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TRANSPORTED TRADITIONS: TRANSATLANTIC FOUNDATIONS OF SOUTHERN FOLK CULTURE

"Here is not merely a nation but a teeming nation of nations."

—Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*¹

INTRODUCTION: FROM MELTING POT TO GUMBO POT

As John F. Kennedy declared in his 1959 book title, the United States is "a nation of immigrants." How then, with their deep and diverse old-world roots, did our immigrant ancestors cross the cultural divide to become Americans? The prevailing view through the mid-twentieth century was that of total assimilation, taking as its model the metallurgical melting pot, an image popularized by Israel Zangwill's 1908 play of that title whose protagonist proclaims, "America is God's Crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and re-forming" (33). The Anglo-Jewish son of eastern European immigrants, Zangwill set his play in New York, and it is to that turn-of-the-century urban population that his metaphor was most often applied.

By the 1970s this model was losing favor as ethnicity became desirable and *multicultural* entered our vocabulary. We came to realize that it is not necessary—indeed, not possible—for newcomers to fully jettison their old-world ways and that selective continuance of those ways serves as a "cultural shock absorber" to facilitate accommodation. An alternative acculturation model—the "salad bowl"—was offered: despite homogenizing pressures, most ethnic groups have retained distinctive cultural identities, with each component of the larger entity still distinguishable from the others. This food imagery was more palatable to our new ethnic consciousness and seemed to approach more closely the realities of Americanization (D'Innocenzo and Sirefman).

While the salad-bowl paradigm may be useful in describing America's ethnic diversity, it doesn't go far to explain the country's regional diversity—geocultural differences so significant as to have fueled, perhaps

ignited, a civil war. A suitably complex model here may be the human personality. Just as an individual's personality is shaped by a combination of nature and nurture (no need to go into the debate as to which is dominant), so too does a region's "personality" arise from the encounter between heredity (cultural rather than genetic, of course) and environment. Since cultural heredity consists of group-shared ideas and behavior often brought from elsewhere, knowledge of the early influential settlers' backgrounds is crucial, and is the subject of this essay. The environment to be considered is both physical (e.g., climate, terrain, natural resources) and social (contact among the region's various population groups). This equation, when combined with the impact of economic and political history, goes a long way in accounting for a region's personality.

At the intersection of settlement history and social environment, and key to understanding how regional cultures develop, is a process known to social scientists as *creolization*: the blending of ideas from different groups occupying the same area to create something new. The term is most often used in linguistics (for example, to explain the emergence among African Americans of coastal South Carolina and Georgia of the Gullah dialect, with its mix of African and English vocabulary and grammar) but is applicable to other fields. The American idiom of jazz arose in New Orleans as a blend of African rhythmic and ensemble patterns, European instruments, and blues and sacred songs, overlain with an African-American genius for improvisation (Joyner 14–15, 196–98).

In keeping with the southern locus of these illustrations, and continuing the food imagery of the salad bowl, an appropriate metaphor for creolization is the gumbo pot. The hearty soup known as gumbo is a hybrid created by southern Louisiana's various population groups. The cooking process begins with the French technique of *roux* (flour slowly browned in oil); the soup gets its name from *ngombo*, an Angolese word for *okra*, the mucilaginous vegetable transplanted from Africa and often added to the pot; while the alternative thickening and flavoring agent, *filé* (powdered sassafras leaves), is a Choctaw Indian contribution. (Aromatic vegetables, spices, and fish and/or meat complete the dish, which is served with rice.) The gumbo pot thus creates a distinct regional flavor by combining African, European, and Native-American elements (Kolb [Figure 1]).

In some creolized products the original source "ingredients" are still recognizable; in others, either the synthesis is so complete as to obscure origins or similar ideas from different sources have coincided to reinforce each other. Such may be the case with face jugs, a folk-art specialty of southern white potters in the twentieth century. As early as the 1860s, jugs

with modeled faces were made by African-American potters in Edgefield District, South Carolina, leading researchers to posit Africa as the source of the regional tradition; figural "spirit pots" were, indeed, made for ancestral shrines in Nigeria and Cameroon (Vlach 81–94). But the English Toby jug and German *Bartmannkrug* or Bellarmine also could have been influences. The latter tradition (a stoneware jug with a bearded face molded on the neck) was likely brought to the United States from the Rhineland in the early 1700s by Johannes Remmey, whose descendants in New York and Pennsylvania made the earliest known Euro-American face vessels a century later.

