

## Southern Hospitality

— A Proposal for Attracting Gastronomic Tourists to a neo-Confederacy —

William F. O'Connor

### Abstract

Perennial disputes surrounding displays of the Confederate flag, which are not likely to abate in the coming years, coupled with the recent removal of Confederate monuments in New Orleans, a policy which is likely to be adopted by other cities, thereby evoking passionate reactions from those both pro and con, may prove problematic vis-à-vis the American South's potential to attract gastronomic tourists. The following is a proposal designed to address that eventuality and changes that may arise therefrom.

*N.B. Approximately 99% of this article was written more than half a year before the tragic events that unfolded in Charlottesville, Virginia, in August 2017. The reader should not infer from what follows that the author in any way endorses the actions of white supremacists or trivializes the concerns of activists who oppose symbols of the Confederacy. Symbolic issues are highly emotional: they have the power to galvanize many, but in the end, their resolution brings only emotional gratification to the victor, whoever he may be. Struggles over substantive issues like income inequality or military conscription, on the other hand, bring the prevailing side benefits that are real and often lasting. The satisfaction obtained from a victory over a symbolic issue may be ephemeral, but the collateral damage done is likely to be significant and permanent, as is the case with tourists who stay away from perceived trouble spots, and, in so doing, deny those locations the pleasure of acquiring their euros and yen. To circumvent the negative impact that such symbols engender, it appears that it would be better to accentuate the positive with respect to the "problematic past." However, this does not imply that the negative be given a free pass, whitewashed, or worse, extolled as virtue.*

“...sail on, O Ship of State!  
Sail on, O Union, strong and great!” (Longfellow 1849 p. 28)

Longfellow’s exhortation to the Union, personified here as a maritime vessel, to persevere and cohere was written on the eve of Southern secession, and the drama that would unfold in subsequent years had a denouement that the poet desired. The Union survived, and the former states of the Confederacy rejoined, albeit reluctantly, the United States of America. Longfellow’s ship of state has remained intact for more than a century and a half since the end of the war, but there have been fissures in its floorboards for quite some time, fault lines running across the deck that could see bow and stern and mast going their separate ways. The recent tumult arising from the 2016 presidential election has widened the fissures and revealed their presence to a greater number of people, as is evidenced by Yes California, whose members seek independence for the state and recently opened an embassy in Moscow for the promotion of trade and tourism (Silva 2016).

As alluded to above, this is simply the latest and perhaps most obvious manifestation of secessionist sentiments to emerge in the United States. The Middlebury Institute, a think tank devoted to the study of secession, which was founded in 2005, lists a number of them, among which is the League of the South. Any entity that proves able to re-create the Confederate States of America in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is likely to encounter a number of obstacles with respect to its image and its ability to attract tourists. The CSA will forever be tainted by its odious advocacy of slavery. The League, which the Southern Poverty Law Center designates as “racist” (Potok 2016), has desiderata (beyond the scope of this paper) that are likely to repel tourists that are progressive, secular, LGBT, and/or non-Caucasian. This is unfortunate because the South has much to offer, whether the setting be as a regional component of the United States or an independent political entity, though one distinctly different from the country envisioned by the members of the League of the South. This paper will present a plan for the promotion of culinary tourism in the region currently identified as the American South, an area conterminous with the CSA. To some readers such an endeavor may seem frivolous

or devoid of any practical application due to the assumed remoteness of such a development as the imminent disintegration of the world's sole superpower. To such skeptics, I say that few knowledgeable observers as late as the 1980s foresaw the demise of the Soviet Union, nor did they anticipate the rapidity with which it would disappear once its instability became discernable.

I will call this nascent nation "MagnoliaLand," after one of the flowers associated with parts of the region. Accepting the premise asserted by Frost et al. (Frost 2016) that "food and cuisine cannot be separated from culture and heritage," I will consider the regional dishes that are historically or socially significant *and* likely to attract tourists to the new nation when packaged appropriately. The discussion will avoid the thorny and often unresolvable question of authenticity. I will offer but one example to buttress my decision to exclude this from consideration. One of the vegetables closely associated with the American South is okra, savored by Southerners and until relatively recently virtually unknown to many people in, say, America's largest city—New York. Experts disagree with respect to its birthplace (Egypt, Ethiopia, South Asia, perhaps), but they most certainly agree that it is not located in the American South.

Before proceeding to food, however, it is necessary to discuss what was noble and therefore marketable with respect to the Confederate cause. Two aspects are readily discernable—the Confederate position on power distribution and their advocacy of free trade. The former is well known, as the South's assertion of states' rights was a major cause of the outbreak of hostilities. Today, devolution, decentralization, local autonomy, secession—call it what you may—are on the agendas in a number of places around the world; e.g., Catalonia, Italy (Northern League), United Kingdom (Brexit), to name a few. The latter cause may come as a surprise, at least to the layman, because few high-school history teachers examine that aspect in great detail, and popular culture tends to ignore it entirely. Nevertheless, the clash can be seen as one between a protectionist nation (i.e., the Union) and a free-trading one (i.e., CSA). For much of its history, the United States has been a protectionist nation, averse to free trade (Faux 2006 *passim*). De-

spite Washington's current vocal and aggressive advocacy of so-called "free trade" in the contemporary sense (i.e., through trade agreements like NAFTA and TPP), which is not free at all and should be called "managed trade" instead, the country is committed to maintaining a practice and an institution that belie its putative stance—agricultural subsidies and the Export-Import Bank, respectively.

