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https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-f1t6-4r49

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LITERATURE AS A TOOL FOR CULTURAL ANALYSIS: A POST-PROCESSUAL EXAMINATION OF THE ANTE-BELLUM TIDEWATER ELITE 1830-1860

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Anthropology

The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

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by

Shirley Kathryn Holmes

1990

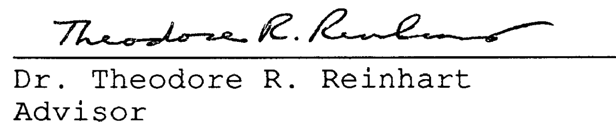
APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Shirley Kathryn Holmes

Approved, May 1990



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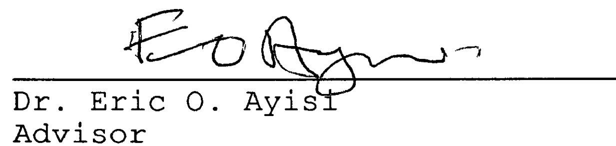
Advisor



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The writer wishes to express her appreciation to Professors Theodore R. Reinhart, Eric O. Ayisi, and Virginia Kerns for their careful reading and criticism of the manuscript.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to attempt to approach the question of the validity and continuity of the aristocratic image of the ante-bellum South within a post-processual, inter-disciplinary framework.

Within this theoretical framework, the study aims to show that literature can be used as a tool for cultural analysis. Literature is a piece of material culture which captures and stores thought and ideas, preserving them for future perusal and study.

The culture under study is that of the legendary ante-bellum society of the American South. In order to get at the foundations of the myth of an aristocratic South and Southern identity, many sources of data will be used. These include fiction, letters, diaries, archaeological and historical evidence for an analysis of the society, in an attempt to understand the many aspects of ante-bellum society as it is made of up of the interplay between individuals and institutions over time.

The legend of elite life will be shown to have a basis in fact. The persistence of the identity will be shown to be a product of self-conscious design, as any culture, as it changes, must actively pursue continuity.

LITERATURE AS A TOOL FOR CULTURAL ANALYSIS:

A POST-PROCESSUAL EXAMINATION OF

THE ANTEBELLUM TIDEWATER ELITE

1830-1860

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to attempt to approach the question of the validity and continuity of the aristocratic image of the ante-bellum South within a post-processual, inter-disciplinary framework. Within this theoretical framework the study aims to show that literature, in this case, short stories by characteristically Southern nineteenth century authors, can be used as another material tool for cultural analysis. Deetz (1977:10) suggests that material culture be defined "as that segment of man's physical environment which is purposely shaped by him according to culturally dictated plans." As well as the more traditionally considered objects, according to Deetz this definition could include landscapes, body scarification and tatooing, a Roman Catholic Mass, and language--the spoken word--itself. Under such a definition, literature is a piece of material culture which captures and stores thought and ideas, preserving them for future perusal and study. As Deetz (1983:30) also said, "there is no reason not to put every bit of evidence to use" as we study past and present cultures.

The culture under study in this paper is that of the legendary ante-bellum Tidewater elite of the American South primarily from 1830 to 1860. In order to get at the foundations of the myth of an aristocratic South and Southern identity, many sources of data will be used. These include

fiction, letters, diaries, archaeological and historical evidence for an analysis of the society, in an attempt to understand the many aspects of ante-bellum society as it is made of up of the interplay between individuals and institutions over time. The legend will be shown to have basis in fact. The persistence of the identity will be shown to be a product of self-conscious design, as any culture, as it changes, must actively pursue continuity.

Chapter I consists of a theoretical discussion of what has been termed "post-processual" archaeology. This discussion includes an examination of critical theory as it is incorporated in archaeological and social scientific inquiry. Chapter II examines the structure of the elite and the elite-created society of the colonial and ante-bellum South. Chapter III examines literature as it can be used in cultural analysis. The examples here are the short stories of three nineteenth century Southern writers. Chapter IV consists of the presentation and analysis of letters, journals, artifactual, and documentary data which illustrate and validate the image of the aristocratic ante-bellum South. The discussion of archaeological, architectural, and documentary data about the society of the ante-bellum South is in no way intended to be an all-inclusive review of the evidence. Rather, the aim is to present a general picture of the society as its major components are illustrated through the combination of different disciplinary data. The majority of the information on the plantation and plantation life of the ante-bellum period comes from John Otto's (1984) work on status differences on Cannon's Point Plantation, St. Simon's

Island, Georgia. In part this is because this plantation exhibits the classically characteristic features of an ante-bellum plantation; and in part because "Otto's ideas are now central to modern plantation archaeology" (Orser 1984:5).

CHAPTER I

POST-PROCESSUAL ARCHAEOLOGY AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDY

> The term 'post-processual' attempts to capture a new openness to debate in archaeology--a broadening...incorporating a variety of influences including Marxism, structuralism, idealism, feminist critiques and public archaeology (Hodder 1986:171).

In the 1960's American historical archaeologists became excited about the application of scientific principles to the discipline of archaeology. To this end scholars like Stanley South (1967) talked about artifact patterning, and Schiffer (1983) talked about n-transforms and c-transforms--the processes which effect the patterning of artifacts in the ground. In the following decades other archaeologists applied these concepts to archaeology, but found them limiting in historical archaeology. Those scholars who relied on historical data to reconstruct past lifeways were considered historical particularists. Scholars like Deetz and others went on to conduct studies which challenged the limits of historical archaeological data using both archaeological and non-archaeological data. In the 1980's Ian Hodder, Christopher Tilley, Deetz, and others articulated a trend in research toward more contextual and symbolic studies which blended cross-disciplinary theories and approaches in the hope of overcoming the limitations of the processual approach.

Textual/Contextual vs. Behavioral/Physical

In her article, "Is There an Archaeological Record?", Linda Patrik (1985) refers to those archaeologists whose theoretical models are structural, symbolic, or contextual as "post-processual" archaeologists; that is, they lean toward theories that are, as Deetz (1983) would say, more "humanistic" in their emphasis and less "scientific." Their models for the archaeological record are textual rather than physical or behavioral (Hodder 1985).

The implications of the use of a textual model are that these structural, symbolic, and contextual archaeologists take into account (or attempt to) the unique, creative behavior of an individual acting in a unique society. They challenge the processual stance that the individual acts according to established nomothetic laws of human behavior and re-emphasize the idea that cultures are unique; and therefore behavior in any given situation in different cultures will not necessarily be predictable. This model also offers a humanistic explanation of the dynamics of culture change making room for innovation and creativity--that individuals acting in society introduce change through unique responses to social situations [what Deetz (1983) calls "self-adaptation"]. In this alternative approach, individuals are not passive, as they are in the processual or behavioral model.

However, this model does not completely throw out the possibilities of general principles that influence behavior--it just does not give these principles the immutability of "laws." Rather, borrowing from linguistic models, this

textual model suggests that, as in language, there are rules which guide the social actor (Hodder's term) within a situation, but do not determine the individual's behavior, much the way grammatical rules guide the speaker. "The behavioral position appears to suggests that one can understand behavior...without going through any cognitive processes that are supposed to lie in the actors" (Hodder 1985:2). The contextual position denies a dichotomy between function (or action) and meaning (belief) because, as in the linguistic model, the individual is only given general guidelines for behavior in any given social situation. "Without the constructed, cultural world, behavior is seen by Geertz as being virtually ungovernable...'There is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture'" (Hodder 1985:2).

The use of a contextual model also attempts to make room for the meaning behind actions and the meaning behind the physical remains of a culture (for example, a pen is not just a writing implement, but carries with it suggestions of power--"the pen is mightier than the sword"--eloquence, education, status, and more). In order to infer the meaning, or symbolism of an object, and to understand what was in "the mind of the maker" and user of an object, it is necessary to reconstruct its context--that is, the action, the event, its meaning at the time of the social action and in reference to the cultural attitudes of that time and place. As Hodder (1985:3) asserts, "Social change is historically dependent...it is subject to contextual, cultural peculiarities...[Each social action] does not exist within a

vacuum but within a historical context." In the extreme case, as Deetz (1983:27) points out, "events unique in place and time have their material correlates that must be explained in terms of the same unique circumstances;" this extreme view is historical particularism.

Critical Theory in Archaeology

What makes "post-processual" archaeology unique from historical particularism (or cultural relativism) is the tacit incorporation of critical theory. That is, there is a determination to look at the social context of an action, and in fact to see the individual as a "social actor" [Hodder's (1985) term], not a passive cog in a law-determined process of cultural control and manipulation. This incorporation of critical theory into archaeological research and interpretation should lead the researcher to recognize his or her own cultural bias or assumptions in the interpretation of data and to try to correct for this, using caution when making inferences about past behavior.

According to Alison Wylie (1985:135), critical theory developed out of and is grounded in an extension of Marxist social criticism and Marx's "insight that knowledge and knowledge-producing enterprises are grounded in 'fundamental characteristics of the human species,' in particular...the socially based productive activity...that serves the species' fundamental interest in survival." Applied to archaeology, or indeed to any social science where the knowledge we acquire and transmit are value-laden, this theory posits that collective self-criticism on the part of researchers as to

their theory, methods, and conclusions can lead to more objective research and knowledge. This is possible because the process of empirical criticism "progressively eliminates error" (Wylie 1985:137). Importantly, however, even "objectivity" is up for criticism. Critical theory, then, involves "critical reflection on the knowledge-producing enterprise itself [and thus] provides a basis for reflective understanding and criticism of the social context of research" (Wylie 1985:137).

Without the "self-consciousness about the extent to which knowledge claims are conditioned by their social context and serve interests and beliefs that comprise this context" (Wylie 1985:137), collective self-criticism on the part of researchers leads only to a positivist false sense of security that the scientific process will lead us happily down the path of objectivity in research. When applied specifically to archaeology, this theoretical framework should "provide a basis for systematic criticism of our current myths about the past" (Wylie 1985:140); that is, it should enable us to reconstruct the past with as little as possible of our own present socially constituted value-laden assumptions (myths) about what the past was like or what we would like to think it was like. The only way this ideal situation can occur is if researchers, or archaeologists, are able to be self-conscious enough about the social context of their assumptions about the past as they interpret and reconstruct it.

It would seem that only partial objectivity in reconstruction is possible. The use to which we put historic

reconstruction/preservation is essentially message-oriented (Hodder 1985). The purpose of museums and historic preservation projects is essentially to instruct society as to its roots (the ones society or the researcher thinks we ought to have), as well as to entertain us. Instruction and entertainment are not destructive of the past in and of themselves, but it is the wanton reordering of the past according to present assumptions about the present and the past, without self-criticism or without awareness of what we are doing, that is destructive of the past. More importantly it is destructive when we are aware of the impact of present socially constituted value-laden assumptions on the past and choose not to do anything about it. That is when we slip into an Orwellian world, in which the past is timeless (Hodder 1985).

Critical theory, in simple terms, is a call to self-awareness and self-criticism, and then action based on that awareness and criticism--to be self-corrective. To assume that "Science" will provide us with objectivity is to forget that science operates in a social context and therefore can not truly be objective when applied to social science research. To let that insight question any possibility of impartial value-free social science research is as pessimistic and unproductive as the other view is naîve.

It is safe to say that "post-processual" archaeology is a collective reaction or response to the "processual," ecological, and dehumanizing position of the kind of archaeology practiced by, for example, Binford or Stanley South. In that approach culture is seen as a purely adaptive

strategy of which the primary function "is to harness energy for man's use" (South 1989:25), and which exhibits patterns which can be recognized and quantified, and from which nomothetic laws can be deduced. The processual position is logically suspect in that Binford and others are attempting to deduce the cause from the effect. The whole question between the two theoretical positions could end up boiling down simply to "Does the Man make the culture or Does Culture make the man?". "The combination of the particularist's emphasis on detail and documentation and the scientific archaeologist's search for patterned regularity extended to the entire record--documentary, archaeological, and artifactual--forms the basis for the mediation of these opposed views" (Deetz 1983:28).

Wrong!

