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GATEKEEPERS OF A CHANGING CULTURE: THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

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*"I change, but I cannot die."*¹ Percy Bysshe Shelley

*"Nothing endures but change."*² Heraclitus

Tradition, perhaps revered in South Carolina as in no other state, means that the wheels of change turn slowly. A fervent loyalty to community and an enduring respect for custom fortify the culture of South Carolina, strengthening tradition and slowing change. Foes call its culture intransigent and full of inertia, but friends contend that it buffers the State from radical innovation and transformation.

Nowhere is the tension between tradition and change more evident than in the General Assembly. "Legislative Government,"³ V.O. Key's thumbnail title for South Carolina government in 1949, may no longer be quite accurate, but the institution remains perhaps the most visible and vital gatekeeper of tradition, monitoring the admission of change to a long history and an enduring culture.

During South Carolina's pinnacle of prominence in the American federal system, the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the State earned these distinctions:

- "the intellectual cutting edge of the South,"⁴
- "the center of opposition to the Federal government and even to what became the standard American theory of federalism,"⁵
- "the most extreme expression of southern sectionalism,"⁶ and
- "a quintessential state of its section . . . at one time its inhabitants even thought of it as the quintessential state, especially in the years when it was the intellectual and political leader of the secessionist movement."⁷

After its demise as an intellectual giant among the states, South Carolina acquired a reputation as an economically poor, a politically one-party Democratic, and a racially segregated society. That reputation remained from the Civil War (or War between the States) until the last one-third of the twentieth century. During the zenith of that era, Key minted his famous title.

Change at the Gate

Then new economic, political, and social forces knocked at the gate of tradition. Northern and international businesses and industries found their way to South Carolina's warm climate with its stable and less expensive labor force. Northern retirees also learned about the mild climate with four moderate seasons. The national government imposed changes on South Carolina's political practices. African Americans flexed their new found political muscle to win many local offices. The Republican Party overcame its stigma among southern whites as the party of Lincoln to challenge the entrenched Democratic Party. Nationally, liberalism lost its luster, and conservatism won respect.

As these changes occurred, South Carolina's government changed also. Governors became more energetic and effective in public policy making, legislative membership became more diverse, the Republican Party advanced major policy initiatives in the General Assembly, the state bureaucracy grew, and the General Assembly moved to modernize itself.

South Carolina is no longer what it once was not so long ago. Though apparently now more like mainstream America, its historic culture and heritage continue to stamp an uncommon imprint upon change. The gate of tradition never swings completely open, but it does open to gradual and moderate change. A distinct, albeit different, South Carolina culture now looms on the political horizon.

Regardless of the era—secession, segregation, or modernization—the General Assembly may be found standing at the gate of tradition with its hand firmly gripping the handle. As a gatekeeper of tradition in each era, the General Assembly reveals the evolution of South

Carolina's traditional political culture.

Traditional Political Culture

Seven elements, typically found in a traditional political culture,⁸ reinforce one another to create a society whose regard for tradition confines the contours of change. The elements manifest themselves differently among traditional political cultures, including South Carolina. Thus, while each element applies to South Carolina, its culture is unique.

Direction by an Elite. In a traditional political culture, persons at the peak of the economic, political, and social structure play the primary roles in the decision-making process. Society itself defers to the elite to perform the preeminent decision-making role in government and politics.

Preservation of Order. The elite functions within a hierarchical society wherein preservation of the existing economic, political, and social order have top priority. Both society itself and its political leaders defer to elite leadership to accomplish this primary objective. By helping to control change, government may play an important role in a traditional political culture.

Moderation of Change. Change, when it does come, not only comes gradually, but usually quietly. The power of the elite to manage change and the demeanor of society to accept that change means that it usually occurs without great fanfare and drama. Gradual and quiet, not bold and abrupt, define the nature of change.

Limitation on Popular Participation. By virtue of the role of a cohesive elite, rank-and-file citizens do not participate as extensively in making political and governmental decisions. Indeed, in some instances they may either be discouraged or prevented from participating in politics.

Diminution of Political Competition. In a traditional political culture, a competitive two-party system either does not exist or the elite effectively controls both political parties on major issues of concern to the elite. Additionally interest groups, generally few in number, lack power except as they reflect elite interests. Open competition between

political parties and major interest groups would threaten elite governance by challenging the established orthodoxy with new ideas.

Personalization of Politics. A "friends and neighbors"⁹ atmosphere hovers over the political landscape of a traditional political culture. Personal relationships in the community and society as well as relationships to the elite substantially influence the outcome of political contests and debates. Political leaders, therefore, depend more on family, community, and elite ties than they do on political organizations.

Subordination of Political Leaders. Elected political leaders, receiving signals from society's elite, govern in a custodial or caretaker manner. They are not innovators, but reflectors of the elite's views. The elite's position and prominence enables it to restrict the public policy options available to political leaders and the public.

Opposition to Bureaucracy. Since a large bureaucracy could interfere with traditional political, economic, and social relationships, anti-bureaucratic language dominates a traditional political culture. The growth of bureaucracy would threaten elite rule by creating a power base independent of the elite and of the close personal relationships in society. To the extent that bureaucracies exist in a traditional political culture, they come under the control of the elite.

