Restoring the South: Nostalgia and Memory in Plantation House Preservation

by

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Introduction

On February 11, 2017, after years of debate, Yale President Peter Salovey announced that Calhoun College, named after John C. Calhoun, would be renamed, as Calhoun’s “legacy as a white supremacist and a national leader who passionately promoted slavery as a ‘positive good’ fundamentally conflicts with Yale’s mission and values.”¹ Salovey’s decision was undoubtedly inspired by widespread backlash against Confederate symbols following the murder of nine parishioners at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina on June 17, 2015 by white supremacist Dylann Roof, bringing questions about the legacy of slavery and Confederate nostalgia in the South into national debate.² Since then, many controversial cases, like Yale’s Calhoun College, have been publicly debated, such as the Confederate flag hanging outside of South Carolina’s Capital as well as the removal of several Confederate monuments, including a statue of General Robert E. Lee, in New Orleans.³ These issues are not at all new; for example, the South Carolina state legislature debated, and decided against, the removal of the Confederate flag in 2000 after mass demonstrations and a march with over 46,000

attendees calling for its removal.\textsuperscript{4} Still, the events of 2015 mark an important renewal of interest in the issue of historical memory, especially in relation to ongoing racism experienced by black Americans, made visible in mainstream American media through the work of activists and organizations such as Black Lives Matter. While this thesis is not explicitly about Confederate nostalgia, though it does play a role in Southern preservation, these continuing debates ignited my interest in Southern memory and nostalgia for the antebellum South.

Much has been written on the topic of Southern history and memory, especially as it relates to slavery, the Civil War, and their legacies.\textsuperscript{5} After the Civil War and the era of Reconstruction that followed, the American South was left to grapple with the legacy of its antebellum life following the defeat of the Confederacy and the abolition of slavery. The idea of the “Lost Cause” helped to create a new Southern regional identity steeped in nostalgia and the romanticization of antebellum life, while also providing a way for the North and South to reconcile and build national unity, as the legacies of slavery and the Confederacy were made more palatable by honoring the chivalrous nature of the defeated South.


This thesis examines the creation and emergence of Southern regional identity and antebellum nostalgia following Reconstruction, using the restoration and preservation of plantation houses as a specific phenomenon through which these larger ideas can be analyzed. As the cult of the Lost Cause minimized the role of slavery in causing the Civil War and re-wrote slavery as a benign institution, plantation houses were seen as relics of the genteel antebellum elite, rather than as centerpieces of slavery. These grand mansions, representing only a fraction of homes in the South, were looked upon with nostalgia and longing, as they reminded those who had benefitted from the antebellum social order and slave economy of a more prosperous time.

The originality of this project comes from the combining of Southern cultural memory and identity studies with historic preservation and material studies. While plantation houses are the central lens through which Southern preservation is explored, I also give a general overview of the historic preservation movement in the South, and the United States as a whole. In fact, it becomes clear that plantation preservation was vital to the preservation movement as a whole, given that Mount Vernon, the house located on George Washington’s plantation, was the target of one of the first preservation projects undertaken in the country. The restoration and preservation of Mount Vernon served as an example and inspiration for subsequent preservation groups, laying the groundwork for national preservation initiatives in the mid-twentieth century, most of which were enacted after World War II.

This thesis consists of five chapters. The first chapter follows the creation of an idealized plantation house in the American imagination through plantation
memoirs written by elite white Southerners following the Civil War, who clung to the traditions and memories of their childhoods in the Old South. The nostalgic reminiscences of these writers contrast with the realities of the antebellum South, where grand, white-columned mansions were the exception even for white planters, most of who lived in small, shabby wooden homes. Crucially, I argue, the romanticization of plantation houses and antebellum life in general led to their restoration and preservation.

Chapter Two explores early (that is, pre-WWII) preservation and restoration from an elite white Southern perspective, looking at preservation societies as well as individuals who undertook projects to restore antebellum sites, with a focus on plantation mansions as the domestic centerpieces of the antebellum South. This chapter also relates Lost Cause traditionalism and nostalgia to late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century aesthetic ideals, as these forces came together to create an interest in historic preservation and a resurgence in Southern Colonial building styles. In many cases, the individuals involved in preservation had lost much of their wealth with the South’s defeat in the Civil War, but were able to use their cultural capital to continue to support their political and cultural agendas, tied to traditionalism and antebellum social ideals.

Chapter Three connects plantation restorations done by elite Northerners to the reunion of the North and South following the fractures of the Civil War. I explore the ways in which white Northerners, particularly those with wealth and access to leisure time, embraced the South, from its history to its landscape, by connecting with the legacy of Southern planters as pseudo-aristocracy. Most notably, I look at the
phenomenon of “Wall Street Planters,” wealthy Northerners who purchased and restored antebellum plantation houses, materially connecting with the antebellum planter class of the Old South while overlooking the legacy of slavery intimately tied to the sites.

Whereas the preservation discussed in Chapters Two and Three was most often privately funded and organized, Chapter Four explores plantation preservation, and preservation in the United States more generally, after World War II, when major national legislation providing support for preservation was introduced. The chapter also looks at the national interest in heritage following the war, as well as the rapid increase in Southern tourism, as non-elites were able to travel to the South and consume the romanticized antebellum nostalgia inherent in the Southern tourism industry, both then and now.

The fifth and final chapter diverges from the story of plantation restoration; instead, it explores the role of plantation ruins in Southern nostalgia, from the first photographs of the destruction wrought during the Civil War to the current preservation of plantation ruins as tourist sites. The symbolism of plantation ruins adds to our understanding of the role of plantation houses in Southern memory.

My research utilizes evidence related to Southern postbellum politics and society, connected to accounts of restoration and preservation during the time periods explored. I rely heavily on memoirs, National Register of Historic Places nomination forms, preservation legislation, photographs, and newspaper and magazine articles as primary sources of nostalgic memories, political and cultural beliefs, and architectural information. These sources are coupled with secondary scholarly works focused on
the Lost Cause and Southern memory and memorialization, as well as works about preservation and Southern architecture. I also visited several historic plantation sites over the summer of 2016, experiences which, while not explicitly written about, helped to ground my research and ideas.

The project is also largely informed by my personal experiences and insights, having grown up in Tennessee with a critical attitude toward Southern identity and history. I was inspired by my immediate geographic surroundings as well, given that my childhood home is located less than a mile from my hometown’s own preserved plantation house—the subject of local lore and legends that I was exposed to from an early age. I consider this thesis to be an avenue through which I have been able to explore my longstanding interest in Southern nostalgia and traditionalism.
Chapter I
Memory and the Myth of the Plantation House

When imagining the architecture of the antebellum South, one’s mind likely draws up images of grand white-columned mansions, surrounded by magnolia trees or Spanish moss-covered oaks. This image of Southern Greek Revival architecture is one perpetuated by nostalgic reimaginings of the South that tended to generalize the region’s past, economically, politically, and even architecturally. This emphasis in historical memory of the South’s white-columned tradition was tied to the greater project of spreading the Lost Cause narrative in which an idealized South, peaceful and prosperous, was tragically destroyed by the Civil War and the period of Reconstruction that followed. The architectural tradition advanced by the cult of the Lost Cause impacted the national imagination, thus creating a romantic notion of impressive antebellum mansions worth preserving, whose histories as the domestic centerpieces of the slave economy were largely ignored or rewritten. This chapter will trace this phenomenon, looking at the actual architectural traditions of the South and the process by which that revisionist history became focused on Greek revivalism.

Buildings incorporating prominent features of classical architecture (that is to say, various types of Greek and Roman columns) existed in the colonies before American independence. Georgian, Palladian, and Neoclassical buildings employing classical motifs could be found across the colonies, and, subsequently, the states. The nineteenth-century Greek Revival, “deeply rooted in aesthetic philosophies of the eighteenth,” was yet “another phase of classicism, the universal heritage of Western
architecture for centuries,” that emerged out of Georgian England.⁶ Considering these trends, it is clear that classical motifs were popular throughout the history of American architecture, with no apparent regional specificity. Not only did Greek Revival not have regional specificity in America, it was also not a distinctively American style of architecture, despite claims of such.⁷

It has been argued that Southern connections to neoclassical architecture amongst the wealthiest of planters were heavily ideological, considering the ways in which the antebellum Southern elite compared ancient civilizations with their own cotton empire, particularly having to do with the institution of slavery. It was not uncommon for Southern planters and politicians to use the fact that the Greek and Roman empires relied on slave labor to argue that slavery “was a basic building block of civilized life.”⁸ According to pro-slavery social theorist George Fitzhugh, the use of slave labor allowed wealthy whites “the leisure and the means to cultivate their heads and their hearts… [Without it] they never would have produced a poet, an orator, a sculptor, or an architect.”⁹ As with the great works of art and architecture in Greece and Rome, neoclassical plantation houses would not have been possible without slave labor, providing the basis for the Southern elites’ wealth and political power.

Given this connection to classical civilization, the Southerness of neoclassical and, more specifically, Greek Revival architecture, makes more sense.

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⁷ Maynard succinctly explores these claims made by nineteenth century architects including Howard Major and Lewis E. Crook, 244-50.
⁹ Ibid., 79.
Architectural historian Alan Gowans made one such argument: “For Southern aristocracy, Greek and Roman architecture was the symbol and assurance that sound society could perfectly well combine ideals of liberty and the institution of slavery,” and therefore Greek Revival architecture “was the chosen style for aristocratic plantation houses.”\(^{10}\) This connection can be easily criticized, however, as the use of classical civilizations by wealthy and powerful politicians and intellectuals to make their pro-slavery arguments does not necessarily mean all planters building houses were deeply inspired by classical art and philosophy. As James C. Bonner so bluntly put it, “the romantic picture of the plantation master sitting beneath a classic entablature, calling up his slaves by Greek and Roman names, with Plato in one hand and Aristotle in the other, was not a spectacle often encountered in the cotton belt.”\(^ {11}\)

Robert Gamble makes a persuasive argument that, despite the connection Southerners made between antiquity and slavery, Southern neoclassical architecture was incidental, part of the national trend rather than a purposeful statement. Gamble notes that “popular acceptance of the Greek Revival by Americans coincided with the first great wave of cotton and sugarcane prosperity,” and as such, “it is not surprising that the Grecian style came quickly southward… by New York-trained architects like James Gallier and the Dakin brothers.”\(^ {12}\) As with older neoclassical trends, Greek Revival architecture in the South was part of a larger, nationwide building trend.

Gamble also highlights the importance of “the popular builders’ handbooks which


[were issued] from Eastern presses… bearing detailed engravings of the various classical orders [which] introduced countless country carpenters to the Greek Revival.”

The use of widespread builders’ handbooks seems to suggest that the majority of those in the South building Greek Revival homes were less influenced by Greek philosophy and aesthetics and more influenced by national building trends and the ability to cheaply and simply use a “giant wooden or stucco-covered brick colonnade [as] a bold announcement of standing and success” in the pre-Civil War “society ‘on the make.’”

In the decades before the Civil War, as tensions between the North and South began to rise to levels not seen before, “Southerners began to formulate a philosophy of rural architecture,” one that exemplified Southerness as “the quest for economic independence was undergoing transition to southern nationalism and political independence.”

Political independence for the South suggests an aesthetic and thus architectural independence, as well. In 1851 in the agricultural journal *Soil of the South*, John Forsyth evoked Southern nationalist rhetoric to argue for a distinctively southern architectural style: "let us have a civilization of our own and depend on our Yankee neighbors neither for refinement and elegance, nor Wethersfield onions and Connecticut cheese.” In fact, it seems Forsyth’s sentiments were largely shared, as “not a single suggestion of a classic design appears to have been offered by the better known of the southern journals between 1830 and 1860.”

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13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., 51.
15 Bonner, 376.
16 Ibid., 374.
17 Ibid., 376.
called for by these journals was a practical and comfortable one, simple and free from excess—a far cry from the neoclassical mansions associated with Southern planters.

Of course, economic and social class must be considered here. Not all Southerners were in the planter class, and not all planters were wealthy. The neoclassical plantation houses commonly imagined were far from the norm, and, as Gamble points out, “within the South itself, classical expressions in architecture varied considerably” as “neoclassicism tended to mold itself to local building traditions and to local circumstances with a resulting diversity.”¹⁸ In rural settings, “a great house of classic design… was a rare phenomenon, even among the more prosperous planters.”¹⁹ Most planters lived in modest, even decrepit, dwellings.

Citing Northern writers such as Frederick Law Olmstead and Emily Burke, Bonner found that “travelers who visited the South were frequently astounded at the great number of wealthy men they found living in miserable dwellings.”²⁰ Considering the rarity of grand mansions among even the wealthy planters, it is not hard to imagine why Forsyth advocated for a Southern vernacular architecture of more modest appearance, especially if, as an editor of an agricultural magazine, he wanted to appeal to poorer planters and non-slaveholding white agrarian Southerners.

Rather than neoclassical plantation architecture being assigned distinctive Southernness at the time of its building, the connection between architecture and antiquity was made after the Civil War by Southern historians and writers during the project of the Lost Cause. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, “the white-column tradition was recognized… as the popular embodiment of the plantation way

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¹⁸ Gamble, 42.
¹⁹ Bonner, 371.
²⁰ Ibid.
of life, evoking sentimental emotions about the regional past.” As the actual nature of pre-war architecture shows, this particular image of the South’s past was not the lived experience of most white Southerners, yet it “became a familiar image by which white Southerners saw themselves in aspiration, and it was an easy stereotype for non-Southerners to use to evoke the South,” as the history of the antebellum South was rewritten by Southern elites, using their personal experiences and memories to make the entirety of antebellum life a general reflection of their own way of life.

The loss of the Civil War “left white Southerners dazed and dis spirited,” unsure of what the future would hold. Hundreds of thousands of men were dead, and countless others were left to deal with injuries and the psychological traumas of war. Southerners were also experiencing a more spiritual crisis as they tried to make sense of the meaning of their loss. Mary Darby, a friend of Mary Chesnut, noted diarist and wife of South Carolina senator James Chesnut, revealed her fear of Southern defeat by announcing, after hearing of General Lee’s surrender, “Now we belong to the negroes and Yankees!” To her, the South was lost, doomed to Northern rule with the help of emancipated slaves. Grief became a common element of postbellum life. J.H. Hudson, speaking at the dedication of a Confederate monument lamented: “Dark has come upon us–poverty is our lot, and a sigh our song... The land that once blossomed as a garden, and flowed with milk and honey, is

22 Ibid.
23 Foster, 20.
now draped in sorrow and grief.”

The “trauma of defeat,” as Gaines M. Foster refers to it, materially affected Southern plantation elites especially, considering the abolition of slavery and, thus, loss of the economic structure that afforded them their way of life. As a New South, with "a hundred farms for every planation, fifty homes for every palace - and a diversified industry that meets the complex needs of this complex age” was being proposed by reformers like Atlanta Constitution editor Henry Grady, others were quick to define and defend the Old South of their memories.

In the plantation memoirs written by white antebellum elites, slavery was a benign institution, made up of fulfilled slaves who were grateful to their masters, and, at times, considered to be like family. In his memoir, The Old South, H.M. Hamill recalls: “On the great plantation, in their picturesque colors, in constant laughter and good nature, well-kept and moderately worked, the negro of slavery lived his careless, heart-free life.”

Edward Thomas, whose family owned at least one hundred and twenty-five slaves, considered “plantation life on the seaboard of Georgia... master and slave in its prettiest phase… The negroes on these places had been reared along with their young masters and mistresses, and the interest of each was the concern of all.”

John D. Bellamy had similar memories, writing in his 1942 Memoirs of an Octogenarian, “I say today, having been reared among the negroes,

26 J.H. Hudson quoted in Gaines, 41.
28 H.M. Hamill, The Old South, a Monograph (Nashville: Publishing house of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1904), 31.
29 Edward J. Thomas, Memoirs of a Southerner, 1840 - 1923 (Savannah, Georgia1923), 8.
that they and their white owners became reciprocally fond of each other…"30 In these passages, memories of slavery were fond, with slave and master living together in harmony, as “the bond… in many cases felt to be as sacred and close as the tie of blood.”31

Thomas Nelson Page, a descendent of two of the First Families of Virginia, the Nelsons and the Pages, who was born at Oakland Plantation, sought to correct the “somewhat inaccurate idea… of the Southern plantation life; that a Southern plantation was generally a great estate, teeming with black slaves who groaned under the lash of the drivers and at night were scourged to their dungeons while their masters reveled in ill-used luxury.”32 According to Page, “nothing could be further than the truth.” While this kind of relationship may have been possible on a large plantation with hundreds of slaves, “on most of the plantations the slaves and masters were necessarily brought into fairly close contact, and the result of this contact was the relation of friendship which has been the wonder and the mystification of those who considered slavery the sum of all the villainies.”33 Susan Dabney Smedes, hoping to honor the memory of her slave-owning father, was worried about what her children, his grandchildren, would be taught, acknowledging “they will hear much of the wickedness of slavery and of slave-owners.” By writing her memoir, though, she “wish[ed for] them to learn of a good master: of one who cared for his servants

31 Susan Dabney Smedes, Memorials of a Southern Planter, Second ed. (Baltimore: Cushings & Bailey, 1888), 47.
33 Ibid., 306.
affectionately and yet with a firm hand, when there was need, and with a full sense of responsibility." Edward Thomas similarly acknowledged the common image of cruel masters, but argued that while there did exist cruelty between master and slave, it was “no more so than between husband and wife, or father and children, or employer and employed…” Unsurprisingly, these plantation reminiscences fail to consider the lived experiences of slaves from their own points of view; had they done so, the narratives would have been much different, as slave narratives often mention their never-ending work, cruel punishment from masters, and inadequate living conditions, among other plights.