Interdisciplinary Study

The post-processualist trend is, among other things, another call for holism in social science research; another reminder that "People are different" (Deetz 1983:29) and that culture is more than just an adaptive strategy. A model like the processual one limits the researcher severely in what s/he can say about people and so ultimately culture and culture processes because of its oversimplistic focus on culture as behavior. While South's (1989:25) contention that pattern recognition is an effective tool for answering some questions about culture, and culture does play a role in harnessing energy for man's use (we do have to survive as living organisms after all), there is more to being human than that. That is why there are so many more disciplines

than just biology to study human beings. Culture, according to Hodder (1982:13) "is not man's extrasomatic means of adaptation...it is meaningfully constituted;" and "men 'are *cultural beings* endowed with the capacity and the will to take a definite attitude toward the world and lend it *significance*'..." (Tilley 1982:36)

As Leone and Crosby state (1987:402), the archaeological record should not be seen as identical, nor unrelated, to the historical record, but each eliciting different information. Archaeologists should look to the historical record "not for corroboration, but for interrelationships between behaviors, events, or organizations--relationships that link artifacts in the archaeological record and their meanings."

By studying a multitude of different sources it is possible to create a better picture and gain a better understanding of a culture or society under study. Historical archaeology, because it deals with complex and sometimes urban societies, has at its disposal many resources for cultural data. An historical culture or society can not be studied in the same way that prehistoric cultures are studied where the only remaining evidence is material and where artifact patterning is of paramount importance. Complex civilizations which have written histories and other documentary data, whether emic or etic or both, call for a more inter-disciplinary examination.

Historical archaeology has and should retain its foundations in anthropological theory; but, like classical archaeology, historical archaeology should incorporate the ideas, knowledge, and principles of other disciplines such as

history, art history, psychology, and sociology. With this in mind, the evidence used below to illustrate the Southern image, its reality, myth, and perpetuation, crosses and tacitly incorporates several disciplines. By using diaries and letters, the actions, thoughts, and perceptions of individuals in various social situations can be assessed. These individual responses to social situations can offer insight into the effects of social actions on individuals as well as the morals and mores of society and the creative ways in which its members deal with those mores. Other larger-scale documentary data (such as census reports, legal statistics, inventories, etc.) offer more objective pictures of society which account for culture change <u>and</u> continuity.

Material culture studies and archaeology offer broader pictures of a society or culture through evidence of settlement patterns, group status indicators, foodways, economic networks, and other general cultural processes, as well as contribute to the elucidation of individual behavior. By combining the study of creative individual approaches to society, as well as large-scale social and political histories, with the study of large and small-scale cultural processes as revealed in archaeology, a more complete picture can be drawn of a society.

Some questions are best answered using the historical record, some better answered using the archaeological record, and many are best asked and answered using a combination of data bases and disciplinary viewpoints. It is the effective combination of disciplines which makes historical archaeology a potential paradigm within which to do research and as such,

a discipline that can have the most illuminating and insightful things to say about human beings. "The combination of the particularist's emphasis on detail and documentation and the scientific archaeologist's search for patterned regularity extended to the entire record--documentary, archaeological, and artifactual--forms the basis for the mediation of these opposed views" (Deetz 1983:28). Neither record is better in principle, just different, and in order to say the most we can about a given time and place, to draw meaning from objects, and to avoid information loss, there must be a give and take--an interdependent relationship--between history and archaeology. "A cumulative and combined use of documentary, historiographic, and archaeological data can...lead to...persuasive explanations for the variations in the material record of the past" (Beaudry 1984:29). It is sometimes true that the study of one over the other can better provide research questions and answer those (discipline-specific) questions. If one wants to get at the realities of slave life, for example, it is sometimes necessary to go to the archaeological record rather than to the historical record, partly because there may be little in the way of historical documents written about slave life, or what was written by the actors in the time period may be biased either as Southern Propaganda or Northern Diatribe.

If one wanted to know how many people lived in Williamsburg at a given time and where they built their houses, it may be necessary to go to the historical record rather than to dig up the whole town looking for houses and

counting chamber pots. However, such things as ethnicity or even socio-economic status may be more apparent in the ground than in documents, such as is shown in Otto's (1984) work on status differences at Cannon's Point Plantation. Otto gives us substantive differences between planter, overseer, and slaves--the nature of the differences, not just the fact of the differences. However, because his study called attention to those substantive differences, historians could go back through the documentary evidence and find more and different kinds of information stimulated by the archaeological evidence.

Each kind of data on its own has its own inherent, peculiar limitations and each approach, to use Deetz’s term, is unidirectional. History, as it is written, is elitist as it is the victors who dictate history. Diaries and letters are biased toward a picture of the elites as it is the educated who write, and sometimes individual behavior is truly counter-culture in nature. Documentary data such as inventories and census reports can be misleading as their interpretation is subject to revision and the interpreters’ cultural assumptions and research goals. And of course, some cultures and societies have no written historical tradition. Archaeology, looking at the material record, can be skewed by physical or natural processes (Schiffer’s n-transforms), such as natural rates of deterioration of objects in particular soils or climates, or cultural processes (c-transforms), such as trends, both of which affect what is left in the ground (Schiffer 1983). Ethnographic and ethnoarchaeological studies can lack objectivity. Because each kind of data has

its limitations, many different kinds of data should be utilized in a study. One such equivalent is regional literature as literature, when approached in an interdisciplinary and social science study, can be a useful tool for cultural analysis and the understanding of thoughts and motivations of social actors. Literature enables the researcher to ethnographically observe the culture by providing a cultural and historical context within which to study.

The pitfall of post-processualist archaeology lies in the impossibility of reconstructing total context as a way of studying psychology (or meaning). In historical archaeology where the objects of study have been made by mass mechanical production and not necessarily by individuals, it is even more difficult to look directly at individuals in society, and so it is easier to study the culture through artifact patterning. But just because the individual is harder to find and the context is incomplete "there is no reason not to put every bit of evidence to use, all the while mindful of the various limitations involved" (Deetz 1983:30).

A true combination of pattern recognition studies and historical particularism can be effective in saying something significant about people and culture. The way a subject is studied is reflective of what the researcher thinks is worthwhile to say about a subject. It is useful to come up with "universal rules" if they can be applied to the study of individual cultures. It is useful to say something that is applicable to only one unique culture because what is interesting about human beings is that although we are

basically all the same, we have unique ways of expressing our humanity. The way to capture multi-faceted human beings is to approach them with a wide net. As my favorite scientific anthropologist said, "The joy of creation is in its infinite diversity, and in the ways in which our differences combine to create meaning and beauty" (Mr. Spock in STAR TREK: "The Medusans").

CHAPTER II

ELITES AND THE SOUTHERN IMAGE

The Character of the Ante-bellum South

The origin of the aristocratic image of the American ante-bellum South lies in the peculiar and particularistic cultural development of a region of the United States due to the effects of immigration, geography, and climate. It is important to be aware of these effects in order to understand the distinctness of the regional culture from that of the rest of the broader American culture. A culturally unique set of circumstances in the South created a group of people who considered themselves unique at a given time in history and who are still considered today to have a recognizable regional character. As a political unit, the Southern people, by the middle of the nineteenth century, considered themselves sufficiently different from the rest of the nation to form a nation of their own. Whether we as moderns judge their reasons to be insufficient or morally reprehensible, as did their opposition, is not the point. Their perception was enough to give credibility to their identity.

In a discussion about particular aspects of a culture, the issue of regional variation can not be ignored. The problem with an examination of regional variations lies in distinguishing true core cultural differences within a culture from gross over-generalizations or stereotypes. It is easy to see differences, at least superficially, of

cultural character when comparing two very different extant cultures like those of, for example, the Kalahari Bushmen and suburban Americans, or when comparing historical societies with modern ones. However, describing differences of character within what is supposed to be the same culture as legitimately and culturally different, and not just variations on the same theme, is much more difficult.

A core element in the character of the South lies in the folkways of the Europeans who initially settled the Tidewater region of Virginia in the mid-to-late seventeenth century (Fischer 1989). The most influential of the settlers, politically and socially, were from the upper class of English society, primarily younger sons of wealthy aristocratic families, who were by virtue of primogeniture denied the privileges of inheritence and therefore the means by which to maintain social or political position in England (Fischer 1989). On settling in Virginia, and later other parts of the coastal South, those families who gained and maintained large property holdings and retained many of the social, political, and religious customs of the English feudal aristocracy, created a society very different from the more egalitarian societies of the Northern and Mid-Atlantic colonies in the seventeenth and early eighteenth century. They created a society "ruled by a particular class, agricultural, paternalistic, more similar in its social connotations to Eupoean nobility than to the bourgeosie" (Luraghi 1978:35). The "ideals...of Viginia gentlemen...were shaped by Machiavelli for the herioc code and by Castiglione for the gentlemanly perspective" (Luraghi 1978:34).

In the first half of the seventeenth century the vast majority of laborers arriving in the Virginia colony were white indentured servants from England who, once working through their servitude, gained their freedom. By the late seventeenth century most of the incoming labor came in the form of black slaves brought against their will from Africa. With this influx of a people vastly different in culture from the Europeans, came the development of a system of discrimination and later a caste system based on race and reinforced by law and customs. The growing disparity between the upper and lower levels of the society, between whites and blacks, was reinforced by laws, custom, and education, as well as in material culture, architecture, and settlement patterns.

With the post-processualist model in mind, the portrayal of the ante-bellum South and the perpetuation of that image can be explored utilizing a broad spectrum of data, textual and physical. To begin with it is necessary to look at the sociology of the elite.

Elite Formation

Elites are an inherent aspect of all complex societies as these societies develop groups or individuals who are more influential than others. Elites are defined relative to the society in which they are members. Elites by definition do not reflect in microcosm the total population. They are the only subcultures that consciously organize themselves "as a distinct overlay upon the class or regional culture of [their] members" (Baltzell 1979:14). That is, the elites

organize themselves around larger structures of their society which they directly or indirectly influence. Their exclusivity enables them to maintain an overlay upon their larger society. Elites create an unspoken praxis as the basis of their domination, institutionalizing their domination through laws, education, and custom. When this happens, their views, attitudes, lifestyles, and so on come to be what is socially most desirable, important, or influential, and their behavior comes to be emulated by non-elites. In some cases, as in the ante-bellum South, the elite image becomes that which characterizes their broader society whether or not this characterization is accurate.

The term "elite" evokes certain images in society which are in turn shaped by three broad qualities of elites. According to George Marcus (1983:10) these qualities are, (1) agency (elites are prime movers or causal agents behind events), (2) exclusivity (involving boundary maintenance), and (3) some form of relationship of elites to their social environment, with the elites "conceived either as corporate institutional orders or as other persons." The agency quality of elites is emphasized in leadership and politics. However, in discussions of social mobility, stratification, wealth, and lifestyle, elite exclusivity (denoting separation) is emphasized. The degree of elite exclusivity is determined by examining elite recruitment, practices of boundary maintenance (how they preserve their exclusivity), and emblems of status embodied in their lifestyles (Marcus 1983: 11,12). In determining the degree of exclusivity of an historical elite recruitment can be observed in records of

society registers, income and tax records, marriage registers, and other documentary sources, as is illustrated in Otto's (1984) work and other plantation archaeology. Boundary maintenance and status emblems can be observed not only in documentary evidence, but in the cultural landscape and in archaeological sources.

Ronald Cohen (1976) suggests that elites can be described as formative, mature, and declining. Formative elites are new elites just gaining access to resources and power (like the "nouveau riche"). Mature elites are established elites with steady hands on the reigns of power. Declining elites are those who are losing elite status. Although the terms suggest a developmental cycle, this is only true from the perspective of a single group. Elite status requires access to scarce resources. Access to and control over resources determines power, socially, economically, and politically. New access to resources for a group previously denied or unable to gain access produces a formative elite, while a mature elite is characterized by secure and continuing access to resources. Loss of access characterizes a declining elite. All three types of elites may be present in a society at any one time and yet be recognized by society in general as only one elite.

The gaining and retaining of elite status are affected by the broader society's authority structuring and by the rules by which the elite group or individual can legitimately exercise influence. The greater the control or degree of coercive capability of the elite, the less likely are new elites able to form and compete successfully with the

established elites and the more likely the elite as a whole are to indefinitely maintain the status quo. Other cultural factors which effect the holding of elite status and effect their characteristics are the norms and expectations associated with elite appearance, deportment, and acceptable interactive modes. The society's attitudes toward inequity, particularly in those whose ideology eschews elitism, make necessary justifications by elites for legitimizing their privilege and power. Their justifications must also validate their goals of reaching and retaining elite status. Self-conscious justifications to validate their status may include claims of socially beneficent activities, ancestral or divine right to rule, leadership experience, expertise, education, white supremacy, and so on. Elitists "affirm that the best (by criteria of heredity, talent or culture) should rule society and determine its tastes, fashions, policies, and the distribution of social benefits" (Cohen in Marcus 1983:22-23).