Thomas Chandler, a white Virginia-born potter, worked in New York, where he may have picked up the face-pot idea from one of the Remmeyes before settling in South Carolina; a circa 1850 Edgefield face jug signed by him is one of the earliest known southern examples (Koverman 6). Did Chandler introduce the idea to slave potters in his community, or were they carrying on a separate African tradition? Yet another possibility is that southern face vessels had no old-world ancestry but arose from anthropomorphic impulses widespread in clay-working societies. The fact that white twentieth-century potters such as north Georgia's Lanier Meaders, whose sculptural skill revitalized face jugs in the 1970s, have a continuous lineage for the tradition (traceable in his case through the Hewell and Ferguson families back to Edgefield District) does suggest diffusion rather than independent invention (Burrison, *Brothers in Clay* 269–72, 227–30). Whether derived from Africa, Europe, both, or neither, southern face jugs have had a variety of meanings for those who have made and acquired them, and an understanding of their changing function is as important as the question of origins (Figure 2).

Gullah, early jazz, gumbo, and face jugs are all examples drawn from southern folk culture (in the genres of speech, music, food, and craft). With their grassroots expression of largely local concerns, such forms of interpersonally learned, group-shared tradition² are central to a region's cultural identity and, when linked to settlement history, reveal the role of continuity and adaptation in shaping that identity.

FUZZY BOUNDARIES: DEFINING THE SOUTH GEOGRAPHICALLY

No region of the United States has a more stereotyped identity than the South. Hoop-skirted belles vie with barefoot hillbillies and cotton-picking sharecroppers in popular mythology. These distortions do, however,

reflect an important reality: the role of the land—both as terrain and as the basis for an agrarian way of life—in shaping the culture.

Where does the South begin and end? Although the Civil War and its aftermath certainly heightened the region's separateness from the rest of the country, a strictly historical approach based on membership in the Confederacy is not entirely satisfactory in establishing the region's limits, for Kentucky would be left out, as would border states such as Maryland and Missouri that are, in part, culturally southern. But a strictly cultural approach is also problematic, for there are "little Dixie" enclaves in non-southern states that maintain or have built upon southern traditions (e.g., Chicago's urban blues scene, rooted in the Mississippi Delta). Ironically, the most southerly extremes of the geographic region—south Texas and Florida—are the least culturally southern.

Central to the formation of a distinctly southern culture was the plantation system with its enslaved labor force; the region's character owes much to its large African-American presence (Degler). Defined in this way, it can be argued that the South extends as far west as east Texas. Popularly regarded as the South's upper limit, the political boundary of the Mason-Dixon line, which runs along the Pennsylvania-Maryland border, not coincidentally corresponds to a shift from northern to southern speech observed by linguistic geographers (Reed 90).

Topographically and ethnically based diversity makes this region far from homogeneous, however. The upland South (the Appalachian and Ozark mountains), which barely participated in the plantation system, nevertheless shares certain features with the lowlands (e.g., plural forms of the pronoun *you*); the Cajun and Creole cultures of southern Louisiana, with their French roots, contrast with the more typical northern part of the state yet are still identifiably southern (Figure 3). This dynamic tension between a unified southern identity and affiliation with smaller communities is crucial to understanding the region's character (Tullos; Ray).

HERE FIRST: THE NATIVE-AMERICAN BASE CULTURE

"Native" Americans began as immigrants from eastern Asia more than ten millennia ago (Hudson 36–37); in migrations through the Americas they developed very different cultures with discrete languages. Some regional American patterns thus were already in place when the first European settlers arrived. Contrast, for example, the Plains Indians' tipi, a conical, hide-covered mobile home designed to follow the migrations of their chief source of subsistence, the buffalo, in the upper Midwest, with

the Pueblo Indians' low-rise apartment complexes of adobe, or sun-dried brick, in the Southwest (the country's oldest continuously inhabited buildings).

The Indians of the South were settled agriculturalists whose villages and towns consisted of square houses with vertical framing posts and wattle-and-daub walls. The once-powerful Mississippian chiefdoms, with their earthen temple mounds, were in decline by the 1500s when Spanish expeditions visited the region. Historic-era southern Indians adopted aspects of the European settlers' lifestyle, including their typical frontier dwelling, the log cabin. Some, such as north Georgia Cherokees Joseph Vann, Major Ridge, and John Ross, owned plantations and black slaves (Hudson [Figure 4]).

By 1840, many southeastern Indians had been relocated in the West. Some groups remain, however, in North Carolina (Eastern Cherokees), South Carolina (Catawbas), Alabama (Creeks), Florida (Seminoles), Mississippi (Choctaws), and Louisiana (Houmas and Chitimachas). Even in Georgia, which lost its indigenous peoples through treaty cessions and forced removal, Native-American influence is present in the form of place names. These include original words such as *Chattahoochee* and *Okefenokee* from the languages of Creeks, Cherokees, and other groups, as well as English translations such as Ball Ground and Ball Play Creek, locations associated with the Cherokee stickball game related to northern lacrosse (Goff 55–58).

