

Atlanta and The Permanent Things
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Part One: *Gone With the Wind*

The Regional Meetings of The Philadelphia Society are linked to particular places. The themes of the meeting are part of the significance of the location in which we are meeting. The purpose of these notes is to make our members and guests aware of the surroundings of the meeting.

This year we are blessed with the city of Atlanta, the state of Georgia, and in particular The Georgian Terrace Hotel. Our hotel is filled with significant history. An overall history of the hotel is found online:

<http://www.thegeorgianterrace.com/explore-hotel/>

Margaret Mitchell's first presentation of the draft of her book was given to a publisher in the Georgian Terrace in 1935. Margaret Mitchell's house and library is close to the hotel. It is about a half-mile walk (20 minutes) from the hotel.

<http://www.margaretmitchellhouse.com/>

A good PBS show on "American Masters" provides an interesting view of Margaret Mitchell, "American Rebel"; it can be found on your Roku or other streaming devices:

<http://www.wgbh.org/programs/American-Masters-56/episodes/Margaret-Mitchell-American-Rebel-36037>

The most important day in hotel history was the premiere showing of *Gone with the Wind* in 1939. Hollywood stars such as Clark Gable, Carole Lombard, and Olivia de Haviland stayed in the hotel. Although Vivien Leigh and her lover, Lawrence Olivier, stayed elsewhere they joined the rest for the pre-Premiere party at the hotel.

Our meeting will be deliberating whether the Permanent Things—Truth, Beauty, and Virtue—are in fact, permanent, or have they gone with the wind? In the movie version of *Gone with the Wind*, the opening title card read: "There was a land of Cavaliers and Cotton Fields called the Old South... Here in this pretty world Gallantry took its last bow... Here was the last ever to be seen of Knights and their Ladies Fair, of Master and of Slave... Look for it only in books, for it is no more than a dream remembered. A Civilization gone with the wind..."

It is ironical that neither Margaret Mitchell nor Scarlett O'Hara had much time for the classic books which transmit the permanent things. She describes Scarlett and the Tarleton twins, Stuart and Brent:

"Although born to the ease of plantation life, waited on hand and foot since infancy, the faces of the three on the porch were neither slack nor soft. They had the vigor and alertness of country people who have spent all their lives in the open and troubled their heads very little with dull things in books. Life in the north Georgia county of Clayton

was still new and, according to the standards of Augusta, Savannah and Charleston, a little crude. The more sedate and older sections of the South looked down their noses at the up-country Georgians, but here in north Georgia, a lack of the niceties of classical education carried no shame, provided a man was smart in the things that mattered. And raising good cotton, riding well, shooting straight, dancing lightly, squiring the ladies with elegance and carrying one's liquor like a gentleman were the things that mattered.

...In these accomplishments the twins excelled, and they were equally outstanding in their notorious inability to learn anything contained between the covers of books."

Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind*

Since the twins were expelled from college (several times), they knew their mother would not let them take the Grand Tour to Europe. They didn't care because, "What is there to see in Europe? I'll bet those foreigners can't show us a thing we haven't got right here in Georgia. I'll bet their horses aren't as fast or their girls as pretty, and I know damn well they haven't any rye whisky that can touch Father's."

The contrast to Ashley Wilkes could not be any stronger. Ashley had just returned from the three year Grand Tour of Europe. According to the twins, "Ashley Wilkes said they had an awful lot of scenery and music. Ashley liked Europe. He's always talking about it... Well—you know how the Wilkes are. They are kind of queer about music and books and scenery. Mother says it's because their grandfather came from Virginia. She says Virginians set quite a store by such things."

Twelve Oaks where Ashley lived was a beautiful white-columned house that crowned the hill like a Greek Temple. "He was courteous always, but aloof, remote. No one could ever tell what he was thinking about, Scarlett least of all....He was as proficient as any of the other young men in the usual County diversions, hunting, gambling, dancing and politics, and was the best rider of them all; but he differed from all the rest in that these pleasant activities were the end and aim of life to him. And he stood alone in his interest in books and music and his fondness for writing poetry."

A 19th century Roger Scruton!

Atlanta and The Permanent Things

Part 2

The purpose of these informational updates is to inform you of what there is to do in Atlanta, if you have some extra time. I also wish to show the relevance of these places to the themes of the conference.

One of the permanent things is the need for structure and hierarchy in society. Respect for authority and deference to the right sources of authority are necessary even for the freest society. Richard Weaver in his "A Dialectic on Total War" makes the case: "For the past several centuries there has been a growing tendency to collapse hierarchy and in consequence to deny, ignore, or abolish proper distinctions among human beings. These distinctions, or discriminations, have been of many kinds, answering to differences in

age, in sex, in education, in occupation, in way of life, in degree of commitment to transcendental goals, etc. In periods of high culture, there is interest in diversity as well as in sameness, and society uses the standards of many qualities to measure and identify, not merely the single standard of quantity to weigh." *Visions of Order*, p. 93.

