ANSONBOROUGH: HISTORIC PRESERVATION IN CHARLESTON, POST-WORLD WAR II

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

in

HISTORY

by

MATTHEW J. KLEIN
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at

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CHARLESTON, SOUTH CAROLINA AT THE COLLEGE OF CHARLESTON AND THE CITADEL

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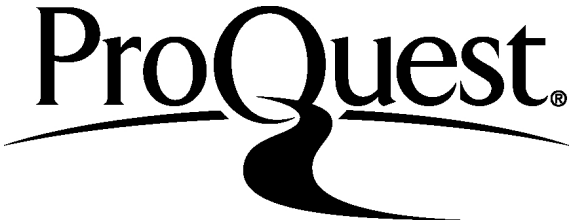

ABSTRACT

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Historic preservation efforts in post-World War II Charleston, SC, as directed primarily by the Historic Charleston Foundation, were often dominated by rhetoric in the local press that focused primarily on the notion of reclamation of the city's antebellum heritage. Using Lost Cause imagery such as the battle over states' rights and the Redemption of 1876, local newspapers attempted to justify the removal of the poor minority population on Charleston's lower peninsula by arguing for this return to Charleston's social, political, and cultural domination by elite whites. In practice, the Historic Charleston Foundation employed racism and white supremacy disguised as the desire for rehabilitating and beautifying the city, to justify the removal of poor minorities, effectively defining what it meant to be a citizen of Charleston during the Civil Rights era.

Thank you to Dr. W. Scott Poole, Mrs. Karen Emmons, Dr. Tammy Ingram, Dr. Kerry Taylor, Dr. Phyllis Jestice, and Dr. Jason Coy.

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Introduction

I.

"*We have today learned that Mrs. Dingle's property at 57 Anson Street was sold a few days ago for $4,000. The name of the buyer cannot be ascertained at this time, but we are informed that the property was sold to White persons who have no plans to make use of the property in any way for Negroes." – Frances R. Edmunds, Director: Historic Charleston Foundation, September 22, 1961*

Southern pride and Southern heritage. These two terms have received an enormous amount of attention on an international scale since the mass shooting of nine African Americans at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, SC on June 17, 2015. The attention paid to entrenched racism and racist symbolism has not only dominated the news cycle since, it has also led to a very heated discussion throughout not only South Carolina, but throughout the United States and the world. The controversy over the Confederate Battle Flag flying on the State House grounds in Columbia, SC has reached a point not seen since 2000, when a bipartisan legislative agreement removed the flag from the Capitol dome and onto to the lawn of the State House.[1] Supporters of the flag often use terms such as "heritage" and "pride" to argue that the Confederate Battle Flag (a flag that ironically was almost never used by Confederate troops in South Carolina) is a symbol of prideful white Southern identity, not a symbol of hate as so many detractors argue. Many supporters in the same breath will tell you that the Civil War was fought over states' rights and not slavery. The consistent Southern uses of states' rights, heritage, pride,

[1] The Confederate Battle Flag was removed from the State House grounds once and for all on July 10, 2015 in the wake of the shootings at Emanuel AME Church.

redemption, and reclamation, all terms with deep racist undertones, can also be used to describe the historic preservation movement in Charleston from the late-1950s through the 1960s.

II.

Historic preservation, broadly defined, revitalizes, rehabilitates, and maintains historic sites and structures for the purpose of allowing all citizens regardless of color, to understand and appreciate their history and heritage, as well as for striking a balance for the present and the future. But, in reality, whose history and heritage is it? Who makes the decisions when it comes to how history and heritage are remembered, preserved, and represented? In many ways, elite whites dominate the notions of heritage and remembrance through the practice of historic preservation, with Charleston being a prime example of this.

In the twentieth century, local preservationists took enormous steps in regard to Charleston's history and architectural heritage. From the creation of the *Society for the Preservation of Old Dwellings* in 1920 to the publication of *This is Charleston: A Survey of the Architectural Heritage of a Unique American City* in 1944, the interwar period was rife with grassroots attempts at preserving Charleston's heritage, attempts that, according to Stephanie Yuhl's *A Golden Haze of Memory: The Making of Historic Charleston*, wealthy white Charlestonians exclusively directed.

This thesis shows that historic preservation efforts in Charleston after World War II, as directed primarily by the *Historic Charleston Foundation*, had an undercurrent of white supremacy throughout. In addition, it establishes that the local press often viewed

historic preservation, and the racism associated with it, as a return to the battle over state's rights versus federal control. Also, the thesis argues that the notion of historic preservation in Charleston being an act of redemption ties in directly to the Redemption of 1876, a violent response to Reconstruction. Lastly, it shows that preservation groups such as the *Historic Charleston Foundation*, through their preservation efforts with assistance from the rhetoric of the local press, defined what it meant to be a citizen. A citizen was essentially a middle to upper-class white who had the means to rehabilitate neighborhoods and remove the undesirable minority population.

The Ansonborough neighborhood on Charleston's peninsula provides an excellent example of post-WWII preservation efforts in Charleston. The *Historic Charleston Foundation* in 1957 designated Ansonborough as a paradigm for a new kind of historic preservation. This preservation was unique in many ways. First, the *Historic Charleston Foundation* targeted an entire neighborhood for preservation, not just one structure. Second, the *Historic Charleston Foundation* put into practice the notion of historic buildings being used for contemporary residential and commercial space, meaning that historic buildings were no longer simply to be repurposed as museums. Lastly, funding was to be used as leverage for private sector investment and rehabilitation.

However, racism and white supremacy were present throughout the historic preservation process. The neighborhood's redevelopment was green-lit by the *Historic Charleston Foundation* ostensibly to showcase Charleston's rich cultural and architectural legacy, yet at the same time it was also a way to drive out those who were considered undesirable, namely poor African Americans, whose tenements threatened to

encroach on Ansonborough's white, elite cultural heritage. Ansonborough offers a clear example of the clash of race, class, and historic preservation.