Historically, South Carolina's unique blend of these elements produced perhaps the most traditional political culture among the United States. Today, however, challenges confront South Carolina, creating change, transforming tradition, and converting culture.

Carolina Culture: Challenge and Change

What distinguishes South Carolina's traditional political culture? What forces limit change and reinforce tradition? Or more particularly, why does the General Assembly only partially open the gate of tradition to the knock of contemporary American democracy?

Federalism: The Challenge of Nationalism

When South Carolinian John C. Calhoun urged upon the south the idea that the federal union is a compact of the states, not a compact of the people, he defined an enduring view of South Carolina's role in American government. Whether with the doctrines of nullification and secession prior to the Civil War (or War between the States) or with twentieth-century resistance to national government policy initiatives, South Carolina lined up on the side of states' rights at the line of scrimmage in the battle between the national government and state governments. The states' rights viewpoint helped Barry Goldwater carry South Carolina in 1964 and every other Republican presidential candidate since then, except for native southerner Jimmy Carter in 1976.

In the public policy arena, the General Assembly funded many efforts from the 1960s to the present to resist national government encroachments upon states' rights. Among those efforts were resistance to integration in the 1960s and opposition to implementation of the Motor Voter Law in the 1990s. In the case of the former, the General Assembly established a special committee, chaired by the late Senator Marion Gressette, a Democrat from rural Calhoun, to fight integration. In the latter, the General Assembly funded a long legal fight to thwart implementation. Motor voter laws, which enable citizens to register when they get their driver's licenses, received strong support from President Bill Clinton, the National Democratic Party, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Beginning particularly with the New Deal of the 1930s and continuing through the Great Society of the 1960s, the national government asserted more control over the states. Few policies remained untouched by the national government. The result forced the General Assembly to react to national government edicts, such as establishing a maximum speed limit of 55 miles per hour in order to retain national government highway funding. The Supreme Court also contributed to the diminution of rural leadership and to the dilution of the traditional legislative power structure. The Court's insistence that legislative districts be based upon population equality, the idea of "one

person, one vote," rather than representation by counties and large multi-member districts, led to gains in legislative representation for urban and suburban areas, African Americans, women and the Republican Party.

When states' rights emerged on the national political scene during the 1980s and 1990s, South Carolina's role in the federal system also changed. President Ronald Reagan and Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Newt Gingrich articulated a conservative view of federalism which appealed to South Carolina. A hostile asymmetrical relationship shifted to a more friendly symmetrical relationship. Devolution of national power to the states to administer such programs as Medicare, Medicaid, and welfare, greatly appealed to South Carolina. That fact, not lost on South Carolina's Republicans, influenced the development of The Palmetto Pledge, their counterpart to Newt Gingrich's Contract with America. The centerfold of the Pledge, which included property tax reform, truth in sentencing, term limitations, and welfare reform, reflected the philosophy of Contract with America. The Pledge calls upon the government to:

invest more power in the people of the state. It is an agenda that will emphasize personal responsibility and accountability. It will reinvigorate the power of individual initiatives. It will free our business community to expand and grow as never before. It looks back to the source of all power—the people.¹⁰

Three forces combined to create more symmetry between South Carolina and the nation: (1) the declining influence of liberal Democratic public policies; (2) the ascension of conservative Republican policy initiatives, and (3) the steady growth of the Republican Party in South Carolina from the 1960s through the 1990s. Thus, as states' rights began to tug more successfully against the nationalists in federalism's giant tug-of-war, the General Assembly became more sympathetic to federalism's emerging trends.

Ironically, however, South Carolina significantly benefited from grant programs enacted under liberal Democratic Presidents and Congresses. Helping rural and poor states served as an underlying

purpose of grant programs during the New Deal, Fair Deal, New Frontier, and Great Society. For each tax dollar flowing from South Carolina to Washington, the State received more than one dollar in return. Wealthier northern states, therefore, lost in the exchange of tax dollars while southern states gained. That led to a continuing fight in Congress between the so-called Frost Belt and Sun Belt of which South Carolina is a part. The South's strength in Congress through seniority and one-party Democratic districts contributed to the perpetuation of its policy advantage. The rise of the Republican Party and two-party competition, however, reduced that advantage and helped to refocus the debate on federalism.

States' rights is to the South Carolina political universe what the sun is to the physical universe: the most fixed and visible reference point around which almost everything else revolves. States' rights, the piece de resistance in South Carolina politics, defines the State's role in the federal system and prescribes boundary lines for public policies pursued by the General Assembly. Within state government itself, the General Assembly historically served as the centerfold or catalytic center of power.