Key Native-American gifts to southern culture are maize (such an important staple among colonists that it was given the British generic name for cereal grain: *corn*) and tobacco (sacred to southern Indians and the region's first plantation crop); southerners still have a taste for corn in a variety of bread types as well as in their whiskey (both illicit moonshine and licensed bourbon) and breakfast grits. Although much southern folk medicine has European roots, settlers surely learned about native plants from Indian contact (Moss).

Such traits first entered the frontier-culture complex in the Delaware Valley and Virginia, but borrowing continued after this initial contact. In discussing his family's "good for what ails you" five-plants recipe in 1968, north Georgian Bennie Caudell declared, "That's an old Indian remedy—my grandmother's side; she was three-quarter Cherokee" (Burrison, *Shaping Traditions* 114). And the traditional Seminole *chickee*, a raised-platform, palmetto-thatched dwelling, recently was adopted as an outdoor shelter by the general population of south Florida (Downs 242).

Southern culture also absorbed aboriginal influences from the West Indies. The "shotgun" house, with its gable-end entrance and rooms arranged one behind the other, began in Haiti as the Arawak *bohio*, which was adopted for slave housing on French colonial plantations; from there it was brought (along with Voodoo) to New Orleans and spread through the region as housing for black and mill communities (Vlach 123–31). Barbeque, the South's quintessential cooking technique, derives its name from the Caribbean Indian word *barbacoa*, the wooden framework on which meat was slow-cooked over coals (Dabney, *Smokehouse* 198). And the pirogue, a log boat still built in Cajun Louisiana, has Caribbean origins for its name as well; such dugout canoes, the chief form of water transport among southern Indians, were adopted by white and black boatbuilders of the region (Vlach 97–107).

MAKING TRANSATLANTIC CONNECTIONS: FOUR CORNERSTONES

Tracing some threads of an American region's folk culture back to their old-world source areas is a useful way of revealing the diversity of early settlement and the contributions of those populations to the formation of a distinctly regional culture. But by no means was this a one-way street; folk-cultural influences flowed across the Atlantic *from* the United States as well. As this story is far less recognized than the export of American popular or mass culture, two illustrations specific to Britain and the genre of folk song are in order: "The Texas Rangers," a mid-nineteenth-century American ballad, was recorded from Aberdeenshire singers in 1954 and 1960, most likely brought years earlier by a returning emigrant (Goldstein); Pennsylvanian Ed Foley's 1892 satirical take on coal miners' barroom boasting, "The Celebrated Workingman," was spread to County Durham colliers by "Yankee Jim" Roberts about the time of World War I (Lloyd 387–88).

Cross-fertilization from both sides of the Atlantic has occurred in scholarship as well as in the lore itself. Again, two examples from the realm of song should suffice. The monumental study and compilation of older British narrative folk songs, *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads*, was the work of Harvard professor Francis James Child; the great salvager and promoter of English folk song, Cecil Sharp, also was responsible for some of the earliest collecting (1916–18) in the Southern Appalachian Mountains.

Exploring old-world backgrounds for the South's folk culture is facilitated by research on American settlement history. Three recent studies,

which establish broad cultural links between old- and new-world regions, are especially noteworthy. David Hackett Fischer's *Albion's Seed* describes regional cultural patterns ("folkways") transplanted to the colonies by settlement waves from different areas of Britain. In limiting his study to British influence, though, Fischer excludes the contributions of immigrants from Ireland (especially Ulster) to the southern back-country. Grady McWhiney's *Cracker Culture* partially compensates for that omission, but by relying on ethnocentrically biased travelers' accounts for the South and the "Celtic fringe" of the British Isles, his findings tend toward negative stereotyping. Finally, *The American Backwoods Frontier*, by Terry Jordan and Matti Kaups, focuses on the Delaware Valley's role in shaping southern back-country culture.

It is now time to examine those early immigrant cultures that joined Native Americans to build the foundations of southern folklife.³ The following comparisons are based on similarities (as diagnostically specific as possible) between old-world and southern traditions, using knowledge of settlers' origins to eliminate all but the most likely candidates for influence.⁴ More complex than that of New England, the South's early settlement history includes migration from the Mid-Atlantic as well as direct travel from the Old World. These influences can be organized into four foundation groups.

British

Southern England supplied a great number of colonists to coastal Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia, while northern England, Wales, and lowland Scotland influenced the back-country less directly via the Mid-Atlantic (Fischer). In addition, Cape Fear, North Carolina, and Darien, Georgia, became Highland Scots strongholds. These British groups contributed a wide range of traditions in oral literature, custom, play, and material culture to the core of southern folklife.