In addition to painting slavery in a positive light, memoirists also framed plantation houses as the centers of Southern hospitality and an unrivalled social life, “an era [in which] cotton was truly king and Southern hospitality required a house large enough to accommodate visiting friends and relatives who might linger for a month or a year or a lifetime.” Thomas Page believed “hospitality had become a recognizable race characteristic [that was] practiced as a matter of course.” In his writings, Page recalled the social life of his Virginia childhood as “one of singular sweetness and freedom from vice… [so] replete with happiness and content… that it

34 Smedes, 8.
35 Thomas, 29.
36 There are many memoirs written by slaves who worked on southern plantations that would refute these claims; for examples, see: Harriet A. Jacobs, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (Boston: 1861); Frederick Douglass, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave (Boston Anti-slavery office, 1845); Solomon Northup, Twelve Years a Slave: Narrative of Solomon Northup, a Citizen of New-York, Kidnapped in Washington City in 1841, and Rescued in 1853, from a Cotton Plantation near the Red River, in Louisiana (Auburn: Derby & Miller, 1853).
38 Page, 205.
is little wonder it asked nothing more than to be let alone.”³⁹ The South of Page’s memory was also a distinctively romantic one, in which “lily-fingered, pink-faced laughing girls, with teeth like pearls and eyes like stars, [were] helped [into carriages] by young men who would have thrown not only their cloaks but their hearts into the mud to keep those dainty feet from being soiled.”⁴⁰

The image of the Southern belle, gracefully frequenting balls while wearing hoop skirts and white gloves, was particularly effective at selling the romanticized plantation myth, and memoirs written by elite women were key to this creation.⁴¹ Cornelia Jones Pond, who grew up in Liberty County, Georgia, in a wealthy planter family, described her time as a belle fondly: “Oh, what happy days those were! What happy evenings we spent!”⁴² The first part of her memoir, detailing life before the war, describes her life from childhood through marriage. She wrote of the balls she attended as a young woman, often mentioning the fashions of the day at length: “Our party dress would be of white tarleton, full-flounced skirt, over large hoop-skirt, with as many as half a dozen stiffly starched white skirts. The larger we stood out, the more stylish we were….”⁴³

Virginia Clay Clopton, wife of Alabama senator Clement Claiborne Clay, spent the decade before the war in Washington, D.C. and wrote of her experiences in her memoir Belle of the Fifties. “While a life-and-death struggle raged between political parties…a very reckless gaiety was everywhere apparent in social circles.”

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³⁹ Ibid., 200.
⁴⁰ Ibid., 201.
⁴¹ Sarah Huff, ”"Moonlight and Magnolias": Myth as Memory“ (Vanderbilt University, 2000), 52.
⁴³ Ibid.
Clopton proudly mentions that this gaiety was “especially… to be observed in the predominant and hospitable Southern division in the capital,” and she spent her days making calls or entertaining, and would often “find [herself] completely exhausted ere bedtime arrived.”

After the Civil War, Clopton became an active member of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and her memoir was recommended to its young members. Once, in an address to a group of Daughters, Clopton told the audience: “We must teach our children to uphold the lofty standards of Southern womanhood….” Surely, the hospitality and social rituals she recounted fondly were part of the program that the UDC would push as Southern tradition, despite their being part of elite society rather than Southern society generally.

Hamill, remembering the Christmas traditions of his childhood with a “sense of regret that it is gone forever,” recalled “the stately plantation home, with its lofty white columns, its big rooms, its great fireplaces, opened wide to all the sons and daughter and grandchildren, uncles and aunts, nephews and nieces.” Here, the grand mansion was home to holiday parties and integral to the social life, as well as the family structure, of the South. Page, also remembering the grand parties of his childhood, mused: “It is a mystery how the house ever held the visitors.” He then attributes the success of parties to the mistress, whose “resources were enormous.”

In these memories, the plantation house is grand and lively, and fused with only the happiest recollections.

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46 Hamill, 38-9.
47 Page, 205.
In spite of the relatively small number of grand, columned plantation homes in the South, their inclusion in the plantation memoir is quite common due to the backgrounds of the memoir writers. John D. Bellamy, descendant of the prominent Bellamy family based in Wilmington, North Carolina, wrote of the particularly impressive columns at his family home: “This building has, on three sides, most beautifully proportioned Corinthian columns, with exquisitely carved capitals, and has been greatly admired by connoisseurs.”

Bellamy goes on to describe an incident in which Dr. James C. Baylies, an editor of a New York-based publication called *The Iron Age*, who had “lived nearly four years of his life in Athens, Greece, and was very fond of architecture” told him “that while many of the Corinthian columns, there, were much taller and larger in circumference, none were more beautifully proportioned than were those around [Bellamy’s] father's home.”

Thus, according to Bellamy, the South not only continued the Greek architectural tradition, but also improved upon it.

The beauty of plantation landscaping was also of note. Cornelia Jones Pond recalls her earliest memory of the family plantation home as “a house of two stories, two large rooms below and two above, with lower and upper halls between…. There was a wide front piazza fronting on a pretty flower garden in the form of a semi-circle. The house was situated in a large grove filled with beautiful trees of native growth… The grey moss also hung in festoons from the live oaks. Two beautiful large magnolia trees were to the right of the house on the side as you drove up…”

The large plantation mansion, with white columns and an intricately landscaped yard

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48 Bellamy, 8.
49 Ibid., 9.
50 Pond, 4.
was a far cry from the “log house half decayed with age, or frame house without
paint, and... a yard without a shrub or a flower," which was "too frequently the
insignia of a planter's premise," as noted the editor of one agricultural magazine.\textsuperscript{51}

The archetype of the plantation home is made especially nostalgic when one
considers the widespread destruction of these homes during the Civil War,
particularly along the path of General William Tecumseh Sherman’s March to the
Sea, as he led Union troops through toward Savannah with a scorched earth policy,
destroying private property and Southern infrastructure.\textsuperscript{52} Hamill recalls:

A few months ago I looked upon the partly dismantled columns of a once
noble home of the Old South, about which there clustered thickly the
memories of a great name and family which for generations had received
homage of the South. As a child I had seen the spacious mansion in the
day of its pride, as the Mecca of political leaders who came to counsel
with its princely owner, or as the center of hospitality.... In those old days,
its beautifully kept lawns, its ample shrubbery, its primeval park of giant
oaks, its bewildering garden of flowers, its great orchards, its long rows of
whitewashed negro cabins... was like a picture from the scenes of Old-
World splendor rather than of a young Western republic.\textsuperscript{53}

The destruction wrought by the Northern troops not only figuratively
dismantled the South, but literally, by the destruction of the plantation houses—
symbols of the grandeur and refinement of the Old South. In addition to the
destruction of plantation houses was the destruction of the pastoral spaces
surrounding the domestic areas, as Hamill writes about. In this passage, Hamill

\textsuperscript{51} Bonner, 372.
\textsuperscript{52} The impact of Sherman’s troops is mentioned extensively in Mary Chesnut’s diary; after
the war, Chesnut describes how “nothing but smoking ruins was left in Sherman’s track... No
living thing was left, no house for man or beast,” 345.
\textsuperscript{53} Hamill, 21-2.
includes “whitewashed negro cabins” in his description of the landscape, as if these buildings were as natural as giant oaks and beautiful lawns, maintaining the connection between the Southern landscape and the institution of slavery.

David Anderson attributes the widespread writing of plantation memoirs to the instability of the future, as “the wholeness of a blissful antebellum past was denied to the wretched postbellum present.”\textsuperscript{54} Nostalgia for the Old South was often expressed in the form of childhood memories and youthful reminiscences, selected to make the plantation a romantic and innocent site of the happy times of the past. Memory here was “sieve-like” and self-selected, as “white Southern elites salvaged from remnants of the Old South only those elements that would best serve to form both individual and collective identities in the present.”\textsuperscript{55} The collective identity put forth is the one of the white Southerner, and the specific experiences of the memoir writers are transformed into the experiences of the entirety of the white South, regardless of the divisions within white antebellum society economically and geographically. As these fond plantation memories belonged only to the select few who were part of the wealthy planter aristocracy, the memoirs that gained popularity privileged a certain perspective on the plantation, specifically that of the elite white Southerners whose vivid childhood memories reflected, in their opinions, the distinctive contentment of the Old South.

In writing their memoirs, memoirists aimed to connect the future of the New South with the ways of the Old South, as many considered their traditions worthy of passing on to the new generation. Confederate chaplain James Battle Avirett was

\textsuperscript{54} David Anderson, "Down Memory Lane: Nostalgia for the Old South in Post-Civil War Plantation Reminiscences " \textit{The Journal of Southern History} 71, no. 1 (February 2005): 110.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 131.
explicit about this goal: “We older Southern people are proud of and thankful for the blessed days of the old South. We will endeavor to teach our offspring to cherish the memories and emulate the virtues of the antebellum civilization.”\(^56\) This sentiment is reminiscent of Virginia Clay Clopton’s call for the United Daughters of the Confederacy to teach young girls the standards of womanhood set forth by their ancestors, a purposeful invocation of romanticized Old South nostalgia. Avirett continues by expressing a familiar notion—that the South has been wronged in the writing of history: “Full well we know that no portion of human history has been more ignorantly misunderstood or painfully misjudged than the slaveholding era of the South.”\(^57\)

To right this wrong, Thomas Nelson Page famously called for the writing of the South’s history from the Southern perspective. Page was deeply bothered by what he considered a dearth in Southern historiography: “There is no true history of the South. In a few years there will be no South to demand a history.”\(^58\) Out of fear of Southerners being written off as “an ignorant, illiterate, cruel, and semi-barbarous section of the American people, sunk in brutality and vice, who have contributed nothing to the advancement of a mankind,” Page hoped to connect the new Southern history to that of the Old South, to which “the New South owes all that is best and noblest of being.”\(^59\) With the help of professional historians “trained in modern historical methods at the best American universities” such as Edwin Alderman and

\(^56\) James Battle Averitt, quoted in ibid, 127.
\(^57\) Ibid.
\(^58\) Page, 346.
\(^59\) Ibid., 346; 62.
William Dodd, the history of the South “lauding Robert E. Lee and celebrating the Lost Cause” was formalized, adding legitimacy to the recollections of memoirists.\textsuperscript{60}

The new Southern history was deeply rooted in reverence for the traditions and people of the Old South, as, Page believed, “reverence for the greatness of its past, pride of race, are two cardinal elements in national strength. They made the Greek; they made the Roman; they made the Saxon; and they make the Southerner.”\textsuperscript{61}

A common feature in plantation memoirs is the author’s lineage, tracing their ancestors back many generations to their noble European roots. Hamill considered this pseudo-ancestor worship—“glory[ing] in one’s blood for centuries past, if only kept pure, tak[ing] pride in the linking of one’s name and fame with the history of one’s country”—as a weakness of the Southerner, but a weakness that he had “nothing but tenderness for.”\textsuperscript{62} In fact, he “set forth in pride and gratitude for the Old South as one of its distinguishing characteristics this devotion to the memory and traditions of its ancestry.”\textsuperscript{63} In a way, though, this new generation was doing the very same by honoring their fathers and grandfathers as the last of a noble slaveholding people, and by basing their new traditions on those of the past, continuing the Old South’s interest in heritage.

Through their romantic memories of the Old South, memoirists writing after the Civil War reimagined the average plantation home into a grand, columned Greek Revival mansion, home to grateful slaves and frequent extravagant parties. While this plantation experience was far different from that of the average Southerner, these

\textsuperscript{60} Wilson, \textit{Flashes of a Southern Spirit: Meanings of the Spirit in the U.S. South}, 34.
\textsuperscript{61} Page, 363.
\textsuperscript{62} Hamill, 24.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 25.
imaginings stuck in the collective memory of the South and were taken up by popular media in its portrayals of antebellum Southern life. Through this process, the plantation home gained a great significance in the history of the South. Historian David Lowenthal writes, “The urge to preserve derives from several presumptions: that the past informs the present; that its relics are crucial to our identity; and that its cherished remains are fragile and dwindling assets, their loss sped by accelerating change that makes even the recent past irrevocably remote.” All three of Lowenthal’s presumptions are present with the plantation houses, made relics of the Old South, somehow still standing in spite of the changes in society following the Civil War. The work done by the cult of the Lost Cause in reifying the past informed the preservation of plantation houses beginning at the end of the nineteenth century and continuing today.

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Chapter II
Traditionalism, Nostalgia, and Southern Preservationists

Although historic preservation in America began before the Civil War, interest in the subject grew rapidly at the end of the nineteenth century. In the South in particular, the rise of historic preservation groups followed the end of Reconstruction in 1877, coinciding with the popularity of other civic organizations that promoted public history and memorialization. Beginning with the Mount Vernon Ladies Association in 1853, historic preservation in the South, especially that done by white Southerners, promoted elite colonial and antebellum history while failing to address the legacy of slavery. In many cases, Southern preservationists were tied to the Lost Cause and supported Confederate memorialization, inspiring their desire to preserve the South’s material culture, with special emphasis on the romanticized plantation house as center of antebellum domesticity and culture.

Mount Vernon, the home of George Washington located in Fairfax, Virginia, is recognized as the site of one of the first preservation movements in the country. In 1853, South Carolinian socialite and mistress of Rosemont Plantation, Louise Dalton Bird Cunningham, sent a letter to her daughter, Ann Pamela Cunningham, expressing dismay that Mount Vernon was in a state of “neglect and desolation.”

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65 Washington’s military headquarter at Newburgh, New York is generally regarded as the first preservation project; Patricia West, Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museum (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999), 4.
66 Mount Vernon Ladies' Association of the Union, Historical Sketch of Ann Pamela Cunningham, "the Southern Matron," Founder of "the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association" (Jamaica, Queensborough, New York: The Marion Press, 1903), 2.
repair," she asked, “if the men could not do it?" The letter sparked the younger Cunningham’s crusade, and led to the formation of the Mount Vernon Ladies Association, an organization that set the stage for preservationists throughout the country.

While the MVLA has come to be known as a patriotic movement, uniting women from the North and South in spite of the ever-intensifying debates over slavery happening in the male sphere of politics, Cunningham first envisioned the movement as a wholly Southern one. As the MVLA’s preservation efforts garnered the interest of the Northern press, the association received criticism for their efforts being sectional, given the national appeal of George Washington. Despite criticism from Southern women including Cunningham’s own mother and Mary Chesnut, the MVLA widened their appeal to the rest of the nation and received much-needed aid from the North. Cunningham acknowledged this transition in an 1858 address: “A call was made to the women of the South to gather around Washington’s grave… The motives were pure, the intentions generous, but it failed! Ye who watch the signs of the times, know ye not wherefore? Washington belonged not alone to the South! (author’s emphasis)” In stressing the importance of Washington’s legacy as they attempted to purchase Mount Vernon, the MVLA asserted that Washington did not

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68 West, 10.; Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association of the Union, 7-8.; Lydia Mattice Brandt suggests that opening the MVLA up to Northern membership was an economic decision, as Southerners could not raise the necessary funds themselves. Lydia Mattice Brandt, "Re-Creating Mount Vernon: The Virginia Building at the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition," *Winterthur Portfolio* 43, no. 1 (Spring 2009): 94.

69 Ann Pamela Cunningham, quoted in Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association of the Union, 19.
belong to Virginia or to the South. Rather, he was a national figure, one who
transcended geography.

Mount Vernon, East Front, c. 1866. From Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association Historical
Photograph Collection.