Shortly after the turn of the twentieth century Charleston began to experience a boom in historic preservation and an embracing by elite whites of the city's unique cultural and architectural heritage. This desire for preserving the city's past through architectural rehabilitation has in many ways made Charleston one of the top tourist destinations of the twenty-first century. However, there were many underlying motives in regard to the *Historic Charleston Foundation*'s preservation efforts, including white supremacy, a return to the battle over state's rights, and the Redemption of 1876. These motives combined to create an atmosphere that subjugated the poor African-American population of Charleston's lower peninsula and ultimately forced them out of the neighborhoods that the *Historic Charleston Foundation* targeted for rehabilitation.

In 1941, at the beginning of U.S. involvement in World War II, the Charleston Shipbuilders and Dry Dock Company was awarded an $8 million federal contract to begin building vessels for the United States Navy. Located on the eastern end of Calhoun Street in what is now the Liberty Square area, the dry docks initially employed over 10,000 workers from various parts of the state and country. These newly arrived workers, many of them African-American and Greek, needed housing. The Ansonborough homeowners during World War II began to move away from the neighborhood and began renting their homes to this influx of dockworkers, thus generating new income as absentee landlords. As World War II came to a close, the need for military vessels for the United States Navy began to dwindle. Many of these new renters, now out of the work that brought them to the Charleston dry docks in the first place, stayed in Ansonborough,

often with minimal income. Thus began the steady decline of Ansonborough into "slum-like conditions."[2]

III.

The historiography of historic preservation in Charleston has focused primarily on preservation efforts during the interwar period. Historian Stephanie Yuhl's book is the most well-researched and accessible work in regard to preservation during this period. Her argument throughout is that, indeed, wealthy, white Charlestonians controlled all preservation efforts from the 1920s through World War II. In her words, elite whites transformed the notions of loss and destruction after the Civil War into "a revitalized civic identity that rebuked the chaos of modern America and reasserted Charleston's relevance in national dialogues about race, politics, economics, and the social order."[3]

Yuhl argues that Charleston has a unique definition of "elite." Whereas personal wealth and ties to big business in the early twentieth-century often defined elite status on a national level, in Charleston being elite meant that one was descended from a quasi-royal bloodline, a kind of "hereditary nobility" that stretched back to colonial times.[4] These members of the hereditary nobility consolidated power throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries via the acquisition of land and the control of slaves. After the Civil War and well into the twentieth century, these elite families practiced the same cultural rituals their ancestors did, often living in the same neighborhoods, joining the

[2] Karen Prewitt, "Ansonborough" in the *South Carolina Historical Society*.
[3] Stephanie E. Yuhl, *A Golden Haze of Memory: The Making of Historic Charleston*. (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005) pp. 1-2.
[4] Yuhl, 7.

same social clubs, intermarrying, etc. Because of these close cultural bonds that had been formed for many decades, these elite white Charlestonians "assumed they would exert significant influence over their city's policies and inhabitants, as had older generations of their families. Maintaining these kinship ties, social patterns, and life expectations…fueled much of Charleston's formal cultural activity between the world wars, as it had the city's politics, culture, and economics from the colonial era through the nineteenth century."[5] Yuhl argues that this creation and maintenance of a cultural community among elite whites not only created a place for memories of a bygone era to exist, but a way to transform those memories into what is now considered Historic Charleston.

Historian Andrew Hurley offers a similar, yet more simplistic take on what prompted the historic preservation boom in early-twentieth century Charleston. His argument is that after the destruction of the city during the Civil War, coupled with the economic decline that followed the end of the plantation system, Charleston residents could simply not afford to replace existing structures with newer ones. By 1920, when elite white Charlestonian Susan Pringle Frost created the Society for the Preservation of Old Dwellings as a response to the threat of development to the Joseph Manigault House on Meeting Street, many Charlestonians had accepted that their aging structures were part of their civic identity.[6] In order to combat the encroachment of modernity, these elite Charlestonians developed a unique process to ensure the preservation of historic structures. Historic zoning allowed residents to determine whether modifications to

[5] Yuhl, 8.
[6] Andrew Hurley, *Beyond Preservation: Using Public History to Revitalize Inner Cities*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010) p. 4.

building exteriors fell within a prescribed notion of historic integrity or whether that integrity might be violated.[7] This historic zoning process, which will be discussed further, extends to this day and proved highly influential in revitalizing and rehabilitating historic structures throughout the city, Ansonborough included.

The Roosevelt administration's New Deal programs of the 1930s also helped to define Southern notions of heritage and memory in unique ways. Historian Bruce J. Schulman argues this point extensively in his 1994 publication *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South, 1938-1980.* Schulman argues that the South had difficulty organizing its labor force after the abolition of slavery and the destruction of southern cities after the Civil War. As Schulman writes: "The postbellum South found itself more dependent than ever on the whims of 'King Cotton'. As southern farmers increasingly specialized in cotton, international cotton demand alternately fueled and strangled the region, leaving the South at the mercy of the world market. The fortunes of the region's farmers fluctuated with world demand, but never rose high; rural southerners never earned more than half the income of their northern counterparts."[8]

This inability to restore the South to its antebellum plantation culture allowed New Deal policymakers to focus their attention away from cotton and toward manufacturing, and while this shift toward manufacturing proved somewhat successful, again the South was not able to match the industrial might of the North. Out of this

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[7] Hurley, 4.
[8] Bruce J. Schulman, *From Cotton Belt to Sunbelt: Federal Policy, Economic Development, and the Transformation of the South: 1938-1980*. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994) p. 4.

continued inability to compete with the North came the notion of the South as a colonial economy, an economy that essentially existed to assist the North.[9]

Coinciding with the shifting southern economy during the early-twentieth century was an internal boom in southern infrastructure and public services. Southern state governments developed new roads, placed more emphasis on education, and attempted to reform the comparatively inferior health care system. In doing so, however, southern state governments effectively left the black population behind. As Schulman attests: "Enhanced services for whites accompanied segregated, inferior public facilities for black southerners. Many states forced blacks to finance their own schools exclusively from their own tax payments, despite their slender economic resources. While southern cities [Charleston included] improved municipal services in the 1920s, black neighborhoods remained without parks, paved roads, street lights, and adequate sanitation systems."[10]