The perceptive observer will quickly realize that MagnoliaLand is hardly a gastronomic monolith. It is, on the contrary, a nation with a myriad of culinary traditions, ranging from the Cajun foodways of southern Louisiana to Texas barbecue, from redneck gator grilling to soul food, from whiskey production to teetotalism, from the pre-Revolution cuisine of Colonial Williamsburg to the generic down-home feel redolent of a Dixie dinner. To attract culinary tourists, MagnoliaLand must select the most suitable comestibles, link them to positive or historically significant Southern heritage, and convince potential tourists that they are worth experiencing.

Frost et al. (2016 p. 38) assert that "a fascination with the past leads some tourists to seek out historic dishes." MagnoliaLand would be able to slake the thirst of such people in a least three ways, by promoting what is currently on offer in Williamsburg, Virginia, and through the creation of two experiences using the re-enactment of the medieval banquet as a model. In the first of these re-creations, the tourist would experience the foodways of the Confederate military. The venue would be outdoors in a faux encampment, and the menu could include all or some of the following dishes: "Cush: beef and cornmeal fried with bacon grease...Salted beef or bacon with potassium nitrate (saltpeter)...Hardtack...[and the ubiquitous] goober peas [peanuts]" (Civil War Preservation Trust). Ersatz coffee made from okra or chicory would be an appropriate beverage. Diners would have to be warned about the potential devastation to dentition caused by the consumption of hardtack and compelled to sign a release form before being served. The second of these re-enactments would be similar to the first, but the purpose would be to re-create the gastronomic experience of a Confederate civilian. The setting would be a typical Confederate home, and the dishes served would be prepared using recipes from the *Confederate Receipt Book*;

e.g., sagamite, slapjacks, (1863 *passim*) both dishes for the impecunious.

Many potential visitors are unlikely to be attracted by such austere dining experiences, however, and for such people a more epicurean and slightly less authentic encounter must be devised, one drawing on the best of the South's culinary traditions, a gastronomic composite but one relying heavily on the foodways of Louisiana. For this I propose the P. G. T. Beauregard Banquet, a dinner named after the flamboyant Confederate military officer of French and Italian extraction, be held on a weekly basis in various locations around Magnolia Land, with the preeminent location being the Beauregard-Keyes House on Chartres Street in New Orleans. A preprandial rebel yell, mandatory for all participants, would kick off the festivities. This wholly invented ritual would continue until the last voice is extinguished by the necessity to inhale. (It should be noted that rituals are excellent vehicles for marketing purposes. Here is what marketing expert Martin Lindstrom has to say about them: "...products and brands that have rituals or superstitions associated with them are much 'stickier' than those that don't. ...product rituals give us an illusion of comfort and belonging" [2008 p. 99]. It is also important to mention that many of our seemingly hoary traditions are of relatively recent origin; e.g., the bearing of the Olympic torch.) The sole survivor of the ritual yell would be rewarded with a jorum of sparkling Catawba, a highly appropriate choice, as the grape from which it is derived was "identified in North Carolina in 1802, even before Concord" (Robinson 1994 p. 199), and because it is a *vinifera-labrusca* hybrid, evocative of Continental sophistication and New World brashness. Seasonal dishes would be added to the menu to add freshness and variety, but essential entrées (U.S. and Canadian sense)—the best of the best—would be available year around. These would include such dishes as crawfish étouffée, turtle soup, and hush puppies, with appropriate Catawba pairings. Postprandial libations would include Jack Daniel's Tennessee whiskey and Southern Comfort.

The Jefferson Davis Presidential Library, located in Biloxi, Mississippi, would make an excellent venue for the Jeff Davis, or Jefferson Davis, pie cooking competition and tasting. The pastry is a variation on the Chess pie. Judges would be required to choose the best pie in a number of categories;

e.g., tastiest, most economical, most healthful, most aesthetic. Alev Fatos Parsa's deconstruction of a Bailey's Irish Cream advertisement (undated, passim) has provided the inspiration for my Jeff Davis Pie Competition ad, which follows. A picture depicting Clark Gable as Rhett Butler from *Gone with the Wind* shows him uttering his most memorable line, "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn," while holding a piece of Jeff Davis pie in each hand. Of course, the subtext here is clearly, "I don't care about the health consequences of my action" [namely, eating too much of a high-calorie, LDL-boosting, sugar-laden pastry], but on a deeper level, given the venue and the man for whom the pie is named, what is being communicated is "Devolution then, devolution now, devolution forever!" The proposed event might even get a boost from the American president. *Harper's Magazine* reported in 2012 that the Jefferson Davis Presidential Library received a \$25,000 donation from Donald Trump (Brook 2012 pp. 40-1).

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