Constitutionalism: The Challenge of Democracy and Government Modernization

Among the 50 states are several types of constitutions, but according to Daniel Elazar, none less democratic than South Carolina:

. . . it has consistently had much less democracy built in, even as it has moved to become more democratic as the country has changed. The state constitution was designed to preserve control by the state's locally based oligarchies, and it did not shy away from providing for state intervention into the economy for development purposes on behalf of those oligarchies. Following the southern pattern, it went through the many changes of the Civil War period, from union to secession to reunion to reconstruction to Bourbon restoration within

the space of a generation. While in the twentieth century South Carolina became increasingly democratic, it managed to find ways to retain as much of its old oligarchic ways as it could, given the spirit of the times and the decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court.¹¹

Perhaps no more emphatic support for Elazar's conclusion could be cited than the procedure for amending the State Constitution. The General Assembly must not only propose, but also ratify. In between, the people vote on amendments, but their votes are not conclusive and final.

Democratic ideas popular in many other states, such as the initiative, referendum and recall, remain *persona non grata* in South Carolina. Variations of these ideas in other states allow the people either to circumvent or to check their legislatures. For example, the people may initiate by petition either statutory laws or amendments to the Constitution; they may vote conclusively and finally by referendum on proposals submitted by the legislature; and they may recall or remove elected leaders from office, including legislators, by petition and popular vote. Occasionally members of South Carolina's General Assembly propose a referendum on an acutely divisive subject, suggesting that a few cracks may possibly exist in the wall of opposition to direct popular participation. Compared to many other states, however, direct democracy still has a long climb to the top of the mountain in South Carolina.

The Constitution establishes a governmental structure which empowers the General Assembly 1) to elect judges to the courts, including the Supreme Court, and 2) to limit the governor's control over the state budget through legislative seats on the very powerful State Budget and Control Board. These legislative powers conflict with the accepted American idea of separation of powers by unduly strengthening the General Assembly in relationships with the executive and judicial branches.

Typically other states choose their judges by popular election or by gubernatorial nomination and legislative confirmation. Increasing controversies about the raw politics of judicial selection in the General Assembly could become like pouring gasoline on a smoldering fire of

popular concern. Already some suggest that opening the closed legislative system of judicial selection to popular participation would be like a fresh democratic breeze blowing away the choking smoke of politics as usual.

The way it works is that a joint committee of state senators and representatives is assigned the task of screening all judicial candidates, incumbents and newcomers, to alert their colleagues before a floor vote on whether or not the candidates meet accepted criteria of legal skill, scholarship and temperament.

This screening is a necessary part of judicial selection in South Carolina because the state now has more than 100 trial and appellate judgeships, far more than members can keep up with, and the judiciary's own leadership has proved incapable or in different to policing misconduct on the bench. Screening judicial candidates for re-election and for vacancies is the next best oversight.¹²

It is not imaginable that the Legislature will give up control over the initial election of judges. It could take a different view, though, on holding judges accountable once they've served a term on the bench and demonstrated their competency and character. Just one alternative used in other states, popular retention, could be much preferred to judges periodically returning for legislative re-election.¹³

Regarding gubernatorial leadership, a great gulf divides traditionally accepted constitutional theory from political reality in South Carolina. Intrusion of the General Assembly into the budget process, for example, maligns the idea of an executive budget. Most governors possess significantly more budgetary power than South Carolina's governor. Such constitutional fetters and shackles divide and diffuse executive power in ways generally unknown and

unrecognizable to the public, making it difficult for the public to hold the governor properly accountable.

The Year 1978 marked the start of a new era, the modern governorship. Beginning then with the election of Governor Richard Riley, who served two terms, and continuing through Carroll Campbell, who also served for two terms, and now David Beasley, governors assumed a more innovative and reform-minded role. Riley fought for education reform, Campbell for administrative and structural reform of the executive branch, and Beasley for several initiatives, including welfare and criminal justice reform. Prior to Riley, governors could not succeed themselves; hence, they lacked continuity in office to assert leadership over the General Assembly and the bureaucracy. During Riley's first term, South Carolina approved a constitutional amendment to allow governors to serve no more than two terms. The magnitude of the transfer of power from the General Assembly to the governor remains to be seen. But at this early juncture, the governor now plays a potentially more catalytic role in policy initiation than the General Assembly. Following Governor Beasley's 1996 State of the State address, *The Greenville News* put its finger on the pulse of this change.

Gov. Beasley's annual State of the State address was doubly impressive for the dynamic use he made of its contents. It was perhaps the most persuasive and appealing of these ceremonial statements made during contemporary times. . . .¹⁴

If lawmakers do their job as well as Gov. Beasley performed Wednesday night, they will subject his recommendations to searching review in good faith. He made an exceptional appeal for their support, and he deserves it in the absence of more compelling argument.¹⁵

The governor could become the primary initiator of public policy, and the General Assembly, the reactor: the pattern in the nation's capital since the New Deal (until quite recently) and in most

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state capitals. Obviously the governor as one person can be more easily seen and understood by the populace than the two-headed General Assembly with its labyrinth of committees, subcommittees, various leaders, and other elements. As the people look for faster action on critical issues, they may be inclined to identify more with the governor than with the General Assembly. Despite constitutional restraints, a popular governor with a partisan majority in the General Assembly will be able to wield even greater influence over public policy.