This cultural vacuum created by southern, white elites led to the displacement of black populations in neighborhoods such as Ansonborough in the mid-twentieth century, displacement that, as Schulman makes clear, was through no fault of the black population itself; rather elite white southerners had attempted to block any social and economic advancement of the black population by providing them access only to inferior resources. In addition, elite white southerners balanced the notion of an advancing southern

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[9] This colonial economy was dependent on two factors. First, the "lack of industry, especially of highly mechanized durable goods manufacturing, was the source of southern backwardness…Only advanced manufacturing could provide the high wages, the purchasing power and the tax base to extricate the South from its misery. Second, the notion of colonial economy meant that the federal government had to rescue the South. As a colony of the North, the South did not bear full responsibility for its problems, nor did it possess the resources to eradicate them." Schulman, 11.

[10] Schulman, 11.

economy with the romanticized memory of antebellum southern existence. In other words, the black population of the South was almost entirely subjugated and was thus at the mercy of elite white governments as well as the burgeoning preservation movement.

Perhaps no other publication has had as great an effect on creating and maintaining the notion of Charleston's mythologized heritage and culture as *This is Charleston: An Architectural Survey of a Unique American City*. Ostensibly a photographic anthology that allows the reader to view photographs of buildings that have been deemed culturally important or at the very least aesthetically pleasing, the approximately fifty pages of text within the book showcase the mindset of elite white preservationists in the post-World War II era. First published in 1944 and revised continuously through the 1960s, the text of *This is Charleston* gives the reader a brief history of the city from its founding in 1670 to the present day. However, one thing the publication blatantly omits is any discussion of slavery. In fact, the words "slavery", "slaves", or anything comparable are never mentioned in the text. The only mention at all of the black population of Charleston is in reference to the intersection of Church and Tradd streets, where "once a lively negro 'alley' still keeps its old contemptuous nickname of 'Cabbage Row', which Dubose Heyward transposed into 'Catfish Row' when he transposed a simulacrum of the building to the water front to house 'Porgy' in his celebrated novel."[11] In addition to the lack of any discussion about slaves, whose labor greatly fueled Charleston's economy for two centuries and helped to create and maintain the elite white Charlestonian notion, the publication also uses language throughout that could be deemed elitist at the very least. Eighteenth-century

[11] Stoney, Samuel Galliard, *This is Charleston: An Architectural Survey of a Unique American City*. (Charleston: The Carolina Art Association, 1994, 3rd ed.) p. 27.

Charlestonians are referred to as "pristine"[12], the War of Austrian Succession "rudely" disrupted the "long comfortable prosperity"[13], and the city of Charleston is referred throughout as "she" and "her", thus creating an almost mythical, virtuous identity to the city, an identity that needed protection. In addition, the Civil War is titled the "Confederate War" and Charleston "is well aware that more than any other southern city she began- and also lost it."[14]

This is Charleston does make the same distinction in regard to architectural preservation after the "Confederate War" that historian Andrew Hurley has made. According to *This is Charleston*, the "poverty that came with peace was not, from our point of view, entirely an evil. Much that was good in the architecture of Charleston, which must have been doomed by prosperity in the tasteless 70s and 80s, survived of necessity to more sensible days. Outside the burned district, mansards, and what they cover and fit with, are mercifully few and far between. Even the 'Queen Anne' successors to these 'General Grant' hideousities and the 'Colonial' of the early 1900's are fortunate rarities in the more interesting parts of the city."[15] In other words, as Hurley argues, the destruction of the Civil War left Charlestonians with no financial resources and thus they were forced to keep and maintain the buildings that existed prior to the conflict.

In sum, *This is Charleston* describes the city as an almost organic entity, a being that has left its architectural richness for the public (a white, upper class public with refined tastes) to enjoy. The publication argues that, until more sound ways to build new

[12] Stoney, 15.
[13] Stoney, 27.
[14] Stoney, 45.
[15] Stoney, 47-49.

structures are developed, "people simply cannot build today the sort of house that old Charleston has kept for us."[16] In addition, a discussion not unlike Stephanie Yuhl's conversation about "hereditary nobility" in Charleston, is found in the closing lines from *This is Charleston*: "The problem of preservation is largely one of appreciation. You get from a thing interest on what you bring to it. On the other hand, a study of what you have at hand is a direct help to good life, and the Charlestonian who neglects his opportunities to see and know and understand his own city renounces a birthright unsurpassed on this side of the Atlantic."[17] Again, heritage, pride, redemption, and reclamation. All terms that *This is Charleston* alludes to. All terms that are used as a way for elite white Charlestonians to rally around their city at the expense of the black population, in much the same way that many racist white southerners have consistently rallied around the Confederate Battle Flag.

Historic preservationist Ned Kaufman speaks to preservation, memory, and race in his work *Place, Race, and Story: Essays on the Past and Future of Historic Preservation*. While his examples of preservation focus primarily on New York City, the concepts he discusses can easily be applied to Charleston. He argues that preservationists fall into two categories, those who look inward and specifically at the mechanics and textbook standards of preservation versus those who look forward to new, unique challenges (of which the author describes himself as in the second group), Kaufman argues that the forward-looking preservationists must tackle the omnipresent problem of racial diversity, or lack thereof, within the historic preservation movement. In doing so, he asks a series of questions that are directly applicable to Charleston's preservation

[16] Stoney, 57.
[17] Stoney, 57.

movement in the twentieth century. First, what good are stringent technical standards of preservation if they do not contribute to a greater social value? Second, how should "preservationists balance the competing claims of disparate sites and divergent values recognized by culturally diverse groups?...Is the persistent whiteness of the profession a problem in a society becoming ever more diverse?"[18] As we shall see, in regard to the last question as it applies to Charleston's Ansonborough preservation in the 1950s and 1960s, the answer is a resounding yes.