In Puritan Boston, Quaker Philadelphia, Digby Baltzell (1979:21) posits that it is the attitudes of a society toward the institutionalization of authority that create different kinds of elites: "It is then the contrasting Puritan and Quaker attitudes towards the institutionalization of authority, not toward wealth and prestige that lie at the core of my argument here." His central thesis in this volume "is that the egalitarian and anti-authoritarian principles of Quakerism produced a confusion in class authority from the very beginning in Philadelphia. At the same time, the hierarchical and authoritarian principles of Puritanism

insured in Boston, from its founding to the close of the nineteenth century at least, a tradition of class authority and leadership, not only in the local community but throughout the state and the nation as a whole" (Baltzell 1979:20). In other words, the traditions and values of the society affected the type of elite that devloped in these areas. In this particular case the focus of the Philadelphia elite was on success as a means of showing their elite status. Under the egalitarian principles of the Quaker influence, this elite needed quite a few justifications for their status, or else a high degree of exclusivity; while the elite of Boston focused on leadership and public service and in this way legitimized their privileged status. This last practice carries with it the idea of *noblesse oblige*, that is, that the elite because of their privileges owe something to the community and because of their privileges have something to offer the "common herd."

Origins of a Consciously Southern Elite

Baltzell states that the "aristocratic values of tidewater Virginia [the "cradle" of Southern society] in the great generation of Washington and Jefferson were largely a product of the material conditions of a plantation economy" (Baltzell 1979:5). However, in this case he seems to ignore his earlier concept of cultural influence in elite formation and fails to point out that the people who developed the plantation economy carried with them cultural baggage which affected the kind of elite which formed in that region. While the material conditions made possible an aristocratic

lifestyle, it was the hierarchical and authoritarian principles that these Tidewater planters held that insured the aristocratic values of leadership and class authority which continued in folk culture long after the fall of the Confederacy. These traditions were passed on by the elite through education of their own offspring and by example to their broader society. The awareness of their uniqueness as a people with a way of life and a "peculiar institution" to preserve made them all the more conscious of the values which constituted their way of life and maintained it. David Fischer (1989), in Albion's Seed, asserts that the Southern elite had a tradition of hiercharchical and authoritarian principles as a result of the character of the most influential of the immigrants into that region in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, namely, younger sons of aristocratic families of England. The type of authority structuring here was affected by a regional difference in, what Fischer terms, folkways. That is, the kind of elite which grew up in the Tidewater area, and later came to characterize the Southern elite in general, resulted from the regional folkways brought into the area from the south and west of England and perpetuated by the economic and social system which this elite created. The plantation economy which they created in turn served to foster their preconceived ideal of the "English Country Gentleman" and an English style class system. The agricultural sytem they developed was in turn affected and fostered by the climate and geography of the South. The eighteenth century Virginia folkways, which were carried over into the rest of the South,

were a result of an interplay between the elites and the Chesapeake environment (Fischer 1989).

The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Foundation: Virginia

David Fischer credits Sir William Berkeley, Royal Governor of Virginia from 1642-1676 and a younger son of a powerful West Country family of England, with the leading role in the creation of the Virginia colony. Berkeley sought "to build an ideal society which was the expression of his own values" by shaping "the process of immigration to the colony during a critical period in its history. That process in turn defined its culture" (Fischer 1989:210, 212).

Beginning in 1642 the "cavalier migration" began and picked up during the 1650's as Royalists fled the Puritan oligarchy and were actively recruited by Sir William Berkeley. Fischer states (1989:213,214) that "the American beginnings of Virginia's ruling families occurred within a decade of the year 1655" and that "of seventy-two families in Virginia's high elite whose dates of migration are known, two-thirds arrived between 1640 and 1669".

In the 1950's scholars such as Carl Bridenbaugh argued that the most significant feature of the Virginia elite was not its aristocratic lineage, but its middle class origins. While the English and American aristocracies did form alliances by marriage with the wealthiest of the mercantile families of London and southern England, the cultural attitude was that of the country gentleman as "the roots of all these men were in the countryside, and Virginia offered a chance to return to the rural life which they preferred"

(Fischer 1989:218) (see Appendix A for an example of the genealogy of Virginia landed and mercantile elite). However, despite mercantile ties, the elite of Virginia came predominantly from the upper classes of England:

> Of 152 Virginians who held top offices in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, at least sixteen were connected to aristocratic families, and 101 were the sons of baronets, knights and the rural gentry of England. Seven more came from armigerous urban families, with coats of arms at the college of heralds. Only eighteen were the sons of yeomen, traders, mariners, artisans, or 'plebs'. None came to Virginia as laborers or indentured servants except possibly the first Adam Throughgood who was also the brother of a baronet. Only two were not British, and nine could not be identified....It should be noted that many men of humble origins became prosperous planters in Virginia but were never admitted to this higher elite. Also many other high-born immigrants came to Virginia, but did not perpetuate themselves in the New World. This list understates aristocratic connections (Fischer 1989:216 and footnote. Refer also to this source for a list of specific family names.).

Fischer (1989:225) firmly states that "the legend of the Virginia cavalier was no mere romantic myth," but rested solidly on historical fact. The hierarchical society which the Virginia elite created as they tried to reconstruct from American materials the English cultural system from which, as younger sons, they had been excluded, created a strong hegemony throughout the eighteenth century in Virginia. This English-style elite was very conservative, "elitist, hierarchical, and strenuously hostile to social change" and sought to preserve the culture of England which they perceived "as a precious inheritance to be protected from change, and passed intact from one generation to the next"

(Fischer 1989:253). There was a self-conscious attempt to reproduce and perpetuate the culture.

The environment of Tidewater Virginia fostered a strong agricultural regime, but its heat and humidity and "endemic summer diseases had other social consequences. Travelers and natives both remarked on the 'idleness', 'indolence' and 'sluggishness' of the Virginians, as well as their irritability and quick tempers" (Fischer 1989:252). Malaria, first introduced from southern England and later from Africa, was a great debilitator, but not the reason that Africans were enslaved in the South. The ruling elite of Virginia required a fixed underclass to support and reinforce its system of social orders. Africans, arriving initially as indentured servants and later as slaves, were a "perfect" choice as they were culturally and racially removed from the predominantly English population.

While in the twentieth century social class is a consequence of material possessions, in the eighteenth century, social class was more rigid and gentility a question of honor, where subordinates deferred to those of higher status and the elite condescended to the "common folk." The American social system was more fluid than that of Europe largely because of immigration, but it was culturally imperative that there always remained a subordinate class of people to carry through this deferential society. As Wyatt-Brown (1982:16) states in Southern Honor, "the South was not founded to create slavery, slavery was recruited to perpetuate the South." Slavery was not, then, merely an economic imperative, and the culture of the Virginia colony,

and of the South, developed before the full-blown institutionalization of slavery. The first blacks in America early in the seventeenth century came as indentured servants like many Europeans and worked through their servitude to freedom. The rigid category of race slavery developed late in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, not reaching full flower until the early nineteenth century.

Justifications for slavery had to be defined and were defined as racial and cultural inferiority. Slaves were rarely referred to as "slaves," but as "my people," "servants," and later, "Negroes," and "coloreds" (Myers 1972), and were "made to dress like English country farmers, to play English folk games, to speak an English country dialect" (Fischer 1989:389). The Virginia elite tried to convince themselves and others that their slaves, taken care of and provided for as they were, were better off tilling the rich and productive soil of the Tidewater than were English peasants eeking out a meager existence in the English countryside. Because a gentleman did not work with his hands but directed the hands of others, slavery was necessary to keep the plantation economy going, and most importantly, maintain the lifestyle of the "English Country Gentleman"--a complex web of economic and cultural imperatives.

The Nineteenth Century

In other parts of the South, particularly in South Carolina, black slavery was imported full-blown from the West Indies when English sugar planters from Barbados settled the Charles Towne area at the end of the seventeenth century.

Also, as the agricultural system depleted the soil of the initial seventeenth and eighteenth century settlements of Virginia and population increased, planters and yeoman farmers settled farther south and west, taking their folkways and cultural attitudes with them. The elite continued to intermarry and their complex cousinages spread throughout the South continuing a web of kinship and reinforcing ancestral ties. With the War of Independence and its victory of democracy came new questions for the Southern elite.

How does an authoritarian elite based on the old European principles of feudal aristocracy, like the Southern ante-bellum elite, maintain its status in an increasingly industrial and democratic society? Eventually the leveling forces of such a society make this aristocratic elite archaic and anachronistic. Today's American elite bear little resemblance to the eighteenth and nineteenth century Southern elite in terms of a cohesive group with public conscience, strong family traditions and the aristocratic ideals of the English country gentleman. The twentieth century American elite is made of a group of famous and moneyed individuals. Money, in the twentieth century, is power because with money one has control over all the mechanisms of society.

As Baltzell (1979) suggests in his study of elites, justifications and rationalizations for power consolidation are necessary in any society for the maintenance of the status quo. In order to legitimize their control over resources, black slaves, and the population at large, the ante-bellum Southern elite had to base their privileged position on heredity--inheritance of elite status by virtue

of kinship ties (see Appendix B for sample geneaology and complexity of elite connections). These lines of descent could be traced back to the Founding Fathers of the new nation, the government, and American democracy through complex cousinages from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

By tracing the roots of their status to the heroes of patriotism, they linked themselves in spirit with the aristocratic men of honor, great ideals, and ethics. When we think of the ante-bellum Southern elite we think of the ideals of aristocracy, of a group of people with values worth striving for, and usually not as "peddlars of human flesh." They convinced society that they did better in life and deserved to do so because they were intrinsically, and by virtue of heredity, better people. (Nowadays no one actually wants to emulate Donald Trump, they just want to have what he has.) By imitating the aristocratic lifestyle of the old elite, one could appear to be connected to the old elite. ← You just said they were connected

As abolitionist sentiment and criticism grew stronger in the early nineteenth century, it became necessary for the elite to find new justifications for elite status, status which could only be maintained (so the elite thought) by a race slave economy whose ideology went against the fine democratic and enlightened views of the great eighteenth century Philosopher-politicians (whose base was also ironically suspect). The ante-bellum Southern elite sought to defensively portray and preserve their way of life against "Northern abolitionism" because the so-called "Lost Cause," the defense of slavery and the racial argument of white

supremacy, were the justifications for their very existence and the way in which they ideologically maintained their control over resources and power. Without that justification, the Southern elite, based on property and the coercive control of property, no longer had access to and control over resources and, therefore, power; and the rest of the Southern white population had nothing on which to structure authority. In short, the way to gain elite status was threatened by abolitionism, without, at the time, providing a viable substitute. A new elite would eventually form, but with a different set of rules and different justifications.

Meanwhile, as the old ante-bellum elite were stripped of their status during Reconstruction, and the old way of life was destroyed, a legend had been built up around what that life had been like. Southern politicians and writers had been romanticizing their own culture for at least the 30 years leading up to the outbreak of the "War Between the States" as they justified race slavery and glorified authoritarian violence (while Northern writers wrote stories like "The Scarlet Letter," Southerners were reading Sir Arthur Scott and writing their own style of Arthurian romance; see below in Chapter III). The pictures painted of life in the South revolved around the plantation and the master-slave relationship, all the while down-playing harsh reality and the inequities inherent in the system. Through literature and popular imagination Southern aristocracy became once more acceptable and enviable.

The picture that we have of the society of the Old South

as genteel, aristocratic, static, and happy was an image created by the elites of that society. The image was maintained through regional folkways and the practice of conspicuous consumption all resting on slavery. The image was perpetuated in the consequent romanticization of the elite's lifestyle by others. They impressed their foreign and Northern visitors as well as their fellow Southerners and the lifestyle of the plantation gentleman slaveholder became the "Southern dream." The appeal of the image we have of the culture of the Old South and the appeal then of a Southern identity lies in the romance of imagining ourselves inheritors of this legacy of aristocracy without having to acknowledge the realities of the Southern situation. As Harriet Martineau wrote in the middle of the nineteenth century, "There is something in the make-shift irregular mode of life which exists where there are slaves that is amusing when the cause is forgotten" (Jones 1957:112).

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE AS A TOOL FOR CULTURAL ANALYSIS

If we can glean from the visual arts concrete information about past societies, for example eighteenth century food preparation practices or kinds and types of American colonial era toys, can we not glean information about people's attitudes, how they thought, and how they perceived their society or wanted it to be perceived, from the literature they wrote? As an image of real life is distilled through the artist's eye, so it is distilled through the literary eye of the writer of a particular era and region.