The oldest ballads sung in the South, such as the romantic tragedies of "Barbara Allen" (Child no. 84) and "Lord Thomas and Fair Eleanor" (Child no. 73), are British imports, and more of these Tudor-era ballads are concentrated in the region—especially the uplands—than in other parts of the country (Coffin; Sharp). Likewise, some of the oldest folk tales found in the South are English; for example, the following, told by north Georgian Emily Ellis in 1970, is traceable to the fifteenth century (Harrod; Briggs All: 14–17):

One night two tramps were walkin', and they had to pass a cemetery. And they heard voices, so they stopped and listened. And they heard this voice saying, "You take this one an' I'll take that one, you take this one an' I'll take that one." And what they didn't know was that two men had come along earlier and shook a walnut tree, and they were dividin' up the walnuts. And they set there listenin' to "You take this one, I'll take that one."

And they said, "What is that?" And one of them said, "Well, I think it's the Devil and the Lord dividin' up the people in the cemetery."

And just as they had reached this conclusion one of the men said [loudly]: "And I'll take the two on the outside." An' nobody saw the tramps anymore! (Burrison, *Storytellers* 48; variants at 37-38 and 99-100)

In the southern Christmas custom known as "riding fantastic" or "serenatin'" (serenading), disguised teenagers walked or rode horseback to visit neighbors and beg for treats; the wearing of homemade masks called "dough faces," cross-dressing, and prank-playing were variables. British readers may recognize this practice, active in Georgia as late as 1950, as a survival of mumming or guising, traceable to the Middle Ages (Kane 127-28, 152; Max White; Wigginton 26-41; Hutton 11-12, 95-96). The southern superstition that a household will be blessed with good luck if a man is the first to enter on New Year's Day appears to derive from the "first foot" tradition of Scotland and northern England (N. I. White VI: 517-18; Randolph 79; Hutton 50-52). And the slave marriage ritual of "jumping the broomstick," now revived among African Americans and thought to be of African origin, is actually British; in Wales it was known as a besom wedding (Fischer 282; Sullivan).

In the frontier custom of the "turn-out," pupils barricaded themselves in the schoolhouse to prevent their teacher from entering and force from him a holiday; this curious practice, known in lowland Scotland and northern England as "barring out," dates to the 1500s (Longstreet 62-70; Fischer 724-26). The southern folk game of "town ball" (played also in the North, where it was formalized into baseball) had its origins as "bittle-battle" in England, where the game evolved into cricket (Herring 163-68; Garrett 188-90; Fischer 150-51). Antique British children's games and associated rhymes, such as "Green Gravel" and "Three Dukes a-Riding," have survived more or less intact in the South, especially in Appalachia (N. I. White I: 56-57, 89-93; Justus 54, 46-47; Gomme I: 170-83, II: 233-55).

In southern vernacular architecture, the square one-room cabin harks back to lower-class cottages of medieval England, while the hall-and-parlor house is a middle-class Renaissance form (Glassie, "Types" 542-45; Glassie, *Folk Housing* 74-81 [Figures 5 and 6]). For folk pottery, antecedents of the antebellum cane-syrup jug and lug-handled food-storage jar are found in northern England (Burrison, *Brothers in Clay* 65-66, plate 2; Brears 63-65, 104 [Figures 7-10]). The southern (and general Anglo-American) quilting tradition received its impetus from England in the late eighteenth century, with all-white, whole-cloth quilts textured by ornate stitching and appliqué quilts in which printed chintz was cut and stitched onto a white top in a bordered central design. It was with pieced quilts—their tops assembled from many colored pieces—that American quilts diverged from English models with the innovation of repeated blocks (recurring colored-pattern squares), which then crossed the Atlantic (especially the 1860s "Log Cabin" type) to influence British Isles quilting (Roberson; Rubin 180-95; Rae).

African

As America's only large body of involuntary immigrants, enslaved Africans representing a variety of language and tribal groups were brought from a crescent of west-central Africa marked by Senegal at its north and Angola at its south (Campbell and Rice; Vlach 2-5). To counter the notion that African Americans have no old-world culture other than a borrowed and perverted European one, scholars searched for, and found, kinship between the cultures of West Africa and black America (Herskovits). At times, however, this search for "Africanisms" has overshadowed the more prevalent cases of creative adaptation and creolization.