Kaufman describes a "diversity deficit" in historic preservation. He defines this deficit as follows: "It is the gap between the nation's racial and ethnic diversity and the preservation profession's lack of diversity. Just as diversity characterizes both the nation's past and its present, so the absence of diversity affects both how preservation portrays the past and how it organizes itself professionally in the present."[19]

Kaufman lays out a few distinct ways for closing this racial gap within the preservation movement. First, he argues the federal government (National Park Service in particular) should lead the way in joining the "histories of minority and majority groups" into a "new *national* history."[20] Second, the preservation movement should hire more minority workers. While Kaufman clearly states that minorities are no less qualified for historic preservation positions, many choose to instead pursue careers in history, anthropology, etc., primarily due to the lack of inclusiveness within the preservation movement.[21] In addition to the above-mentioned suggestions for creating more racial

[18] Ned Kaufman, *Place, Race, and Story: Essays on the Past and Future of Historic Preservation.* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009) p. 2.
[19] Kaufman, 22.
[20] Kaufman, 123.
[21] Kaufman, 125.

inclusiveness, which Kaufman argues the federal government should play the largest part in implementing, he also desires more involvement from citizens. Arguing that community-based initiatives can have the most direct positive effect on preservation efforts, he suggest that the federal government should play a direct role in assisting local communities, primarily in the form of financial assistance.[22] It is interesting to note that, if Kaufman's suggested reforms were implemented by preservationists in Charleston in the 1950s and 1960s, the outcome of rehabilitation projects such as the one spearheaded by the *Historic Charleston Foundation* in Ansonborough would likely have had a much different, more positive impact in regard to the racial diversity of the neighborhood and the legacy of displacement and gentrification in the city as a whole.

Historian Robert R. Weyeneth's 1997 book, *Historic Preservation for a Living City: Historic Charleston Foundation, 1947-1997*, provides a detailed overview of the foundation's preservation efforts, as the author puts it, "warts and all".[23] And while some of these warts do appear in his chapter on Ansonborough, much more could have been written on the racial prejudice and fear that drove the Historic Charleston Foundation's rehabilitation efforts, or "slum clearance."

Weyeneth's chapter on Ansonborough does offer the reader a clear, concise overview of the Historic Charleston Foundation's rehabilitation project beginning in 1957. Going into great detail about the implementation of the revolving fund, a fund designed to finance the gentrification of Ansonborough, Weyeneth nonetheless offers comparatively little in the way of a discussion about displacement based on race and

[22] Kaufman, 129.
[23] Robert R. Weyeneth, *Historic Preservation for a Living City: Historic Charleston Foundation: 1947-1997*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997) p. vxiii.

class. He seems to gloss over the rampant racism used both publicly and privately to justify the Historic Charleston Foundation's rehabilitation efforts, often saying simply that "low income tenants who were often- although not exclusively- African American were replaced by middle- and upper income residents and property owners who were most often white."[24] This is an understatement to say the least when one views the Historic Charleston Foundation's archives in regard to the Ansonborough project. Weyeneth is at least able to offer a bit more discussion of the subject, acknowledging that the project was "in retrospect 'a case study in displacement'". And while Weyeneth's other writings on historic preservation and race offer a much more detailed description of the disparity between race and preservation[25], his discussion of race and preservation in Ansonborough is underrepresented given the plethora of primary sources available on the subject, sources that blatantly showcase the discrimination that occurred.

In short, while it is obvious that the historiography surrounding historic preservation in Ansonborough and other parts of Charleston reveals that racial factors prevailed, the degree to which racism played a role in preservation has yet to be fully explored, especially in the 1950s and 1960s when the Ansonborough rehabilitation project was in full swing. Judging not only from the language in countless newspaper articles discussing the "redemption" of Ansonborough and the removal of "undesirables" from the neighborhood, but also from private correspondence detailing the *Historic Charleston Foundation*'s goals at slum clearance and rehabilitation, there can be no doubt that racism played a very large, if not the largest role, in the *Historic Charleston*

[24] Weyeneth, 63.
[25] For more on his work, see *The Architecture of Racial Segregation: The Challenges of Preserving the Problematical Past*.

Foundation's preservation efforts in Ansonborough at mid-century. The following chapters will provide many examples of both the public (newspaper editorials) and private (correspondence within the *Historic Charleston Foundation*) racism that ran parallel with Ansonborough's "redemption", as well as Federal preservation efforts that began in 1966 with the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act, an act that ironically had its roots in Charleston preservation and yet also helped to curtail the displacement of minorities within the city.

Chapter One

Rhetoric of Historic Preservation in the Local Press

I.

"In their concern for the poor of the cities, who inhabit slums and often strike terror into the hearts of the timid, government and other planners seem determined to create expensive and permanent abodes for the most shiftless elements of the United States. The faster they clean out slums, the more new breeding places the planners create for the underprivileged and the delinquent."- News and Courier, December 6, 1958

Local newspaper coverage of the *Historic Charleston Foundation's* efforts to revitalize Ansonborough, as well as coverage regarding Charleston's preservation efforts as a whole in the 1950s and 1960s, took many forms. From a comparison of Charleston's historic preservation policies and practices to other American cities such as Philadelphia and New York to writing about the ongoing problem of slum clearance and urban renewal, local papers such as the *News and Courier* (a newspaper that was never shy about its conservative slant; its catchphrase being "South Carolina's Most Outspoken Newspaper) allowed the public to not only stay informed in regard to the preservation efforts of the *Historic Charleston Foundation*, but also to be subjected to many editorials and opinion articles within local newspapers, editorials and opinion pieces that not only had racist overtones, but that also at times borrowed from the rhetoric of the antebellum South's notion of states' rights versus federal government involvement as it pertained to historic preservation and urban renewal in the 1950s and 1960s. This chapter will summarize and analyze a number of newspaper articles in an attempt to show that the rhetoric of preservation constantly evolved and became steadily more vitriolic, as elite

white Charlestonians not only used newspapers as a mouthpiece for justifying slum clearance, but also began to view preservation as a states' rights issue, re-inflaming nineteenth century notions of an idyllic, peaceful, white-dominated Charleston society.

