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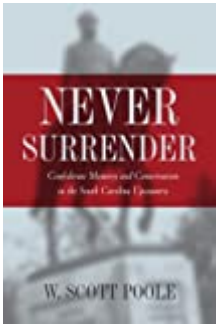

W. Scott Poole. *Never Surrender: Confederate Memory and Conservatism in the South Carolina Upcountry.* Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004. x + 263 pp. $49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8203-2507-1; $19.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8203-2508-8.

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Hothouse Flowers: The Confederate Roots of Southern Conservatism

The *Edgefield Advertiser*–the "Oldest Newspaper in South Carolina"–carries as its banner motto the legend: "We will cling to the pillars of the temple of our liberties and if it must fall we will perish amidst the ruins." Dramatic words, but hardly reflective of the resilience of post-Civil War South Carolina upcountry southerners. So far from perishing amongst them, they, as Scott Poole shows, utilized their own particular ruins as the cornerstone of a new conservative philosophy. This philosophy was made possible, in fact, only by the Confederacy's defeat and the opportunity it afforded to recycle the building blocks of the antebellum South, using the mortar of the Lost Cause, to construct a New South structure that was both more consistent and more durable in its conservatism. South Carolinian conservatives, Poole suggests with a particularly lyrical turn of phrase, actually "used defeat itself to configure a stance of inveterate defiance against the larger world of the nineteenth century ... showcasing alternative worlds that seem exotic growths in the garden of mass democracy" (p. 1). By focusing on South Carolina, Poole is implying that these "exotic growths" required the concentrated atmosphere of that ÃÂ¼ber-secessionist state in order to thrive at all. Unusually, however, South Carolina has received less attention than some of the other southern states in studies of the Lost Cause, despite the fact that its upcountry (an inverted triangle with Edgefield at its point and bordered along the top by Pickens, Greenville, York, and Lancaster) represented "a theater of constant change, a frontier that provided a backdrop for colliding cultures and value systems" (p. 6). It is the "raw newness of the region," Poole argues, that "allows us to watch the emergence of a new cultural ideology in South Carolina, a cultural ideology born in violence and the search for order" (p. 8). "The Lost Cause became the gravamen of South Carolina conservatism," he argues, "providing a vocabulary of dissent and a forum within which to express that dissent to all ranks of Carolina society" (p. 82).

In some ways Poole's thesis reinforces the traditional image of South Carolina as a state apart, simultaneously, as Manisha Sinha has recently argued, able to "tell us more about the creation of the Confederacy" than any other and yet "not representative of the South."[1] However, whereas Sinha's study regarded the Civil War as the endgame for South Carolina's counterrevolutionary ide-

ology, Poole sees the war, and its outcome, as merely the start of a process whereby "provincial dissent" solidified into an "oppositional" conservative culture (p. 1). His purpose is twofold: to challenge some of the traditional assumptions held regarding the Lost Cause and its role in post-war South Carolina and, via this case-study, to take the study of conservatism down from "the rack of theory" where, he argues, it "has too long languished," and explore its development at the grass-roots level; in effect, to examine it "in action rather than as a static phenomenon" (p. 200).

For Poole, neither Charles Reagan Wilson's study of Confederate "civil religion" nor Gaines Foster's study of the attempt on the part of former Confederates to assuage the "psychological anxiety attendant upon defeat," fully captures either the essence or the impact of the Lost Cause: the former fails to take account of the "exclusionary nature" of the "civil religion" it describes; the latter downplays the significance of evangelical Christianity to the Lost Cause.[2] Although Poole makes full use of both these landmark studies of the defeated South, he argues that "new conceptual tools are needed to fully explain the importance of the Lost Cause in the waning years of the nineteenth century" (p. 3). His methodology is to approach the ideology of the Lost Cause as it was "elaborated in intellectual life, public performances, religious experience, and cultural production," and to structure his analysis via two main terms: "Confederate religion" and "the aesthetic of the Lost Cause" that together "describe how conservatives fashioned a variety of cultural materials into a public articulation of an ordered and organic society" (pp. 1, 3).