Carroll Campbell's executive branch reforms now enable governors to assert more control over the bureaucracy. Prior to his reforms, most departments and agencies answered to boards and commissions, which the Governor only indirectly controlled and through which the General Assembly preserved its hidden-hand influence by legislative representation. Campbell's efforts to modernize, however, did not touch some major departments and agencies, such as the Department of Transportation, and the ten statewide elected officials. Although considered to be the chief executive of South Carolina, the governor cannot be held accountable by the people for a large part of executive branch action. Public education policy, for example, remains in the hands of a separate statewide elected official. A governor may advocate new policy initiatives in this and other areas, but his position as chief executive sorely limits his ability. The General Assembly resists efforts to improve the accountability of the executive branch to the public.

Often as government becomes more aggressive and reform oriented, a larger government or bureaucracy must be established to perform the additional roles prescribed. Thus, to the extent that the General Assembly supports new policy initiatives, it may need to transfer power from itself to a bureaucracy needed to implement those policy changes. To illustrate, as late as the 1970s, the General Assembly dominated funding of the State system of higher education. But with the General Assembly's creation of the Commission on Higher Education, bureaucratic resolution of education issues became more important than the "hands-on" legislative approach under the leadership of Senate President Pro Tempore Edgar Brown and House Speaker Sol Blatt. As powerful trustees for Clemson University and the University

of South Carolina, respectively, they personally and successfully fought for their interests in the General Assembly.

Following a national pattern, the General Assembly began to improve its legislative operations in many ways during the 1970s and 1980s.

- Construction of the Sol Blatt and Marion Gressette Buildings for Representatives and Senators, respectively, created an enhanced aura of respectability for legislative service.
- Both the House and Senate established professional staff positions for research and created new staff positions to serve key committees. Prior to this, legislators and committees depended much more on the Legislative Council, created in 1949, to provide for research, reference, and bill-drafting assistance.
- To satisfy a variety of data processing needs, administratively, legislatively, and analytically, the General Assembly instituted the Legislative Information System in 1974.
- The Legislative Audit Council, also established in 1974, improved the General Assembly's ability to investigate the performance of state departments, agencies, and institutions.

The traditional General Assembly centralized authority under the strong leadership of its formal and informal leaders, who dominated not only the General Assembly, but also state and local government. In those days, county legislative delegations controlled local government. But judicially imposed legislative redistricting reduced the importance of county boundary lines, and the rise of home rule for local government in the 1970s eclipsed the General Assembly's direct authority over the counties.

After some 20 years of home rule, forces in the General Assembly now want to clip the wings of local government's taxing authority. Beth Padgett, deputy editorial page editor of *The Greenville News*, argues that this would be a denial of democracy. In this intense

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battle, a lingering political culture confronts an emerging political culture.

What these state lawmakers are pushing, with the heavy backing of a bunch of tax protest groups, are restrictions that would limit the ability of local governments to take care of needs in their communities. Legislation under consideration would prevent local governments from levying taxes beyond the property tax and local-option sales tax. This is only the beginning, though.

More extreme measures call for requiring direct voter approval on tax increases greater than the inflation rate, while super-majority votes would be required for smaller tax increases. Only the rhetoric of some lawmakers exceeds the harshness of these measures:

'They call it home rule,' Sen. Glenn McConnell, R-Charleston, told one newspaper. 'But it's almost a home-picking fest for them in terms of taxes on the taxpayers.'

'Right now they can have an income tax, a sales tax, any kind of tax,' Sen. John Land, D-Manning, told The Associated Press. 'We need to put some balance back on that.'

. . . Legislators eager to impose restrictions on local officials back home are guilty of the same type of arrogance that pervades Washington, where for years it's been assumed the best solutions can come from those farthest removed from the situation. It's odd to see legislators in Columbia adopting this paternalistic view of government.¹⁶

Modernization of the General Assembly could restore some of its power, but of a different type: improving oversight of the executive

branch and enhancing the service of constituent needs. Side effects of modernization, however, may be increased competition between and among members and committees which can now act more independently of the General Assembly's elected leadership. Thus, this devolution of power may necessitate strong partisan and gubernatorial leadership to offset potential internal legislative conflict.

Devolution of power in the General Assembly, however, did not inhibit Republican House Speaker David Wilkins from forging a successful first legislative session under his party's control. As pointed out by the Columbia State, "Democrats agree the GOP House delivered on its 'Palmetto Promise.'"¹⁷ Speaking of the role of a strong party in this endeavor, Speaker Wilkins said: "There's no question in my mind that the Republican majority in the House has caused us to pass major legislation that otherwise has not been passed."¹⁸

On some issues, the General Assembly finds itself in a strait betwixt two. Extending the length of legislative sessions allows it to be more responsive to the people by performing more oversight of the bureaucracy. On the other hand, extended sessions increase legislative costs and create greater potential for full-time legislators. Some otherwise outstanding candidates for the General Assembly may choose not to run if the membership in the General Assembly becomes more of a full-time occupation. Increased tenure due to diminution in competition for legislative offices would reduce the flow of fresh blood and new ideas into the legislative system. Wise use of the already enlarged legislative staff and retention of a part-time legislative role may enable the General Assembly to accomplish both objectives: 1) full and proper representation of the people, especially to insure bureaucratic compliance with the will of the people, and 2) retention of part-time legislators to encourage more competition for seats in the General Assembly.