An extreme vision of hierarchy is found in the popular (mis)conceptions of *Gone with the Wind*. As we saw in Part 1, the movie begins with mention of the Cavaliers and Cotton Fields in the Old South. It is described as a "pretty world where gallantry took its last bow." It is "the last ever to be seen of Knights and their Ladies Fair, of Master and of Slave." We are told to look for it only "in books, for it is no more than a dream remembered. A Civilization gone with the wind."

Often overlooked in the accounts of *Gone with the Wind* is failure to observe the ubiquity of class structure and deference in all classes and between classes. The simple antithesis of master and slave does not do justice to the complex stratifications within the white society and the equally complex stratifications within the slave society. On top of this is the fact that many blacks as portrayed in the novel are superior to the whites.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

The dream of slavery as a legitimate distinction is countered by the dream of another Atlantan, Martin Luther King, Jr. Today you can visit his birthplace, Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site, 449 Auburn Avenue, NE. It is two miles from the Georgian Terrace Hotel.

<http://www.nps.gov/malu/index.htm>

On August 28, 1963, Martin Luther King, made his "I have a dream speech." In it he included the refrain, "I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood.... But not only that; let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia!"

Why did Martin Luther King specifically mention Stone Mountain? Slave and slave master were uppermost in his mind, but the only Knights that Martin Luther King would have recognized were the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stone_Mountain

Stone Mountain, about 20 miles from the Georgian Terrace, is noted for its huge memorial to Jefferson Davis on Black Jack, Robert E. Lee on Traveler, and Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson on Little Sorrel.

More sinister is the fact that the resurrection of the Ku Klux Klan took place on Stone Mountain in 1915. William Joseph Simmons on Thanksgiving Eve, 1915, formed the nucleus of the second Ku Klux Klan.

Simmons was inspired by the movie, *Birth of a Nation*. The movie was produced by D.W. Griffiths and was based on a couple of novels by Thomas Dixon, Jr., *The Clansman* and *The Leopard's Spots*. Dixon said his purpose was “to revolutionize northern sentiment by a presentation of history that would transform every man in my audience into a good Democrat!” One good Democrat who didn’t need to be transformed was President Woodrow Wilson, a classmate of Thomas Dixon. It was also the first movie shown at the White House. At its Atlanta premiere, Ku Klux Klansmen paraded the streets of Atlanta.

War, Total War, and Pacifism

Aside from its racism, Griffith’s was a progressive who saw the message of the movie to be anti-war: “Dare we dream of a golden day when the bestial War shall rule no more? But instead—the gentle Prince in the Hall of Brotherly Love in the City of Peace.” Unfortunately, war, terrorism, and sin are parts of the permanent things.

In both *Birth of a Nation* and *Gone with the Wind*, Sherman’s march to the sea and the burning of Atlanta are important parts of the story even though General Sherman himself is not one of the characters. The theme of “total war” as Sherman’s contribution burns brightly in the understanding of many Southern conservatives, such as Richard Weaver and Mark Royden Mitchell. Against total war, they would have the virtues of chivalry and restraint, gentlemanly codes of honor, as the hallmark of the “last non-materialist civilization in the Western World.”

At its root, this is the ideal that made Weaver the implacable foe of total war developed by William Tecumseh Sherman and Philip Sheridan, applied to both the South during the Civil War and the American Indians after the Civil War. Richard Weaver’s treatment of, William Tecumseh Sherman: “But against Sherman, who admitted that of the one hundred million dollars of destruction his armies wrought in Georgia only twenty million were of military advantage, words could not contain the measure of Southern indignation.” (Richard Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay*, p. 68)

He also outlines the impact of Sherman and Sheridan on the development of German total war concepts in his essay referred to above, “A Dialectic on Total War.” (*Visions of Order*, pp. 97ff.)

Columbia, South Carolina, was burned in lines with Sherman’s dictum, “When I go through South Carolina, it will be one of the most horrible things in the history of the world. The devil himself couldn’t restrain my men in that state.” Even more vindictive than his March through Georgia, one of his men stated, “Here is where treason *began*, and, by God, here is where it shall end!” (Ken Burns, p. 356) Columbia, the capitol of South Carolina, was burned the same day as Fort Sumter surrendered to the union navy.