"Literature...as...a unique kind of cultural expression" (Myers 1976:331) enables us to see some of the attitudes, assumptions, and values of a culture as they are expressed in dramatic action and in descriptive detail. The story or tale shows us how individuals act on these cultural assumptions and values within the daily context and how they interact with the institutions of their society and culture. The author, whether consciously or unconsciously, becomes a social historian (by preserving in writing these values), commentator, and critic (as s/he shows how his/her characters act on their culturally inherited assumptions, the conflicts that arise, and how the characters are effected by their society). The characters themselves become the embodiment of certain culturally endorsed values. By the author's emphasis

on particular detail, the author also expresses his/her own culturally influenced biases. Literature, then, is the quintessential form of "thick description." Through literature the readers can become ethnographically aware of their own and other's cultures and aware of what makes that society or culture distinct from others. Literature, in the hands of the social scientist, becomes another tool for cultural analysis as the information and inferences drawn from literature can enhance the data gleaned from other historical and archaeological sources. Regional literature in particular, because it is self-conscious, is particularly useful for analysis.

The literature of the different regions of the United States is reflective of some of the subtle and not-so-subtle differences in attitudes, assumptions, and values of the people within their subcultures (meaning the subcultures of the larger so-called American culture). Historically speaking, there have certainly been common values within these different regions, such as the American self-consciousness, conservatism, insistence of actuality, and the importance of family and kinship networks, growing out of the shared historical experience of the country as a whole nation. However, each region has its own unique historical experience out of which attitudes, institutions, and values have grown and in the context of which they have been shaped. The literature of each region has its won unique focus and flavor as it is influenced by local characters, history, and language. In 1879, in an article for The Atlanta Constitution, Joel Chandler Harris wrote, "The very spice and

essence of all literature, the very marrow and essence of all literary art is its localism" (Brookes 1950:12). Jay Hubbell quotes Frederick J. Turner's 1939 statement that "No one can make a sectional list of the men and women who have achieved distinction in [American] literature and fail to see that whether in prose or poetry, fiction or essay, there is a special sectional quality in each, a reflection of the region's common interests and soul" (Hubbell 1954:vii).

Interesting in an anthropological sense, as well as in a literary sense, is the creation and persistence of the myth of the "civilization" of the Old South. Writers in the South began in the 1830's to build up a rival literary tradition to that of New England and one which was designed as a defense against what was perceived as Northern misrepresentation of the Southern way of life. After the Civil War this ante-bellum Southern literature was considered to have little intrinsic value coming as it did out of a defeated and barbarous slave system. After the end of Reconstruction in 1877 many Northern writers "rediscovered the charm of Southern life" (Hubbell 1954:ix). They gave credibility to the new literature of the South, which emphasized local-color fiction designed in part to correct what was felt to be a distorted picture of Southern life found in the writings of such authors as Harriet Beecher Stowe and abolitionist propaganda. This literature was also influenced by the market which only wanted to read what it wanted to imagine life was like.

The image or myth of the Old South was a conscious creation of the propertied elite of the first half of the

nineteenth century. One of the ways this image was perpetuated was in the literature of the region. The romantic picture of elegant plantation life has consistently been an attractive one to all who look at the society of the ante-bellum South. The Romantic Southern writers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries created a legend of the Old South much like the Arthurian traditions of loyalty, love, and combat. "Out of these traditions grew certain typically Southern characteristics...ancestor worship, an exaggerated gallantry toward women, over-emphasis on honor, and a glorification of war" (Downs 1977:176). This myth has its foundation in the impact on Southern society of the socially, economically, and politically dominant planter class, heirs of the tradition of the English Cavaliers.

In order to illustrate how localism in literature allows us to glimpse the values of a society, I have chosen to study selected writings of three popular nineteenth and early twentieth century Southern writers considered to be characteristically Southern in style and content. In their work it is possible to see the mythical Southern image as it was created and perpetuated.

William Alexander Caruthers (1802-1846)

William A. Caruthers was a Southerner born of a Scotch family. His father was a successful merchant, a gentleman farmer, and a respected member of society. Caruthers married an heiress of an aristocratic Tidewater family in 1821, and they moved into an "elegant home, in which they were able to entertain with the hospitality and graciousness typical of

their class and of the Old South" (Caruthers 1968:i).

Although cosmopolitan in upbringing, Caruthers glorified and sentimentalized the colonial Virginia gentry. His heroes are fine aristocratic Virginia gentlemen like Victor Chevillere who was "handsomely formed, moderately tall, and fashionably dressed. His face was bold, dignified, and resolute" (Caruthers 1968:6). They lead "fine southern animals" and own faithful old slaves like "Old Cato" who had "served the father of his present highly honoured young master, and was deeply imbued with that strong feudal attachment to the family, which is a distinguishing characteristic of the southern negroes who serve immediately beneath the persons of the great landholders" (Caruthers 1968:7).

Even descriptions of the scenery are imbued with self-conscious magnificence, such as "that most magnificent 'meeting of the waters' of the Shenandoah and Potomack" and "those stupendous fragments whose chaotic and irregular position gives token of the violence with which the mass of waters rent for themselves a passage through the mountains, when rushing on to meet that other congregation of rivers, with whose waters they unite to form the Bay of the Chesapeake" (Caruthers 1968:7). In another work, Caruthers even more self-consciously wrote,

> Oh may that day soon come, when Virginians will learn to venerate more and more the land where the bones of their sires lie; that land consecrated as the burial place of a whole generation of high-hearted patriots, and where yet breathes the purest spirit of enlightened freedom that ever refreshed and purified the earth; that land in which was exhibited that rarest combination of social aristocracy and public equality--where virtue, and talents, and

> worth alone were consecrated to reverence, through hereditary lines of descent" (from The Knights of the Golden Horse-Shoe in Caruthers 1968:ii).

In that one protracted sentence Caruthers managed to touch on the themes of landed aristocracy, political self-consciousness, honor, and genealogy and ancestor worship. Ironically, in the face of a system of chattel slavery, he asks Virginians, and the rest of us, to recall the concepts of "enlightened freedom" and "public equality" and to remember, in the words of Harriet Martineau, that "there is something in the make-shift irregular mode of life which exists where there are slaves that is amusing when the cause is forgotten" (Jones 1957:112). The unpleasant fact of human bondage was made to look pleasant in the descriptions of happy story-telling slaves and the conscious linkage of descriptions of involuntary servitude with voluntary (and adventurously romantic) feudal obligations.

Joel Chandler Harris (1848-1908)

Joel Chandler Harris, a Georgian journalist who wrote in the late nineteenth century, painted a strong if somewhat romanticized picture of the plantation black character. "Harris himself remarked that he had 2 purposes in writing the stories. The first was his desire 'to preserve in permanent shape those curious mementos of a period that will no doubt be sadly misrepresented by historians of the future'" (Cousins 1968:157). Harris had a profound and lasting impact on American literature as a whole and, because of his emphasis on localism, can be used to understand some of the regional characteristics of attitudes and values of

the South. He wrote in the midst of a defeated and changing way of life--during the time of Reconstruction. His writing was influenced by the strong self-conscious sense of history and tradition that pervaded the South at that time, the strong wish to preserve and romanticize the chivalrous, aristocratic plantation life, the wish to preserve a way of life against any kind of outside influence, and the masked hostility within a changing yet resisting society (evident behind the common courtesies of the animals in the Uncle Remus tales). All this can be extrapolated from Harris's writing through his very choice of subject, his depiction of the black, and his setting, as well as the overt references to values.

Joel Chandler Harris gives us Uncle Remus as the epitome of the black character, a composite figure he created to represent the Southern black. The stories that Harris tells, both as narrator and through Uncle Remus the story teller, reflect the character and values of the rural ante-bellum South and their place in the defeated, changing, post-war plantation South.

Harris grew up in middle Georgia during the Civil War. As a boy he apprenticed on a small country printing press on a plantation before the collapse of the Confederacy. While there he befriended some of the black slaves and would listen to the stories and tales they told. Later, in the 1870's he published in The Atlanta Constitution, in dialect, some of the stories he had absorbed, creating the "animal-tale-telling plantation Negro" who became "a household symbol of the good old days"--Uncle Remus (Flusche in Bickley 1981).

These were so popular that he continued to write them down as the stories that Uncle Remus told to a little white boy on the plantation. The folktales of Uncle Remus, although international in origin (as folklore so often is), to illustrate values and attitudes held among the Southern black) and in a wider sense the South) during the transitional post-Civil War era. "Such ways and folkways were, of course, first of all American and universal before they were Southern, but because they have come to be considered characteristically, if not exclusively, 'Southern' (Botkin 1949:xxi). They are values of security, hospitality, and a belief in the importance of long-established and landed community life.

Harris's picture of the old-time plantation black is a romanticized one of the humorous, endearing, childlike, but wise in human nature, mellowed by time, "happy darky." Harris's Southern awareness of history and tradition influenced him to depict the black character and the little white boy in their historical and traditional roles. In Harris's depiction we see Howard Odum's statement confirmed that the "most powerful folk cultures were those of the aristocratic planter class and...upper brackets of the white South [where] democracy and earned privileges have been the folk motif" (Botkin 1949).

Harris's narrative and the stories of Uncle Remus illustrate many values held in the South. Some of these, like neighborliness, hospitality, and family connections, are similar to those values of other communities in predominantly rural areas of other regions of the country. What makes

these peculiarly Southern is the self-conscious exaggeration of them. Aside from the more universal morals which Uncle Remus's tales give (as folktales), such as the moral of *Mr. Lion Hunts Mr. Man* ("the bigger they are the harder they fall" or "don't get too big for your britches"), or the moral of the tale *How Brother Fox Was Too Smart* ("Dat w'at Brer Fox git fer playin' Mr. Smarty en copyin' atter yuther folks, en dat des de way de whole Smarty fambly gwine ter come out" [Harris 1955:133]), the tales also give us, through the characters' actions and words, their cultural assumptions and attitudes. Uncle Remus is contemptuous of Marse John's Northern (democratic) "idee dat some folks is good ez yuther folks" (Harris 1955:130). Uncle Remus knows better and so does Miss Sally, who is also a Southerner, that the old aristocratic order must be preserved (according to their belief in the social order). He says of the Favers family (with whom the Little Boy has been playing) that "dey ain't no Favers 'pon de top side er de yeth w'at kin hol' der han' wid de Abercrombies in pi'nt er breedin' en raisin'...I knows der pedigree fum de fus' ter de las'" (Harris 1955:130-131). The Favers family's genealogy is unknown and questionable. This is preamble to *How Brother Fox Was Too Smart;* and in the preamble to the following story, *Brother Rabbit's Astonishing Prank*, he tells us that Brer Rabbit's success is due to the fact that he does not copy other folks. In this way personal honor and integrity and thereby family integrity is preserved.

Another kind of family loyalty, regional loyalty, is illustrated in the short history Harris gives us on how Uncle

Remus met his future "boss", also the future husband of Miss Sally and father of the Little Boy. Marse John was a Union soldier that Uncle Remus shot out of a tree when he saw him about to shoot a Southerner.

"Southern-style courtesy" is illustrated in all the tales in the the relations between the animals who are always "Howdyin'" each other and "spondin'," passing "de time er day wid de nabors" and asking "'bout de fambly connexshuns." In *The Wonderful Tar-Baby Story*, Uncle Remus tells the Little Boy about Brer Rabbit's reaction to what he thought was discourtesy and rude behavior on the part of the Tar-Baby he met along the road.

> "Mawnin'!" sez Brer Rabbit, sezee--nice wedder dis mawnin'," sezee.
> Tar-Baby ain't sayin' nothin'...
> "How duz yo' sym'tums seem ter segashuate?" sez Brer Rabbit, sezee...de Tar-Baby, she ain't sayin' nothin'.
> "How you come on, den? Is you deaf?" sez Brer Rabbit, sezee. "Kaze if you is, I kin holler louder," sezee.
> Tar-Baby stay still...
> "You er stuck up, dat's w'at you is," sez Brer Rabbit, sezee, 'en I'm gwine to kyore you, dat's w'at I'm gwine ter do," sezee...I'm gwine ter larn you how ter talk ter 'spectubble folks ef hit's de las ack", sez Brer rabbit, sezee. "Ef you don't take off dat hat en tell me howdy, I'm gwine ter bus' you wide open," sezee (Harris 1955:7).

