds [of America]* project had survived by the skin of its teeth and by the dint of the monumental efforts of the entire Audubon family and of such good friends as Bachman and [Edward] Harris." By the time the final volume appeared only about 160 or 170 subscribers remained. Among these were the State of South Carolina and the Charleston Library Society.³¹

The Birds of America was Audubon's, but it unquestionably inspired John Bachman's own interests in producing a similar work on the quadrupeds of North America. "[T]he quadrupeds were Bachman's birds, the focus of his lifelong commitment, about which he was deeply knowledgeable . . ." For Audubon, on the other hand, this new project was simply "a commercial enterprise." During the years that the pair worked on the new venture, Audubon's mental health began to deteriorate. Had it not been for Bachman, the book would not have been completed. Yet, it was Audubon's name, his contacts, and his marketing ideas that made *The Quadrupeds of North America* a possibility in the first place.³²

The trans-Atlantic social, cultural, and educational links between South Carolina and Europe were maintained, and in some ways strengthened, in the years between the British evacuation of occupied Charleston in December 1782 and the secession of South Carolina from the Union in December 1860. And, it is to the latter action – a political action – that we can trace the most significant impact of a European on South Carolina, the American South, and, even, on the United States.

Thomas Cooper, a native of Westminster, England, studied at Oxford and the Inner Temple. In his youth he was something of a radical and abandoned England in 1794 because of its reactionary response to the French Revolution. Cooper settled first in Pennsylvania where he became a fervent Jeffersonian, but in the early nineteenth century began to veer to the right in response to the unruliness of democracy. In 1820 he was hired by the trustees of the South Carolina College to be a professor of chemistry and just a year later was named the second president of the college. He continued teaching chemistry, but by 1825 was also teaching a course in political economy. And, a year later his lectures were published. Cooper "made his lectures a means of communicating his own ideas on current problems both to his students and the general public . . ."³³

Cooper was basically a *laissez-faire* economist and had little patience with the political nationalism of the post-War of 1812 politicians. The publication of his lectures was not his first foray into state and national political debates and, he did not shy from using his position as president of the college as a bully pulpit. In 1824 he wrote a pamphlet, *On the Proposed Alteration of the Tariff*, in which he denounced protective tariffs and framed the argument in terms of absolute right and wrong. A contemporary observer pronounced Cooper's subsequent pamphlet, *Consolidation*, "the text-book of South Carolina politics." Originally published as a broadside in support of William H. Crawford's 1824 presidential campaign, it was later re-published in 1830 as the Nullification Controversy began to boil. The doctrine of states' rights was not new, but Cooper went further and attacked contemporary political figures including Calhoun, Monroe, Jackson, and Adams. The "Era of Good Feelings," he argued, was a sham because the party of Jefferson had drifted away from its principles: "till the power of the President of the United States, the power of the Congress of the United States, and more than all, the power of the Supreme Court of the United States (the most dangerous body in the Union) *has increased, is increasing and ought to be diminished.*"³⁴

In trying to analyze his subject, Cooper's biographer Dumas Malone argued that Cooper had abandoned democracy "because it placed too great a premium on ignorance, but his passion for freedom remained and expressed itself in advocacy of a modified political individualism, *the sovereign power of the state.*" There was also Cooper's quixotic desire to champion the cause of minorities – and he viewed South Carolina and the South as minorities within the United States. According to Malone, "the doctrines of South Carolina, as they evolved in part through his [Cooper's] influence, were a logical development from the economic philosophy of Adam Smith and the political teachings of the great Virginians, whom of all American statesmen he revered most."³⁵

In 1826 Cooper published *On the Constitution of the United States and the Questions that have arisen under it*. He also republished an earlier pamphlet, *Propositions respecting the Foundation of Civil Government, 1787*. With these, he had moved from lauding "the rights of man to the rights of the sovereign states, and the safeguard he now advocated was not the spread of democracy but the strict interpretation of the constitution, which he regarded as a bulwark against usurpation."³⁶

The very next year he publicly stated in a speech in Columbia that “it was time for South Carolina to ‘calculate the value of the Union.’” It was but a single phrase, but it attracted considerable attention of both friend and foe.³⁷

“I have said that we shall, before long, be compelled to calculate the value of the union;” wrote Cooper, “and to inquire of what use to us is this most unequal alliance? By which the south has always been the loser, and the north the gainer? Is it worth our while to continue this union of states where the north demand to be our masters and we are required to be their tributaries?”³⁸

There were still a fair number of unionists in South Carolina in the late 1820s and they were united in their vituperation of Cooper as a “*drivelling fool, traitor, renegade Englishman, etc.*” Cooper’s being a naturalized citizen was seized upon by both northern and southern newspapers as grounds alone for dismissing his radical, unpatriotic ideas. But, as an illustration of how seriously some took Cooper’s comments, one only has to look at Daniel Webster’s replies to Robert Y. Hayne in the great debate over the nature of the union in January 1830.³⁹