Mark Royden Winchell brings Sherman into contemporary perspective, “The catastrophe faced by the characters in *Gone With the Wind* and the Southern people they represent is that their civilization, as well as much of their material well-being, was destroyed by an

enemy waging total war and bent on total victory. When Islamic terrorists flew airplanes into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, many well-meaning but historically ignorant people expressed disbelief that anyone could be so implacably evil as to target a civilian population in order to achieve a political objective. Anyone who had read Margaret Mitchell's description of the burning of Atlanta or seen that event depicted on the movie screen would know that such evil was not invented by Osama bin Laden. Terrorism is as old as Original Sin and as American as William Tecumseh Sherman." (*God, Man & Hollywood*, ISI Books, 2008, pp. 24-25; also see his reviews of *Birth of a Nation* and *Song of the South*, to be taken up in a later update)

Atlanta and the Permanent Things Part 3

The best defender of the South was Richard Weaver. Although he believed in hierarchy and distinction, he was not a defender of slavery.

In his important essay, "Status and Function" in *Visions of Order*, he defended an "equilibrium" between North and South. "We have had in the United States during the latter half of our history convincing illustrations of what happens when this principle of equilibrium is ignored. The North-South polarity of our American culture must be understood in these terms. North and South have consistently opposed one another; each has charged the other with unreasonableness and perversity in its attitudes and institutions. Moreover, each is puzzled and indignant over what it regards as the groundlessness of the other's charges. This opposition can be referred to the cause we are now considering. The South has attached too much weight to status. The North or in general that part of the country to which the sobriquet 'Yankee' is applied, has attached too much importance to function." (*Visions of Order*, p. 30)

We could only have wished for a full-blown treatment by Weaver of *Gone with the Wind* since there are interesting parallels between his work and that of Margaret Mitchell. It is striking that Scarlett O'Hara, Rhett Butler, and Ashley Wilkes were skeptical of the fire-eaters of the Confederacy.

Scarlett consistently hated conversation about war, secession, and Lincoln. "Fiddle de dee!" For the very good selfish reason that it did not revolve around her. Later she referred to all such talk as "Twaddle." Rhett Butler was the cynic and realist who realized early on that the South was doomed to failure.

Ashley Wilkes' letter to Melanie that Scarlett reads illicitly contains the rural spirit that drove the Southern Agrarians. "Home and country" is what motivated Ashley. "And so when I lie on my blanket and look up at the stars and say, 'What are you fighting for?' I think of States' Rights and cotton and the darkies and the Yankees whom we have been bred up to hate, and I know that none of these is the reason why I am fighting...[rural memories]...And that is why I'm here who have no love of death or misery or glory and no hatred for anyone. Perhaps that is what is called patriotism, love of home and country.

But, Melanie, it goes deeper than that. For, Melanie, these things I have named are but the symbols of the thing for which I risk my life, symbols of the kind of life I love. For I am fighting for the old days, the old ways I love so much but which, I fear, are now gone forever, no matter how the die may fall. For, win or lose, we lose just the same.” (p. 211)

Melanie understood these things; Scarlett did not—in spite of her fierce belated attraction to her beloved Tara. Richard Weaver was explicitly critical of Scarlett O’Hara: “The tremendous impression which Miss Mitchell’s Scarlett O’Hara made upon the Northern audience is owing to the fact that Scarlett is a type of ruthless entrepreneur which Northerners have met in their own life and can therefore understand and credit.”

(Richard Weaver, “Aspects of Southern Philosophy” *The Hopkins Review*, Vol. V, No. 4 (Summer 1952), reprinted in *The Southern Essays of Richard M. Weaver*, ed. George M. Curtis and James J. Thompson, Jr., The Liberty Press, Indianapolis, 1987, p. 208.)

Of the three, Ashley Wilkes’ comes the closest to the agrarianism of the “Twelve Southerners” and their later interpreters, Richard Weaver, and Mel Bradford.

Atlanta and the Premier of *Song of the South*

The same year as the Atlanta premiere of *Gone With the Wind*, 1939, was the same year that Walt Disney procured the rights to the Uncle Remus stories of Joel Chandler Harris. The movie did not get off the ground until 1946. November 11th had been declared Joel Chandler Harris Day as well as Armistice Day, including a parade down Peachtree street. The movie premiered, November 12, at the Fox Theater immediately across from the Georgian Terrace.

The Fox Theater can easily be visited and has an interesting history and architecture.
<http://www.foxtheatre.org/the-Fox-Story.aspx>

It is difficult and expensive to obtain copies of *Song of the South*. Not only PC Police, but also Disney Studios itself has made it virtually unavailable.

Ironically the *Song of the South* celebrates rural Georgia and not the urban center of Atlanta. Although we are meeting in the most cosmopolitan city of the state, the tensions between the outlying regions and the city are significant. If it weren’t for the convenience of airplane connections in Atlanta, we should probably be meeting in a more rural part of the state.