South Carolina's Constitution, considered the most undemocratic in the nation, curtails the power of the people to influence public policy, creates perhaps the strongest legislative branch in the nation, and dilutes the accountability of the executive branch to the people. Efforts to make South Carolina government more democratic and modern include home rule for local government, a strengthened role for the governor as the chief executive, and enhanced support facilities and

staff for the General Assembly. Modern governors, on their own, used their informal powers to persuade the General Assembly to support bold and innovative public policies, including a partially restructured and somewhat streamlined executive branch. Major issues awaiting resolution include: 1) reform of the judicial selection process, 2) correction of the budgetary process to allow a genuinely executive budget, and 3) reorganization of the executive branch to improve even more the chief executive's ability to properly administer and manage the bureaucracy and to enhance the capability of the public to hold a governor rightfully accountable. The General Assembly must wrestle with such internal issues as full-time versus part-time legislators and whether power should be centralized in the hands of the General Assembly's leaders or dispersed among committees and subcommittees.

Elitism: The Challenge of Competition

In South Carolina, elitism cannot be separated from tradition and progress. Certainly South Carolina's constitutional history demonstrates that.

From the earliest years of its settlement it was built around the maintenance of traditional patterns of rule and institutions to support them. Its oligarchy (i.e., elites) not only used subtle means to discourage ordinary people from voting but included the most stringent franchise restrictions possible. It not only developed informal ways to manage incipient democratic trends but institutionalized limits on democratic participation in decision making. Moreover, it is hard to read the more recent changes in South Carolinian civil society as being other than traditionalistic accommodation. While the state is certainly more progressive than it has ever been, its progressivism is also within the traditionalistic frame and does not require its exponents to step outside of that frame.¹⁹

Elitism and progress are not antithetical in South Carolina. During the 1960s and 1970s the State's elite urged upon the General Assembly the development of vocational-technical education and educational television, and the creation of special tax incentives to help lure northern and international business and industry. These programs and policies achieved both national recognition and success as they also helped strengthen the state's economic development and job creation. With strong support from the elite during his administration, Governor Richard W. Riley (1979-86) worked with the General Assembly to establish a financial package to improve the public schools. Once again, this program, the Education Improvement Act, gained favorable national recognition.

The historically dominant elite must now share power with emerging elites. South Carolina's economy, long dominated by the powerful textile industry, reveals an evolution from a cohesive elite to competing elites. For example, between 1990 and 1994, according to the State Ports Authority, international trade increased its impact on the State by 40 percent, reaching \$11.4 billion in 1994. International trade now accounts for 78,000 jobs in South Carolina, not including most of the job creation from the new BMW facility opened in late 1994 in Greenville-Spartanburg.²⁰

Change, which comes slowly in South Carolina, often reflects the preferences of elite leaders; however, conflict may emerge between cultural tradition and elite economic interests. For example, should the Confederate flag fly over the State Capitol? When the integration movement gained momentum during the early 1960s, the General Assembly voted to fly the Confederate flag over the State's center of government. Whites generally support this tradition while African Americans oppose it, creating an incendiary racial issue in state politics. According to a *Charleston Post and Courier* survey,²¹ members of the predominantly white General Assembly strongly support cultural tradition:

- 87 percent oppose legislation to remove the Confederate flag from the Capital, and
- 82 percent believe the public should not vote on removal of the Confederate flag.

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Supporters argue that the Flag appropriately represents an honorable southern heritage while opponents contend that it unnecessarily polarizes the State along racial lines. Beneath the surface, the Flag issue may pit an enduring cultural tradition against an emerging economy. Should flying the Confederate flag over the State House restrain the State's ability to attract new industry, then economic elites will likely try to sound the death-knell for that tradition begun in the 1960s. Will then an emerging political culture bow to an enduring political culture?

Pluralism also challenges elitism. A more complex and diverse South Carolina produces more competing interests, making it more difficult for an elite to control contests over issues in the public policy arena. For example, should the General Assembly either limit or reduce taxes and taxing authority for local governments and school districts? Many new interest groups argue "yes." The State Chamber of Commerce contends "no."²² Taxpayer groups want to limit the tax burden on citizens. The State Chamber wants good public schools to enable South Carolina to compete successfully against other states for new business and industry. Public schools now face increased competition from private, religious, parochial, and home schools. Expectedly, these schools organized their own interest groups, often placing them in conflict with the South Carolina Education Association and other groups supporting public schools.

Tenure, highly valued in the South Carolina tradition, reveals itself in the reelection of public officials. To illustrate, South Carolina's United States Senators, Strom Thurmond and Fritz Hollings, have served longer than the Senators from any other state. Not only that, they also reflect the historic line of succession in South Carolina politics: election to the General Assembly, then to the Governorship, and finally to the U.S. Senate. In part due to the support of the State's elite, notably the textile industry, neither U.S. Senator faced a serious challenge to reelection after first winning office.