Southern speech incorporates such African vocabulary as *goober* (the folk name for *peanut*, from the Kimbundo word *nguba*), *chigger* (the Wolof word meaning *small flea*), and *juke* (also Wolof, meaning *disorderly*); West African retentions are especially prevalent in the Gullah dialect of coastal South Carolina and Georgia (Dillard 116-18; Turner). Many animal folk tales featuring the trickster Brer Rabbit, popularized by Joel Chandler Harris in his Uncle Remus books, have been substantiated as having African origins, as Harris himself suspected (Baer).⁵

The banjo, later adopted for upland white folk music, began as a slave instrument based on West-African prototypes such as the *bania*, *molo*, and *halam* (Conway; Gura and Bollman 11-17 [Figure 11]). From antebellum spirituals and work songs to later jazz and black gospel, musical traits such as antiphony (call-and-response), clapping accompaniment, and syn-

copated rhythm are rooted in West-African style (Waterman; Rosenbaum 17–25). The magical practice known as *conjure* or *hoodoo* (not to be confused with Voodoo, the Haitian folk religion), although possibly colored by similar British witchcraft beliefs, is predominantly African in origin (Puckett; Savannah Unit; Joyner 64–65). And the burial custom of grave “decoration,” in which durable objects owned by the deceased are placed on the grave, has West-African antecedents (Vlach 139–47; Joyner 66).

The log mortar and pestle for hulling rice, the coiled-grass basket, and the circular cast-net for fishing are coastal folk artifacts with probable links to Africa (Parrish 47–48; Vlach 7–16; Burrison, *Shaping Traditions* 43–46; Rosengarten).⁶ Of wider import is “the Africanization of the New World palate,” as one writer hyperbolically put it (Harris xvii). African plant foods now integral to the southern diet include the aforementioned okra, yams (often confused with the new-world sweet potato), black-eyed peas, watermelons, and sesame (*benne*) seeds.⁷

Irish

The most important Irish group to influence southern folk culture were the Scotch-Irish, eighteenth-century refugees to Pennsylvania whose forebears—mainly Presbyterian lowland Scots and English borderers—had come to Ireland’s northern province when James I established the Ulster Plantation in 1609 (Leyburn). Moving south as a major component of the back-country population, they transplanted northern Irish traditions to the Appalachian and Piedmont frontier (McWhiney).⁸

The Scotch-Irish adapted their Ulster distilling technology to the new-world grain—corn—for their most mythologized gift to southern folk culture, the illicit whiskey known as *moonshine* (Dabney, *Mountain Spirits*; Danaher 58–63).⁹ They also brought an old rectangular cabin type, with front and rear opposing doors in the larger, fireplace room, grafting that design to the log construction of the back-country (Glassie, “Types” 545–49; Evans 41–46). Many upland cabins were equipped with a common item of Irish furniture, a lidded meal bin having two compartments: one for cornmeal (oatmeal back in Ireland) and the other for wheat flour (Evans 78, pl. 1; Danaher 30).¹⁰ Stave-built wooden containers called *piggins* and *noggins* were most likely an Appalachian continuation of an ancient Irish coopering tradition (Burrison, *Shaping Traditions* 12, 32, pl. 2; Evans 74, 98–99 [Figure 12]).

The characteristic style of southern fiddling, with its simultaneous bowing of multiple strings (as opposed to the northern single-note approach, which harks back to England), owes a debt to the fiddling of

Ireland and Scotland, which in turn echoes bagpipe drones (Cauthen 3–4);¹¹ many of the older tunes, such as “Soldier’s Joy,” “Leather Britches,” “Bonaparte’s Retreat,” and “The Devil’s Dream,” can be traced to Ireland and Scotland (Bayard nos. 332, 328, 238–39, 334). And the southern mountain and bluegrass singer’s “high, lonesome” sound, with its nasality and ornamentation (e.g., Jean Ritchie, Bill Monroe, Ralph Stanley), is very likely rooted in Ireland’s *sean nós* (“old style”).¹²

The South is the only region to maintain an Anglophone tradition of European *Märchen*, or fairytales (Burrison, *Storytellers* 4, 137–52), the best known of which are the Appalachian Jack Tales featuring an adolescent hero named Jack whose positive character traits (cleverness, helpfulness, teachability) allow him to overcome supernatural adversaries. There is evidence for Jack Tales in the back-country by the late 1700s, and they’ve remained an active part of the story repertoire in western North Carolina (Lindahl). Some scholars believe these mountain *Märchen* to be of mainly English background, but an oral tradition of such tales has been stronger in Scotland and Ireland, including Ulster, pointing to the need to re-evaluate the role of the Scotch-Irish in introducing this storytelling tradition (Briggs AI: 313–36; Glassie, *Irish Folk Tales* 257–311; McKenna).

Continental European

Continental influence on southern folk culture tends to be localized to sections of certain states and to vary widely within the region. Two major exceptions, however, are apparent Finno-Swedish and Germanic contributions to the back-country folk culture that was carried south from the Mid-Atlantic.

One of the longest-running debates in American architectural history involves the source of horizontal log construction. While acknowledging that Finno-Swedes of the Delaware Valley first employed the building technique in the 1630s, some scholars felt this group was too small and insular to have so significantly impacted frontier culture, and shifted their attention to later immigrants from Switzerland and east-central Europe who were part of the Pennsylvania “Dutch” population.¹³ The debate recently was revisited with fresh fieldwork and archival evidence to make a convincing case for Finno-Swedish diffusion not only of horizontal log walls but of two vernacular building types common in the South (both having open central passages), the “dogtrot” house and double-crib barn (Jordan and Kaups [Figure 13]).