Although the story is humorous (Brer Fox made the baby out of tar to trick Brer Rabbit) and Brer Rabbit's reaction is rather extreme, the story is useful in illustrating the individual's reaction to behavior which is deviant from behavior considered culturally normal. The story also gives us a glimpse into the socialization of youngsters in a society where violence is near the surface and an acceptable

aspect of life.

The Uncle Remus stories and Harris's narratives illustrate and attempt to perpetuate the assumptions and values of the period in which Harris was writing. Harris's Uncle Remus tales are attempts on Harris's part to reflect, through the composite figure of Uncle Remus, Southern values as he believed they were felt and expressed by Southern blacks and whites. "It was recognized at once that [the Uncle Remus tales] represented a new kind of Southern literature--a complete departure from the chivalric gentleman, charming belles, white-columned mansions, and lordly manor houses with retinues of servants characterizing the overdrawn romances of the past" (Downs 1977:164). However, his setting was still the plantation and his characters still representative of only two levels of society, the elite and the slave, without which there could be no elite. Ironically, although Harris was not of aristocratic parentage (he was as illegitimate child and his Irish day laborer father deserted his mother), unlike many other Southern writers, there is no mention of the middle class except as they are, like the Favers family, contemptible and outside the realm of projected Southern values.

Thomas Nelson Page (1852-1922)

Born of an aristocratic family, Thomas Nelson Page was very popular with both Northern and Southern readers. He painted a romantic picture of the South that everyone wanted to believe. He truly felt that he was serving the purpose of

helping to reunite the North and South in sentiment by offering stories of reconciliation (Downs 1977).

As in the works of most nineteenth century Southern writers, there were no middle class characters of any significance in Page's stories. He wrote dialect stories similar to Harris's although rather than using animals for characters, his stories generally revolved around a Southern gentleman separated from his fair lover by political differences. His stories were usually narrated in the words of a loyal slave or loyal ex-slave. Using this medium he extolled the virtues of the Old South (virtue, chivalry, honor, and loyalty) and helped to create a romantic plantation tradition, which influenced and lingered on in popular literature and imagination in such later works as the phenomenally successful Gone With the Wind. Slaves, like Sam in "Marse Chan", are happy, never rebellious or discontented, and voluntarily share their masters' lives. The heroines are fair, delicate, courageous, and ultimately loyal (like the heroine in "Marse Chan" who dies of a broken heart when her lover dies a heroic death in battle).

In another story, the lovers are united in a ceremony that takes place in the lady's Southern mansion and beneath the portraits of her ancestors, stressing the importance of genealogy and the tradition of the gracious landed family with its impeccable ancestry. "The reader is never permitted to forget the central importance of the Southern past and way of life" (Downs 1977:180).

Literature as a Tool for Cultural Analysis

In the hands of the social scientist, literature can be used as a tool for the uncovering of cultural information relevant not only to the elucidation of material life, but to the unobservables of thought and symbolism. Just as the artist's painting gives the viewer a glimpse of how the world looked, if only through one actor's eyes, literature can give us a glimpse of how the world was perceived by social actors. This is achieved not only through the drama of fiction, but in reality, as the author distills those things, thoughts, and impressions that were perhaps most important and most affecting to the members of society. Literature allows the reader to participate ehtnographically in the culture. What the author chooses to mention, describe, or how s/he sets the characters within the story illustrate the perceptions that impacted people at the time of the action and place scientific study of the society in a more realistic context.

CHAPTER IV

DOCUMENTARY AND MATERIAL SOURCES

Letters and Diaries: Myers' *Children of Pride*

Through the letters and diaries of a single family, Robert Myers (1972) introduces us to the Jones family of Liberty County, Georgia. Solely through those papers we can observe the characteristics of the ante-bellum elite and explore the veracity of the image of the aristocratic South. Yet while we can see generalities and recognize that the family is characteristically elite, individual behavior is illustrated.

The Reverend Charles Colcock Jones was a member of the small minority of Southern society who owned over 100 slaves; he also owned three plantations and three mansions. But, uncharacteristic of the elite, or Southern white society in general, Jones educated his slaves. The opposition he encountered demanded of him a spotless personal reputation, a continued strong social position, and an unwavering conviction and decision in his work (Myers 1972:14). He had to be very careful to couch the purpose of his work in terms that did not threaten the status quo of the white/black, master/slave relationship. Instruction of the blacks had to be oral as it was against the law to teach the slaves to read and write, because it was felt that an educated slave was a troublemaker. Certainly the idea that a black slave could be as educated as a white man was a threat to the entire

rationalization of white Anglo-Saxon cultural dominance.

Jones typified some of the ambivalent attitudes that white planters had toward slavery, and the moral and mental dilemma of trying to reconcile the discrepancy between democracy and the patriarchal labor system of the South. On the one hand he was obligated to slaves for his lifestyle, and yet he felt that slavery was "a violation of all the Laws of God and man at once. A complete annihilation of justice, an inhuman abuse of power" (C. C. Jones to Mary Jones, 8 September 1829, Rogers and Saunders 1984:47). Although Jones considered emancipating his slaves, he decided in the end that he could do more for them by keeping them enslaved and giving them the "benefit" of care under "more civilized" people. He could only teach them those ideas from the Bible that would encourage the slaves and free-blacks to be submissive, humble, obedient, and respectful of preordained authority.

However, though Jones had dedicated his life's work to the evangelization of slaves and free blacks, and despite the fact that he was learned and compassionate, the racial attitudes of the family were little different from the attitudes of most white Southerners and other Americans at the time. Mrs. Jones wrote in her journal during a month of Yankee raids at her home, Montevideo,

> With [the slaves'] emancipation must come their extermination. All history, from their first existence, proves them incapable of self-government; they perish when brought in conflict with the intellectual superiority of the Caucasian race...facts prove that in a state of slavery such as exists in the Southern states have the Negro race increased and thriven most (January 11, 1865, Myers 1972:1244).

In the Jones family letters their own slaves are always referred to as "the people" or "the servants" or by their names, but rarely, if ever, as “slaves”; or if not their own slaves, they were referred to as “blacks,” “Negroes,” or “coloreds.” It is difficult for people within a social context, even those people of intelligence and with a broad educational background, to imagine what radical changes in the structure of society must be like. Although Mrs. Jones did at least recognize that change was imminent, she expected that slavery would continue to exist as a necessary good for the blacks if the South won the war.

> Not that we have done our duty to [the “African race”] here; far from it. I feel if ever we gain our independence there will be radical reforms in the system of slavery as it now exists. When once delivered from the interference of Northern abolitionism, we shall be free to make and enforce such rules and reformations as are just and right (Mrs. Jones' journal, January 11, 1865, Myers 1972:1244).

As members of a Southern elite the Jones family exhibit those qualities and characteristics typical of an elite. The Joneses were landed, owning three large homes, three plantations, and over 100 slaves. They were wealthy, displaying their wealth in the number of servants and in the quality, kind, and quantity of their material possessions. They displayed their wealth and position in their entertaining and in the quality and diversity of foods they ate, as well as in the preparation and serving of these foods at dinner parties, family meals, and so on. The fact that they were able to maintain the plantations and property they owned and the lifestyle that these required also attests to their status and means. They were professionals, members of

the clergy, physicians, engineers, lawyers, and educators, and were well educated, the men having attended some of the finest schools and institutions of the time (C.C. Jones, Jr. attended Princeton). The women attended school with their brothers and cousins, with a few, like Mary Sharpe Jones, attending Ladies' seminaries. The men held political offices and were members and heads of many different kinds of societies. They had access to the resources of the plantations, leisure to travel, access to fine foods and imports, and controlled, along with other planters in their class, a proportionately larger percentage of the resources and income of their region than their actual numbers would warrant.

As elites the family also recruited such men and women into their ranks as were like them, wealthy or well educated professionals, ministers and clergymen of the Presbyterian or Episcopal Churches (those churches to which the elite most commonly belonged), and who usually came from old Southern families. In this way they maintained a tight kinship network. The elite was open not only to those with long-standing family connections, but also to those self-made men whose plantations and fortunes were the result of their own prudent investment and work. "In the South, Renaissance 'gentlemen' believed in a strong individuality and defied adverse fortune by personal virtue" (Luraghi 1978:32). The integrity of each person was as valuable as the outward appearances of elitehood.

Robert Myers (1972) calls these people the "Children of Pride." Although after the War they initially lost the

social and economic status they once enjoyed, they still considered themselves an aristocracy because they felt they had the breeding and education that made them people worthy to rule. As mentioned above in Chapter II, Baltzell (1979) suggests that the aristocratic values of the Old South were a product of the material conditions of a plantation economy. This ignores the cultural baggage which the people carried with them who developed the plantation economy. While the material conditions made possible an aristocratic lifestyle, it was the hierarchical and authoritarian principles that these Tidewater planters held that insured the aristocratic values of leadership and class authority which continued long after the fall of the Confederacy and which affected a whole region.

These traditions were passed on by example and education. The awareness of their uniqueness as a people with a way of life and a "peculiar institution" to preserve made them all the more conscious of the values which constituted and maintained this way of life and consequently all the more anxious to preserve these values.

Material Culture: Architecture and Archaeology

Just as ideological justifications were needed for the maintenance of elite status in the face of chattel slavery, material displays were needed for the justification and expression of elite status. Fraser Neiman's (1978) archaeological study at the Clift's Plantation shows that the change in the architectural materials and style of the "manner house" and elite homes in general reflected the

change in the broader society of an egalitarian system in the seventeenth century to a more authoritarian, hierarchical system in the eighteenth century, as Tidewater plantation life acquired the stereotypical accouterments of aristocratic plantation life which we associate with the legend of aristocracy. "The change appears to have involved a dramatic restructuring of the basis of social relations, of the way in which men ordered and conducted their dealings with one another on a day to day basis" (Neiman 1978:3121).

The initial plan of the "manner house," the cross-passage plan, corresponds with the earliest settlement of the site in the last half of the seventeenth century, at a time when servants and masters were basically of the same racial and regional background. The hall in the cross passage plan appeared, from archaeological data, to be a communal area and the main work center of the plantation, with the chamber being shared by the family and servants together.

Some time in the last quarter of the century and lasting until the destruction of the house in 1730, the house was renovated to a lobby entrance plan and outbuildings were added which were used as work centers and servants quarters. Prior to this time the only outbuilding had been a smokehouse. The lobby entrance plan precludes the common usage of the hall by masters and servants together and effectively separates the public from the private sphere of the house. By the turn of the century and a second generation of planters, black slaves constituted the bulk of the plantation work-force and were "perceived as an increasingly threatening mass of laborers" (Neiman

1978:3123).

The hall was now used mainly for dining and public reception and the outbuildings for the cooking and dairying, etc., that had once been done in the hall. The "removal of these activities from the dwelling is again a reflection of the planter's need for increased physical separation from his social inferiors, in this case his work force, The "manner house" and the hall within it were becoming less the shared center of everyday life on the plantation for the planter and his laborers and more the isolated domain of the planter and his family" (Neiman 1978:3124).

The hall was now used also as a reception area for visitors, reflecting a change in how planters treated each other as a neighbor was no longer received into the actual living area. At this time also the chamber of the "manner house" was enlarged, reflecting its increased importance as it took over "some of the old functions of the hall" (Neiman 1978:3124), becoming a private sitting room as well as a sleeping room. "The enlargement of the chamber can be seen as a product of the need to remove family life from the hall" (Neiman 1978:3126). The hall was then reserved for formal, ritualized, and public behavior as the planter no longer felt a sense of community with his social inferiors. As the hall became increasingly public, it was decorated architecturally and with objects specifically designed to impress on the mind of the visitor the social position of the owner (Neiman 1978:3126; data on hall furnishings obtained from probate inventories).

In 1730 Thomas Lee, then owner of the Clifts plantation,

tore down the two-cell "manner house" and erected a new Georgian style brick house that was built at a different site on the plantation. This multiple room house "made possible a more exact correspondence between rooms and activities" (Neiman 1978:3127).

> Thus in the architectural sphere, bricks, symmetrical Georgian elevations, and interior paneling among other things, assumed important roles...Such items identified their owner as a gentleman. For the gentry symbolic forms served to distinguish 'them' from 'us' [and], with the demise of mutually felt duties or reciprocal standards of conduct, objects became essential in ordering and controlling the course of everyday encounters between men of different social status (Neiman 1978:3128).

In this way the pattern of conspicuous consumption, characteristic of the ante-bellum legend, was laid in the eighteenth century formation of the Southern elite.