From reading older histories of the MVLA, it seems that little attention was
paid to the fact that Mount Vernon was a working slave plantation not only during
George Washington’s time at the estate, but also immediately before its purchase
from John Augustine Washington III, George Washington’s great-great nephew, by
the Association in 1858.70 Despite its exclusion from the historical record, the issue
was a contentious one during the early years of preservation shortly before the Civil

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70 “John Augustine Washington Iii,” http://www.mountvernon.org/digital-encyclopedia/article/john-augustine-washington-iii/; In Mount Vernon is Ours, Ellsworth Thane refers to the slaves owned by Washington’s descendants at Mount Vernon as “Negro servants,” thus whitewashing the legacy of slavery. This was also a common feature of nostalgic plantation memoirs.
War.\textsuperscript{71} Sarah Jane Sibley, head of the Minnesota branch of the MVLA, found it difficult to secure monetary donations or volunteer help due to Mount Vernon’s reputation as a plantation that kept slaves. One friend, Ann Loomis North, is quoted as writing that she could “give no aid to such an object without the assurance that it should no longer be a slave plantation.”\textsuperscript{72} The St. Paul Mercantile Library Association raised $70 in admission sales for a Mount Vernon fundraising benefit, but funneled its donation through members of the MVLA to avoid the stigma of helping “a slave plantation in Old Virginia.”\textsuperscript{73} MVLA volunteers in Boston faced similar pushback in their attempt to garner support for the project as there was an “undercurrent… of opposition to every Southern proposition because of the dread of slavery connected with it.”\textsuperscript{74} Given the hesitation of Northern communities to donate to the MVLA due to its Southern origins and Washington’s ties to slavery, it is understandable that the MVLA attempted to distance itself from such a contentious issue at the eve of the Civil War, promoting Mount Vernon as a neutral emblem of American history. Washington was not, however, seen as neutral by most Americans at the time.

In the South, Washington was a focal point of Southern pride. As he was a slave-owning Virginian, proslavery Southerners often argued that Washington would have sided with the South in congressional debates.\textsuperscript{75} Following secession,
Washington’s likeness was placed on the Confederate national seal and postage stamps. In the North, it was not uncommon for Washington’s legacy as a slave-owner to go unmentioned or be purposefully ignored as his morality was praised and his place in American history solidified. The MVLA benefited as supporters such as Susan Fenimore Cooper described Washington as a “wise, industrious, thrifty farmer,” with no mention of the slaves who performed the agricultural labor. For some Northern supporters of the MVLA, it may have been easier to uphold Washington’s legacy despite his owning slaves as he later freed his slaves in his will, a gesture that suggests his moral qualms with slavery despite his own culpability. After Washington’s death, his wife Martha ensured that her husband’s wishes were fulfilled and his slaves freed. This did not, however, apply to all of the slaves at Mount Vernon as many were considered part of Martha’s late husband Daniel Custis’ estate, and could not legally be freed by the Washingtons. The legacy of slavery at Mount Vernon following George Washington could have been easily forgotten or ignored given the focus on Washington in the preservation of the estate; if preserving the Mount Vernon of George Washington was the goal, as it was, the decades following his death could be easily overlooked by antislavery Northerners.


The work done by the MVLA inspired the formation of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities (APVA) in 1889, the nation’s first statewide preservation group, which was founded with the objective “to acquire, restore, and preserve the ancient historic grounds, buildings, monuments, and tombs in the Commonwealth of Virginia.” That the first statewide preservation group was founded in Virginia is significant when one considers that there is, historically, a connection between preservation and cultural politics. At the cusp of the twentieth-century, the country was facing rapid change; the economy was industrializing and American capitalism took on a new life during the Gilded Age, demographics were changing as immigration increased and Southern black populations either stayed in Southern communities or moved to other parts of the country to escape racist Jim Crow laws and look for employment, and many political and social traditions were upended as populations and power structures shifted. In Virginia and the South more generally, these national changes were combined with the after-effects of Reconstruction and the memory of better times in antebellum days. Of course, those Southerners who remembered antebellum life more fondly were a certain type of white Southerners, able to live a prosperous agrarian life as planters, or, even if not wealthy, still able to benefit from the social order of the day.

Like the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, the APVA was led primarily by women. Civic groups focusing on preservation and memorialization allowed women

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81 Lindgren, 2.
to extend their reach in society beyond the household while still following traditional gender roles—the preservation of Mount Vernon by women was praised as a tribute “hallowed by womanly affections and executed by womanly devotion.” In the South, women played an integral role in navigating the emotional and spiritual crises that arose with the loss of the Civil War. More tangibly, white women often led the movements that organized Confederate cemeteries and memorials, playing a key role in the promotion of the Lost Cause. While the involvement of women in these civic organizations was seen as non-political—politics were, after all, a realm belonging to men—the power and import that the associations garnered led to men becoming involved in organizing roles regardless of the word “Ladies” in the name, though women continued to perform the brunt of the work. The MVLA, for example, used the political influence of male advocates like Edward Everett and former senator and attorney general John McPherson Berrien to win support and effectively organize the group. The same can be said of the APVA, which was led by women but had an advisory board staffed by influential men.

The leadership of the APVA reflected those members of the former antebellum elite who yearned to preserve Virginia’s noble history. Membership in the association required one to be invited to join and be considered “in good standing in the community” at a time when social life was very closed off to those with differing backgrounds and views. While one did not have to have certain ancestry to join the

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82 Thane, 18.
83 Faust, This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War, 238-40.
84 Ibid., 247.
85 Foster, 38.
86 Thane, 29-36.; West, 11-2.
87 Lindgren, 49.
group, many of the women serving in leadership positions and the men on the
advisory board were connected to elite Virginian families who had seen their wealth
disappear after the war. They were also often members of various other cultural and
professional societies, forming a small circle of elites who served as “custodians’ of
culture in the Old Dominion,” shaping the aspects of Virginia’s history that they
deemed worthy of preserving. Mary Jeffrey Galt, the association’s founder, was a
descendent of two of Williamsburg’s oldest families, the Galts and Jeffreys. Sarah
Rice Pryor, a vice president, was raised by her wealthy, slave-owning uncle, Dr.
Samuel Hargrave, in Charlottesville and married a Confederate politician and general.
She gained notoriety as a writer, and chronicled her early life in a romantic plantation
memoir, My Day: Reminiscences of a Long Life. Isobel Bryan, the first president of
the association, also served as president of the Hollywood Memorial Association,
tending to Richmond’s Confederate graves, as well as the Confederate Memorial
Literary Society. Her husband, Joseph Bryan, was a Confederate veteran and
president of Virginia’s historical society who had seen his father’s wealth, property,
and over one hundred slaves lost during the Civil War. Thomas Nelson Page was
also an outspoken member of the advisory board of the APVA, and an ardent admirer
of the work done to preserve Mount Vernon.

88 Ibid.
89 Lindgren, 48.
90 Ibid., 42.
Company, 1909).
92 Lindgren, 50-1.
93 Ibid., 52.
94 Thomas Nelson Page, Mount Vernon and Its Preservation, 1858 - 1910 (New York: The
Knickerbocker Press, 1910).
The work of the APVA was intended to connect Virginians with their exceptional past, reminding them that Virginia played a vital role in early America. This can be clearly understood from one APVA meeting, held on January 18, 1890. After praising the histories of Williamsburg, Jamestown, and Yorktown, Page asked the audience: "Do you know that that generation of Virginians made this nation? You will say you know it? How do you know it? By tradition merely, handed down from father to son. You do not know it from history, for history has not so been written. Whose fault is it? It is the fault of the South. The North wrote but as it believed, though it doubtless wished to believe as it wrote. The South was ever too indolent or satisfied to write." Once again, Page condemned the South for failing to secure their place in written history. With the work of the APVA, however, Virginia’s rich history would not only be included in the history books, but would also be materially preserved. After Page spoke, Joseph Bryan took the stand, and, after lamenting that the memories of Virginia's fathers have been forgotten and their monuments turned to dust, he made an appeal to religion by comparing the preservation work of the APVA to the restoration of the wailing walls in Jerusalem, as both projects protected sacred places that deserved to be "held in everlasting and loving memory," placing an almost spiritual obligation on the audience to support the APVA.

Between its founding in 1889 and 1939, the APVA acquired buildings in cities important to both Virginian and national history, such as Jamestown,

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96 "Talk About Old Things: Meeting of the Association to Preserve Antiquities," The Times January 19, 1890.
97 Ibid.
Williamsburg, and Richmond. Through the preservation of Jamestown, the APVA asserted Virginia’s place in American history while attempting to lessen New England’s. Virginians such as Page and Bryan commonly blamed the South’s slavery on New Englanders, and some went as far as promoting the claim that the *Mayflower* transported slaves after its landing at Plymouth in hopes of tarnishing its reputation. At the same time, the APVA banned black people from visiting Jamestown in groups, only allowing individual black servants accompanying white families in. The association also refused a proposal to erect a monument on the island to mark the site where the first captured Africans were brought to America, arguing that “the incident of bringing negroes by the Dutch ship… forms no such part in the life of the Colony,” both blaming the Dutch for the arrival of slaves in America to lessen the role of the South while also refusing to acknowledge the Africans as members of the “English speaking” colony in any form.

In the same way that the stories of Mount Vernon’s slave population were ignored in the histories written by the MVLA, the experiences of black Virginians were absent from the histories prioritized by the APVA. The APVA had no black members and the history emphasized by the association was that of white Virginians exclusively, often in reaction to the changes in society brought about by abolition and Reconstruction. In 1889, Lyon Gardiner Tyler, a Williamsburg preservationist and son of President John Tyler, described the experience of white Southerners during and after the Civil War as a “calamity” and saw their resistance to change as “a struggle for self-preservation against reconstruction and negro domination, foisted...
upon them by their merciless conquerors."¹⁰¹ Tyler’s description, while hard to empathize with given the introduction of Jim Crow laws and rise in violence against black communities and black men in particular, echoed the sentiments of many white Southerners who clung to tradition and revered the Old South. APVA members were no exception. Joseph Bryan once referred to black enfranchisement as “the greatest curse that ever befell this country,” and founder Mary Jeffrey Galt supported black disenfranchisement.¹⁰² The cultural elites of the APVA were traditionalists, and, like their ancestors before them, saw it as their duty to preserve the history and values of their forefathers, reimagining the role of elites once again as paternalistic rulers.¹⁰³ The history and values that they were familiar with were learned on and through plantation culture and were intimately linked to white supremacy and Anglo-Saxon ethnocentrism, which guided and skewed their interpretations of Virginia’s past.

Preservation in Charleston, South Carolina, a town now known for its Southern charm and historic buildings, also began with civic-minded women. Many of the city’s landmarks had been damaged or destroyed in a massive fire in 1861 and the years of war that followed, and due to the aftermath of war, had not been fully restored. In April 1920, a group of women (with the addition of a few men) led by Susan Pringle Frost, a realtor from a prominent Charlestonian family, formed the Society for the Preservation of Old Dwellings.¹⁰⁴ The rallying point for the newly formed society was the Joseph Manigault House, an impressive neoclassical mansion

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 14.
¹⁰² Joseph Bryan in a letter to Edward W. James, quoted in ibid., 15.
¹⁰³ Ibid., 183.
built in 1803 for the rice planter and designed by his brother, Gabriel Manigault. At the time of the SPOD’s founding, the Joseph Manigault House was at risk of being torn down and replaced with an automobile garage, a symbol of the modern age that stood in stark contrast with the historic house.

Sentimentality ran throughout this early preservation. Frost, a renowned suffragist and businesswoman, had a passion for restoring historic buildings “with stability and nobility of character and taste,” only to later resell the buildings, often at financial loss. Her successor as SPOD president, Alston Deas, described Frost as seeing Charleston through "a golden haze of memory and association, not only for its buildings... but also for those men and women she had known, or of whom she had been told, who dwelt there, and created, through a period of many generations, the town.” The SPOD connected romantic notions of Southern history to their preservation and presentation of historic buildings. The group’s focus on domestic life was apparent even from its name, as “Dwellings” were central to the preservation of white Southern domesticity. With this focus on hospitality and domestic womanhood, the group filled restored homes with colonial-era furniture, antebellum gowns, and intimate family memories and legends. Susan Frost’s sister, Nell, even considered moving into the Manigault House to live as a “permanent hostess,” to make the tourist attraction a site that would appeal to visitors for its authenticity.

106 Yuhl, 230.
108 Alton Deas, quoted in Yuhl, 232.
109 Ibid., 231-5.
110 Ibid., 232.
Charleston preservationist Elizabeth Jenkins Young, who was born in 1919 and raised on Brick House Plantation on Edisto Island, echoed Frost’s nostalgic sentiments in an interview conducted in 1983.\textsuperscript{111} Young recalls that, “after the War of Northern Aggression, as we call it… Charleston had a great many hardships and life was very difficult and because of that really, very severe economic time.” In response to a loss of wealth following the end of extensive rice plantations that created much of Charleston’s wealth, Charlestonians “hung onto everything they had—they hung onto their traditions, they hung onto their silver and their beautiful portraits and so forth.”\textsuperscript{112} After tracing Charleston’s traditionalism to the antebellum period, she concludes by attributing the city’s emphasis on its architectural heritage to the lack of financial resources required to modernize. Rather than incorporating modern architectural styles into the cityscape, an expensive feat, residents of Charleston restored its historic architecture, manifesting their political and social traditionalism materially through preservation.

While it is true that rice plantations in the twentieth century could no longer create the wealth that they had in antebellum days, loss of fortune did not diminish the power and influence of the families that had made their money through slavery. Charleston’s preservation was performed by cultural elites. Historic preservationist Elizabeth O’Neill Verner described Charleston’s social life in the 1930s as being “clearly marked… [by] blood and breeding and have nothing to do with bank accounts.”\textsuperscript{113} The women involved in the SPOD were able to use the economic and political power that belonged to their slaveholding ancestors to continue shaping the

\textsuperscript{111} Elizabeth Jenkins Young, interview by Miriam Cooper, May 10, 1983, MP3.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{113} Yuhl, 244n2.
culture of Charleston even after their families had lost their material wealth. Despite the chronic financial depression that plagued the city in the early twentieth century, these women, even in their relative poverty, continued to act as the elite ruling class of Charleston, perpetuating the antebellum social order.

In her essay “Rich and Tender Remembering: Elite White Women and an Aesthetic Sense of Place in Charleston, 1920s and 1930s,” Stephanie Yuhl claims that the “female historical memory active in Charleston between the world wars differed significantly from that most commonly associated with the post-Civil War white South,” as they did not actively reference the Confederate traditions of their past.\(^{114}\) However, by cashing in on the antebellum history of Charleston and particularly highlighting the elite society of their planter forefathers, the preservationists contributed heavily to the romanticization of Southern plantation culture by reviving the material history of the time without any overt references to slavery or acknowledgement of the lived histories of their black neighbors and their ancestors. The white women whose families benefitted from the area’s lucrative rice plantations were able to repackage the city’s history without mention of slavery, while preserving the material culture of elite planters whose lifestyles depended on it. The work of Susan Frost went further than ignoring the black community in Charleston; Frost believed that through her preservation efforts she could turn lower east Charleston into a more respectable area and attract wealthier clientele by “changing all [her]
property from Negro to white,” displacing black families in order to restore their homes and sell them to white families instead.\textsuperscript{115}

Interest in historic architecture, inspired by preservation movements, was not only explored through the restoration of old buildings, nor were preservation projects only undertaken by civic groups. The cusp of the twentieth century saw a rise in Colonial Revival architecture around the country, spurred by regional examples of Colonial architecture recreated at the 1893 Chicago’s World Fair: Columbian Exposition.\textsuperscript{116} While the architectural examples chosen by states were meant to convey their state-specific styles, the Colonial models as a whole worked together to promote an American architectural tradition that, some architects and architectural historians argued, was “intensely American in every line,” as Colonial and Georgian styles had “grown up with the nation.” In their opinions, “no more tangible [an] expression of our national character could be found” outside of colonial architecture.\textsuperscript{117} Scholar Frank E. Wallis acknowledged the English roots of the Georgian and Colonial styles, but believed that, given their connection to early American history, these styles could still be seen as the national architecture of America.\textsuperscript{118} Ralph Adams Cram acknowledged the English influence in early American architecture and embraced it, believing that “colonial architecture was good

\textsuperscript{115} Sidney R. Bland, \textit{Preserving Charleston's Past, Shaping Its Future: The Life and Times of Susan Pringle Frost} (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 85-6.; While Frost as a realtor and businesswoman followed Jim Crow-era norms, Bland makes a point to acknowledge that many saw Frost as being “clearly ahead of her time on civil rights,” 172.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 252.
not because it was American, but because it had English origins,” the same origins that made America an Anglo-Saxon nation.\textsuperscript{119} The Colonial Revival architecture that gained popularity at the turn of the twentieth century was seen as uniquely American, and promoted a nationalistic and, in the case of Cram, an Anglo-Saxon ethnocentric interpretation of culture and style by eschewing non-English European influence.\textsuperscript{120}

In the South, the trend took a regional-specific turn known as Southern Colonial, consisting of “large and symmetrical house[s] characterized by a portico of white columns,” which, according to a 1895 \textit{American Architect and Building News} article, brought with them “a certain tinge of the big-heartedness and hospitality which are the rightful heritage of the Southern people.”\textsuperscript{121} By connecting Colonial Revival architecture to romanticized versions of the white-columned, hospitality-centered plantation house, Southern Colonial Revival went beyond promoting American nationalism generally and furthered the Lost Cause version of Southern history. While the Colonial Revival attempted to distance American architecture from modern European aesthetics, the Southern Colonial Revival reaffirmed the connection between the cultures of the Old South and ancient Greece at the same time that nostalgic memoirists were embellishing plantation architecture.