Members of the General Assembly also hold long records of service. For example, upon his death in 1995, Senate President Pro Tempore Marshall B. Williams (House, 1947-52; Senate, 1953-95) held the national record for continuous legislative service. Williams' record portrays a statistical picture: average tenure among members of the

General Assembly gradually and significantly increased over the past 30 years.²³ Since South Carolina only recently left the ranks of one-party Democratic dominance, more time must pass before determining if a competitive two-party system will reduce legislative tenure.

This respect for tenure in office raises interesting questions. The term limits proposal in the Republican Party's Palmetto Pledge conflicts with South Carolina's historic reverence for tenure. Of course, making members of the General Assembly more responsive to the people undergirds the idea of term limits. However, term limits would also deny the democratic right of the people to choose the person they deem best qualified to represent them. While term limits swept to victory in approximately 25 states during the early 1990s and passed the South Carolina House of Representatives in 1995, the Senate failed to act on it.

Not only is tenure valued in the General Assembly, but membership there serves as a launching pad to political success. Whether with Thurmond and Hollings or with state judges, membership in the General Assembly prominently features itself in the backgrounds of South Carolina's political leadership. Significantly all five members of the South Carolina Supreme Court served in the General Assembly. No surprise here: most judges bear that common mark.

Threats to this traditional launching pad surfaced in 1974 when the position of Lieutenant Governor slipped off the rung on the ladder of succession to the governorship. A legislative outsider, Charles "Pug" Ravenel, brandished large amounts of money in a sharply honed television campaign to win the Democratic gubernatorial nomination over the then Lieutenant Governor Earle Morris and former legislator and longtime member of the U.S. House of Representatives Williams Jennings Bryan Dorn. Ironically Ravenel lost the nomination in a court battle, because he failed to meet the State Constitutional residency requirement for the Office of Governor: five years immediately before assuming office, an unusually long residency requirement among State Constitutions. This campaign appeared to signal at least the beginning of the end of "friends and neighbors" politics. Television and money began to dominate campaigning more and more. In 1994, political outsider Bob Peeler became the first non-legislator to win the Office of

Lieutenant Governor. Like "Pug" Ravenel, he used his own business and personal fortune to win the Republican nomination and the general election.

Many challenges now test elitism in South Carolina. First, the historically dominant elite, led by the textile industry, must now share power with emerging elites. Competing elites displaced a cohesive elite. Second, the elite's economic interests may clash with an enduring culture. Third, the increasing number and types of interest groups, reflective of a more diverse society, impede elite governance. Pluralism, therefore, poses a challenge to elitism. Fourth, the elite's ability to work with entrenched incumbents faces challenges. Term limits would reduce tenure. Less respect for the traditional ladder of political succession enables outsiders to contest entrenched political leaders for higher office. The decline of "friends and neighbors" campaigning removes one of the bridges the elite had to influencing the political process.

Ruralism: The Challenge of Urbanization and Diversification

Barons of the Barnwell Ring typify the historic respect paid to legislative service. Rural Barnwell produced the two most powerful members of the General Assembly over several decades. Senator Edgar Brown, President Pro Tempore of the Senate (1942-72), exerted great influence over all of state government through membership on such additional bodies as the State Budget and Control Board and the Clemson University Board of Trustees. Representative Sol Blatt, Speaker of the House of Representatives (1935-45, 1951-73), similarly served on the State Budget and Control Board and the University of South Carolina Board of Trustees. Rural influences fought to retain their legislative dominance by resisting single-member legislative districts and the doctrine of "one person, one vote" in the drawing of district boundary lines.

The dynamics of population growth and distribution forever altered the legislative power of rural South Carolina.²⁴ An 11.7 percent population increase, primarily in urban and suburban areas between 1980 and 1990, ranked South Carolina 18th among the United

States. Stunning increases occurred in suburban areas: 29.56 percent in Simpsonville, 87.89 percent in Summerville, 26.12 percent in Myrtle Beach, and 110.82 percent on Hilton Head. Interestingly, these data parallel the Republican Party's most significant growth areas.

Such counties as Beaufort, Berkeley, Dorchester, and Horry grew by more than 30 percent. By contrast, eight counties lost population and 12 grew by less than five percent. Each of these 20 counties possesses common characteristics—agricultural, rural, small-town, and a higher than average concentration of African Americans—and they also typify the backbone of rural dominance of the General Assembly, which was white and male. In 1971, only two women served in the House of Representatives, none in the Senate; today, those respective numbers are eighteen and three.²⁵ Significantly, however, women do not occupy any of the General Assembly's most visible leadership positions.

Predictably, legislators are now better educated; surprisingly, fewer are lawyers;²⁶ understandably, smaller single member districts produce legislators more representative of racial, sexual, and partisan interests. Better educated legislators, more representative of the state's population and group interests, should lead to more competent legislative involvement on more issues. In a word, these changes should make the General Assembly more democratic.