The Plantation: Documentary and Archaeological Sources

Charles Orser (1984:5) states that "studies of plantation slavery in the Southeast are very important to plantation archaeology because they document the daily lives of people who were seldom written about and who seldom left contemporary records of thier experiences." As was pointed out in Chapter II above, the slaves were the very foundation of the aristocratic society of the ante-bellum South. In order to understand the society as a whole it is important to have information about every level of the society. The following account of archaeological and documentary evidence gives a summary account of the plantation and plantation life.

John Otto (1984:157) gives a definition of the typical antebellum plantation as:

> an agricultural and social unit where there was a sharp separation between the owner, the supervisors, and the workers; where the aim was year-round commercial agriculture; where there was specialization in one or two cash crops; and where the owner was a businessman first and a farmer second. A plantation was also an instrument of force, creating and maintaining a hierarchy of planters, overseers, and slaves. This force was backed by the state slave codes, which allowed the planters to coerce slaves into producing a surplus of not only cash crops but also food crops, livestock, and labor...

As a social unit the plantation exhibited status patterns regarding race, social, and economic standing related to the wider society. Within the microcosm of the plantation there were three distinct sets of individuals. At the top of the hierarchy was the planter family, who owned and managed the plantation, monopolizing the surplus, selling crops on the market, then reinvesting the profit and spending large amounts of money on household necessities, luxuries, and entertaining. A planter, as opposed to a large-landholding farmer, was one who owned more than 20 slaves (Coulter 1960), and usually more than 50. Only five percent of slaveholders owned more than 100 slaves (Flanders 1933:127). The next level down in the social scale on the plantation was that of the overseers (sometimes a manager and common overseer), who were hired supervisors granted the use of a house and servant or two and receiving a few hundred dollars a year out of which they had to provide their own food, clothing, household necessities, and luxuries. A common overseer might earn $200-$400 a year, whereas a

manager might earn between $1000 and $2000 a year. At the bottom of the social scale was the black slave. Slaves were usually agricultural workers, though some were skilled laborers, household servants or slave drivers (considered skilled labor). Slaves received the use of cabins, rations of food and clothing, and occasional gifts. Both the overseer and the slaves had limited access to plantation surplus; and in many cases despite the higher racial and social status of the overseers, their economic status, or poverty, may have been equivalent to that of the slaves (Otto 1984:15).

While a sharp social separation between the different groups on the plantation was maintained, there were annual and multi-annual events which brought them together in a relationship other than master, employee, and slave. These events included the annual Fourth of July barbeque, to which all would go to eat, and to listen to the political speeches and camp meetings or revivals. In the Midway community of Georgia the whites and blacks worshiped together in the same church, though the slaves sat in a special gallery built specifically for them (Myers 1972).

Tidewater plantation production in the lower South (South Carolina and Georgia), consisted mostly of rice. Cotton was predominant in upland production, and in the sea-islands where the production of sea-island cotton became very profitable after the crop's discovery in 1786. The majority of the following description of plantation life and its regimen will be confined to the Southern tidewater area, particularly that of the Georgia coast, although the

description, with modifications, is characteristic of plantation life in other parts of the antebellum South.

The base of the plantation regime was always the threat of coercion, but the tidewater plantations usually worked on a "task system" which had a kind of built-in reward system for the slave. Under the task system each slave was given a task to perform. When the slave finished the task the work was inspected by the overseer or slave driver and, if found satisfactory, the slaves could go on with their own work of gardening, hunting and fishing, sewing, etc. Rice culture was particularly conducive to the task system as there were successive processes in the production which made defining the slave's work more feasible. It was often true that "tidewater slaves enjoyed more daily leisure time than slaves elsewhere in the old South, but during the late spring when cotton had to be hoed at crucial stages, and again during the fall picking time, tidewater slaves had to work longer hours" (Otto 1984:35). Slaves tended to work well and quickly under the task system probably due to the fact that the quicker they got their task done the more time they had for food collecting and other private pursuits. Sea-island plantations tended to be large with large slave-holdings, averaging 67.2 slaves per plantation, with the largest average of "improved" tracts of land (Flanders 1933:79). Tidewater plantations in general tended to be the largest. In Georgia "the most valuable farms, the largest slave-holdings, and the most stock were located [along the coast]; and the value of land and buildings per farm was largest in this part of Georgia" (Flanders 1933:81). The percentage of

blacks to whites was also greatest along the coast.

While the planter was a "businessman first and a farmer second" (Otto 1984:157), "the paucity of plantation account books suggests a lack of effort on the part of planters to operate their establishments upon a business-like basis" (Flanders 1933:209). Planters tended to be in debt to merchants, and their fortunes went up and down with the market prices for their staples. Lack of cultivation of food crops on any wide scale and the persistent agrarianism meant that the South was increasingly dependent on the West and the North for food crops and manufactured goods; but custom and tradition played an important part in keeping the planters shackled to the single crop system and precedent discouraged diversification and more scientific, less wasteful agricultural methods (Flanders 1933:225).

Plantations were intended to be more or less self-sufficient. A well-managed plantation like Joseph Rucker's along the Savannah River in Elbert County, Georgia which comprised 13,245 acres and 224 slaves, was practically self-sufficient. Joseph Rucker's plantation raised stock of all kinds and large crops of corn and wheat. Mills on the plantation converted the grain into cornmeal and flour. There were sawmills that provided the lumber for buildings and a tannery with slave tanners and slave artisans who made harnesses and shoes from the leather. Cotton was ginned and baled on the plantation, and slave women made thread and wove cloth. The plantation also had blacksmiths and wheelwrights. On a plantation such as this often the only things that it was necessary to buy were salt and medicines. In letters to

his daughter, Aaron Burr wrote as a visitor on a plantation on St. Simon's Island, Georgia, in 1804, that the plantation produced along with the cash crops, milk, cream, butter, turkeys, fowls, kids, pigs, geese, mutton, fish, and an assortment of fruit from fruit trees and vines such as figs, peaches, melons, oranges, and pomegranates (Jones 1957:88). Typically, it was necessary for planters to buy wheat, corn, cloth, medicines, and other foodstuffs and luxury items.

A plantation usually was comprised of the planter's house (most commonly an unpretentious and comfortable house and not the manorial mansions of legend and a later day), the overseer's house, several slave cabins (well removed from the "big house"), a gin and cotton house, hospital, shop (blacksmithy and carpentry shop), corn cribs, a stable and other wooden out-houses. Sometimes a schoolhouse (such as the ones built on the Jones family plantations in Liberty County, Georgia), or a chapel was included.

Slaves

The black slave sat at the bottom of the plantation hierarchy and at the bottom of Southern society. Mulattos were considered Negroes, and therefore also at the bottom of the hierarchy, although in the majority of cases house servants were mulatto and as house servants were considered by the whites as better than field hands. It was usually thought that mulattos did not make the best of slaves, as they were most often revengeful, obstinate, and troublesome. Evidence for their undesirability as slaves comes from the numerous runaway slave notices describing the runaway as

"copper-colored" or "tending to be a little yellow."

Among whites, the black slave driver was usually at the top of the labor hierarchy and, as such, was set apart from the other slaves by better clothing, housing, or food in order to enhance their status. The driver was often chosen from among those blacks already well-respected by the slaves themselves, such as African-born slaves, conjurors (or witch-doctors), preachers, and sometimes Muslims. House servants and skilled workers came next to drivers. Skilled workers included cart drivers, nurses, seamstresses, cooks, carpenters, blacksmiths, gardeners, stock-minders, hunters, and fishers. In short, the further from the common body of slaves and the closer to white society, the higher the slave was considered to be in the whites' estimation (Otto 1984).

The slaves had their own hierarchy that was quite different from the white's labor hierarchy and based on their own value systems (Otto 1984:37). At the top of the slaves' social ranking were the conjurors, root doctors, and preachers. Next came the craftspeople, exceptional field hands, and fair (just) drivers. Below these came the temporary house servants who lived in the slave quarters, and the common field hands. At the bottom of the slave social ranking were harsh drivers and permanent house servants (those who lived in the "big house"). Those slaves who were closest to the slaves, to black (African) culture and holding the most responsibility which they exercised fairly were ranked highest among the slaves. Those closest to white society and white values were accorded the lowest status. However, the reward system naturally favored those slaves

most valued by the whites.

Archaeology on the Cannon's Point plantation revealed that slave housing there consisted of one-room cabins with at least one window (rarely glazed) that could be shuttered and locked, and a door that could also be locked. The floors were usually dirt and the cabin had one chimney. They resembled the homes of poor whites in dimensions, building materials, techniques and durability. Cabins ranged from 12 by 12 feet to 18 by 20 feet for one slave family (Otto 1984:43-44). Most tidewater cabins were square clapboard frame cabins, 12 by 12 feet with a thatched-roof recalling, the square 10 by 10 feet thatched-roof houses of West African style, although most planters actively discouraged African-style huts. Wheaton and Garrow (1985) suggest that "archaeological evidence...supports the idea that an architectural shift took place through time in which West African styled mud-walled huts were replaced by more familiar Euro-American style frame buildings" (Wheaton and Garrow 1985:248). They attribute this to acculturation of African blacks into the European culture of the eighteenth and nineteenth century South. Otto's findings of slave quarter dimensions and style are consistent with findings at other sites (Fairbanks 1974; Fairbanks and Mullins-Moore 1980; McFarlane 1975; Singleton 1980). Planters provided the cabins, but the interiors were up to the slaves themselves; as whites rarely if ever entered them, the slaves were allowed to do what they wished with the interior.

The matrilineal and matrifocal emphasis of most coastal blacks (springing from West African and Southwest African

matrifocal tribal influences) was reinforced by the planters, as cabins were assigned to the women, children were listed as belonging to the women, food was rationed weekly to the women, and the condition of the child was inherited through the mother (Otto 1984:44). Women made the clothes, tended the livestock and gardens, and sold garden produce and livestock, pocketing the money. Fathers added to the food supply through hunting and fishing, but they rarely had any other official responsibilities to the cabin (other than perhaps making furniture) or to the slave family.

Archaeological studies at Cannon's Point Plantation on St. Simon's Island, Georgia (Otto 1984), showed that the slaves were allowed firearms for hunting and that their sources for food outside of the rations provided by the planter family (the Coupers) included wild 'possum, squirrel, fish, and other marine flesh, as well as hogs, poultry, and domestic rabbits which the slaves could raise. Food collecting was usually a necessity rather than a luxury for slaves, as the fluctuating market prices that caused fluctuating fortunes among the planters often meant that food rations were not adequate nor dependable (Otto 1984). Food was most commonly prepared in one-pot meals (also reminiscent of West African ties) with hominy, grits, and corn pone as staples. Ferguson's 1978 paper on Colono-Indian pottery carries the question further of West African influence on slave material culture as he studied non-European pottery forms associated with slave sites.

Clothes were plain and often inadequate (and shoes were not always given to the slaves), but slaves often wore beads

and trinkets. Luxury items included clay pipes and tobacco, holiday rations of whiskey (though the slaves usually drank brewed beverages), clocks, toys, glassware, and interestingly, from the remains at the Cannon's Point site, tea sets, suggesting that the slaves also indulged in the "status-enhancing afternoon tea-drinking ritual" (Otto 1984:166) of the whites. (Tea-sets were also found among the overseers' trash middens.) This evidence suggests the emulation of elite behavior by non-elites.

Overseers

"It is the popular fashion in America, and I think elsewhere to abuse these overseers as a class" (Captain Basil Hall quoted in Jones 1957:96). Overseers were often the sons of local planters, trying to make money and gain experience, or men of the large class of landless poor. But the majority of overseers came from the small class of middling coastal and tidewater farmers and small planters. Unless the overseer were the son of a local planter he was usually considered the social inferior of the planter and was certainly economically inferior as well, receiving only $200 to $400 a year or $1000 to $2000 if he were a manager.

The elite among overseers were the head overseers or "general managers" who served as the proxies of absentee planters (Otto 1984:94). As the surrogate planter they sold the cash crops, bought plantation provisions, and supervised the slaves and common overseers. The common overseer was expected to rise early with the slaves, assign their tasks, inspect their work, police their quarters, give out rations,

"physick" the sick, punish errant slaves, and prevent sabotage to plantation property by the slaves. The planter also expected the overseer to be a model of respectable white behavior for the slaves and required that he not fraternize with them and usually that he not entertain white guests. Overseers also had to ask permission from the planter in order to leave the plantation.