The connection between the rise of both Southern Colonial style and historic preservation was exemplified at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, where Mount Vernon was replicated and submitted as “the Virginia Building,” typifying Virginia’s architectural tradition with a large, white, porticoed plantation house. The

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 242.
building was meant to both tie into George Washington’s national appeal and acknowledge Old Virginia’s history outside of Washington's legacy as an archetype of the plantation system defended by the Confederacy. This history was directly referenced through the display of objects belonging to Confederate icons such as Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee. Among the supporters of the Virginia Building were the MVLA and Daughters of the American Revolution, organizations that shared members, such as Sarah Rice Pryor, with the APVA. The house was arranged according to the MVLA interpretation of Mount Vernon and hosted by Lucy Preston Beale, a descendant from one of Virginia’s “oldest and wealthiest” antebellum planter families. The combination of these groups culminated in the Virginia Building acting as both a symbol of the Lost Cause and symbol of American history, promoting both revisionist history and a reuniting national history that could appeal to Southerners and non-Southerners alike.

122 Brandt, 80;85.
123 Ibid., 104.
124 Ibid., 106-7.
Preservation historian James Lindgren compared the preservation done by the APVA with that of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, founded in 1910, by noting the importance placed on Virginia’s antiquities as “symbols of venerated ancestors, time-honored customs and the early cultural environment of early Virginia,” while the SPNEA was concerned with “artistry, landscape… [and] craftsmanship.”  

Rather than focusing on the preservation of aesthetically beautiful buildings, groups like the APVA and even the SPOD sought first and foremost to preserve buildings that connected to the histories that they wanted to promote. This is not the case with all pre-war Southern preservation projects, though. Other projects, often completed by individuals rather than

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organizations, were inspired by the Southern Colonial aesthetics that highlighted the architectural traditions of the South.

North Carolinian Democratic political leaders in and around Raleigh and Wilmington took an interest in the historic architecture of the area, tying it to the legacy of the Confederacy and praising the accomplishments of the area’s antebellum past. In 1909, Samuel A’Court Ashe, a Democratic politician, historian, and former editor of Raleigh’s *News and Observer*, gave a speech in the state Capitol building, an 1830s Greek Revival building, where he spoke fondly of the architect, David Paton, and reflected on the “hallowed… memories that [the] chambers evoke.” Ashe continued by praising recent political events, most notably the end of Reconstruction and rise of Democratic power in the state following the 1898 Wilmington Race Riot (also known as the “Wilmington Insurrection”), recalling that “these walls have witnessed the reversal of that State policy forced on an unwilling people by the mailed hand of the conquering power, and the full restoration of Anglo-Saxon control.” In this address, Ashe connected the political history of North Carolina with its material history, referencing the halls of the Capitol building as a living symbol and reminder of the past. The *News and Observer*, now edited by Josephus Daniels, also an outspoken Democrat, ran an article in 1907 praising Raleigh’s historic architecture, most notably Greek and Colonial styles, and denouncing the more recent building styles as “architectural ‘atrocities.’”

As historic architecture was being promoted by North Carolina’s political leaders, elite families who were connected to the very architectural heritage being

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126 Bishir, 231; 75.
127 Ibid., 274-5.
128 Bishir, 236; 276-7.
praised were building Southern Colonial residences across the state. In cities including Charlotte, Raleigh, and Wilmington, wealthy families built massive urban mansions that combined the stylistic grandeur of the Old South’s plantation homes with modern conveniences.\textsuperscript{129} Going further with their connection to history, some couples opted to renovate historically significant homes, reviving colonial architecture quite literally. In Wilmington, a coastal city known for its impressive architectural heritage, James and Luola Sprunt purchased Governor Edward Dudley’s mansion, originally built in 1825.\textsuperscript{130} The couple were Wilmington civic leaders deeply invested in the city’s history, as James was a businessman, Confederate veteran, and historian, and Luola was the president of the North Carolina Society of Colonial Dames.\textsuperscript{131} In October of 1895, the Sprunts expanded the house, adding a second floor to the wings and “a monumental Corinthian portico,” transforming the house into a Wilmington landmark and an archetype of the Southern Colonial style that was being celebrated at the time.\textsuperscript{132}

Renovations like the Sprunts’ at Dudley Mansion reimagined colonial architecture through a contemporary lens, often adding the columned porticoes and porches that were commonly attributed to the South’s antebellum history. More specifically, the addition of grand columns reminded onlookers of “the days of large plantations and baronial rule,” as Virgil St. Cloud remarked about a Raleigh mansion.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[129] Bishir, 278-81.
\item[131] Bishir, 280.
\item[132] Despite the Sprunts’ additions, the portico and porches were removed by the next owner, J. Laurence Sprunt, in 1924; Wrenn, 55.; Bishir, 280.
\end{footnotes}
restored by Sallie and Bennehan Cameron in 1901. Restorations inspired by Southern Colonial trends did not stop at merely mirroring plantation aesthetics. Outside of city centers, plantation houses in rural and suburban areas were also being restored. James and Luola Sprunt continued their Wilmington renovations by expanding Orton Plantation, built in 1725, which had been previously restored by Luola’s father, Kenneth Murchison. The Sprunts added wings on both sides of the mansion, transforming the house into a local landmark as “one of the finest examples of pure colonial architecture in America,” whose “stately white columns gleam[ed] in the sunshine.”


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133 Bishir, 281.
135 Bishir, 285.
James and Luola Sprunt had no familial connection to Orton Plantation other than through Murchison, who had purchased the house in the 1890s.\textsuperscript{136} While the Sprunts were interested in the history and aesthetics of the colonial homes they restored, others were driven by an ancestral obligation. This is the case of Hayes Plantation, located in Edenton, North Carolina and originally built in 1814 by Samuel Johnston, a former governor of the state.\textsuperscript{137} In 1863, the house, along with the entirety of the estate including money and slaves, was bequeathed to Edward Wood, a close friend and assistant of Johnston’s son James, with the instruction to preserve the property in its present condition so long as the family had the means to do so.\textsuperscript{138} Since the end of the Civil War, the Wood family has kept Hayes in pristine condition, as, Rebecca Wood Drane noted in her memoir, “the Wood family has always considered Hayes a trust to be kept up as well as possible [and] its preservation… a real obligation.”\textsuperscript{139} Many of the furnishings, including furniture, paintings, and busts are original to the house, a preservation scheme that has been compared to the continued maintenance of British manor houses belonging to the aristocracy.\textsuperscript{140}

\textsuperscript{136} Judah, 104.
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., 105.
\textsuperscript{139} Rebecca Wood Drane, quoted in ibid., 162.
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid.
The early preservation of Southern homes and historical buildings before World War II began with the creation of civic organizations that rallied around antebellum history, with elite members who fondly recalled life before the Civil War, either from their own memories or from romanticized stories passed down through generations. While the types of buildings preserved ranged from specific historic sites, such as Mount Vernon and Colonial Williamsburg, to single family homes admired for their architecture, the early projects undertaken by Southerners found common ground in their reverence for the past rooted in the values and traditions of their ancestors. In plantation houses in particular, slavery was either ignored or was
remembered as a benevolent institution while the experiences of the white planters who lived in the homes was remembered and celebrated. In all cases, the past was preserved in a way that connected the South with American history in general, focusing on an antebellum history that, with the absence of slavery in its narrative, could be acknowledged and celebrated by white Southerners and Northerners alike. As Southern preservationists portrayed history through a “golden haze of memory,” so, too, could the Northerners who became enamored with the romantic plantation culture and were inspired to restore a plantation home of their own.
Chapter III
National Reunion and Northern Preservationists

The reunion of the North and the South began immediately after the Civil War ended. As General Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox, General Ulysses S. Grant ordered the Union troops to stop celebrating their victory, reminding them, "the rebels are our countrymen again," thus assigning an almost familial connection between the regions.\footnote{James McPherson, \textit{Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 850.} According to historian David Blight, the national reunion that was to take place required reconciliationist and white supremacist visions of Civil War memory to unite, overshadowing the emancipationist vision of memory that prioritized the experiences of black Americans and the conception of the war as the pathway for black liberation and citizenship.\footnote{David Blight, \textit{Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory} (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 2.} White Northerners were willing to embrace their white Southern brothers once more, buying into and furthering the romanticization of the Old South. In the process, elite white Northerners established a connection between the Old South’s aristocratic social structure and their own positions of power in modern America. Between the cusp of the twentieth century and World War II, white Northerners embraced the mythology of the Old South and the plantation in particular, and joined their white Southern brothers and sisters in preserving its material culture.

The push for reunion and national healing in the aftermath of the Civil War was a strong one–even outspoken abolitionists supported reconciliation with the
South, and began to do so immediately following the war’s end. In 1867, Horace Greeley, the abolitionist Republican editor of the *New York Tribune* began a political career after the war campaigning on the issue of reunion, and was one of three wealthy Northerners, the other two being Cornelius Vanderbilt and abolitionist Gerrit Smith, to pay Jefferson Davis’ bail out of their desire to facilitate an emotional and financial reconciliation between the North and South.\(^{143}\) Greeley made appeals to both black and white Americans for their support of the reunion, once asking an audience at an African American Methodist Episcopal Church in Richmond to “forget the years of slavery and secession… that some of you have been masters, and others slaves…. and remember only that you are Virginians.”\(^{144}\)

In the decades following Greeley’s address, the reunion process marked a shift in racial opinion in the North from the time of the Civil War, “a period characterized by a certain optimism regarding the position of African Americans,” to the end of the cusp of the twentieth century, decades after the end of Reconstruction, “when Northerners seemed uninterested, pessimistic, and derisive regarding the status of Southern blacks.”\(^{145}\) As the legacy of slavery began to fade from the white Northerners’ minds, they sided with the Southern white interpretation of race. One Northern writer who had traveled to the South wrote that “no Northern man who has not been South can faintly appreciate the relation there between the white and colored people,” an attitude that allowed Northerners the opportunity to become apathetic.

\(^{143}\)Ibid., 58-9.
\(^{144}\) Horace Greeley quoted in ibid., 61.
toward racial problems in the South, as well as those in the North.\textsuperscript{146} In fact, as immigration increased and ethnic tensions stemming from xenophobia and nativism rose in the North at the end of the century, Northern whites turned to white Southerners “as models of etiquette, and of control, in managing a non-Anglo-Saxon population.”\textsuperscript{147}

Of course, even before the twentieth century shift in white Northerners’ ideas about race that Silber identifies, anti-black racism existed in the North. By accepting the mythology of the Old South, white Northerners could denounce the legacy of slavery as well as continued racial inequality and discrimination in the North as a purely Southern phenomenon.\textsuperscript{148} Historian C. Vann Woodward referred to the South as “a moral lightning rod, a deflector of national guilt, [and] a scapegoat for stricken consciousness” as guilty white Northerners could ignore their own racial reality by viewing the North as the abolitionist foil for the South’s racism.\textsuperscript{149} The ‘anti-slavery myth’ that Woodward identifies was used to hide the national, not regional, white supremacy that undergirded the country.\textsuperscript{150} Howard Zinn, noting the ways in which the South and its mythology seem to capture the worst traits in the American character, such as its racism, argued that the nation as a whole “reacts emotionally to the South precisely because it subconsciously recognizes itself there.”\textsuperscript{151}

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid, 140-1.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., 141.
\textsuperscript{149} C. Vann Woodward, quoted in ibid, 575.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{151} Zinn, quoted in Northern Origins, 576.
Just as Blight has argued, white supremacy was a uniting factor of national reunion, even if it was less apparent in the North. This is how, despite the film’s blatant racism, D.W. Griffith’s 1915 *The Birth of a Nation*, which heroicized the Ku Klux Klan, was a commercial success among both Southern and Northern whites. The film was even reportedly praised by President Woodrow Wilson after its screening in the White House.\textsuperscript{152} Similarly, Margaret Mitchell’s sentimental novel *Gone with the Wind* gained international fame, and its film version, released in 1939, finally topped *The Birth of a Nation* as the highest-grossing film movie of all time, after Birth’s twenty-five year reign.\textsuperscript{153} Despite their commercial successes, both films were condemned by black and white reformers for their overtly racist messages, inaccurately portraying the Civil War, and, in the case of *Gone With The Wind*, romanticizing slavery.\textsuperscript{154} Rather than listening to the lived experience of black people, many white Northerners looked to white Southerners to interpret Southern race relations for them.

The romanticized accounts of slavery found in plantation memoirs, in which master and slave had friendly, or even familial, relationships, took hold of the Northern imagination, lessening the image of slavery as a violent and oppressive

\textsuperscript{152} Melvyn Stokes, *D.W. Griffith's The Birth of a Nation: A History of the Most Controversial Motion Picture of All Time* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 125; 3.; Woodrow Wilson is reported to have praised *The Birth of a Nation*, though there is doubt as to whether the quotes attributed to him were actually spoken. Historian Mark Benbow has argued that, regardless of whether the quotes are accurate, “the screening was in itself a tacit endorsement,” from Mark E. Benbow, "Birth of a Quotation: Woodrow Wilson and "Like Writing History with Lightning"," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 9, no. 4 (2010): 529.


The popularity of plantation memoirs written by elite Southerners was not limited to the South—nor was nostalgic writing about the Old South limited to Southern authors. Northern editors and publishers, too, played an important part in the spread of Southern sentimentalism across the country. In 1890, Richard Watson Gilder, editor-in-chief of the *Century Monthly Magazine*, credited the publication of Southern writers with making periodicals “more national”; he wrote: “It is well for the North, it is well for the nation, to hear in poem and story all that the South burns to tell of her romance, her heroes, her landscape; yes, of her lost cause.” The Lost Cause writers attracted white Northerners with their stories of a romantic, hospitable Old South known for its lavish parties, admirable culture, and faithful slaves.

As the Old South was portrayed by its Southern admirers for its grandeur, so, too, did white Northerners admire it for its semblance of aristocracy, as the plantation was, according to historian Francis Pendleton Gaines, “alone among native institutions [able to] satisfy the American craving for a caste system.” Much like the centrality of elite white Southerners in promulgating the Lost Cause, so, too, were elite white Northerners central to national reunion and acceptance of the South.

Historian Nina Silber attributes the social and economic instability of the late-nineteenth century North to the interest that middle and upper class Northerners had in plantation culture. “Yankees found the plantation aristocracy especially deserving of sentiment and sympathy,” she writes, “because of the tremendous losses that class

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155 Silber, 141.
156 Gerster and Cords, 572-3., 572-3
158 Francis Pendleton Gaines, quotes in Gerster and Cords, 572.
had endured.”159 Rather than expressing sympathy and concern for Southern blacks who were facing increasing hostility, Northerners focused on the sufferings of plantation men and women who were experiencing financial hardships and distress due to their changing social positions.160 Similarly, the wealth that Northerners would eventually bring to the South led white Southerners to change their opinions of their former Yankee foes. As one “venerable Low Country lady,” responding to the Northerners “bring[ing] new money to a proud but poor land,” expressed: “In 1865 the Devil sent the Yankee. Today God sends them.”161

With the national reunion underway, Northern tourism in the South increased. It was not uncommon for wealthy Northerners to take a trip down South for health reasons, or to avoid harsh winters. In an ever-industrializing society, Northerners saw the South as an “anti-modern refuge,” a place where one could “escape... the distressing uniformity and alienation of mass consumer culture.”162 With the nostalgic memories of the Old South in their employ, it was easy for critics of the Gilded Age and the scandal and corruption that it produced to look longingly at the Old South, whose “long-standing commitments to family, leisured living, honorable conduct, and chivalry” continued, they believed, into the present.163 While this idealized conception of the Old South had its roots in the Lost Cause, commonly thought of as a purely Southern ideology, according to Silber, “Northerners used the Southern image not in the way that Southerners did, but to soothe their own specific set of

159 Silber, 106-7.
160 Ibid., 51.
162 Silber, 69.
163 Gerster and Cords, 576-7.
social and psychological needs.” In an age of crony capitalism and alienation from society, white Northerners relied on a romanticized and distinctive South to escape the stresses of a life that had been “homogenized by a corporate and commodified culture.”

During the industrialization of society and the quickening pace of modern life, people began to worry about the health effects of such changes. The South, with its seemingly anti-modern lifestyle, warm climate, and lush landscape, appealed to Northerners for its suspected health benefits. These claims, combined with the new veneration of the Old South and its aristocratic legacy, led middle and upper-class Northerners to frequent exclusive health resorts, from the mineral springs of the Virginian mountains to the constant sunshine of Florida. Apart from the benefits of these particular remedies, a Southern vacation would de-stress the travelers, as the South provided an atmosphere of leisure that was inherently tied not only to its history, but also to its landscape.

Writing about the South’s physical landscape, W.J. Cash describes the scene as “a sort of cosmic conspiracy against reality in favor of romance.” With its vibrant colors, rich soil, and medley of flora and fauna, the “natural opulence of the South prompted… writers to see the woman’s touch in the Southern landscape… employ[ing] feminine descriptions to suggest the languid and idle qualities of the region.” As such, the South became a feminine contrast to the masculine North, a setting that was naturally inclined to romance and relaxation. The fertile soil that

164 Silber, 5.
165 Silber, 69.
166 Silber, 68.
167 WJ Cash, quoted in Gerster and Cords, 567
168 Silber, 85.
allowed the agrarian plantation economy to thrive became a marker of the wealth of the South, and an important aspect of Southern tourism.