Ironically, however, there is a price tag on the head of progress. Single member districts increase representation of diverse interests, but decrease competition for office. Less populated single member districts with fewer competing interests enable legislators to respond more effectively to district interests, thereby reducing the threat of competition. The small number of independents in the General Assembly, five, may owe their election to smaller single member districts, which do not require as much time, effort, money, and party support to campaign successfully.²⁷

Some evidence suggests that better educated, more representative legislators from smaller districts will not necessarily focus more on major public policy issues. The *Columbia State* found that:

- 24 percent of legislators believe constituent service and district funding are their most important functions;

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- 38 percent think that constituent service and setting public policy are equally important; and
- 37 percent regard the determination of public policy as their most important function.²⁸

Should legislators represent the statewide public interest or local district interests? To the extent that members of the General Assembly represent only local district interests, resolution of broader statewide issues may be more difficult to achieve. In producing a legislature more representative of South Carolina's population, single member districts may also have the side-effect of reducing representation of the statewide public interest.

How does the new South Carolina compare with the old in voter registration? The emerging South Carolina—generally white, emigrants from the north and overseas, highly educated, older, and more affluent—demonstrates a higher degree of political activity as measured by voter registration. Between 1982 and 1993, African American registration declined by 52 persons while white registration increased by 163,890. Between 1988 and 1992, statewide voter registration increased from 51 percent to 57 percent. The ratio of white to African American voters is now slightly greater than three to one. The more rapidly growing areas of South Carolina account for most of the increases in voter registration.²⁹

What all of this portends is further erosion of rural interests in public policy making. First, rural areas lost their political clout as the urban population grew and as the courts' mandated single member districts. Second, rising Republican strength, concentrated in the urban areas, reflects different interests than the declining rural areas. Third, legislators under single member districts may be less likely to represent the larger statewide interest on issues, devoting more attention to the narrow interests of their own districts. Fourth, rural areas do not demonstrate an increasing level of political participation as the urban areas do. Fifth, African Americans, concentrated in the rural areas, possess less legislative influence by virtue of their dominant location.

Racism: The Challenge of Changing Colors

In his 1948 book, *Southern Politics*, V.O. Key titled his chapter on South Carolina "The Politics of Race."³⁰ Significantly, in 1948 then Governor of South Carolina Strom Thurmond, a product of the General Assembly, led the walkout at the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia to found the Dixiecrat or States' Rights Party. While ostensibly done in the name of states' rights, that effort without race as an issue would have flown about as well as a balloon without helium.

Race no longer overtly dominates South Carolina politics, but covertly its presence remains just below the surface. During the 1990s African Americans and Republicans, following a two-decade old flirtation at cooperation on legislative redistricting, combined to create more legislative districts for both groups. Legislative redistricting served as a two-edged sword, compressing African Americans into districts dominated by them, thereby allowing whites to dominate in more districts. The result enlarged the African American minority in the legislature and also led to the creation of a Republican majority in the lower house after 1994. White flight into the Republican Party and race based redistricting redefined the rule of race: white Democrats cannot win state legislative elections without a substantial African American population in their districts.

Race based redistricting presents three odd twists of fate. First, white Democrats, who favored race based districting, found that it undermined their political strength. Conservative Republicans, who opposed it, discovered that it strengthened their numbers. White and African American Democrats, therefore, have different interests in this issue. To the degree that the U.S. Supreme Court allows for race based redistricting, African Americans and Republicans may paradoxically continue to make common cause.³¹

Second, today's General Assembly contains 30 African Americans, 24 in the House of Representatives and six in the Senate.³² In 1971 there were only three, all in the House.³³ Numerically, therefore, African Americans strengthened their position in the General Assembly, but since they belong to the Democratic Party, the new Republican majority in the House of Representatives signaled not only

the decline of Democratic Party dominance, but also a devaluation of African American influence.

Third, does race-based redistricting actually increase African American influence? Concentration of African Americans into fewer districts to elect more of them to office may actually dilute their legislative influence. As the argument goes, better to have African Americans serve as a significant voice in more districts than to confine their voice to a few districts controlled by them. White legislators who depend on African American votes to win office may just as forcefully represent their interests as persons of their own color.

The eras of secession and segregation may be past, but the politics of color remain in the era of modernization. Racism presented itself as a black and white issue before. People were either for it or against it. Irony and subtlety, however, now color racism in South Carolina. Today, in the era of modernization, not even African Americans agree on what best serves their interests.

Regionalism: The Challenge of the Rising South

"The south will rise again." While the South may not have risen again in the way those who shouted that slogan would like, it has risen. And South Carolina benefits from that rise.

No region of the nation can lay claim to a more cohesive lifestyle and culture. To illustrate, college curricula around the nation, but particularly in the South, include scores of courses on southern literature, southern history, and southern politics. No other region even remotely approaches southern regional identity. This regional identity, of course, reinforces South Carolina's position within the American political and economic universe.