Overseers bore the brunt of slave resistance, and slaves were quick to pick up on and exploit any discord between the overseer and the planter. As overseers were often caught between demanding planters and resisting slaves, few had long tenures. The young men seeking money and experience were usually looking for temporary jobs anyway, and many overseers turned to alcohol and drifted from job to job. It was a common complaint among planters that it was difficult to find a reliable and respectable overseer and to keep him for any length of time. Due to the trouble and expense of finding trustworthy employees some planters dispensed with white overseers and used slave overseers and drivers instead.

Most overseers' houses were considered by planter standards to be of "undesirable character," though they were comparable in quality to the houses of small farmers. The Cannon's Point overseer's house in the mid 1850's was comparable to the houses of many small planters, but this particular plantation was considered a "show-case" plantation. The overseer's house usually resembled the planter's house regarding the types and quality of building materials used and the durability of the house as opposed to the poorer quality and limited durability of the slaves'

cabins (Otto 1984).

Out of his small annual income the overseer had to provide his own food, clothing, household utensils, and luxuries. He was usually given a servant or two for housekeeping and cooking. Corn was also the staple of the overseer in the tidewater area; and one-pot meals like the slaves' were common, though material evidence, such as Dutch ovens and flatware found in overseer homes, suggests that they also ate more roasted and separately cooked foods than did the slaves. Like the slaves, overseers had to spend a good deal of time hunting and fishing in order to supplement their diet of salt meats and staples. Also like the slaves, their hunting and fishing range was limited to what could be obtained conveniently on plantation property, unlike the planter family whose slave fishers and hunters had access to a less local and wider range of wild game and marine life. Some overseers also managed to raise a garden and some livestock. As stated earlier, archeological work done on the Cannon's Point plantation uncovered tea sets in the overseer's house trash middens (Otto 1984), although these sets, like the slaves' sets, were often mismatched and outmoded, compared with the matched and fashionable tea-sets used by the planter family. "The overseer's and slaves' [heterogeneous] ceramics may well have reflected a folk-like worldview that was characterized by asymmetry and heterogeneity in material culture. The mixed, outmoded ceramics of the overseers and slaves stood in stark contrast to the planter family's matched sets of fashionable transfer-printed wares that reflected a larger concern for symmetry

and homogeneity in material culture" (Otto 1984:114) as well as higher status.

Because of their modest wages and their limited access to plantation surplus, materially and economically overseers often resembled their slaves charges, although their social status because of race was unquestionably higher. Despite their social superiority over the slaves because of race, overseers remained socially inferior to the planter class, unless, as was mentioned earlier, the overseer happened to be the son of a local planter. It would seem that the closer the interaction with common slaves (as opposed to house servants) the lower one was on the social scale.

Planters

> Habitual seigneurs of large land-holdings, without any strong religious discipline, they were fond of good reading, leisure, hunting and horsemanship (Luraghi 1978:32).

Planters, particularly those who owned more than one plantation and could afford to leave, did not live year-round on their plantation as did the hired overseers who supervised the slaves and policed the plantation. On the sea-islands, which were relatively free of the malaria that plagued inland plantations, planters could live year-round. Mainland planters often left their plantations in the malarial summer months and moved to plantations in more healthful areas, or to elegant town houses. The planter's home on the plantation itself was most typically a comfortable and unpretentious house. The plantation of tradition, "a distorted picture when the actual facts are known, came late in the antebellum

period, and, save in exceptional instances, little resembled the planting establishments of the first forty years of the period" (Flanders 1933:94). Travelers to the South were nearly always surprised at the actual picture of plantation life. The plantation mansions of the deep South--Louisiana, Mississippi, and those areas settled later in the nineteenth century--more typically resembled the romantic image of the aristocratic wealthy plantation with large white collonaded mansions surrounded by moss-dripping trees.

While the majority of slaveholders owned less than 20 slaves, the large planters "dominated the political and social life...Wealth, social distinction, and political influence made firm this position, and the aristocracy enjoyed the deference of their numerous but less fortunate brethren" (Flanders 1933:127). The large number of professional men and merchants in positions of as equal influence as the "landed aristocracy" prevented the exclusive ranking of individuals on the basis of land and slave holdings. However, the ownership of slaves "constituted a badge of honor and membership in a select group" and to many was regarded "as a mark of dignity, a fundamental support of the social order, and not as an instrument for economic advancement" (Flanders 1933:225, 227). Simkins says that in 1850 out of a slave-states' white population of 1.25 million families, 347,000 owned slaves, making it only one quarter of the white population involved in slavery.

> Five sevenths of these slave-holders were but yeoman farmers, since each owned less than 10 slaves. To be of consequence a planter had to be the master of 50 or more slaves; in this class there were less than 8,000 persons. The holders of more than 100 slaves numbered less

> than 1,800. Only eleven persons owned more than 500 or more slaves. The largest slaveholder in the whole South was Nathaniel Heyward of South Carolina. When he died in 1851 he possessed 1,843 slaves (Simkins 1967:133).

In 1860 Georgia had more plantations of over 1000 improved acres than any other state. Only 236 men owned more than 100 slaves each, only one of whom owned more than 500; and twenty-three men over 200 slaves each. Most farms in Georgia were under 100 improved acres and many of those did not employ slave labor (Roller and Twyman 1979:526).

Ownership of the best lands and control of a disproportionate share of the annual regional income was also in the hands of the planter elite. The economics of the plantation agricultural system as a whole was to the advantage of the wealthier planters with larger plantations. In a letter, Henry Benjamin Whipple said, "...I am fully confirmed in the belief that this is no place for the poor man. The tendency of the planting interest is to make the rich man richer and the poor man poorer" (Jones 1957:158-159).

<u>Hospitality</u>

Entertaining was a large part of the planters' way of life and included extended visits by friends and family, as well as elegant dinner parties, barbeques, and picnics. Travel was also a large part of a planter's life-style and made possible in part because of the tradition of extended visiting and the custom of carrying letters of introduction with one from friends, kinspeople, and acquaintances of the

planters whose lands one may have been traveling through. These letters of introduction insured the traveler a comfortable home to stay in and an entertaining visit. While Captain Hall of England was traveling between Charleston and Savannah with his family in 1828, the family stopped at the plantation home of a friend of theirs from Charleston; and even though the owner himself was away, instructions had been left with the house servants and stable boys to take care of their needs and beg them to stay as long as they liked (Jones 1957). "For these elite planters, a lavish lifestyle was actually a form of business expense, designed to impress outsiders, peers and even the southern white and black masses" (Otto 1984:127).

From the diaries and letters of slave-holding women complaining of work or working with the slaves, it is easy to assume that the planter's wife actively did chores on the plantation with the slaves. However, according to Elizabeth Fox-Genovese (1988), the planter's wife rarely did the chores, but rather supervised the slaves' work. Just as a Gentleman directed the hands of others, so did the Lady. Her duties on the plantation often included cutting out and sewing slave clothing, visiting sick slaves, and supervising the housekeeping of the planter's sometimes several homes. The planter's wife planned and supervised the entertaining of the friends, family, and other visitors to the plantation. She would oversee the cutting of the many kinds of meat for roasts, seeing that the choice cuts went to the planter's table and the viscera, heads, necks, backbones, tails, and lower legs went to the slaves. Planters preferred fresh

beef, but ate a wide variety of meats in great quantity, including many kinds of wild game, venison, mutton, birds, chickens, pork, occasionally raccoon, and along the coast, turtles, alligator, and many kinds of fish and marine flesh. The mistress also supervised the cook who used her recipes. Meats were cooked as carefully cut roasted joints. Seafood was usually prepared as chowders, and vegetables were steamed.

The types and kinds of ceramics found in the different middens of the Cannon's Point plantation attest to the different types of food preparation which Otto (1984) attributes to differences in status among the social groups on the plantation. Crader's (1984) zooarchaeological study at Monticello supports Otto's breakdown of food variety and preparation as these are reflected in the faunal remains of the middens associated with the different social classes on the plantation.

In the 1820's the Couper family of Cannon's Point had a renowned cook named Sans Foix.

> As an example of his culinary skills [and a planter's table], in December 1821 Sans Foix cooked the dinner for a meeting of the St. Clair's Club, whose members included the leading planters of St. Simon's Island. The first course consisted of fish, shrimp pies, crab in the shell, roasts, and steamed vegetables -- all of which were served with wines. This was followed by a simple dessert of marmalade tartlets, dried fruits, and nuts. After clearing the dishes, John Couper's slave waiters...served the planters a punch of rum, brandy, sugar, lemon-juice and peel (Otto 1984: 150).

After-dinner luxuries included fine Cuban cigars for the men,

as well as fine wines, books, artworks, memorabilia, engravings, ancient coins, fossil bones, minerals, and other collections. Charles C. Jones, Jr., who was a lawyer and historian, collected skeletons, fossils, and minerals, beginning as a young man (Myers 1972).

The planters' lavish hospitality could only be maintained through the efforts of their household servants and skilled labor. "On Cannon's Point in 1823, there were six full-time house servants as well as five skilled workers and 63 adult field slaves. The household slaves included the cook, Sans Foix, his staff, and the maids...at least one-tenth of John Couper's adult slave-force spent their days caring for the Couper family and their many guests" (Otto 1984:156).

The planters "dressed the part of elite hosts" (Otto 1984:154), wearing the latest fashions and costly fabrics imported from Europe. For travel, which was done for business as well as pleasure, planters had carriages, buggies, and boats. Travel was not limited to the southern states, as many of the elite had ties with wealthy northern and European families. Extended visits were carried out in the manner of English country gentlemen. (Any Jane Austen novel is filled with account of friends and relatives visiting each other for up to several months at a time.)

"The Couper's carriages, plantation boats, clothing, library, dinner parties, and their mansion itself established a pattern of conspicuous consumption that impressed dozens of foreign, northern and local guests" (Otto 1984:155); and although Cannon's Point had a reputation as a showcase

plantation, the "pattern of conspicuous consumption" was typical of the planters' way of life.

Fanny Kemble wrote of the plantation life that it is "a world of compensations--a life of compromises...and one should learn to set one thing against another if one means to thrive and fare well" (Jones 1957:144). Through documentary and archaeological sources a detailed picture can be drawn not only of individuals in a society, but of broader patterns of social structure and behavior. This picture of a segment of the ante-bellum South provides evidence for the truth behind the legend of an aristocratic South.

CONCLUSIONS

The plantations of the Old South reflected in microcosm the status patterns of the ante-bellum Southern society as a whole. The differences in living conditions, food (content, quality, variety, preparation, and consumption), food-collecting equipment, ceramics, luxuries, clothes, and living space all reflect differences in social, racial, and economic status. The planters as a class in the nineteenth century were unquestionably at the top of the social, racial, and economic scales of southern society (and nineteenth century society as a whole) because they were white, and because they controlled the plantation surplus and a larger percentage of the annual income of their region. They therefore had privileged access to all resources--natural, educational, political, and more--to which overseers, small planters and farmers, the landless poor, and blacks (slave and free), had limited or no access.

The elite's control over resources and the quality of their lives in contrast to the lower levels of their society is not only legendary, but confirmed in historical records, the decorative arts, and in archaeological data. While the extent of the image of an aristocratic civilization in the ante-bellum South is exaggerated, archaeological, literary, and historical evidence point to at least a degree of truth to the aristocratic legend. It can not be denied that

politically, economically, and socially the landed elites of the ante-bellum South dictated the tenor of the society. Archaeological evidence confirms historical and literary suggestions, in such findings as tea sets in the middens of the overseers' and slaves' middens, that the lower levels of the society emulated the upper level by imitating higher status behavior in the acquisition of higher status material culture. Changes in architecture reflect changes in social ordering, and in the case of the plantation South, reflect the change from an egalitarian social structure to a hierarchical structure. Archaeological and documentary evidence both illustrate the conscious symbolic use of artifacts and landscape--by individuals and groups--as indicators of status, and in social and ethnic boundary maintenance (Neiman 1978).

By preserving in a material form the thoughts and impressions of actors in social situations, literary sources illustrate how this kind of society operates on a daily basis even if the characters are surrounded by the mythical image of the aristocratic society. These sources allow us a glimpse into the psyche of this kind of a society as its members cope with the inequity and inherent violence of the system by either indulging in flattering panegyerics, or expressing frustrations in the guise of characters getting the better of the system. Literature provides a special kind of historical and cultural context as the social scientist can participate ethnographically in the culture under study. The reader becomes the ethnographer who can then see first-hand "the cultural framework that makes the actions

possible...negotiated and played out in the practice of the lived world" (Hodder 1985:5). "Southern" values can be picked out from the literature and substantiated by references to the history of the period. However, the literature can add to our knowledge of the period under study in ways that straight historical documents can not: by identifying and preserving individual (as well as group) emic responses to past social situations--situations we would otherwise be unable to observe.