In 1939, Life published an article titled, “The Low Country: Rich Northerners, lured by quiet charm of coastal South Carolina, now own many great plantations.” Reflecting on the Low Country’s history as the home to many rice, indigo, and cotton plantations, the author states, “Today the big cash crop is rich Northerners who have come down South and bought the plantations where Carolina aristocrats once lived and ruled.” In the article, the Southern landscape is described at length, with emphasis on the local flora and fauna that the wealthy Northerners meet on their new estates. The land is almost mythicized, containing centuries-old live oaks, whose “thick limbs are tangled with persistent wisteria.” Thickets “are filled with quail and wild turkey, the bogs with snipe, the fields with doves,” cohabitating with egrets and long-legged herons, alligators, raccoons, and opossums.

Recreational activities such as hunting and fishing were among the most popular ways for the Northern elite to spend their leisure time, providing organized and social avenues for the health benefits of the South’s landscape to be enjoyed. Many exclusive clubs in the South at the beginning of the twentieth century were popular with wealthy Northerners, who often consisted of the majority of the membership. The Santee Club of South Carolina, for example, was organized in 1898 to "acquire tracts of land in South Carolina and to use and maintain the same as a private preserve for the benefit of its members for the purpose of hunting, fishing,

169 “The Low Country: Rich Northerners, Lured by Quiet Charm of Coastal South Carolina, Now Own Its Great Old Plantations ”.
170 Ibid, 39.
171 Ibid, 44.
172 Ibid, 42-3.
yachting, health, rest and recreation.”\footnote{Henry H. Carter, *Early History of the Santee Club* (1933), 3.} The Club’s charter members were either from South Carolina or New York, and by the time the “Early History of the Santee Club” was published in 1934, almost every member of the Club had a Northern mailing address.\footnote{The only exception was Horatio Shonnard, a New York stockbroker who had settled at Harrietta Plantation in Santee; Carter, 4; 22.} In 1924, the Yeamans Hall Club was built just outside of Charleston and boasted a membership filled with America’s elite, “‘half [of whom] were Yale men, [and] many of them Scroll and Key to boot.’”\footnote{Stephanie Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory: The Making of Historic Charleston* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 178.} Restored plantation homes would also play a key role in Northerners’ leisure, as many estates were bought for recreational purposes, particularly for hunting.

In addition to seeking out the South’s health benefits, Northern tourists consumed the history and material culture of the Old South and the failed Confederacy. Tourism presented an opportunity for white Northerners to experience the distinctive history of the South firsthand, from the “drafty old houses and broken-down beds,” to an “up-close encounter with the ruins of an old plantation, a rundown former slave cabin, or an old Confederate soldier.”\footnote{Silber, 69-70.} These experiences were seen as apolitical—rather than connecting the sites to the reality of slavery, the tourist was experiencing the myths and idealized legacy of the South, experiences that were much different from what the North had to offer. Early plantation tours allowed Northerners the experience of watching former slaves picking cotton in an ironically nostalgic turn of events, considering the emancipation of slaves having been reliant

\footnote{Silber, 69-70.}
on the support of the North.\textsuperscript{177} Civic groups including Charleston’s Society for the Preservation of Old Dwellings and the Garden Club of Natchez, Mississippi, opened up their antebellum mansions for Northern tourists to fully experience the domestic life of elite planters, allowing the tourists to fully immerse themselves in the aristocratic ways of old.\textsuperscript{178}

Going beyond mere tourism, many wealthy Northern visitors spent their entire winters in the South, often buying property of their own, solidifying their status as “winter colonists,” a term used by Charlestonian architect Albert Simons.\textsuperscript{179} Enamored with the history and connection to what was viewed as the American aristocracy, elite Northerners bought and restored plantation houses in the same vein as their Southern brethren, despite a lack of familial connection that was present in some Southern restoration projects. The ‘Wall Street Planters,’ a phrase used by Simons, were the wealthiest of the Northern “leisured classes” who visited Charleston during the winter months.\textsuperscript{180} This group included powerful millionaires such as Solomon Guggenheim, A. Felix DuPont, and J.W. Johnson, among others who made their fortunes in commerce, finance, and manufacturing.\textsuperscript{181} In most cases, these men purchased their plantations from the old aristocracy of Charleston who could no longer afford their maintenance.\textsuperscript{182} This new class of visitors provided a great surge

\textsuperscript{178} ibid., 165.
\textsuperscript{179} Yuhl, 37.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid, 177.
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{182} Ibid.
of wealth in their wake. In 1931, the members of the exclusive Yeamans Hall Club alone represented an investment in Charleston of $2 million.\textsuperscript{183}

In her book, \textit{A Golden Haze of Memory}, Stephanie Yuhl notes that while some of the Northern elites were relatively recent immigrants or, in the case of Guggenheim, a first-generation Jewish immigrant, Charleston’s Tourist and Convention Bureau reeled in white Northern elites by advertising the city as being predominately Anglo-Saxon and with a “high percentage of native born population,” appealing to nativist ideals. Addressing the non-Anglo-Saxon groups found in Charleston, the Bureau noted, “the Jewish element is in the eighth or ninth generation… [and] the low country Negroes are good tempered, courteous, and industrious.”\textsuperscript{184} Cashing in on the history and mythology of the region, the ‘Wall Street Planters’ with “relatively recent middle-class or ‘ethnic’ backgrounds” were able to remake themselves in the image of the Old South’s Anglo-Saxon aristocrats, using plantation houses, “intimately attached to ideas about pedigree, status, taste, legitimacy, and power” to do so effectively.\textsuperscript{185}

In 1930, an article in \textit{Country Life} titled “Memories of the Old South, That Live Again in the Restoration of Her Plantation Homes” was published along with drawings done by Savannah native Christopher Murphy, Jr. Each of the drawings is accompanied with a caption and the name of the owners, and all three plantation houses mentioned in the article were then used as winter homes for Northern owners. Dr. H. N. Torrey of Grosse Pointe, Michigan owned a home that showed “the open handed hospitality traditional of the South,” on Ossabaw Island off the coast of

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid, 183.  
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid, 179.  
\textsuperscript{185} Ibid.
Mr. Howard E. Coffin, a Michigan-based automobile engineer and co-founder of the Hudson Motor Car Company, restored an antebellum home on Sapelo Island. According to Murphy, “the spirit of the Old South linger[ed] still in the classic simplicity,” of Coffin’s mansion, which stood “in the midst of great trees draped with the picturesque Spanish moss that is typical of the region.” Also mentioned in the *Country Life* article is “the lovely old residence” on Harrietta Plantation, a 1797 Georgian and Federal-style mansion with a large, ornamental portico, located near Charleston and owned by Horatio Shonnard, a New York stockbroker.

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186 Christopher Murphy, "Memories of the Old South, That Live Again in the Restoration of Her Plantation Homes," *Country Life* 57 (January 1930): 60-61.
187 Ibid.
In 1911, after several trips to Savannah to attend automobile races, Howard Coffin and his wife were so charmed by the coastal landscape that he purchased a large portion of Sapelo Island for $150,000, acquiring 20,000 acres of land and the buildings on them.\textsuperscript{189} He restored the plantation house, called South End, which had been built between 1807 and 1810 by Thomas Spalding, the island’s original owner, and left abandoned after the Civil War.\textsuperscript{190} The restoration design was completed by noted Detroit architect Albert Kahn, and the mansion was almost completely rebuilt, with only the original tabby foundations and walls left.\textsuperscript{191} The antebellum exterior of the house was rebuilt according to an 1858 sketch done by Sallie Spalding, Thomas Spalding’s granddaughter.\textsuperscript{192} In addition to South End, several other buildings on the island were renovated, and new office spaces and guest quarters were built.\textsuperscript{193} Coffin hosted many important guests while he owned the estate, including Charles Lindbergh, President Hoover, and President Coolidge, who, with his family, spent the 1928 Christmas holiday on the island.\textsuperscript{194} Coffin owned Sapelo until he lost the majority of his fortune during the Great Depression, and Sapelo was sold to Richard J. Reynolds, Jr., heir to the R.J. Reynolds tobacco fortune.\textsuperscript{195}

Horatio Shonnard, whose wife was “a blue-blooded Southerner,” purchased Harrietta Plantation in 1930 from David Doar, whose family had owned the

\textsuperscript{189} Maxwell Taylor Courson, "Howard Earle Coffin, King of the Georgia Coast," \textit{The Georgia Historical Quarterly} 83, no. 2 (1999): 328.
\textsuperscript{191} Ibid, 6.
\textsuperscript{192} Ibid, 8.
\textsuperscript{193} Courson, 328.
\textsuperscript{195} Sullivan, 11.
plantation since 1858. Shonnard made extensive repairs to the house, restoring the grounds and the house, and furnishing it with period-appropriate decor. During his renovations, Shonnard also added wings to either side of the house, complete with Greek Revival motifs in the mantels and woodwork, deemed “appropriate to early 19th century plantation dwellings.” At the time of his possession, Shonnard was in contact with Charleston-based museum curator and preservationist Laura Bragg, who convinced him to keep the plantation’s historic name and offered him help to secure the appropriate furnishings should he need assistance.

Bragg, a Northerner herself, was born in Massachusetts in 1881, and spent several years of her childhood in Mississippi, where her father taught math at a freedmen’s college. In 1920, she became the first female director of the Charleston Museum, the oldest museum in the country. While Bragg was a social reformer, opening the Charleston Museum to black visitors in 1921 and helping to secure books for use in black schools, she also worked to preserve the material culture and heritage of antebellum Charleston, purchasing old plantation homes to be operated by the museum. Though Bragg was not a member, she frequently worked with the Society

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198 South Carolina Department of Archives and "National Register of Historic Places Inventory - Nomination Form: Harrietta Plantation."

199 Allen, 136-7.

200 Ibid, 1.

201 Ibid, 2.

202 Ibid 2; 122; 133.
for the Preservation of Old Dwellings to save historic homes, and allowed the group to give their romanticized tours in museum-owned houses.\textsuperscript{203}

Laura Bragg was not the only Northerner to get involved in large-scale preservation efforts in the South. After being approached by preservationist Dr. William Goodwin in 1926, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. agreed to finance the restoration of Williamsburg, following a number of unsuccessful attempts on the part of the Association for the Preservation of Virginian Antiquities to restore the historic area themselves.\textsuperscript{204} Initially, the name of Williamsburg’s investor was kept secret, though some correctly guessed Rockefeller’s identity. In 1927, John Stewart Bryan, Richmond’s \textit{News Leader} publisher and son of prominent APVA leaders Joseph and Isobel Bryan, wrote to Rockefeller, saying: “If you are [Dr. Goodwin’s] backer and supporter you have added one more impressive reason for my already high admiration of yourself,” offering an endorsement of the philanthropist despite his Northern roots.\textsuperscript{205}

Rockefeller’s “Northern invasion” of Williamsburg was met with mixed reaction from locals. Some Williamsburgers regarded Rockefeller’s role in the restoration akin to a “second Yankee invasion.”\textsuperscript{206} Earl Swem, for instance, voiced his concern about the role that Northerners with liberal political views would have in

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{203} Ibid, 138
\bibitem{206} Lindgren, \textit{Preserving the Old Dominion: Historic Preservation and Virginia Traditionalism}, 232.
\end{thebibliography}
the study of local history, previously dominated by Virginian traditionalists.\textsuperscript{207} More
publicly, Swem and other APVA members presented Rockefeller with gratitude, as
his contribution would allow America’s history to be preserved for future generations,
“perpetuat[ing] the glory of old Williamsburg.”\textsuperscript{208}

Rockefeller’s interest in historic restorations was not limited to Williamsburg. In fact, before he became involved in the Colonial Williamsburg project, he had
visited France and became so enamored with its history and architecture that he
donated millions of dollars to go toward the restoration of several French icons,
including Rheims Cathedral, Versailles, and Fontainebleau.\textsuperscript{209} Over $2 million went
towards the restoration of Versailles alone, the “splendid monument which Louis XIV
in the magnificence of the Bourbon period had created out of vast swampland,”
etymologizing the history of the French aristocracy and revealing the interest that
wealthy Americans had in such institutions.\textsuperscript{210}

Back in Williamsburg, the history of colonial America was itself being rebuilt
and retold. As sectional division was pushed aside in favor of reconciliation, the
experiences of Williamsburg’s black population were pushed aside as the white,
Anglo-Saxon history was preserved, despite colonial Williamsburg’s population
being nearly half black.\textsuperscript{211} Regardless of this omission, Rockefeller regarded the
preservation as a way to highlight the “patriotism, high purpose, and unselfish

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{207} Ibid, 233.
\item \textsuperscript{208} Ibid, 232.
\item \textsuperscript{209} Fosdick, 353-357.
\item \textsuperscript{210} Fosdick 356; 352
\item \textsuperscript{211} Zora Martin, "Colonial Williamsburg: A Black Perspective," \textit{Roundtable Reports} (Jun 1973).
\end{itemize}
devotion of our forefathers to the common good.”212 The values and aesthetics of the colonial period were romanticized, and 350 new buildings were erected in the Colonial Revival style, appealing to traditionalists who saw the “revival of the Colonial type” as “a return to the simplicity, genuineness and youthful impulses of the nation.”213 The Colonial restoration did not go uncriticized. In 1938, architect Frank Lloyd Wright thanked the Williamsburg restorers for the “service they had performed for organic architecture” by “showing ‘how shallow and little life was then,’” later congratulating Rockefeller for “creating an authentic museum piece.”214 For Wright, the Colonial Revival styles being promoted by the preservation of Colonial Williamsburg lacked meaning and originality. Rather, they were mere reflections of earlier architectural styles that did not connect to the contemporary world or its aesthetic trends.

The Colonial Revival trend made its mark on Southern plantations, as well. In instances where original plantation houses had been destroyed, their new owners built mansions in the styles of the old, continuing the Southern Colonial Revival tradition that many white Southern elites used to connect to the aesthetics of the Old South. Two such examples are Boone Hall and Bonny Hall, both located in South Carolina’s Low Country, whose Northern owners built grand plantation mansions in place of the former residences.215

214 Wright, quoted in Hosmer, 61
215 "The Low Country: Rich Northerners, Lured by Quiet Charm of Coastal South Carolina, Now Own Its Great Old Plantations ".

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Publisher Nelson Doubleday and his wife Ellen purchased Bonny Hall, located in Yemassee, South Carolina, in 1934 from Arthur Lyman, a Boston-based timber heir.\(^{216}\) The rice plantation was established in 1761 by Henry Middleton, but more notably owned by Walter Blake, who was among the most successful Low Country planters, in terms of the number of slaves owned.\(^{217}\) While the original house is thought to have been destroyed during the Civil War, a Victorian structure was eventually built on the land. The Doubledays oversaw a large-scale renovation of the house, transforming the Victorian house into a grand Georgian Revival residence, adding wings on both sides of the house and modernizing the interior. Victorian elements were replaced with “more classical cornices,” and the interior was similarly transformed.\(^{218}\) While owned by the Doubledays, Bonny Hall acted as a Southern refuge for many important literary figures and other notables. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr., the son of President Theodore Roosevelt, and his wife Eleanor Butler Roosevelt frequently spent their winters at the Doubleday plantation. Writer W. Somerset Maugham wrote his novel *The Razor’s Edge* at Bonny Hall, living in a cottage on the plantation that Nelson Doubleday had built for him.\(^{219}\)

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\(^{218}\) Hallam, 139.

\(^{219}\) Hallam, 140.
In 1935, Thomas A. Stone, a Canadian diplomat, purchased Boone Hall from the Horlbeck family, who had owned plantation throughout the 19th century and had made their fortune producing bricks. In the 1852 inventory book of Boone Hall, two hundred and ninety slaves were listed, revealing the scope of the Horlbeck’s brick production. After several tumultuous periods marked by foreclosures, Stone bought Boone Hall, convinced he could become successful growing pecans on the land. The original plantation house had been destroyed, leaving Stone to build a grand Colonial Revival mansion, complete with a massive portico supported by six Tuscan

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221 Adams, 43
columns and modern conveniences, “an excellent example of the combination of ‘up-to-date’ comfort and revival styles that dominated the grand houses of the northerners who rebuild Lowcountry South Carolina plantations.” Interestingly, Stone sold the property to New York-based, Georgian Prince Dimitri Djordjadze who had been exiled following the Bolshevik revolution—a purchase that indicates the international appeal of the antebellum South.

The reunion between the North and the South following the Civil War led to the romanticization of the antebellum South in the minds of elite white Northerners. As middle and upper class Northerners felt increasingly alienated from their industrializing society, they sought refuge in the antimodern South, whose connection to the antebellum American aristocracy were particularly appealing to the wealthiest families in the country. These powerful ‘Wall Street Planters’ restored, rebuilt, or built new homes informed by antebellum plantation houses, inserting themselves both mentally and materially into the mythicized Old South. At the same time, Northern preservationists and philanthropists became involved in preserving the South’s heritage and history materially, connecting it to the broader scope of American history.