Functioning within the southern region of the United States, South Carolina functions politically, economically, and socially as a part of the Sun Belt: the Old South and the border south, including such states as Florida and Texas. These states possess much in common besides a southern heritage. Politically and economically the Sun Belt competes with the Frost Belt, namely northern industrialized states, and other regions of the nation for business and industry as well

as for a share of federal grants. For example, economically, the Sun Belt vies effectively through tax incentives and other policies to lure business and industry from the north and also from overseas. Also the Sun Belt now dominates the Electoral College with the largest single block of Electoral votes, 149, for election of President of the United States. The nearest region, the Midwest, has 129 Electoral votes. In the U.S. House of Representatives, the Republican leadership speaks with a southern accent: the top three elected leaders and many others come from the Sun Belt. Just as South Carolina once benefited from its regional identity during the hey-day of one-party Democratic rule, it now benefits from a competitive two-party system which finds southern Republicans in the vanguard of national Republican leadership.

While South Carolina once fought against nationalism as part of the Old South, it now represents and sometimes helps to lead national organizations and movements. Both Governor Richard W. Riley and Carroll Campbell assumed national leadership positions in their respective political parties as well as in other ways, Riley as U.S. Secretary of Education and Campbell as Chairman of the National Governors' Conference. South Carolina remains distinctly tied to states' rights, but as the national debate over federalism favors states' rights more, the State benefits from increased national prominence.

South Carolina not only mirrors the rising south, in some ways it leads. To wit, no southern Republican Party can claim more success. Republicans command a majority in the House, a challenging minority in the Senate, and all but one statewide elected office. Republican Governor Carroll Campbell, etched into the cement of history for his role in developing of the modern governorship, did something equally as important: he laid the foundation of the modern Republican Party. The two fit as snugly as hand in glove. Campbell used the Office of Governor to recruit Republican candidates for the General Assembly, and he used the enlarged Republican minority in the General Assembly to assert his leadership over state government, including the modernization of the executive branch.

With regard to regionalism then, South Carolina benefits from the rising tide of the south in the nation. No longer economically, politically, and socially isolated from the nation, South Carolina now assumes a more important role in national affairs. The General

Assembly, reflective of these changes, now has a more balanced and less asymmetrical relationship to the rest of the nation. As an institution, the General Assembly may be able to produce more leaders on the regional and national scene, such as two former legislators, Riley and Campbell.

Calibrating Carolina's Culture

Has a new political culture emerged in South Carolina? Joining that issue here would be presumptuous and premature. Only indicative and suggestive, not conclusive and definitive, evidence exists on either side. Greater promise may be found in calibrating our understanding of a changing political culture.

Closed to Open Politics. In recent decades, South Carolina's traditional political culture gradually became more democratic. Although not as open as it may become, still by the standards of the past, its political culture is now remarkably open. Participation of African Americans in large numbers, of course, demonstrates this change better than any other example. The General Assembly, standing at the gate of tradition, limited access to change. However, as external and internal pressures forced changes on the General Assembly, more change came through the gate.

Cohesive to Competitive Elite. Although the elite remain strong in South Carolina's political culture, they function now as a competitive rather than a cohesive elite. Where the textile industry dominated much of South Carolina's political and economic landscape, today new and very different industries from the north and overseas share elite power with the older cohesive elite. The General Assembly, rather than receiving signals from a cohesive elite, now balances competing elite interests.

Fusion to Diffusion of Power. In the old days, power rested in the hands of a few. For example, in the General Assembly, a few dominant leaders controlled not only the legislative process, but also much of the political system of South Carolina. The rise of several new structures and movements reduced the centralized power of the legislative leadership: the two-party system, the modern governorship, a much stronger bureaucracy, and more interest group competition.

Simplicity to Complexity and Subtlety. "Friends and neighbors" campaigning, though still found, occupies a much less prominent role. Sophisticated political campaigns from local to national races, beginning especially in the 1970s, altered the dynamics of politics. But campaigning is not the only example of a more complex political culture. The General Assembly itself, after undergoing some two decades of modernization, evolved into a much more complex body than when a handful of powerful men controlled the process. Racial issues no longer present themselves in a cold, stark manner, but they remain nonetheless in more subtle forms, such as on legislative redistricting.

Asymmetrical to Symmetrical. States' rights, an indelible tattoo on the arm of South Carolina's participation in the American federal system, led to its alienation from much of the rest of the country from the mid-1800s until very recently. Now, however, with the rising star of conservatism and states' rights on the national scene, South Carolina finds itself in a more symmetrical relationship with other sections of America. In appearance as well, population shifts—rural to urban and suburban and immigration from overseas and the north—make South Carolina look more like mainstream America.

Slower to Faster Change. Change still does not come with a bound in South Carolina. Who could have predicted though, looking ahead in 1970, that the State would have changed as much as it has? The pace and rate of change may have accelerated from slow to moderate during the past 25 years. Illustrative, however, of how South Carolina measures change carefully, the lottery, so popular in many other states, draws dust on the shelf here. The General Assembly also resists certain other changes, such as merit selection of judges and the creation of a completely and truly modern executive.

The many forces of change now combine to loosen the General Assembly's grip on the handle of the gate of tradition and to alter tradition itself. Two fundamental questions await resolution: 1) to what extent will South Carolina retain a traditional political culture, and 2) what role will the General Assembly play in that transformation: initiator or reactor?

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