The newspaper coverage of the *Historic Charleston Foundation's* preservation efforts in Ansonborough in the 1950s and 1960s confirm Stephanie Yuhl's notion of elite white Charlestonians desiring to return their city to its supposed antebellum glory. Historic preservation in Ansonborough, as it was advertised to the white public via extensive *News and Courier* coverage, often used the restoration of dilapidated homes as a metaphor for the desire to return Charleston to its elite white dominated glory. One such article that appeared in the *News and Courier* on February 4, 1966 showcases this notion of a return to white supremacy in its title. "Miracle on Anson Street: Redemption of a Heritage", written by *News and Courier* staff reporter Martha Carson, focuses on one home located at 72 Anson St., the Benjamin Simons Neufville House. The house, originally built in 1846 for the prominent local Huguenot, remained in the family until 1904, when it was sold to prominent local black businessman Charles C. Leslie. Occupied by his daughter until her death in 1959, the home was then acquired by the *Historic Charleston Foundation*. By the time of its restoration in the mid-1960s it did indeed, judging from the many photographs published alongside the article, look as though its condition had remarkably improved. As far as the practice of historic preservation goes, the rehabilitation of the Benjamin Simons Neufville was textbook in its success, as per the *Historic Charleston Foundation*'s guidelines; the home's condition was dramatically improved, the owners of the home, Mr. and Mrs. Hugh V. Walker were

pleased with their investment, and they were ready to recoup their renovation costs many times over via the sale or rental of the home.[26]

From a strictly practical standpoint, the restoration was a success. However, why did the *News and Courier* refer to it as a redemption of a heritage? Mr. and Mrs. Walker certainly weren't alive during the antebellum Charleston era nor was the reporter of the article. So whose heritage was being redeemed? Benjamin Simons Neufville's? That of the home itself? The neighborhood? The redemption of a heritage is thinly veiled racism, racism that had its roots in the Redemption of 1876, a redemption of white South Carolinians after the federal policies of Reconstruction had come to an end. This redemption, cloaked in the notion of the Lost Cause, an ideology that spawned from Confederate defeat, effectively subjugated the African-American population in many parts of the South through the 1960s.[27] When dilapidated homes are restored their value obviously increases. When the value increases, a potential buyer must have a comfortable income. In 1950s and 1960s Charleston, the African-American population in many cases did not earn a comfortable income. Therefore, the home, and by extension the elite white heritage, is being redeemed, or removed, from the reach and influence of the minority population.

So why did publications such as the *News and Courier* refer to Ansonborough's rehabilitation as a redemption of a heritage? When the *Historic Charleston Foundation* first began to rehabilitate Ansonborough in the late 1950s what was the rhetoric of preservation in the local press? In May of 1958, the rhetoric, at least as the *Charleston*

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[26] Martha Carson, "Miracle on Anson Street: Redemption of a Heritage" in the *News and Courier*, Feb. 4, 1966

[27] See conclusion for a more in-depth discussion of the Redemption of 1876 and its aftermath.

Evening Post used it, was about placing blame squarely on poor residents of Charleston. The title of a May 20, 1958 editorial in the *Charleston Evening Post* was glaringly called "It's The People Who Make Slums." Arguing that no amount of structural redevelopment can improve a neighborhood, the *Charleston Evening Post* uses an unnamed example of new, low-cost housing on the peninsula attracting an undesirable clientele who, in the paper's eyes, effectively destroyed the property. The *Charleston Evening Post*'s editorial states the following: "Within less than two years after tenants moved in, the houses were slums. Screens had been torn out. Doors had been marred. Walls were stained. Trash piled around the foundations and littered the small yards. The buildings themselves were still comparatively new, but they were slums…in any crusade to clean up slums, emphasis should be placed on people, not on buildings. Buildings, in time, accurately reflect the habits and characteristics of their occupants."[28]

A short editorial published in the *News and Courier* on July 16, 1958, one year after the *Historic Charleston Foundation* began its efforts to revitalize the Ansonborough neighborhood, sheds some light on how the local press often viewed what historic preservation should do for the city of Charleston. Titled "Meaning of a City", the editorial states that not only should a city provide modern services for its residents (medical, educational, etc.), it should also use preservation as a way to recognize and memorialize its past. According to the article, a city is a "school for life, in which the character of its citizens [likely elite white citizens] is developed. It is a living monument to what its sons and daughters have accomplished throughout generations. The more it saves of the past, while it builds for the future, the greater opportunities and delights it

[28] *Charleston Evening Post*, May 20, 1958

affords the living. Anyone who attempts to reduce his city to a mere collection of services and facilities seeks to deprive his community of the blessings of civilization."[29]

It becomes clear, as the rhetoric of preservation ramped up in the local press in the late 1950s and 1960s, when the Civil Rights movement was reaching its zenith, that the blessings of civilization, civilization being an elite white-dominated southern society that should, and did, subjugate African-Americans, were not extended to minority populations living in the areas the *News and Courier* deemed worthy of saving.

The issue of states' rights in regard to preservation first began to appear with regularity in the local press in the summer and fall of 1958 and continued throughout the turn of the next decade. On September 14, 1958 the *News and Courier* ran one of the first of what were to be many editorials in regard to the fear of federal involvement in local preservation efforts. Titled "Cities Can Rebuild Blighted Areas Without Seeking Federal Handouts", the *News and Courier* argued the following: "One of the keys to redevelopment is fixing responsibility for slum properties. Slumlords who hide behind company names and trusts should be rooted out. Owners must be available to receive summonses and go to court if violations are discovered." However, the *News and Courier* was also very concerned with the issue of private property rights. To the editorial board, federal involvement in slum clearance and rehabilitation was something to at least be wary of, if not downright feared. In the board's eyes, cities should have the utmost autonomy in regard to how slum clearance and rehabilitation should be approached. In their words "there is no reason for cities to abandon initiative simply because the smell of Uncle's green folding money is wafted down from Washington." Also, according the