Atlanta is still the home of The New South and the Newer South derivatives. “Lantatantarum” is the word that Uncle Remus uses to describe the citified Atlanta opposed to the rural parts of Georgia. The word captures the chaotic nature of the place. You can find Uncle Remus stories read on Youtube.com:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HiqNXMGlcE>

Mark Royden Winchell has provided a nuanced consideration of *Song of the South* and the figure of Joel Chandler Harris in his *God, Man, & Hollywood* (ISI Books, 2008).

Uncle Remus is the antithesis of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom*, but Harris' sympathetic portrayal of Uncle Remus has more in common with Mark Twain.

Mark Royden Winchell, Professor of English at Clemson University, died prematurely at age 60 in 2008. He was also a biographer of Donald Davidson, Cleanth Brooks, and Leslie Fiedler. It was Donald Davidson who once sarcastically stated, "I am not sure that I quite understand the principles of Mr. Roosevelt in the role of theoretical agrarian—that is of the mostly absentee landlord of a Georgia farm." ("Agrarianism and Politics" *Review of Politics*, 1939, p. 115)

Margaret Mitchell shares the view of Uncle Remus by comparing the character of Atlanta to the character of Scarlett O'Hara: "Atlanta was of her own generation, crude with the crudities of youth and as headstrong and impetuous as herself." (p. 141) Atlanta not only stands in juxtaposition to rural Georgia, but also other southern cities which were more genteel and older, Savannah, Georgia, and Charleston, South Carolina. Atlanta by contrast was a brash and pushy town.

Ironically Joel Chandler Harris, the chronicler of Uncle Remus, was part of the New South movement and good friends with Henry W. Grady, progressive editor of *The Atlanta Constitution*. For information about Henry Grady and his statue in downtown Atlanta:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_W._Grady

The Grady Hospital, 36 Butler Street, currently Georgia Hall, was named after Henry Grady when it opened in 1892. Welcoming poor and rich, black and white, Grady Hospital was to be state of the art.

Although most of the New Southerners hoped for racial reconciliation, they saw it as the fruit of economic progress. Social and political equality were not part of the immediate picture. The supremacy of whites over blacks was to be continued. Grady stated in an 1888 speech, "the supremacy of the white race of the South must be maintained forever, and the domination of the negro race resisted at all points and at all hazards, because the white race is the superior race... [This declaration] shall run forever with the blood that feeds Anglo-Saxon hearts."

Booker T. Washington's famous "Atlanta Compromise" speech of 1895 at the Atlanta Exposition tactically accepted these relationships and emphasized the importance of the work ethic for the Negro. Vocational Education was to be the answer to the degradation of the former slaves.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Atlanta_Exposition_Speech

The speech was given at the Cotton States and International Exposition.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cotton_States_and_International_Exposition_%281895%29

The land subsequently became Piedmont Park, a beautiful park of 189 acres in the center of the city.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Piedmont_Park

Robert Penn Warren's "Briar Patch" essay in *I'll Take My Stand* uses Uncle Remus in the title, but the metaphor does not occur in the essay. The position he took demanding equality before the law and vocational education for the Negro are essentially similar to that of Booker T. Washington. Steve Ealy has given a careful analysis of Robert Penn Warren's position in, "A Place for the Negro in the Agrarian Scheme: Robert Penn Warren's Contribution to *I'll Take My Stand*" which was based on a presentation, "Agrarian Reflections on Civil Rights," he gave at The Philadelphia Society meeting, *Black History and Conservative Principles*, October 1-2, 2004:

<http://www.firstprinciplesjournal.com/articles.aspx?article=1611&theme=home&page=1&loc=b&type=cttf>

One of the strongest opponents of Booker T. Washington was W.E.B. Dubois, who wrote the poem, "A Litany at Atlanta," in response to the Atlanta race riots of 1905. He was a professor at Atlanta University and spent two long periods in Atlanta: 1897-1910 and 1934-44. It was W.E.B. Dubois who bitingly named Washington's speech as the "Atlanta Compromise." In essence, he argued that Washington had sold out the demands for equal rights and social equality with the accommodationist position dictated by white industrial interests.

The ongoing debate about Civil Rights in this country follows the same tracks as the contrast between Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Dubois. For a provocative defense of Booker T. Washington, cf. *Booker T. Washington: A Re-Examination*, Prefaced by Joe Bast for the Heartland Institute. Compiled by Philadelphia Society member, Lee Walker, it also contains a very stimulating essay by the speaker at our last National Meeting, Anne Wortham, "Booker T. Washington was Right." There are also essays by Members, Peter Schramm and William B. Allen.