There is no question, though, that central Europeans such as the Swiss and Moravians did reinforce the log-building tradition, and made new

contributions as well. The stringed instrument known as the Appalachian dulcimer most likely developed from the *Scheitholt*, a type of German zither made in Pennsylvania (Smith [Figure 14]). The Pennsylvania German tradition of salt-pickling cabbage to produce sauerkraut also became part of the southern upland culture complex (Dabney, *Smokehouse* 336), while such "Dutch" folk arts as *Fraktur-Schriften* (illuminated manuscripts), painted dower chests, and inlaid hunting rifles migrated into Virginia and the Carolinas (Rubin 79–91, 139, 141, 150; Bivins, *Longrifles*). Direct central European influence is seen in the material culture of Missouri's German settlements and in the Moravian pottery of North Carolina, with examples of Continental building types and *fachwerk* (half-timbering) still standing in both states (van Ravenswaay; Bivins, *Moravian Potters*). Finally, the German custom of Christmas and New Year "shooting rounds" brought to the Carolinas and Missouri paralleled the more widespread southern Christmas practice, derived from Britain, of shooting firecrackers and guns (Robbins; N. I. White I: 241–43; Fischer 745).

More obvious Continental influences on southern culture are found in Louisiana, home to two distinct groups of French ancestry. Concentrated in New Orleans, the Creoles (white and black) are descendants of the original French settlers, while the Cajuns of the bayous and prairies came as refugees from Acadia, Canada. French folklore correspondences for these two groups, such as the origins of Mardi Gras and the numskull folktale character Jean Sot, certainly can be found (Kinser; Ancelet 78–81), but, as suggested by our gumbo-pot metaphor, interaction with Native Americans, African Americans, and those of Spanish, British, and German ancestry has created a truly creolized culture best described as south Louisianan with a French accent.¹⁴

CONCLUSION (BUT NOT THE END OF THE STORY)

Only the clearest and most supportable examples of old-world influence on southern folk culture have been selected for this essay. Some southern traditions—such as field sleds, querns for milling corn, and chair-makers' pole lathes—have old-world roots but cannot be traced to a single source area (Burrison, *Shaping Traditions* 40, 66–68, Cat. nos. 43, 92, 309); others, such as basketry fish traps, corn cribs, and gourd containers, probably resulted from the merging of similar Native-American and old-world ideas. Still other traditions have non-immigration overseas origins, such as the alkaline (woodash- and lime-based) stoneware glazes typical of Deep

South folk pottery, which appear to have been triggered by a published account from China and thus are of indirect Asian inspiration (Burrison, *Brothers in Clay* 58–62); while many, like the African-American folk tales of Old Master and his slave John, arose from historical or environmental circumstances peculiar to the region (Burrison, *Storytellers* 4, 100–01, 156–62).

The aim of this essay has been to demonstrate that the identification of old-world sources for southern folklife is crucial to understanding this distinctive regional culture. More difficult to document, but no less important, are the processes of synthesis and recontextualization as these disparate influences came together and adapted to new-world conditions.¹⁵ Behind this seemingly mechanistic approach to cultural history are flesh-and-blood people who introduced, spread, and creatively expanded these traditions, although their names and lives are seldom recoverable from the mists of time.¹⁶

It does not follow that because southerners of different backgrounds exchanged traditions they always coexisted peacefully. Even the extremes of prejudice and racial strife the region has seen, however, couldn't prevent members of one group from borrowing from another. As South Carolina folklorist Charles Joyner expressed it, "Every southerner, regardless of race, shares both African and European traditions.... The central theme of southern folk history might well be described as the achievement of cultural integration" (9, 149).

Many of the traditions described here belong to a rural way of life being steadily eroded with the South's modernization. So what is the future of southern folk culture? Again, we can look to other countries for part of the answer, for recent immigration is re-internationalizing the region (Figure 15). The Sun Belt's economy and climate have attracted Asians, Latin Americans, and others who, like early settlers, are adapting their old traditions to their new situations (Burrison, *Shaping Traditions* 97–104). As these new ingredients are added, the southern folk-cultural gumbo continues to cook and change flavor.

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NOTES

¹ Whitman liked this line so much he used it twice: in his 1855 Preface to *Leaves of Grass* (488) and in an individual poem in that collection, "By Blue Ontario's Shore" (288). The Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History borrowed the line for the

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title of its 1976–91 exhibition, *A Nation of Nations*, a sophisticated presentation of America's cultural pluralism.

² This communications-based approach to defining folklore was adopted in the 1970s and is still applicable.