I know that there are some persons in the part of the country from which the honorable member comes, who habitually speak of the Union in terms of indifference, or even of disparagement. . . . They significantly declare, that *it is time to calculate the value of the Union*; and their aim seems to be to enumerate, and magnify all the evils, real and imaginary, which the Government under the union produces.⁴⁰

As the debate over the tariff morphed into the Nullification Crisis, South Carolina Joel R. Poinsett, a Jackson loyalist, wrote to the President that it wasn’t just the declamations of the state’s congressional delegation that had roused the state’s populace, but also Thomas Cooper “whose talents and great acquirements give weight to his perverse principles, and make him doubly dangerous.” The unionist press in South Carolina condemned him as both the “high priest of nullification” and the “father of nullification.”⁴¹

What angered the Carolinians opposed to nullification in 1830 was the impact that Cooper was having on the future leaders of the state. Here was a man in the employ of the State of South Carolina who was “rendering our sons and brothers disaffected towards the Union . . . What have his renegade English notions of Government to do with the arts and sciences? He was not employed to come among us and sow the seeds of discord and disunion. We were a happy, united people,

until his arrival.”⁴² This is quite a powerful denunciation. And, for the most part it is accurate: Cooper was in the forefront of the states’ rights movement in South Carolina in the early 1820s – along with William Smith and Robert J. Turnbull. It was not until 1828 that John C. Calhoun abandoned his nationalism for states’ rights.

Despite all the heated verbiage in the press and halls of government, was Cooper as influential as his critics feared and thought he was? Absolutely! His biographer even has a chapter entitled “The Schoolmaster of States’ Rights” and the historian of the antebellum South Carolina College concurred.⁴³

During the three decades leading up to 1860, alumni of the South Carolina College – many of them Cooper’s students – dominated all branches of state government. Non alumni bitterly complained that public office in South Carolina had become virtually closed to anyone who had not attended the college. Between 1824 and 1860, twelve of the twenty-one men elected governor (57 per cent) were alumni. From 1830 until 1860, one U.S. Senate seat was always occupied by an alumnus. Some 40 per cent of all antebellum legislators were alumni. And, some years were worse for non alumni than others. In 1854, for example, the governor, both U.S. Senators, four of six members of the U.S. House of Representatives, and the Speaker of the South Carolina General Assembly had all attended the college.⁴⁴

Not all of these antebellum politicians were actually Cooper’s students, but many of them were. In 1860, fifty-nine of the 168 members of the Secession Convention were alumni and twenty-four had actually studied under the man they lovingly called “the old coot.” Cooper’s influence on the South Carolina College and its students lasted much longer than did his tenure. During his thirteen years on the faculty, “the College became to a large extent the center not only of education, but of political thought in the State, and is doubtless the institution which has done most to mold and influence the character of the people of the State.”⁴⁵

In the early twentieth century, historians such as Colyer Meriwether and U.B. Phillips gave Cooper full credit for laying the “academic foundation” of the states’ rights doctrine. In 1860 when the names of John C. Calhoun, Langdon Cheves, Robert Y. Hayne, and George McDuffie were revered for their advocacy of states’ rights, Langdon Cheves, Jr., gave a speech that did not mention any of the state’s political luminaries (including his own father), “but referred to and cited the works of Dr. Cooper as first having given that bent to

his thought, which assured him of the soundness of his political views and the rectitude of his political principles . . .” Young Cheves was a member of the Secession Convention and along with all of his fellow delegates, he voted to leave the Union. In July 1863, he was killed in the naval bombardment of Battery Wagner at Charleston Harbor. Cheves was one of an estimated 18,000-21,000 white male Carolinians who died in the war – the equivalent of 31 to 35 percent of the eligible male population (one in every fourteen or fifteen males in uniform). In comparison, the remaining Southern states suffered death rates of one in every nineteen. The “lost generation” of young Englishmen, Frenchmen, and Germans during World War I was only about one-half the carnage suffered by South Carolina during the Civil War.⁴⁶

Pre-Civil War South Carolina was a fascinating lost world. Its trans-Atlantic connections with England and Europe were many and varied. The cultural, social, scientific, commercial, and educational links prior to the Revolution helped create a sophisticated, cosmopolitan society in the Carolina lowcountry. And, if Rogers and other legal historians are correct, the education of so many of the state’s future leaders in England may well have contributed to their becoming revolutionaries. The South Carolina of 1783-1860 was still a wealthy, cosmopolitan place. However, the nature of the links changed and the impact of individual Europeans – such as Michaux, Audubon, and Cooper – was actually much greater in a slave society that was becoming increasingly insular in its political outlook. States’ rights opinions did not prevent Carolinians’ traveling abroad, purchasing “precious trinkets of sophistication,” or sending their sons to Europe to be educated (although certainly not in the same numbers as in the eighteenth century). Antebellum South Carolina disappeared – along with a generation of young men and the state’s capital wealth – in the maelstrom of the American Civil War. For two centuries South Carolinians had had an attraction to new fashions, new ideas, and new people from abroad. Unfortunately, one of their most ardent attractions was to the political ideas refined and propounded by Thomas Cooper. And that attraction proved to be a fatal one.