Elite white Southerners and Northerners worked to preserve the history of the Old South in the period between Reconstruction and World War II. Both groups, to differing degrees, were influenced by the Lost Cause mythology of the South, romanticizing its history through a veil of nostalgia. After World War II, nostalgia

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took a more central role in the everyday American’s conception of history. As tourism became more affordable, and national laws were put into place prioritizing the preservation of historic landmarks, the restoration and commodification of plantation culture gained momentum, reaching an ever-growing audience.
Chapter IV
Preservation in Post-War America

The preservation projects undertaken in the century before World War II, including those at Mount Vernon, Williamsburg, and Charleston, laid the groundwork for massive changes in historic preservation in the United States that were enacted following the war. Locally organized and privately funded projects informed a generation of preservationists who sought to expand their profession into a large-scale industry. The post-war era provided the perfect opportunity for national preservation projects, made possible through a series of related Congressional acts. Similar to the preservation boom in the South following wide scale changes to Southern life after the Civil War and Reconstruction, rapid changes in American society, from the economy to politics and social structures, spurred the drive to preserve the nation’s early history before it became too late.

The economic boom following World War II stimulated the automobile and housing industries, as white middle-class Americans left cities for developing suburbs—a process commonly referred to as “white flight.” Rapid suburbanization of the country led to unprecedented levels of development, including massive highway and interstate projects, made possible through the Federal Aid Highway Act of 1956, also known as the National Interstate and Defense Highways Act. These developments changed the American landscape and drew criticism from city planners and activists, including preservationists who highlighted the ways in which

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224 There are many scholarly works that explore this trend. For a book that does a particularly good job at connecting segregation, urban space, and the emergence of reactionary conservative politics, see: Kevin Kruse, White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
development threatened important historic sites. As the post-war decades progressed, social changes also swept the country, as fears stemming from the Cold War and growing demands for civil rights created an aura of paranoia and instability. In response to this ever-changing society, a national interest in heritage emerged, rooted in white nostalgia and tradition.²²⁵

In the South in particular, backlash against Jim Crow laws and segregation, leading to the emergence of the Civil Rights movement, brought about a “watershed in symbolic Southern culture.”²²⁶ Charles Wilson identifies a reemergence of “Lost Cause symbolism and explanation of Southern destiny” used by segregationists to uphold their white supremacist views, continuing trends from the turn of the twentieth century.²²⁷ Southern nostalgia took hold of the national imagination in various forms, and particularly in romantic Hollywood films such as Gone with the Wind. These portrayals of an aristocratic Old South, “rural, contented, free from social ills” offered an escape for white audiences.²²⁸ The popularity of the mythical plantation house intersected with the renewed interest in the country’s history and traditions, and plantation houses became “firmly established as national heritage sites,” eventually receiving federal support for their conservation as national organizations developed to preserve the nation’s material history.²²⁹

Several pieces of legislation relating to historic preservation were enacted prior to 1966. The Antiquities Act of 1906, created in response to the looting and

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²²⁶ Wilson, Flashes of a Southern Spirit: Meanings of the Spirit in the U.S. South, 57.
²²⁷ Ibid.
²²⁸ Adams, 76.
²²⁹ Ibid, 55-6.
destruction of prehistoric remains in the Southwest, prohibited the excavation or destruction of “any historic or prehistoric ruin or monument, or any object of antiquity, situated on lands owned or controlled by the Government of the United States” and granted the President the authorization “to declare by public proclamation historic landmarks, historic and prehistoric structures, and other objects of historic or scientific interest that are situated upon the lands owned or controlled by the Government of the United States to be national monuments.”

During the Great Depression, the Historic Sites Act was signed into law by President Roosevelt, creating a “national policy to preserve for public use historic sites, buildings, and objects of national significance for the inspiration and benefit of the people of the United States.” This was the first time a policy asserted that preservation of historically important sites was a duty of the government, rather than individuals or non-governmental organizations.

Also of note is the Historic American Buildings Survey, established in 1933 by the National Parks Service, which created an archive of photographs and documents of historic architecture across the country. HABS was just one project that documented the nation’s architectural history; in 1927, Frances Benjamin Johnston began chronicling the architectural legacy of the South specifically, a project that came to be known as the Carnegie Survey of the Architecture of the South. Projects like Johnston’s, and the subsequent HABS, captured the architectural heritage of the country, sparking an increased interest in historic architecture and

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preservation, as the photographs showed the gradual decline of America’s historic sites.

More impactful than the previous two preservation acts or the HABS was the establishment of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, established in 1949, which was meant to both facilitate public interest and participation in preservation of sites of national importance and interest, and to empower the Trust to receive donations of sites and administer gifts “of money, securities, and other property” toward preservation projects.\textsuperscript{233} The Trust was founded by preservationists “who foresaw a very serious threat to our nation’s historic landmarks,” as, according to Trust president James Biddle, the building booms following World War II threatened “the symbols of our heritage.”\textsuperscript{234} Interestingly, the founders of the Trust are referred to as “a small group of men,” a shift from earlier, less formalized preservation that was spearheaded by women.\textsuperscript{235} These men, according to Glenn E. Thompson, the Trust’s Director of Membership and Public Relations, “all wished to establish a system or an institution which might hold in trust for future some of the physical evidence of the American traditions… tangible links with the past, of examples of the finest flowering of our national culture.”\textsuperscript{236}

The first historic site to be preserved by the National Trust was Woodlawn Plantation, located at Mount Vernon and acquired by the Trust in 1952.\textsuperscript{237} The

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
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\item Glenn E. Thompson, "The National Trust for Historic Preservation," \textit{The Wisconsin Magazine of History} 49, no. 2 (1965-6): 152.
\item Thompson, 155.
\end{thebibliography}
Georgian mansion, designed by the architect of the Nation’s Capitol, Dr. William Thornton, was originally built in 1805 for George Washington’s nephew, Lawrence Lewis, and his wife, Nelly Custis, Martha Washington’s granddaughter. While the Lewis’ owned Woodlawn it housed over ninety slaves. In 1846, the plantation was sold to a group of antislavery Quakers, who operated the plantation with free labor as a “controversial social experiment,” selling lots to free black and white farmers alike in hopes of showing that free labor was as efficient as slave labor.


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240 "About Woodlawn".
By 1965, the Trust owned eight properties in total, three of which were plantation houses. In addition to Woodlawn, the Trust acquired Shadows-on-the-Teche in New Iberia, Louisiana, as well as Belle Grove in Middletown, Virginia. The Greek Revival mansion often referred to as “The Shadows” was built in the 1830s to be the home of David Weeks, a Louisiana sugar planter. The house stayed in the Weeks family until William Weeks Hall bequeathed the house to the Trust shortly before his death in 1958. Prior to ownership by the Trust, Hall himself oversaw a major restoration project at the Shadows as he hoped the home would “remain one of the few perfectly restored examples of its period as an architectural survival in a section rich in historical interest but fast losing that character.” In an era of rapid development and change, Hall believed “the path of progress is every bit as destructive as the path of decay.” James Biddle, who became president of the Trust in 1967, wrote that “the white-pillared elegance of Shadows-on-the-Teche… recall[ed] the romance of the antebellum South,” interpreting the plantation house through the romanticized lens of the plantation myth. Similarly, the architecture of Belle Grove, built in 1794, was considered to be “architecturally one of the finest houses in the Valley of Virginia.” The architecture of the house is especially noteworthy as it was discovered that Thomas Jefferson “was instrumental in designing Belle Grove,” leaving his mark on the house through its semicircular

243 Ibid.
244 Biddle, 119.
design, Doric portico, and T-shaped hall. In early writings about these sites, their connection to slavery is all but erased. Rather, the architectural details and emotions they evoke are highlighted, while their earlier usage is downplayed.


While the National Trust for historic preservation created an organization that was, and is, vital to historic preservation in the country, the most significant piece of legislation related to preservation was, and continues to be, the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson. Several months before the Act was written, a report sponsored by the United States Conference of Mayors and the Ford Foundation titled With Heritage So Rich was published; it has been credited as being the document that most influenced the NHPA as “nearly every major recommendation in the report was translated into law.” In a foreword written by First Lady “Lady Bird” Johnson, historic buildings are credited

246 Ibid.
with “giv[ing] a sense of continuity and of heightened reality to our thinking about the whole meaning of the American past.”

The report gives a detailed history of early America and its material culture, highlighting the buildings and building types that were vital to American life, including administrative buildings, churches, and houses—specifically mentioned in the report are the “master’s house on the great plantations” which, according to the author, “reflected that social and economic basis of that system.”

The timing of the report is as important as its content. In the section “Landmarks of Beauty and History,” Christopher Tunnard argued, “Our preservation of the past is a responsibility to the future.” He lamented the “expansion of population, the increasing consumption of space by motor vehicles and economic pressures [that were] destroying our cultural heritage at a constantly-increasing speed.”

The report’s “Findings and Recommendations” highlight the “great wave of urbanization… sweeping across the nation,” which wrought physical destruction upon historic buildings. These changes—urbanization, development, and economic pressures—are all referred to without any mention of their social roots.

Reverence for heritage was central to the National Historic Preservation Act itself, and reflects the reactionary nature of the preservation movement. Writing about the modern emergence of “heritage,” David Lowenthal connects the popularity of heritage with feelings of loss or change: “We seek its comfort partly to allay… griefs. In recoiling from tragic loss or fending off a fearsome future, people the world over

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249 Ibid, 6.
250 Ibid, 30.
251 Ibid, 203.
revert to ancestral legacies. As hopes of progress fade, heritage consoles us with tradition.”

In Section 1 of the NHPA the “Purpose of the Act” is explained:

The Congress finds and declares that — (1) the spirit and direction of the Nation are founded upon and reflected in its historic heritage; (2) the historical and cultural foundations of the Nation should be preserved as a living part of our community life and development in order to give a sense of orientation to the American people; (3) historic properties significant to the Nation's heritage are being lost or substantially altered, often inadvertently, with increasing frequency; (4) the preservation of this irreplaceable heritage is in the public interest so that its vital legacy of cultural, educational, aesthetic, inspirational, economic, and energy benefits will be maintained and enriched for future generations of Americans; (5) in the face of ever-increasing extensions of urban centers, highways, and residential, commercial, and industrial developments, the present governmental and nongovernmental historic preservation programs and activities are inadequate to insure future generations a genuine opportunity to appreciate and enjoy the rich heritage of our Nation…

The NHPA explicitly lays out the importance of history and heritage in “giv[ing] a sense of orientation to the American people,” which seemed particularly important in a time of rapid development and societal change.

The NHPA established the National Register of Historic Places, which identifies and documents significant historic sites.\textsuperscript{254} It also established state historic preservation programs, a Historic Preservation Fund to be used “for projects to acquire, restore, preserve, or recover data from any district, building, structure, site, or object which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places,” among other things.\textsuperscript{255} In summary, the Act created governmental precedents for the widespread support of historic preservation, as well as financial incentives to do so, both through the use of the Historic Preservation Fund and tax incentives for those undertaking preservation projects.\textsuperscript{256} The Act was not meant to proliferate the number of historic house museums in the country, but to support a broader culture of preservation, public and private, among government agencies and private citizens.

As the number of preservation organizations increased and “public-private partnerships in support of historic preservation goals” became more common, tensions between local and nonlocal preservationists grew as their goals for preservation and interpretations of history differed.\textsuperscript{257} An example of these tensions can be found with the preservation of Drayton Hall near Charleston, a city with a rich history of preservation in its own right. Drayton Hall was built between 1728 and 1742 for John Drayton, a wealthy colonial planter whose son William Henry, “perhaps the most influential member of the Drayton family,” was the first chief justice of South Carolina.\textsuperscript{258} According to its National Register of Historic Places

\textsuperscript{255} “National Historic Preservation Act of 1966,” Section 109(a).
\textsuperscript{256} \textit{Ibid}, 112(b)(2).
\textsuperscript{257} Preservation 50, “The NHPA.”
\textsuperscript{258} "The First Generation: John Drayton," http://www.draytonhall.org/about-us-then-now/the-people-of-drayton-hall/the-drayton-family-through-the-centuries/the-first-
nomination form, the house is significant as it is "without question one of the finest of all surviving plantation houses in America," with elaborate architectural details including a two-story portico with Doric and Ionic columns—a feature of Andrea Palladio’s second book of architecture that was not used in other American homes until decades later.259 The house remained in the Drayton family until the 1970s, when the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the state of South Carolina, and the Historic Charleston Foundation “entered into… ‘a unique agreement to own and operate the property jointly, the first time such a public-private cooperative effort [had] been made to preserve a historic property.’”260

As Gerald George describes in a 1984 article titled “The Great Drayton Hall Debate,” the partnership was not without its disputes. In this case, the main issue with the preservation centered on changes to the original house made in subsequent generations by later members of the Drayton family. Local preservationists belonging to the Historic Charleston Foundation, as well as the state agency, sought to remove all Victorian elements from the house, which they interpreted as “symbolic of plantation culture.”\textsuperscript{261} While Charlestonians wanted the plantation house to be an accurate representation of the colonial period, members of the Trust saw the changes as architecturally and historically “valid,” arguing that they did not “want to impose 1982 values on Drayton Hall.”\textsuperscript{262} Through this debate, issues of historic interpretation become obvious—how should a historic site, with many generations of history available, be interpreted? It seems that the Trust was more interested in preserving the complete architectural heritage of the site than the local preservationists, who preferred to keep the Hall in its colonial condition, prioritizing its value as a symbol of the antebellum South’s plantation culture. This decision is similar to the one made by the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, which chose to focus on the Mount Vernon of George Washington’s time, overlooking the site’s later plantation usage by Washington’s descendants.

As historic preservation came to be seen as a key strategy for saving America’s material culture and heritage, the tourism industry in the South latched onto America’s newfound heritage industry, commodifying history by selling the plantation myth to a growing middle-class. While the tourism industry in the United

\textsuperscript{261} Ibid, 10.
\textsuperscript{262} Ibid.
States existed in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, a tourism boom followed World War II, as the consumerist economy was in full-force and, vitally, paid leave was made available to middle-class white- and blue-collar workers alike.263 The nostalgic renditions of antebellum Southern culture that elite Southerners and Northerners had enjoyed in the decades before were now available to white Americans as a whole. At the same time, black Americans were often more limited in their vacation opportunities, as resorts, hotels, and motels in all regions of the country, according to *Ebony* magazine, “maintain[ed] the color line perhaps more rigidly than any other American institution.”264 While black vacationers looked for “Jim-Crow-Free-Oases,” often seeking black-owned establishments or traveling outside of the country, “the burgeoning middle class and the advent of the automobile began the process of democratizing Southern travel.”265 The tourism industry in the South used both its location, within a few days’ drive for much of the country, and its distinctive culture to target a new class of tourists, replacing the waning agricultural industry in the region with an industry that, historian Thomas D. Clarke noted, could perhaps be “a more profitable and dependable source of income than cotton ever was.”266

Plantation tourism is just one aspect of Southern tourism, yet it is of particular interest when considering Southern (and national) memory and nostalgia. In *Souvenirs of the Old South*, Rebecca McIntyre details plantation tours in the latter

264 Ibid, 78
266 Ibid, 6-7.
part of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, revealing that plantation tourism was popular at the height of belief in the ideology of the Lost Cause, as well as national reunion. In one instance in 1917, she notes, tourists were "advised to tour a plantation and dream about what life must have been like in the good old days before the war," placing the tourist in the role of plantation master.  

The tourism boom the nation experienced after World War II did not bring about a new interpretation of the plantation for tourists, and the romanticization of the South continued.

In *Reconstructing Dixie*, Tara McPherson describes her experiences touring plantations in the early 2000s. Recalling the centrality of architectural grandeur and the Old South’s aristocratic past, she notes, “The ‘loveliness’ of the homes became the overarching rationale for the tours, as the period’s interracial past disappeared along with the history of slavery.” In many cases, slaves are referred to as “servants” by tour guides, in much the same way plantation memoirists redefined “servant” to include domestic slaves. As slave cabins were usually not preserved during plantation renovation projects, and the plantation land itself has often been divided and developed or otherwise landscaped, the material remains of slavery were rarely present for the lived experience of slavery to be put into focus. McPherson recalls a visitor asking about the slave quarters while on a tour of Oak Alley. Responding to the question, a woman who worked at the plantation explained that the buildings had fallen down and never been rebuilt - “there was hardly any point in rebuilding them” because they were ‘just a part of American history that is no

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267 McIntyre, 132.

more.”269 Despite her answer, the tour guide clearly thought that antebellum plantation culture was a part of American history worth preserving, yet the quarters that housed the slaves who built the Old South were not worth remembering.