³ The term *folklife* was coined by folklorists in the 1960s to reflect the addition of material culture (art and craft, architecture, food) to the oral, musical, and customary traditions previously studied as folklore, and to suggest the integration of all these expressive forms into people's lives. In this essay, *folklore*, *folklife*, and *folk culture* are used more or less interchangeably.

⁴ A hallmark of folklore scholarship since its early days, comparative research of this sort cannot always "prove" descent but, if properly done, can strongly suggest it (Richmond). This essay's conclusions, many of which are supported by scholarly consensus, are made more speculative by the divergence of southern culture from its old-world roots over the intervening centuries and reliance on some later reports in the belief that these traditions have been continuous since early settlement.

⁵ The most famous of these, "The Tar Baby," is first reported among Oklahoma Cherokees in 1845, thirty-two years before its first report in African-American tradition. But the tale is almost certainly African in origin; there would have been many opportunities for southeastern Indians to borrow it from slaves in their more than a century of contact prior to 1845 (Baer 29–31).

⁶ A similar type of mortar and pestle was used by southeastern Indians for milling corn, but the mortar's concave bowl was shallow and the working end of the pestle narrow, while the African-American mortar bowl is deeper and the pestle wedge-shaped at both ends, as is often the case in West Africa. There was a tradition of coiled straw baskets in Europe and England, but it is more likely that on coastal rice plantations the technique was an African carry-over. The cast-net has not yet been generally recognized in print as an Africanism, and awaits further research.

⁷ Peanuts and chile peppers (the latter gracing today's southern table as hot sauce), apparently introduced to Africa from Latin America by the early slave trade, were later brought to the South ingrained in African culinary practice. Collard (colewort) greens are most likely another African gift to southern cuisine, but are documented in England as early as the eighteenth century.

⁸ "Scotch-Irish" is the term adopted by their American descendants; the term "Ulster Scots" is preferred in the British Isles. Later Irish immigrants—this time mostly Catholic—arrived in the nineteenth century; their numbers were greatest in the North, but their presence in the South is reflected in Savannah, Georgia's, massive St. Patrick's Day celebration.

⁹ Similar whiskey-making technologies were known to Germanic and Finno-Swedish settlers of the Mid-Atlantic, but the Ulster connection was undoubtedly the strongest, hence the survival of the Anglo-Irish terms *moonshine* and *mountain dew* (the Gaelic equivalent is *poitín*).

¹⁰ A common and highly utilitarian item of furniture in the upland South, the meal bin seems to have escaped the notice of writers.

¹¹ Bagpipes are traditional not just for the Scottish Highlands but for the Lowlands, Ireland, and northern England as well. The Irish *Uilleann* pipes were played and made in northern cities such as Philadelphia in the nineteenth century, but I've seen no evidence of early piping in the South.

¹² While discussions with other folklorists acknowledge this similarity, I can find no mention of it in print.

¹³ The largest element of this population, however, came from the Rhineland-Palatinate in west-central Germany, where timber framing was the predominant building technique.

¹⁴ Cajuns and Creoles are Catholic; French Protestants (Huguenots) came to the Carolinas, but their impact on southern folk culture has yet to be determined. There was also a small Huguenot element in the Scotch-Irish population.

¹⁵ An institution that tangibly addresses these processes for the southern back-country is the Frontier Culture Museum (a.k.a. the Museum of American Frontier Culture) at Staunton, Virginia. It reconstructs three historic old-world farmsteads—English, Irish, and German—to compare with one from the Valley of Virginia, as described in the museum's 1997 *Guidebook*.

¹⁶ A few such pioneers have been identified, however. For example, Moravian records reveal that the central European earthenware tradition was transplanted to North Carolina in 1755 by Gottfried Aust, who had trained as a potter under Andreas Dober at Herrnhut in eastern Germany (Bivins, *Moravian Potters* 16–23). Aust's tradition was built upon, in turn, by his apprentices, and *their* apprentices, in Piedmont North Carolina.