Notes

- ¹ Peter A. Coelanis, *The Shadow of a Dream: Economic Life and Death in the South Carolina Low Country, 1670-1920* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989) 64-65, 112, 121.
- ² Alice Hanson Jones, *Wealth of A Nation to Be: The American Colonies on the Eve of Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980) 10, 170-71, 377-79. Figures converted to 2005 dollars using the Inflation Calculator at *The Inflation Calculator*, ed. S. Morgan Friedmann, <<http://www.westegg.com/inflation/infl.cgi>>.
- ³ Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998) 151-53.
- ⁴ George C. Rogers, Jr., *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1969) 26-54.
- ⁵ Carl Bridenbaugh, *Myths and Realities: Societies of the Colonial South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952) 94.
- ⁶ Emphasis supplied.
- ⁷ Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt: Urban Life in America, 1743-1776* (New York: Knopf, 1955) 274. J. Thomas Savage and Robert A. Leath, "Buying British: Merchants, Taste, and Charleston Consumerism," *In Pursuit of Refinement: Charlestonians Abroad, 1740-1860*, ed. Maurie D. McInnis and Angela D. Mack (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999) 55-63.
- ⁸ Robert M. Weir, *Colonial South Carolina: A History* (Millwood, NY: KTO Press, 1983) 250-51. Marion B. Smith, "South Carolina and *The Gentleman's Magazine*," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 95 (1994): 109-10. Wendell Garrett, introduction, *In Pursuit of Refinement*, ed. McInnis and Mack 1-7. Rogers, *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys* 99.
- ⁹ Angela D. Mack and J. Thomas Savage, "Reflections of Refinement: Portraits of Charlestonians at Home and Abroad," *In Pursuit of Refinement*, ed. McInnis and Mack 24. Robert A. Leath and Maurie D. McInnis, "'To Blend Pleasure with Knowledge': The Cultural Odyssey of Charlestonians Abroad," *In Pursuit of Refinement*, ed. McInnis and Mack 9-11. "Catalogue of the Exhibition," *In Pursuit of Refinement*, ed. McInnis and Mack 96, 112.
- ¹⁰ Savage and Leath, "Buying British: Merchants, Taste, and Charleston Consumerism" 55-64.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.* 58-59. Garrett, introduction 2. Edgar, *South Carolina* 194-95, 199. Savage and Leath, "Buying British: Merchants, Taste, and Charleston Consumerism" 57-60.
- ¹² Walter B. Edgar, ed., *The Letterbook of Robert Pringle*, 2 vols. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1972) 15, 17, 85, 181, 237, 544. Edgar, *South Carolina* 180.
- ¹³ In the United States frequently referred to as the French and Indian War and on the Continent often as the Seven Years' War.
- ¹⁴ Edgar, *South Carolina* 47-62.
- ¹⁵ Edgar, ed., *The Letterbook of Robert Pringle* xv-xxiii, 62-64, 188, 706, 832, *passim*. Walter B. Edgar, ed., "A Letter from South Carolina," *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* 122 (1973-74): 95-98, 171-72, 231-33. Walter B. Edgar, "Robert Pringle and His World," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 76 (1975): 1-11.