[29] *News and Courier*, July 16, 1958

editorial board, "there is no reason why private business interests of a city, in cooperation with municipal authorities, cannot eliminate blight. And if private businesses and cities are ever to end federal control over their operations, they must stop holding out their hands for subsidies. Charlestonians, we are convinced, can solve their own problems."[30]

Just over one week later, the editorial board of the *News and Courier* again argued against any type of federal involvement in slum clearance and preservation, instead arguing once again that urban renewal efforts could be, and should be, a local grassroots effort. Titled "Action On Urban Development Need Not Await Federal Handout", the *News and Courier* is quick to point out that "slums can strangle a city"; nevertheless, the removal of the slums should in no way be contingent on financial help from Washington. The editorial lays out its argument as follows: " In discussing ways to improve the face of Charleston, money is a first consideration. It is need for money that causes advocates of urban renewal to look to the federal treasury where money is available on terms." These terms include "a requirement that the city be granted the right to condemn private land for clearance and resale to other private individuals. This is a departure from the historic right to condemn property only for public use. It is a right which can seriously be abused." In short, any federal involvement in local preservation efforts should be immediately rejected, as no urban renewal plan should ever "depend on subsidy from Washington"[31], a dependence that could come with strings attached in the form of HUD programs. Also, this federal dependence could eliminate autonomy on the local preservation level in regard to what could be considered a slum or an historic home.

[30] *News and Courier,* September 14, 1958
[31] *News and Courier,* September 26, 1958

The *News and Courier's* concern that Charleston's past was being threatened by supposed progress and federal assistance extended to other cities as well, with Washington itself being among them. John Temple Graves Jr., son of John Temple Graves, well-known journalist and proponent of lynching in the early-twentieth-century South, published an opinion piece in the October 4, 1958 issue of the *News and Courier* titled "U.S. Capital to Become a Second-Class City." In it, Graves held the Supreme Court was responsible for allowing Washington, DC to succumb to "blight created by overcrowding of Southern Negroes into central areas", causing white residents to flee to the "safe and serene suburbs", leaving "in their wake the indigent and immobile, vacant stores and depressed property values, third-rate businesses and marginal enterprises of all kinds."[32] The fact that the *News and Courier* published this opinion piece, seeing that Washington, DC and Charleston, SC are not only far removed geographically but also, at least in from an elite white Charlestonian's perspective, culturally, is quite remarkable. It seems as though the *News and Courier* is concerned that Charleston will suffer much the same fate that Graves argues Washington, DC suffers, inner-city blight and overcrowding by the undesirable black population. However, as we shall see, local Charleston publications, the *News and Courier* not exempted, also began to be very concerned that the federal government in Washington would dictate how Charleston chose to preserve and revitalize its own city, including the removal of the black population (slum clearance) from neighborhoods such as Ansonborough. In short, it is quite ironic that the editors of the *News and Courier* are seemingly concerned with the struggles of Washington, DC. Shouldn't elite white Charlestonians be happy to see the nation's capital suffer, seeing as

[32] John Temple Graves, "U.S. Capital to Become a Second-Class City" in the *News and Courier*, Oct. 4, 1958

how it is the capital that they are so concerned will dictate public policy in regard to preservation and gentrification of Charleston's peninsula, not to mention that the nation's capital was the seat of power during the Civil War, a war that effectively shattered Charleston's ideal of an elite white society?

In many ways, elite white southerners were happy to see the Yankee suffer. However, a paradox had developed in the late 1950s. Southern congressmen such as outspoken segregationist Strom Thurmond strongly believed in the racist notion of State's Right's and black subjugation, yet at the same time Thurmond, like many others, believed that the federal government should do all it can in fighting the spread of communism and the threat of a nuclear Soviet Union in the Cold War. Therefore, the federal government was right and just in its newly-formed military industrial complex, yet at the same time was wrong in attempting to dictate domestic issues within individual southern states.

Only one week after the *News and Courier* ran John Temple Graves' opinion piece on the deterioration of Washington, DC, the rhetoric of preservation in about federal involvement in Charleston began to heat up. A very short editorial published in the *News and Courier* titled "Calling on Uncle" wasted no time in attacking Charleston preservationist's desires to accept federal funding for local preservation efforts and slum clearance. The text of the editorial is as follows: "A city that says it cannot control slums unless Uncle Sam lends a helping hand full of folding money is a city that admits it can't do its own housekeeping."[33]

[33] *News and Courier*, Oct. 12, 1958

By late October of 1958, the rhetoric of federal involvement in Charleston preservation showed no signs of slowing down in the local press, with local newspapers again very concerned that the federal government sought to control individual property rights. Discussing the federal government's role in determining whether Charlestonians had autonomy in slum clearance and rehabilitation, the *News and Courier* argued that the "nub of the issue is granting to a branch of government the right to condemn private property for other than public use…To some observers, this means further infringement of private property rights. It means expansion of government power over the possessions of the citizens. It means that public officials can take away the property of one citizen and convey it to another. It means another step toward despotism."[34] One can argue that this fear of federal involvement, the fear that Washington, DC would dictate how Charleston, SC, once the hotbed of State's Rights and secession, should control its preservation and urban renewal efforts, doomed the city's approach to these efforts from the start. By turning an issue that could, and should, ultimately benefit all citizens of Charleston (historic preservation should, ideally, beautify a town, creating a desire for more occupancy of structures, a higher quality of life, a boom in tourism, and job creation for all its citizens) into one that is warped by the age-old southern fear of the big bad Yankee dictating policy on a tradition-based, genteel public, then historic preservation becomes unnecessarily politicized, thus making it difficult for citizens of all races and class structures to benefit from its implementation.