At well-known plantation museums, whose ties to historical people or events are central to their preservation, slavery is better documented. Monticello and Colonial Williamsburg were two of the first historic sites to grapple with their connection to slavery, “becom[ing] models for other sites in their region.”270 Monticello, the home of Thomas Jefferson, began archaeological studies of Mulberry Row, an avenue that was lined with slave quarters, in 1980.271 In 1992, the Monticello Education Department introduced a unit that taught visitors about the life of Isaac Jefferson, one of the Monticello slaves who documented his life through memoirs.272 It should be noted, however, that this particular program was designed for secondary students and information about Jefferson’s role as slave owner was not included in the average Monticello tour until the public became aware thanks to DNA disclosures that he had fathered children with his slave Sally Hemmings.273 Before Monticello, Colonial Williamsburg first interpreted slavery in 1979, when six black interpreters were employed to present first-person accounts of the slaves who lived there during colonial times.274

269 Ibid, 59.
273 Horton, 34-5.
274 This occurrence was controversial, but not nearly as controversial as a slave auction that was recreated by Williamsburg’s African America Department in 1994; Horton, 30-1.
Focusing more on Louisiana, Julia Rose noted that in the years between 1980 and 2004, twenty-four museums in Louisiana added slavery to their exhibitions.\textsuperscript{275} She attributes the changes to “increased interest in and information about African American history” following the rise of social history and African American studies in academia, as well as desegregation and the civil rights movement.\textsuperscript{276} While these changes are undoubtedly needed, they are not wholly accepted and still exist in spaces that are interpreted from the point of view of the plantation master. Jessica Adams even questions whether additions of slave history in plantation museums could be attributed to “commercial possibilities… and simple opportunism,” as restored or recreated slave cabins are highlighted as tour features, drawing in more visitors.\textsuperscript{277} The tours of the plantation house and slave cabins are often disconnected, and slavery is not interwoven into the stories of architectural grandeur and antebellum hospitality.\textsuperscript{278}

One notable exception to the white elite-centered plantation tour is Whitney Plantation, located in Wallace, Louisiana, which opened in 2015 and is referred to as a “slave museum” rather than a plantation museum.\textsuperscript{279} The owner of Whitney is John Cummings III, a rich white lawyer based in New Orleans who spent more than $8 million of his own money restoring the house and setting up the museum, with help from historian Ibrahima Seck, who has worked at Whitney full-time for years, 

\textsuperscript{276} Ibid, 27.
\textsuperscript{277} Adams, 63.
\textsuperscript{278} Ibid, 64.
\textsuperscript{279} "Whitney Plantation," http://whitneyplantation.com/.
researching its history.\textsuperscript{280} Whitney Plantation is the country’s first museum solely devoted to the history of slavery, telling the story of the plantation through the eyes of its slaves, rather than through the experiences of the Jean Jacques Haydel, for whom the house was built, and his family. In an article published in the \textit{Washington Post}, Cummings expressed his shock that, before Whitney, “not one of America’s 35,000 museums had been dedicated solely to the facts and experiences of slavery,” which he calls “an egregious national failure.”\textsuperscript{281} One is left to wonder why it took a wealthy white man with ample resources, one hundred and fifty years after emancipation, to open a privately owned museum dedicated to telling the story of slaves, something that no state, nor the national government, has done. Similarly, it took until 2003, after decades of failed proposals, for the National Museum of African American History and Culture, opened in 2016, to be approved by Congress.\textsuperscript{282}

In 2002, a report written by Jennifer Eichstedt and Stephen Small titled “Representation of Slavery: Race and Ideology in Southern Plantation Museums” was published, in which the authors explore the ways slavery is (or, often, is not) discussed in plantation tours. Through an analysis of one hundred and twelve plantation-based tourist sites, Eichstedt and Small found that “most of the sites… tell a story of American history that centers around whites, males, and elites, and that these sites erase or minimize the presence, labor, and lives of enslaved African


Americans.” The study identifies four primary methods of representation and discussion of slavery at the sites: symbolic annihilation and erasure, trivialization and deflection, segregation and marginalization of knowledge, and relative incorporation. These categories are useful for thinking about plantation preservation even outside of the context of the house museum, which is helpful considering the number of plantations that are privately owned and not open to the public. In particular, the category “symbolic annihilation and erasure” is valuable for understanding plantation preservation, especially as it was undertaken in nostalgic ways. Eichstedt and Small define this category as a strategy that “ignore[s] the institution of slavery altogether or treats it in a perfunctory way… suggest[ing] that slavery and the presence, labor, struggles, and contributions of people of African descent were not important enough to be acknowledged.” This phenomenon is especially obvious when reading through the nomination forms of plantation houses on the National Register of Historic Places, in which the house’s historical and architectural significance is recorded.

For a building to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places, it must be related to a significant event in history, be associated with a significant historic figure, “embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or… represent the work of a master,” or yield important historical or pre-historical information. The nomination forms include spaces for standard

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284 Ibid, 10.
285 Ibid.
information such as the site’s name, location, owner, and classification, as well as
descriptions of the physical appearance and the statement(s) of significance according
to its appropriate “area of significance.”\textsuperscript{287} The nomination forms of plantation houses
that have been placed on the Register, of which there are many, follow the trends that
Eichstedt and Small highlight in plantation museums. The histories of elite white men
who owned plantations are preserved in the record, while the legacy of slavery is
overlooked almost entirely.

In the case of Harrietta Plantation, which was nominated for the Register in
1973, the significance of the house is elaborated upon in three areas: architecture,
agriculture, and politics. Architecturally the house is considered important due to its
Federal and Greek Revival motifs, as well as the “later alterations… [that] have been
carried out in a manner appropriate to early 19th-century plantation dwellings.”
Agricultural significance stems from the rice cultivation that was “conducted” by the
owners of Harrietta, with no mention of the slaves who performed the agricultural
labor. Finally, the house is considered politically significant because it was, at one
point, owned by Stephen D. Doar, who “achieved local prominence not only as a
planter, but as Justice of the Peace, Commissioner of Free Schools, and Justice of the
Quorum.” The only mention of slaves is in the description of the house’s
surroundings, which at the time included the remnants of “one of the slave cabins,”
though the condition of it and its usage is unknown. Confederate nostalgia is present
in the form, which was prepared by the South Carolina Department of Archives and
History’s Historic Preservation Department, as the Civil War is referred to as “The

\textsuperscript{287} "National Register of Historic Places Program: Nomination Forms,"
War Between The States,” a title that was supported by the United Daughters of the Confederacy as preferable to the “Civil War”, which was, they argued, “erroneous and misleading”.

Harrietta Plantation’s Historic Register nomination form, which deems the significance of the plantation house largely on its architectural value while also praising the plantation master who owned it, is a normal example of plantation house nominations. The plantation house is seen as a historically significant symbol of the antebellum South, though through this practice of mythification and romanticization, it is a historically inaccurate one.

While there are similarities between the ways in which slavery is erased by museum staff and preservationists, the implications of two types of preservation are worth differentiating. Museum curators and historians have professional duties to interpret history fully and factually, while those undertaking preservation projects for themselves have no such professional obligations. Historic house museums are tools used to demonstrably teach visitors about the history and material culture of the sites being interpreted. Though privately owned homes that are not open to the public are not used to teach history, it would be a mishap to overlook the implicit histories and memories that these sites evoke. The history of plantation preservation itself reveals a greater history of white supremacy and antebellum nostalgia, as both Southern and Northern elites regarded the legacy of the Old South with fondness and a certain sentimental yearning. Plantation preservation also tells a story of the South after the Civil War, as it was once again embraced by the nation even after secession.

After World War II, preservation in America evolved, shifting from private to public-private organizations as heritage became more central to American life. The involvement of national and state governments in plantation preservation solidifies the plantation house’s role in national memory. Plantation houses are seen as symbols of the South’s history; their significance is rooted in architectural details while the legacy of slavery is all but written out of history. One must read between the lines of preservation documentation to know whether these homes were sites of slavery at all; it is easier to assume that all antebellum Southern mansions were sites of slave labor than it is to research their histories and find well-documented evidence of slavery.

In contrast to the restoration of plantation houses are the effects of their ruins, seen as symbols of the fall of the Old South. By analyzing the ways in which Southern ruins have been regarded in the past, the legacy of the Old South becomes both better understood and more complicated.
Chapter V
Unrestored Ruins

Many of the antebellum South’s plantation homes have been restored, but many more have been lost over time. In contrast to the restored plantation houses are the destroyed ones—either gone completely or left to decay, becoming ruins that only hint at their grand past. These ruins reflect destruction during the Civil War as well as the decline of the Old South following the war’s end, as the exact circumstances behind each ruin are not immediately recognizable. The image of the ruined plantation house has become a common one, featured in memoirs, literature, and photographs, by Southerners and Northerners alike. Often, plantation ruins were romanticized in a fashion similar to their restored counterparts, where they are read as picturesque decay, incidental features of the South’s distinctive landscape and history. The ruins of the Old South, both literal and figurative, also played a part in the lore of the Lost Cause. As historian W. Scott Poole writes, the pessimism at the heart of Lost Cause mythology and the emergence of Southern conservatism rooted in Lost Cause ideology “represented a contemplation of ruins and an insistent criticism of the new world that modernity sought to erect on those ruins.”

In 1864, General William Tecumseh Sherman and his troops set out on their March to the Sea, tracing a path from Atlanta to Savannah, Georgia. This campaign is known for its use of violence in the destruction of Confederate infrastructure and property, affecting the Confederacy’s economy and transportation systems, while also freeing slaves along the route. At this time, the destruction of civilian property,

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289 W. Scott Poole, Never Surrender: Confederate Memory and Conservatism in the South Carolina Upcountry (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2004), 56.
including private residences, was considered to be “an effective weapon against Southerners.” General Sherman was convinced that the destruction of both public and private property, which, in the Union troops’ eyes, was being used to support the Confederate cause, would constitute “a psychological battle that would undermine Southern morale and convince Confederate civilians that a Union victory was inevitable.”

The support for destruction of Confederate property was not limited to Sherman and his troops. Article 15 of the Lieber Code of the Union Army allowed “all destruction of property” when necessary. During a speech to the Lancaster County Republican Convention on September 3, 1862, radical Republican US Representative and abolitionist Thaddeus Stevens cried: “Abolition–yes! Abolish everything on the face of the earth but this Union; free every slave–slay every traitor–burn every rebel mansion, if these things be necessary to preserve this temple of freedom.” Union troops did just that, destroying thousands of homes, from mansions and slave cabins owned by wealthy planters to one-room log cabins owned by poor farmers. The devastation of homes in the South, and South Carolina in particular, due to its centrality in secession, was often done for revenge. As one Union major, George Nichols, noted in 1865, “houses are burning, and South

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291 Ibid.
292 Ibid., 63.
294 It should be noted that Confederate troops were also engaged in these same tactics, though, due to the majority of the Civil War being fought in the South, most domestic ruins were found in the South and caused by Union arson; Nelson, 62.
Carolina has commenced to pay an installment, long overdue, on her debt to justice and humanity.”\textsuperscript{295}

The destruction wrought by Sherman and his troops, as well as other members of the Union Army, was recorded in Virginian journalist Edward A. Pollard’s 1866 book, \textit{The Lost Cause: A New Southern History of the War of the Confederates}, a pro-Confederacy history of the Civil War. Writing about the capture of Columbia, South Carolina, by Union troops, Pollard lamented, “The sun rose with a wan countenance, peering dimly through the dense vapours which seemed wholly to overspread the firmament; the best and most beautiful portion of Columbia lay in ruins.”\textsuperscript{296} Similarly, he notes, “Charleston came into the enemy's possession a scarred and mutilated city… what were once fine houses, presented great gaping holes in the sides and roof, or were blackened by fire; at almost every step were to be found evidences of destruction and ruin wrought by the enemy.”\textsuperscript{297} Pollard’s descriptions of Southern ruination in the wake of General Sherman also tie into the Confederate loss of the Civil War in general, which “closed on a spectacle of ruin, the greatest of modern times.”\textsuperscript{298} Pollard continues by listing the various losses faced by the South: “There were eleven great States lying prostrate; their capital all absorbed; their fields desolate their towns and cities ruined; their public works torn to pieces by armies; their system of labor overturned; the fruits of the toil of generations all swept into a chaos of destruction; their slave property taken away by the stroke of a pen.”\textsuperscript{299}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[295] Ibid., 69.
\item[297] Ibid., 671.
\item[298] Ibid., 743.
\item[299] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
The physical ruins of the South following the Civil War were just part of the destruction. Plantation ruins specifically help to illustrate the dismantling of the Old South. As H.M. Hammill wrote in his memoir, *The Old South*, “Here and there mansions of the old order of Southern aristocracy are standing in picturesque and melancholy ruin, as reminders of the splendor and luxury of the antebellum planter.”300 In contrast to plantations that have been restored to their former grandeur, ruins symbolize decline and decay, and those who write of ruins in this way often do so with an air of sadness. In the 2009 book *Lost Plantations of the South*, New Orleans native Marc Matrana outlines the histories of formerly grand plantation houses that are now either in a ruinous state or completely gone. In describing the process of the deterioration of these plantation houses, Matrana notes, “the stories of their decline and ruin are each unique, but they hold a common thread in that all these estates have been lost physically, economically, socially, and culturally… the era they represent is equally lost.”301 While Matrana is careful to note the connection between plantation houses and “a time when human beings were forcefully held as property,” he also praises them for their role in architectural history, calling them “the most striking architectural relics ever created by an agrarian people.”302

The ruins resulting from the Civil War, and Sherman’s troops specifically, were first documented by George N. Barnard, a nineteenth-century photographer who was assigned, by the United States Army, the task of surveying the areas visited by General Sherman and his troops, as well as documenting their work in general,

300 Hamill, 21.
302 Ibid., xiii.
beginning in September 1864. Barnard documented the destruction of Atlanta, Charleston, and Columbia, among other places, as Sherman continued his March to the Sea. His album, *Photographic Views of Sherman’s Campaign* includes striking photos of the Southern landscape and its new ruins, taken during and after the war had ended. Scholar Keith Davis notes that Barnard does not include any images of the troops or the destruction they wrought during the March to the Sea in the album, despite the centrality of the March to Sherman’s fame. Davis attributes this to Barnard’s discomfort with the event, noting that “Barnard was disturbed by the burning of homes and other acts of violence committed by Sherman’s troops… probably evok[ing] in the photographer memories of marauding, undisciplined troops.” Still, Alan Trachtenberg reads Barnard’s photographs as showing an “undisguised hatred of slavery and Southern aristocracy.”

In Barnard’s photographs “The New Capitol” and “Columbia from the Capitol” one sees toppled columns, evoking familiar images of Ancient Greek ruins, symbolizing an empire in decline. Another photograph, “Ruins in Columbia S.C. No. 2,” captures what appears to be the ruins of a burned-down plantation house with only three brick columns still standing, the remnants of walls, chimneys, and staircases behind them. While Barnard did not capture the destruction wrought by Sherman’s troops during the process, his photographs show the aftermath, “the fall of the slave South,” with “Southern classicism in ruins.”

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303 Keith F. Davis, *George N. Barnard: Photographer of Sherman’s Campaign* (Kansas City: Hallmark Cards, Inc., 1990), 78.
304 Ibid., 170.
306 Ibid., 103.
“The New Capitol, Columbia, S.C,” George Barnard, 1865

“Columbia From the Capitol,” George Barnard, 1865
While the exact identity of the plantation house ruins that Barnard captured is unknown, a better-known ruin located outside of Columbia still exists today. In 1971, the ruins of Millwood Plantation outside of Columbia were added to the National Register of Historic Places for their agricultural, architectural, and political significance. According to the nomination form, the house, “an ambitious Greek Revival mansion with a central pile and matched wings,” was built sometime in the 1830s, and was burned to the ground in 1865 by troops “acting under orders from General William Tecumseh Sherman.”307 Sherman’s direct orders regarding the house

307 William Seale, "National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form - Millwood," ed. Department of the Interior (1970); While Sherman originally dismissed these accusations, he later admitted that he had given the orders to burn Hampton’s homes, “to shake the faith of his people in him,” Rod Andrew, Wade Hampton: Confederate Warrior to Southern Redeemer (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 320.
are not surprising, as the homes of prominent Confederate generals were especially targeted for destruction by Northern troops. Millwood Plantation had been the home of Wade Hampton II, a prominent South Carolinian whose father, Wade Hampton I, had owned over 2,000 slaves throughout his estates and was considered by many to be the “wealthiest planter and slaveholder in the South.” By the time of the Civil War, Millwood was owned by Hampton II’s unwed daughters, but was still considered home by Wade Hampton III, a Confederate general who, following Reconstruction, became an important Democratic politician.