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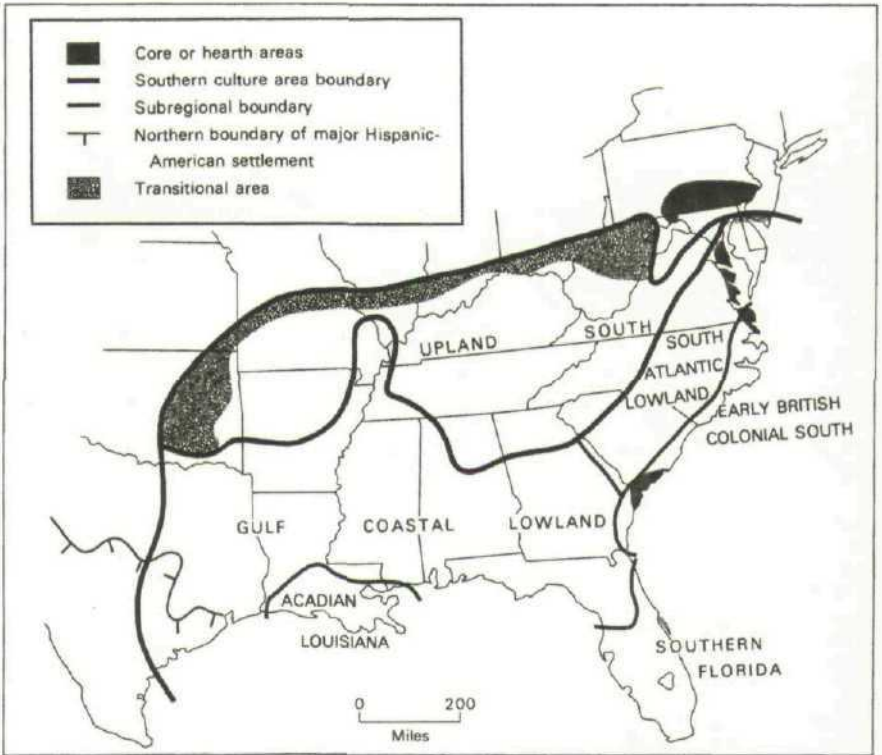
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1. Gumbo and Its Multicultural Ingredients. (photo by William F. Hull, courtesy Atlanta History Center, from Burrison, *Shaping Traditions*, © 2000, University of Georgia Press)



2. Talking Heads. Face jugs by slave potters of Edgefield District, South Carolina, 1860s. Do they speak of African continuity, adaptation of a European tradition, a subtle protest against enslavement, or all of the above? (Photo by author, ex-collection Tony and Marie Shank)



3. The American South and Its Cultural Subregions. (Map by Richard Pillsbury, in Ferris and Wilson, eds., *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, © 1989 by University of North Carolina Press, used by permission of publisher)

4. Sequoyah (George Guess), Inventor of the Cherokee Syllabary. He is depicted in early 1800s southern Indian clothing, a mix of native and European elements; note log cabin in background. (Painting by Charles Banks Wilson, originally exhibited at the Oklahoma State Capitol. Used by permission of artist, Oklahoma Arts Council, and Capitol Preservation Commission)



5 & 6. Single-Bay Cottages in England and the South. British continuity is seen in the dwellings' form. *Right:* Much Wenlock, Shropshire, 1600s, stone walls. *Below:* Walker County, Georgia, ca. 1850, hewn log walls with half-dovetail corner notching. (Photos by author)



7 & 8. Southern Syrup Jug and English Antecedent. *Left:* Edgefield District, South Carolina, ca. 1840, alkaline-glazed stoneware. *Above:* Liverpool, Merseyside, ca. 1830, salt-glazed stoneware. (Photos by William F. Hull and author)



9 & 10. Southern Storage Jar and English Antecedent. *Left:* by Thomas Chandler, Edgefield District, South Carolina, ca. 1850, alkaline-glazed stoneware. *Right:* Newcastle upon Tyne, Tyne and Wear, early 1800s, lead-glazed earthenware. Both have four lug handles and trailed slip (liquid clay) decoration. (Photos by William F. Hull and author)

11. An Early Banjo. Detail from *The Old Plantation*, a late 1700s South Carolina watercolor of a slave quarters with gourd-bodied, skin-headed banjo prototype similar to the West African *molo*. (Artist unknown; photo courtesy Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, VA)



12. Handing on An Ulster-Derived Craft in Appalachia. Rick Stewart learning coopering from his grandfather, Alex Stewart, at Sneedville, Tennessee, 1980. Alex's great-grandfather, Jim Stewart, is thought to have brought the tradition from Ireland before the Revolutionary War (Irwin 38). (Photo by Dan Yearout, courtesy Tennessee Valley Authority)



13. Cornelius Lynch House, Stewart County, Georgia, built 1848. Both the log construction and central breezeway "dogtrot" plan are thought to have originated with Delaware Valley Finno-Swedes. (Photo by author, *Shaping Traditions*)

14. A Germanic Instrument in Appalachia.

Below: Ernest Hodges playing an old dulcimer from north Georgia, 1968. Unlike the more typical bulge-sided dulcimers evolved in the mountains, its straight-sided, tapered form closely resembles its Pennsylvania German forerunner, the *Scheitholt*. (Photo by author, *Shaping Traditions*)



15. A Newly Transplanted English Tradition. *Above:* Since Bristol native Betty Kemp brought bobbin lace making to Atlanta in 1967 she has taught this European art to many Georgians, proving that folk culture need not be introduced by large movements of people. (Photo by author, *Shaping Traditions*)

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