On October 20, 1958, the *News and Courier* first reported on the *Historic Charleston Foundation*'s receipt of the $100,000 revolving fund. Beginning in March of

[34] *News and Courier*, Oct. 24, 1958

1957, the *Historic Charleston Foundation* was granted $25,000 by the *Richardson Foundation*, a private trust, contingent upon the *Historic Charleston Foundation* raising an additional $75,000 through other private contributions. According to the *News and Courier*, the *Historic Charleston Foundation* implemented the fund to ensure the rehabilitation, restoration, and preservation of buildings deemed architecturally important. In addition, the foundation desired to put the buildings to "proper use." Also, the fund was designed to expand beyond its $100,000 mark as well as to restore entire areas of the city. The ultimate goal of the fund was to "raise the standards and property values of the entire areas in which the work is being done, insure a stable neighborhood, and encourage investment of private capital…The board expressed hope that restored homes could be resold or rented to responsible persons, so that the money can be used over again in other areas needing restoration."[35]

By November 12, 1958, the rhetoric of preservation and slum clearance in Charleston took on a clearly racist tone. On that day, the *Charleston Evening Post* published an editorial that preyed on people's fears of the federal government as well as of the black population co-existing socially and economically with whites. Titled "Federal Threat in Housing Plan", the editorial wastes no time in suggesting that the federal government would be responsible for allowing blacks to encroach upon elite whites in Charleston. The *Commission on Race and Housing*, a private urban renewal organization based in New York, had asked President Eisenhower's administration to essentially eliminate any racial discrimination in regard to federally funded housing projects and rehabilitation efforts. The *Charleston Evening Post*, needless to say, did not

[35] *News and Courier*, October 20, 1958

approve of this proposed effort to eliminate discrimination in conjunction with revitalizing American cities. Arguing that "any city that would proceed…would be faced with the threat of federal dictation against separate housing for whites and Negroes", the *Charleston Evening Post* asserted that "national politics are now such that Washington is giving an ear to integrationists in all fields in which the federal government can drum up an excuse for meddling. Surely the South faces enough trouble without inviting the federal government to take a hand in renewal housing…In any event Washington is going to attempt racial integration in all programs in which it renders financial help."[36]

On December 6, 1958, the *News and Courier* published an editorial titled "Slum Clearance Schemes Don't Cope With People Who Create Problems". This editorial tries to cover its racism with a confused sense of compassion, arguing that the "faster [local government and urban planners] clean out slums, the more new breeding places the planners create for the underprivileged and the delinquent." In other words, the poor are the same as rats or cockroaches. Arguing against the "exploding population" of Charleston and other cities in the late-1950s, the *News and Courier* editorial board asks, "Where will those people live? How will jammed streets take new traffic?" The answer, according to the *News and Courier*, is for city planners to "encourage riff raff to stay, multiply, and demand ever more free services. If any attempt has been made to resettle slum dwellers outside of the cities it is not apparent or generally known…the cities plow ahead with preparations for more people without considering methods of discouraging undesirable migrants." Again, the poor are no better than cockroaches.[37]

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[36] *Charleston Evening Post*, November 12, 1958
[37] *News and Courier*, December 6, 1958

As for the veiled compassion toward the poor, the *News and Courier* editorial answers its own question as follows: "What is to become of the displaced persons? We do not know a good answer to that question. A couple of answers occur to us that are too cold and unappealing for serious consideration. Nevertheless for the sake of argument we shall propose them." The editorial then asserts that the poor must pay higher rent, thus ensuring that they will "deny themselves fancy food, television sets, or automobiles." Or perhaps the poor and dispossessed could "go on public relief. In accepting charity they ought to forfeit some of the rights and privileges enjoyed by citizens who are self-supporting. One of those rights is the choice of one's place of residence." Lastly, "huge poor farms could be set up to drain the cities of excess population that creates slums, crime and other aspects of 'urban blight'. The proposal sounds drastic, even offensive. We do not expect it to receive serious consideration now. Someday-if Big Brother takes charge-it may be adopted." The *News and Courier* is essentially arguing for the creation of an African state; "huge poor farms" are a metaphor for an African homeland where the black population could not have any contact with whites. The last comment, a direct jab at federal involvement in slum clearance, is interesting to say the least, in that, even though the *News and Courier* itself proposed these terrible ideas for dealing with the poor, it is evil Washington that may one day put these ideas into practice.[38]

Public housing in Charleston is fairly unique, especially for a southern city. While many public housing projects in cities such as Atlanta, Memphis, Birmingham, and Knoxville were often heavily segregated from the white population, the public housing projects in Charleston were in many ways the opposite. For example, the Robert Mills

[38] Ibid

Manor, an integrated housing project on Charleston's lower peninsula, rests in a desirable neighborhood and was developed by local architects Albert Simons and Samuel Lapham with landscaping assistance provided by prominent landscape architect Loutrel Briggs. Developed in the 1930s with federal subsidies designed for low-income housing construction and slum clearance, the Robert Mills Manor is not only an example of how twentieth-century public housing could be aesthetically pleasing, but also how a low-income dwelling could coexist among an elite white population.

Ironically, in February of 1959, Charlestonians under the rhetoric of Senator Strom Thurmond, began to question federal assistance in the creation of new public housing, an about-face to all the Robert Mills Manor stood for. Titled "Thurmond Issues Timely Warning", the *Charleston Evening Post*'s editorial from February 11, 1959 argues strongly against federal assistance in public housing projects based, of course, on race. Arguing that federal assistance in public housing will force integration upon white Charlestonians, the *Evening Post* writes that integration "is not an imaginary threat. In some states the federal government is now refusing aid in these fields to any segregated projects. And in New York there is a clamorous demand from integrationists that the government rule out any aid anywhere for housing projects confined to one race…We applaud Senator Thurmond's stand, and regret that a number of Southern congressmen voted for the stepped-up housing aid the House of Representatives approved recently. Loans and grants of this nature are invitations to the government to crack down on racially separate housing."[39][40]

[39] *Charleston Evening Post*, Feb. 11, 1959
[40] For more on public housing in New York, see Nicholas Dagen Bloom, *Public Housing That Worked: New York in the Twentieth Century.*