In 1876, Hampton became the governor of South Carolina, serving in the position until 1879, when he was elected to the Senate. Throughout his political career, and especially towards its end, Hampton was considered to be a symbol of the Lost Cause—a Confederate hero who also assumed the position of Old Southern statesmen in both his “standards of honor and fair dealing,” as well as his familial ties to the antebellum aristocracy. Following Hampton’s death in 1902, the ruins of Millwood became “the emblem and almost trademark of the Lost Cause... [and] were pictured on postcards, opera curtains, prints, and in books,” and were even included in the seal of the local high school. In the same way that Hampton symbolized the old order and aristocracy of South Carolina, so, too, did the ruins symbolize the opulence of the antebellum South. According to the National Register, in 1971 the

308 Nelson, 70.
309 Seale.; Andrew, 3.
310 Seale.
311 Andrew, 443.
312 Ibid, 482-4.
314 Seale.
Millwood ruins were considered to be “undoubtedly the most important historic site of South Carolina, as applies to emotional climate of the people in the years after the Civil War.”\[^{315}\] Similarly, an article from the *New York Times* written in 1961 about Columbia, titled “A Visit to an Old Southern City,” referred to the ruins as “one of the most touching Confederate memorials,” as the house, “perhaps the most elegant mansion in South Carolina above tidewater,” was the “boyhood home of Confederate General Wade Hampton.”\[^{316}\]

Ruins made their way into nineteenth-century Northern travel writings and literature as well. In the short story, *From the Ancient City*, written by Constance Fenimore Woolson in 1874, Woolson describes the ruins of a Florida plantation house: “In the center of a broad lawn there were ruins of a mansion, the white chimney alone standing, like a monument to the past.”\[^{317}\] When history of the plantation is called into question, one character, Sara, asks: “Why insist upon digging it up? Let it rest in the purple haze of the past.”\[^{318}\] The site, with its wild greenery, plantation ruins, and unmarked tombs, is compared to Arcadia, an idyllic and romanticized region in Ancient Greece.\[^{319}\] In another instance, travel writer Albert Webster noted that Charleston was “full of picturesque surprised and unique architectural combinations, and the disasters that have overtaken it have left their traces in ruins that are, in some cases, wonderfully beautiful.”\[^{320}\]

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\[^{315}\] Ibid
\[^{319}\] Ibid, 109; 123n46.
\[^{320}\] Webster quoted in Silber, 77.
of Woolson’s writing, or by omission, in the case of Webster’s use of the vague term “disaster.” Ruins instead are aestheticized along with the rest of the South, as features of its landscape and its history.

Woolson’s portrayal of Southern ruins, and her writing more generally, came during the national reunion between North and South. Northerners, like Woolson, traveled down South for rest and relaxation, and to take in the distinctive Southern landscape and culture. While nineteenth-century Northern tourists enjoyed early plantation tours, they also visited ruins. As Nina Silber mentions, “ruins, even of a slave market or a plantation estate, appealed to the tourist’s aesthetic demands and thus became devoid of political content” as “relics of the lost cause… spoke to something that was old, historic, and distinctively Southern.”

321 Ruins became, and still operate as tourist sites, as their decay is preserved. Across the South are ruined plantation sites that have received local, state, or federal funds to aid in their stabilization and preservation, including the Windsor Ruins in Port Gibson, Mississippi, and the ruins of Rosewell Plantation in Gloucester County, Virginia.

The ruins of Windsor Plantation consist of twenty-three complete Corinthian columns and five partial columns, the only surviving remains from the mansion known for being the “ultimate expression of Greek Revival architecture in antebellum Mississippi,” built in 1861 by Smith Coffee Daniell II. 322 In 1890, the house was destroyed in an accidental fire, though the property continued to be passed down

321 Ibid, 77.
through Daniell’s heirs until it was donated to the State of Mississippi in 1974. Before its acquisition, the Port Gibson–Claiborne County Historical Society worked with the family to stabilize and waterproof the columns and to clean the site overall before handing it over to the State, which continues to oversee its preservation today. The Windsor Ruins are frequently visited and photographed, as “visitors come from far and wide to explore the site and gaze upon the lost plantation’s few remaining vestiges.” The columns have even been featured in Hollywood films, including Raintree County and Ghosts of Mississippi.

Rosewell Plantation in Gloucester County, Virginia was also an important antebellum mansion, dating back to Colonial Virginia. Rosewell was built in the 1720s and 30s for the prestigious Page family, the main structure on a 3,000 acre tobacco plantation. The Georgian plantation house, “one of the grandest colonial mansions” in Virginia, was destroyed in a fire in 1916. The ruins and nine surrounding acres were donated to the Gloucester County Historical Society in 1979, ten years after being added to the National Register of Historic Places. In 1995, the Rosewell Foundation was created for the sole purpose of preserving the ruins of Rosewell, along with the surviving documents and histories related to the site. In 2000, the bricks on the site were stabilized and a visitor’s center was built on the site.

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324 Ibid.
325 Matrana, 155.
326 Ibid., 155
329 Hubbard
using funds collected by the Foundation, which continues to offer self-guided tours and special events, including ghost tours during the Halloween season. The Rosewell ruins have been called the “most romantic ruins… in Virginia,” reminding visitors of the grandeur of Virginia’s past while “hint[ing] at the fragility of dreams and that nothing is permanent.”

For many plantation ruins not physically preserved, their memories live on in literature and art, including the photographic projects of Frances Benjamin Johnston and Clarence John Laughlin. Johnston included many images of Southern ruins in the Carnegie Architectural Survey of the South, making the ruins an integral part of the South’s architectural history and material culture. In Clarence John Laughlin’s book *Ghosts Along the Mississippi*, Laughlin focuses solely on the nostalgic and haunting images of plantation ruins, while ruminating on their histories, both material and social, in what he terms a “historico-architectural perspective.” These projects brought the ruins of the South to a broader audience in the mid-twentieth century, once again capturing the decline and destruction of the South, following George Barnard’s lead.

While Frances Benjamin Johnston’s Architectural Survey of the South captured various architectural eras and styles, it has been noted that she was particularly drawn to ruins and images of decay and decline, connecting to the aesthetic appreciation of age, decay, and the picturesque that had first appeared in

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331 Hubbard  
seventeenth-century landscape painting.\textsuperscript{333} In fact, Johnston photographed ruinous buildings so frequently that she met with criticism from local patrons and community members. A North Carolinian Colonial Dame who worked with Johnston on her 1941 book \textit{The Early Architecture of North Carolina} feared that Johnston would represent the architectural history of North Carolina as being filled with log homes and dilapidated houses, and entreated her to photograph “as many mansions as possible,” tying regional pride into the architectural record.\textsuperscript{334} Yet Johnston’s portrayal of Southern ruins was not an inherently negative one, nor was it a story of a declining culture. Johnston herself insisted that she photographed decaying houses because she was a “photographer of age before beauty because [her] camera finds beauty in the aged.”\textsuperscript{335} Her framing of plantation houses as such also reveals her interest in their architectural legacy. Rather than creating critical portraits of the houses or connecting the buildings to their social legacies, Johnston’s images are mere documentations. The Architectural Survey of the South only includes a handful of images of dilapidated slave cabins amid the mansions, and they are never photographed in connection with the plantations they were associated with.

Clarence John Laughlin’s plantation photography tells a different story of Southern history. His surrealist photographs are haunting and disorienting, capturing the beauty of decay while highlighting the downfall of plantation culture. Laughlin’s work is encapsulated in his book \textit{Ghosts along the Mississippi: An Essay in the Poetic}

\textsuperscript{335}Woods, 134.
Interpretation of Louisiana's Plantation Architecture, first published in 1948. The book contains one hundred images of plantation houses, from their intricate interiors to their crumbling columns and overgrown gardens, many of which were taken during Laughlin’s time as a photographer for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. During his assignment to document the levee system and nearby structures along the Mississippi River, Laughlin took notes of the decaying plantation homes along the river, returning later to photograph them.

In the introduction to Ghosts Along the Mississippi, Laughlin explains the appeal of these houses, noting both their beauty and their sinister histories: “Majestic, surely, were the great plantation houses; based upon a substratum of human exploitation, it is true; but, nevertheless, evocative of dignity that even age cannot wholly humble; a beauty then that even now, despite fire and flood and ruin, still sweeps the heartstrings with an impossible nostalgia for a time when life, for a while, had graciousness and leisure and peace.” Laughlin sees the Southern past as a time to be remembered for its relative calm, as he describes his present, New Orleans in the mid-twentieth century, as a hectic site, “with its organized madness, its frenzied concentration on multiple murder, its tempo which gives time a character wholly different from that during which the structures of the plantation period were formed.” Still, his photographs are dark in tone and composition, reflecting the downfall of the “doomed plantation system.”

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337 Ibid, 19.
338 Laughlin.
339 Ibid.
340 Ibid.
haunting nature of the past, including “Doorway to Forgotten Years,” “Under Time’s Onslaught,” and “Elegy for the Old South,” as he mourns the death of these houses at the hands of time.

Through his subject matter, Laughlin connects the fall of the Old South with the fall of ancient empires, focusing on white columns as well as ruined Greek statuary. In “Neo-Romantic Elegy,” Laughlin captures a double-exposed Greek plaster head found in the ruins of Belle Grove Plantation, “creating,” in his words, “a poem to the great structure where Grecian purity and severity reappear…[as the] concept of the head which swallows itself as symbol of the complex way by which plantation culture devoured itself from within.” 341 After a fire destroyed Belle Grove in 1952, Laughlin wrote an emotional elegy for the house to accompany the image “The Final Act,” comparing the ruins to “a palace of antiquity—lost in time and space” whose image has “the emotional quality of Piranesi’s engravings of Roman ruins.” 342 Belle Grove and its ruins, while no longer standing, are preserved in time through not only Laughlin’s images, but also through Johnston’s and Walker Evans’ photographs of the site, taken in the 1930s.

Laughlin’s comparison of plantation ruins to the ruins of the Old World was a common one. As tourism was on the rise at the end of the nineteenth century, decaying Southern buildings and cities were compared to the “fashionable tourist vistas of Europe,” as the presence of ruins revealed and reminded visitors of the history of the South, highlighting its aristocratic old order. 343 The South’s ruins added another layer of Southern distinctiveness that Northern tourists were searching for, as

341 Ibid.
342 Laughlin quoted in Meek, 89.
343 Silber, 77.
“the South... had room for ruins while the North,” an industrial and modern region, “did not.”\(^{344}\) Despite a national affinity for Greek Revival architecture during the antebellum period, the images of dismantled and decaying columns helped to solidify the connection between the antebellum South and ancient Greece, as plantation ruins were seen in an almost mythical light.

“Neo-Romantic Elegy,” Clarence John Laughlin, from *Ghosts Along the Mississippi*

\(^{344}\) Ibid.
The ruins of plantation houses, and the Old South in general, tell a story of destruction and loss, as the Civil War and its aftermath radically changed the economic, social, and political structures of the South, as well as its landscape. While restored plantation houses tell a story of continuation, these ruins highlight the present’s break from the past, signifying an earlier era that cannot be returned to. The images of plantation ruins were central to the Lost Cause aesthetic and mythology, as the mourning that was principal to its ideology could be translated into material loss in addition to the spiritual and corporeal loss that marked the memorial associations of the South following the war’s end. The loss of the Civil War taught white

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345 Poole, 70.
Southerners that “the truth lives among the ruins,” as they revered their ancestors and mourned the end of the Old South, quickly being replaced by an industrializing modernity.\(^{346}\) For those not associated with the Lost Cause, the image of ruins revealed the distinctiveness of the South, whose landscape reflected a bygone era of plantation gentility and grandeur. The ideas and feelings connected to restored plantation houses do not entirely differ from those related to ruins— in all cases, the lives of wealthy white plantation masters are made central to the story, as the antebellum South is seen through the lens of these elite members. Still, ruins evoke a distinctive sadness, as their physical decay symbolizes the decay and ruin of the Old South in an overt and tangible way.

\(^{346}\) Ibid, 19
Conclusion

Preservation projects undertaken in the South following the Civil War and the end of Reconstruction were steeped in nostalgia and memory, as white Southerners and Northerners alike romanticized the Old South and its plantation culture. Plantation preservation, in particular, provided an avenue for the material legacy of the elite antebellum planter class to be enshrined in the postbellum United States, despite the abolition of slavery and the Confederacy’s defeat in the War. Plantation preservation also played an important role in the creation of the current historical preservation culture in the country, as the restoration of Mount Vernon informed subsequent preservation groups, from the APVA to the National Trust.

As discussed in Chapter Three, the mythicized plantation culture created by elite white Southerners aided the national reunion between the white North and South, as white supremacist ideals overshadowed the experiences of black Americans. Wealthy Northerners were enamored with the romantic legacy of the Old South, even purchasing and restoring plantation homes on their own to fully immerse themselves in the grandeur of the antebellum South, created through the slave economy. Both restored plantation houses and unrestored ruins worked as symbols of the Old South and the Lost Cause that propagated myths about antebellum society, and plantation culture more specifically.

From the end of the nineteenth century through the twentieth century, plantation preservation evolved in relation to developments in American culture. The first preservation movements in the South (and the nation more generally) were organized by local activists and paid for through local fundraising. In the cases of the
MVLA, APVA, and SPOD, preservationists belonged to elite antebellum families who had lost their wealth but continued to hold the same political power and cultural sway. As time, and the culture of preservation, progressed, formal governmental channels were set up to aide in the organization and financing of preservation projects. Much like critics of state and local governments financing the upkeep of Confederate monuments, I am left to wonder whether it is appropriate for public funds to go towards the nostalgic and romanticized preservation of plantation houses, especially in cases where the experiences of elite white planters are privileged, and the experiences of slaves are all but erased.

The myth of the plantation house, stirring up images of grand white-columned mansions that served as the centers of antebellum hospitality, continues to this day, undoubtedly a continuation of the work done during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In one 2016 example, an Architectural Digest article titled “Go Inside a Historic Plantation Home,” the architectural details of Mulberry Plantation in South Carolina are described at length, with no mention of slavery or the legacy of the plantation apart from brief mentions of former rice fields.347 The market for plantation homes is thriving—by looking at the listings of Plantation Services Inc., a luxury real estate firm specializing in plantation sites which emphasizes the beauty of

347 Howard Christian, "Go inside a Historic South Carolina Plantation House Turned Family Home," Architectural Digest, http://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/mulberry-plantation-south-carolina.; While the article fails to address the history of slavery at Mulberry Plantation, it does, however, end by arguing that the house, a “South Carolina landmark, proves continuity is king,” playing off of South Carolina Senator James Henry Hammond’s infamous 1858 speech during the Senate debates over Kansas’ Lecompton Constitution, in which he advocates for the Southern slave economy on the basis that “cotton is king,” vital to both the Northern economy and the economy of England. James Henry Hammond, "Speech on the Admission of Kansas, under the Lecompton Constitution," in Selections from the Letters and Speeches of the Hon. James H. Hammond, of South Carolina (New York: J. F. Trow & Co., 1866).
the estates and their hunting potential, one can clearly see that wealthy Americans from across the country still seek the antimodern refuge of the South, along with its relics of antebellum grandeur.348 The plantation tourism industry also continues to thrive, a fact made evident not only through scholarly work being done on the subject, but also through the experience of driving through the South and encountering advertisements for historic sites, or by browsing tourism-centered websites, such as TripAdvisor.

Returning to the controversies surrounding Confederate symbols that I mentioned in the introduction, I am also left to wonder about the implications of plantation preservation, especially considering the connection between preservation and Old South traditionalism and white supremacy. It is worth noting that several articles have been published that discuss, in varying detail, visits taken by Dylann Roof in 2015 to multiple Charleston-area plantations, including Boone Hall, written about in Chapter Three. Writing for The Washington Post, reporters Neely Tucker and Peter Holley note that “[Roof] was drawn to former slave-owning plantations recast as “graceful” tourist attractions meant to evoke an antebellum ideal of romance and valor of the “Gone With the Wind” variety.”349 I am cautious of reading too much into these visits, or making any conclusions about the meaning behind them. Still, one is left to wonder about the power of these sites, both public and private, in continuing to symbolize the antebellum South and its related histories and legacies.

As my own experiences have shown me, it is much easier to leave a plantation site in awe of the architecture and stories of antebellum life than it is to leave with a more profound understanding of slavery and the experiences of those who were enslaved. Even I, with a critical interest in the ways in which plantation houses have been romanticized, feel a twinge of nostalgia when gazing upon the gleaming white columns of antebellum Southern mansions, despite connecting their architectural grandeur with the oppression of the antebellum plantation system. When one sees or visits a plantation house without being adequately presented with the history of its slaves, I imagine that the awe-inspiring effects are compounded.

This is, I believe, the crux of this thesis. Through the study of plantation preservation, we are able to better understand the emotional power of these sites as sentimental relics of a bygone era. Plantation houses are not as explicit in their meanings as Confederate monuments, though their preservation is historically tied to the Lost Cause and Confederate memorialization. More abstractly, the preservation of plantation houses allows for greater understanding of the role of collective memory and nostalgia in the South and the United States as a whole. The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 explicitly states the importance of heritage and material culture in the fabric of the American nation. The preservation of plantation houses, then, seems to have played a crucial role in the creation of a Southern regional identity and culture of nostalgia and traditionalism that the South is still known for today.
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