> "It is through the acts of individuals that cultural forms find articulation. Man creates himself. The acts of individuals are not determined by a cultural code because the culture is itself constructed in those acts...artifacts and social acts draw their meaning from the roles they play, their use, and in the daily patterns of existence. Each moment is created" (Hodder 1985:4). Non-Durkheimian

The literature of and about the ante-bellum period, as written by actors within the society, is the closest we can get to actually seeing the immediate creation of the society of the Old South, as well as the conscious creation and perpetuation of its mythical image.

The persistence of such a characterization in the face of great changes in the social structure of the South in this century is a product not of stasis, but the active and self-conscious transmission of cultural values and attitudes from one generation to another--social actors creating culture again (see Hodder 1985:4, above). This transmission occurs on many levels. On an individual level, elites control institutions and cultural processes both politically and mechanically, and so maintain a status quo. On an institutional level, such as in churches, schools, and

families, individuals learn their social roles at every stage of life (Fischer 1989:896-897). Society as a whole has its mechanisms that control deviant behavior by force if necessary. And finally, on the broadest level, the superstructure of culture is effected by the interdependence of its various parts which "tend to be mutually reinforcing" (Fisher 1989:896).

In a general sense, literature can be a valuable tool for modern anthropologists and sociologists when they can see and define the values, as well as the consequences of values within a society or culture. The researcher can then more accurately reconstruct past lifeways making plausible, practical suggestions for change and synthesis of old and new values for those societies in the process of disintegration or change.

A multi-disciplinary, or post-processual, approach to a complex historical culture is a must in historical archaeology as the various parts of culture are so varied and interdependent. When studying an historical culture why ignore sources, in the face of so much available material, because they are not considered traditionally historical, or material? If we are to reconstruct past life-ways and elucidate past cultures, we must explore as many different directions as are available. The challenge of historical archaeology is to make sense out of the myriad sources available in complex historical cultures. Archaeology, more than any other discipline, has the advantage of being the vehicle for the application of theory to the study of human beings, out there where it counts, where human beings are

acting, creating social exchanges and culture, material and otherwise. Futhermore, in being aware of knowledge gained through study in other disciplines, the researcher can isolate what needs to be known from what is known, and then proceed with new research objectives (Beaudry 1984). In combining data bases we avoid simplistic and deterministic answers to the explanation of cultural processes and take into account the nature of the human animal to imbue the things around it with meaning.

APPENDICES

Appendix A (The Filmer-Byrd-Beverley-Carter-Culpepper-Berkeley Cousinage) illustrates the complexity of kinship ties among Virginia's colonial elite. "Within three generations most of Virginia's first families were related to Mary Horsmanden Filmer Byrd...[who was also] related to leading families in other southern colonies" (Fischer 1989:220). Mary Horsmanden Filmer Byrd was cousin to Frances Culpepper who married three colonial governors (see genealogy). She was also the cousin of William Penn and Nathaniel Bacon (her second husband's mortal foe).

Appendix B (The Northampton Connection) illustrates another cousinage which is in turn connected with the Filmer-Byrd-etc. cousinage. Fischer (1989:220) proposes that intermarriages between many families on both sides of the Atlantic resulted in "a tightly integrated colonial elite which literally became a single cousinage by the beginning of the eighteenth century." Fischer (1989:220) quotes historian William Cabell Bruce who compared the geneaologies of the eighteenth century ruling Virginia families to "a tangle of fishhooks, so closely interlocked that it is impossible to pick up one without drawing three or four after it."

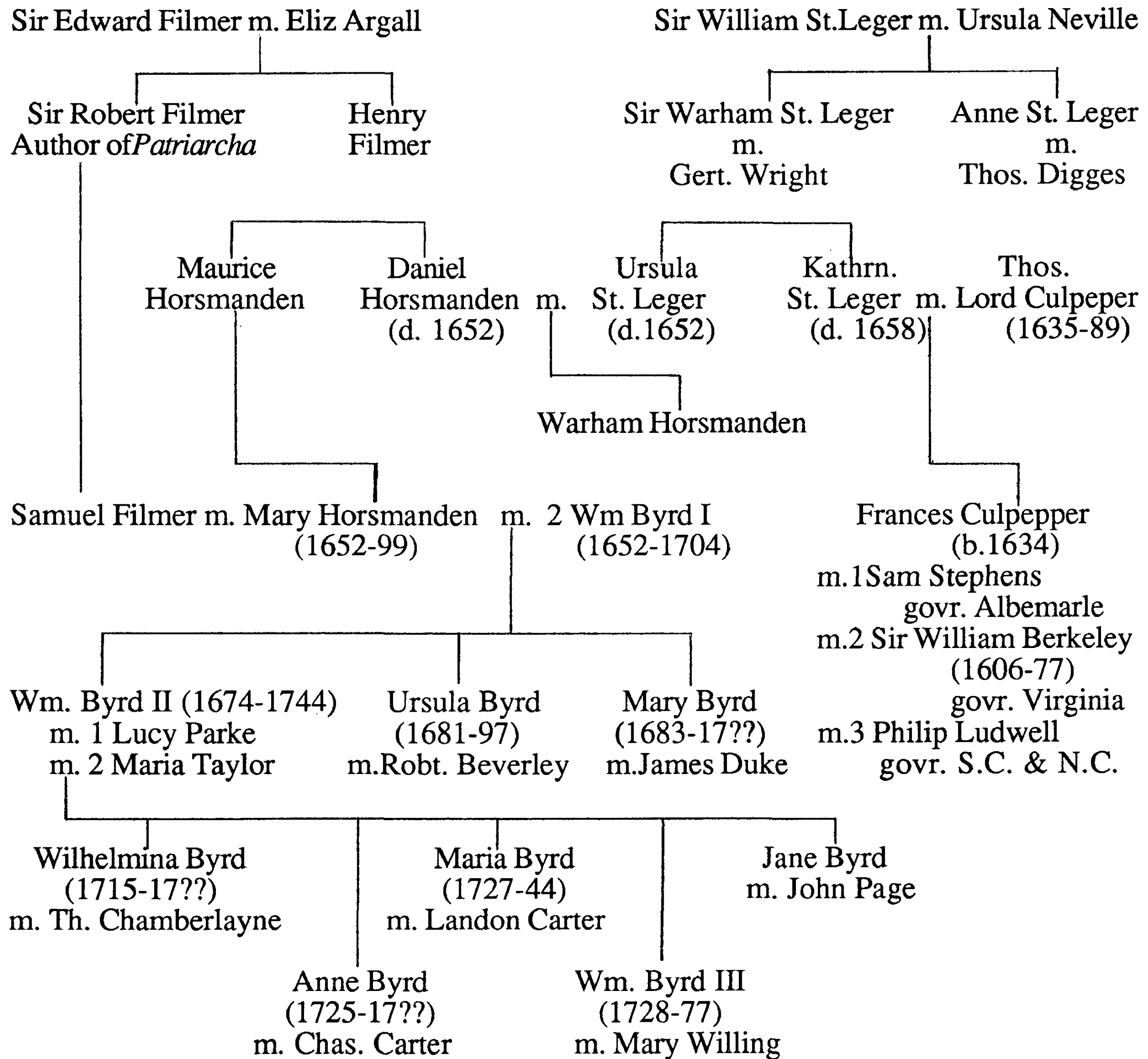
The families of the Northampton connection were closely linked to the Filmer connection as Washingtons married Filmers, Horsmandens, Culpeppers, Berkeleys, and others. Fischer (1989:222) says of the colonial elite, "It is

difficult to think of any ruling elite that has been more closely interrelated since the Ptolemies." He quotes an eighteenth century English emigrant named George Fisher as saying,

> John Randolph...very freely cautioned us against disobliging or offending any person of note in the Colony...for says he, either by blood or marriage, we are almost all related, and so connected in our interests, that whoever of a stranger presumes to offend any one of us will infallibly find an enemy of the whole (Fischer 1989:224).

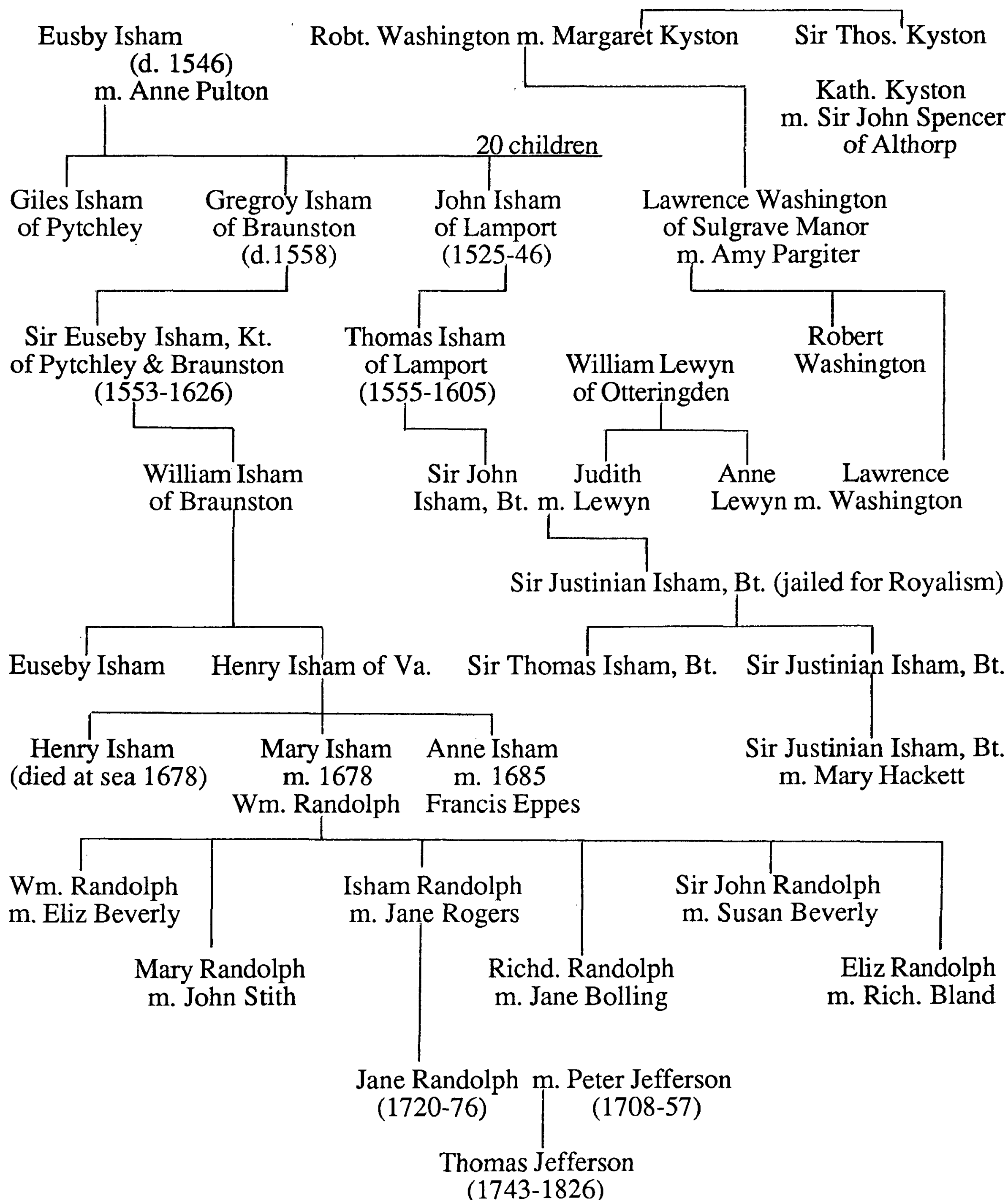
APPENDIX A

Virginia's Royalist Elite
The Filmer-Byrd-Beverly-Carter-Culpepper-Berkeley Cousinage
(Fischer 1989:220-221)



APPENDIX B

The Northampton Connection
The Isham-Washington-Spencer-Randolph-Jefferson-Bland-Beverly-Bolling-Eppes-Hackett Cousinage
(Fischer 1989:220-221)



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