In his exploration of the South Carolinian mentalities at work in the years following the Civil War through to the ascendancy of "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman and the eventual fading of the conservative impulse, Poole is describing not a cause lost but one found. The antebellum South, he suggests, "contained a number of inherent contradictions that, ironically, could find resolution and catharsis in Confederate defeat." Only in the context of this defeat, he argues, could South Carolina conservatives "deal with the paradoxes of their society by creating a public aesthetic, a dream of the world" (p. 3). In constructing their conservative vision, Poole sees European romantic conservatism as influential, its ideology entering the South through the writings of Thomas Carlyle (who was incidentally, not English, as described here, but Scottish (p. 4). To describe Carlyle as English is rather like describing a South Carolinian as a Yankee). Yet if European conservatism offered southern intellectuals "paradigms of their ongoing struggle with modernity," the conservative impulse took on a very specific form in the two decades after the war, as southerners attempted to reconfigure a way of life that the war had destroyed (p. 4). The conservative vision that they enunciated was structured around the Lost Cause, but a Lost Cause symbolized by gender and the patriarchal household in which women, a specific type of woman, rather, came to occupy a defining space (p. 17). Poole's analysis of the symbolic role of women, of the ways in which they "shaped the aesthetic of defeat while showing how class and gender conjoined in the celebration of the Lost Cause" is especially astute (p. 67). In an attempt to deny the fundamental shift in gender relations ushered in by the war that brought women's work into the open, South Carolina's conservatives focused on such women as could still conjure up for them the antebellum ideal of the "sequestered belle," women such as Lucy Holcombe Pickens, the belle *par excellence*, and Louisa McCord (p. 68). Physical beauty, Poole shows, clearly functioned "as a social category structured by such diverse factors as dress, artistic paradigms, and even root metaphors of religious and ideological meaning. In postbellum South Carolina, beautiful bodies had a class location ... and played a central role in southern conservatism's challenge to modernity" (pp. 68-70).

In places, however, Poole is in danger of accepting the conservative vision on its own terms, missing some of the undercurrents that perhaps undermined it. His identification of Louisa McCord as symbolic of the Lost Cause is obvious enough, and it is no surprise that Poole asserts that McCord "certainly would have seen the work of memorializing the dead as part of this effort to preserve the conservative ethos of the South against the tides of time" (p. 71). However, in the case of McCord, all may not have been as it seemed. Her recent biographer argues that for McCord the Lost Cause rung hollow. Despite her presidency of the South Carolina Monument Association, she "could not salvage any meaning out of the preservation of the memory of the Confederate dead." As McCord herself put it, "South Carolina is fast becoming to me, but as one great grave of the great past."[3] At times, too, Poole sails close to the wind of "what if" history, particularly in his assertion that had "the Confederate war effort proved successful, their romantic conservatism would have gone the route of so many European conservatisms after 1848 and dissolved into a full-throated modern nationalism" (p. 35). Indeed, when it comes to his analysis of the South's "Confederate religion," Poole misses the opportunity to draw the very ob-

vious comparisons between this and some of its European variants, but also, and more importantly, draws too clear a distinction between "civil religion" and its Confederate variant. It is by no means the case that civil religions "assume a kind of eternal national present in which a dominant set of values unites a variety of religious, ethnic, and racial groups;" in other societies and at other times, such values are always negotiated, as they were and are in America, North and South, throughout its history. "Tolerance and equality played no role in Confederate religion," Poole asserts, but he might have added, nor in American civic nationalism, itself a moveable feast but, historically at least, fundamentally exclusionary in nature (p. 53).

It would be unfair, however, to end with a critique of what Poole has not done. What he most certainly has achieved is a challenging, fresh and in many ways genuinely innovative study of the South Carolina upcountry at a moment of transition. His argument that "Confederate religion, the taut connection drawn during the war between the experience of conversion and the mythic struggle for southern independence, provided a way to knit together a region fundamentally fragmented," is persuasive, and the case is forcibly made and defended that South Carolina, in the 1870s, "acted very much like a traditional *gemeinschaft*, commemorating its fallen warriors rather than a society dominated by private interests" (p. 47). The eventual disintegration of the conservative dream, Poole argues, originated in the racial violence unleashed, to a great extent, by the ascendancy of Ben Tillman. The potential for such violence was always there, however, in the "dark and bloody history" of Edgefield and Aiken counties; in the end, Tillman was no more than a "catalyst" for this transformation of South Carolina's conservative culture in the closing years of the nineteenth century (pp. 157-159). Ultimately, Poole concludes, "the rather delicate and exotic flora of southern conservatism could not withstand the blasting heat of the popular mass movement that Tillmanism represented," a movement that "shattered the aesthetic of the Lost Cause, at least in its function as a grand narrative for the southern social order" (pp. 177, 194). In the end, the conservative vision did perish amidst the ruins, leaving only the flags and monuments that dot the South Carolinian landscape, symbols isolated from the conservative meaning that they once encapsulated, the last vestiges of those "exotic growths" that flourished, for a brief time, in the state's turbulent history.

Notes

[1]. Manisha Sinha, *The Counterrevolution of Slavery: Politics and Ideology in Antebellum South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), pp. 1-2.

[2]. Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: The University Press of Georgia, 1980); Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[3]. Leigh Fought, *Southern Womanhood and Slavery: A Biography of Louisa S. McCord, 1810-1879* (Columbia and London: The University of Missouri Press, 2003), p. 181.