- ¹⁶ Raymond Phineas Stearns, *Science in the British Colonies* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1970) 294-96, 315-21.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Marion B. Smith, "South Carolina and *The Gentleman's Magazine*" 110-11.
- ¹⁹ Ibid. 104-25.
- ²⁰ Joseph Ioor Waring, *A History of Medicine in South Carolina, 1670-1825* (Charleston: South Carolina Medical Association, 1964) 182-84, 188-97, 254-60. "Bull, William II," "Chalmers, Lionel," and "Lining, John," *The South Carolina Encyclopedia*, ed. Walter Edgar (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2006) 106-07, 142-43, 558. Edgar, *South Carolina* 178. Smith, "South Carolina and *The Gentleman's Magazine*" 122-24.
- ²¹ Edmund Berkeley and Dorothy Smith Berkeley, *Dr. Alexander Garden of Charles Town* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969) 36-122, 168-69, 178-79, 216-17. Edgar, *South Carolina* 179. Smith, "South Carolina and *The Gentleman's Magazine*" 117.
- ²² George C. Rogers, Jr., *Generations of Lawyers: A History of the South Carolina Bar* (Columbia: South Carolina Bar Foundation, 1992) 4-5. James Lowell Underwood, *The Constitution of South Carolina, Vol. I: The Relationship of the Legislative, Executive, and Judicial Branches* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1986) 14-16.
- ²³ Rogers, *Generations of Lawyers* 6-7. Clinton Rossiter, *1787: The Grand Convention* (New York, 1968) 213-19.
- ²⁴ Rossiter, *1787* 213-19. Catherine Drinker Bowen, *Miracle at Philadelphia: The Story of the Constitutional Convention, May to September 1787* (New York, 1968) 217. William F. Stierer, Jr., "Four South Carolinians at Philadelphia: historians view the convention," in *With Liberty and Justice ... Essays on the Ratification of the Constitution in South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989) 41-54.
- ²⁵ Savage and Leath, "Buying British: Merchants, Taste, and Charleston Consumerism" 62-63. Rogers, *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys* 50-54. Robert A. Leath and Maurie D. McInnis, "To Blend Pleasures with Knowledge," *In Pursuit of Refinement*, ed. McInnis and Mack 10-21. "Catalogue of the Exhibition" 132-38, 288-96.
- ²⁶ Leath and McInnis, "To Blend Pleasures with Knowledge" 12-13. Garrett, Introduction 6. "Allston, Washington," and "Lynch, Patrick Nelson," *The South Carolina Encyclopedia*, ed. Edgar, 19-20, 578. Richard Coté, *Mary's World: Love, War, and Family Ties in Nineteenth-century Charleston* (Mount Pleasant, SC: Corinthian Books, 2001) 192-93.
- ²⁷ Joseph Ioor Waring, *A History of Medicine in South Carolina, 1825-1900* (Charleston: South Carolina Medical Association, 1967) 210-11, 212-14, 288-89. "Cain, Daniel James Cahusac," "Chisholm, Julian John," "Gibbes, Louis Reeve," and "Ravenel, St. Julien," *The South Carolina Encyclopedia*, ed. Edgar 119, 171, 371-72, 777-78.
- ²⁸ Rogers, *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys* 85-86. Henry Savage, Jr. and Elizabeth J. Savage, *André and François Michaux* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1986) 59-63. Steve Bender and Felder Rushing, *Passalong Plants* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993) 37-38. Walter B. Edgar, ed., *South Carolina: The WPA Guide to the Palmetto State* (Columbia, SC, 1988) x.
- ²⁹ David Taylor, *South Carolina Naturalists: An Anthology, 1700-1860* (Columbia: The

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- ³⁰ Richard Rhodes, *John James Audubon: The Making of an American* (New York: Knopf, 2004) 352-55, 400-11.
- ³¹ *Ibid.* 351-55. Mary Durant and Michael Harwood, *On the Road with John James Audubon* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1980). Davy-Jo Stribling Ridge, *A Load of Gratitude: Audubon and South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1985) 3.
- ³² Rhodes, *John James Audubon* 388, 413-14, 430-31. Durant and Harwood, *On the Road with John James Audubon* 606-07.
- ³³ Dumas Malone, *The Public Life of Thomas Cooper, 1783-1839* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1961) 251-54, 303-04.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.* 282-83, 291-97 [emphasis in original].
- ³⁵ *Ibid.* 282-84 [emphasis supplied].
- ³⁶ *Ibid.* 300-02.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.* 307-36. Daniel Walker Hollis, *University of South Carolina, Volume I: South Carolina College* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1951) 97-108.
- ³⁸ *Mercury* (Charleston) 18, 19 July 1827, cited in Malone, *The Public Life of Thomas Cooper* 309.
- ³⁹ Malone, *The Public Life of Thomas Cooper* 317 [emphasis in original], 311-32.
- ⁴⁰ *Register of the Debates in Congress, VI*, cited in Malone, *The Public Life of Thomas Cooper* 321-22 [emphasis supplied].
- ⁴¹ Malone, *The Public Life of Thomas Cooper* 334.
- ⁴² *Courier* (Charleston) 7 Sept., cited in Malone, *The Public Life of Thomas Cooper* 334-35.
- ⁴³ Malone, *The Public Life of Thomas Cooper* 281. Hollis, *University of South Carolina, Volume I* 102-16, 255-70.
- ⁴⁴ Hollis, *University of South Carolina, Volume I* 255-59.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 266-67. John Amasa May and Joan Reynolds Faunt, *South Carolina Secedes* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1960) 107-231.
- ⁴⁶ Hollis, *University of South Carolina, Volume I* 282-83, 291-96, 335. May and Faunt, *South Carolina Secedes* 128. Edgar, *South Carolina* 375.

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