The *News and Courier* published an editorial on December 7, 1958 that could be viewed as an extension of the editorial that appeared in the *Charleston Evening Post* on November 12th. While not confronting integration head on as the *Evening Post* did, the *News and Courier* editorial from December 7, 1958 nevertheless continues the fear mongering of federal involvement in southern states' urban renewal plans. While not exactly sure yet what the plans are, the *News and Courier* nevertheless attempts to assure the public that Charleston Mayor William Morrison's locally grown urban renewal plans will be much better than anything the federal government would have in mind. Basically a plan to encourage property owners to revitalize homes prior to renting, the *News and Courier* strongly believes that Mayor Morrison's local efforts will trump other U.S. cities' revitalization efforts, efforts that would involve "begging with outstretched palms for money from Washington."[41]

Local newspapers in the spring of 1959 did not back off their assertion that federal efforts to revitalize Charleston's neighborhoods and infrastructure would have a negative impact on the city in regard to the removal of local autonomy. On March 15th of that year, the *News and Courier* again published an editorial warning citizens and local policymakers of the evils of federal involvement in historic preservation. Titled "Urban Renewal Hook", the short editorial proved that Charleston is a "slum-ridden" city, yet the appeal of accepting federal funds should be met with marked skepticism at the very least. Comparing Charleston's urban renewal efforts with those of New York City, the editorial argues that New York took the bait and, upon taking the bait, the federal hook was set in the form of denying citizens autonomy in regard to preservation and urban renewal.

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[41] *News and Courier*, Dec. 7, 1958

Arguing that $12 million was accepted by New York to revitalize luxury apartments, said apartments were then taken from one group of private citizens "against their will" and were subsequently sold to another group of private citizens. The editorial then makes the claim that New Yorkers are more naïve and gullible than Charlestonians in relation to accepting federal funds for urban renewal, going so far as to say that "New Yorkers are beginning to feel a deep sense of distrust for urban renewal." However, South Carolinians "have recognized in urban renewal proposals opportunities to victimize the public.[42] They can count themselves fortunate that the distrust they now share with New Yorkers has so far protected them from the hook."[43]

II.

By the summer of 1959, the *News and Courier* began to shift its coverage of preservation efforts in Charleston away from the supposed threat of federal involvement and instead started to focus articles more directly on what local organizations had been doing to revitalize the city, with the *Historic Charleston Foundation* receiving the majority of the attention. A continuously running segment in the *News and Courier* titled "Ashley Cooper: Doing the Charleston With His Lordship" began to extensively cover the *Historic Charleston Foundation's* efforts to rehabilitate the peninsula. The column heaps abundant praise on the *Historic Charleston Foundation*. For example, the "Ashley Cooper" segment from July 23, 1959 begins with the almost sycophantic line "the program to restore and reclaim the 'borough' section of Charleston is one of the most exciting things to happen in the Holy City for a long time…*Historic Charleston*

[42] The "public" being an attempt to define a citizen as a wealthy white.
[43] *News and Courier*, March 15, 1959

Foundation has taken the initial step."[44] The article continues with effusive praise for quite some time, with the overall argument of the piece being that "the slums are all but gone" and now is the time for white citizens to "pioneer" in the few remaining slums.[45]

Of great importance in this article is the use of the word "reclaim" as it relates to the *Historic Charleston Foundation*'s revitalization program being one of the most exciting things to ever occur in Charleston. In many respects, the use of the word "reclaim" is a precursor to the use of the phrase "redemption of a heritage", published in the *News and Courier* almost seven years later. Who is the *Historic Charleston Foundation* reclaiming the city from? The poor, predominately African-American population that has been so economically and socially depressed by elite white Charlestonians. By cruel design, elite white Charlestonians denied African-Americans the same opportunities for social, political, educational, and economic advancement, essentially forcing them into the slums of Charleston, and then subsequently, through efforts of organizations such as the *Historic Charleston Foundation*, stole the slums right out from underneath them, leaving them with even less than they had to begin with.

By the beginning of the 1960s newspaper coverage of slum clearance and rehabilitation again began to move away for a time from the polemic conversation of State's Rights and began to focus more on what organizations such as *the Historic Charleston Foundation* had begun to accomplish in neighborhoods such as Ansonborough. However, the *Historic Charleston Foundation*'s renewal efforts were, ironically, contingent upon the use of federal funds. An article in the *News and Courier* from early 1960 discusses the *Historic Charleston Foundation*'s desire to supplement its

[44] *News and Courier*, July 23, 1959
[45] Ibid

own $100,000 revolving fund with federally appropriated funding, funding that could only be accessed by the *Historic Charleston Foundation* if the state of South Carolina passed a constitutional amendment allowing such funds to be used. Because the amendment had not passed by early 1960, no city in South Carolina, with the exception of Spartanburg, could "participate in federal urban renewal programs because they lack authority to condemn private property for resale to private developers."[46] The *Historic Charleston Foundation* made it clear in the article that they were strongly in favor of receiving federal funding for urban renewal, going so far as to say that "prompt action will be necessary" to ensure that the constitutional amendment would pass.[47]

The federal urban renewal plan, beginning as a Public Works Administration program in the 1930s under FDR's New Deal, was designed essentially as follows: Federal funding was available for a variety of urban renewal uses. However, no "piecemeal" projects could use federal funds. As the article states: "If a municipality lacks condemnation power, it is presumed, one property-owner could block an entire slum clearing operation…Under an urban renewal plan, the government would pay two-thirds of the net project cost of private development. A city could purchase slum property, sell pieces of it to individual redevelopers and be reimbursed by the government for two-thirds of its costs."[48] However, the Supreme Court of South Carolina stated that this approach meant condemnation for private instead of public use. The city could condemn property to build and maintain public facilities such as city parks, but could not re-sell condemned spaces to private investors.

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[46] *News and Courier,* February 10, 1960
[47] Ibid
[48] Ibid

By the early-1960s the local press began to run articles showcasing Charleston's historic charm, in many ways advertising for tourism. Many of these articles ran to multiple pages, often with a number of large, color photographs showing a "city of palm trees, fragrant shrubs, walled gardens and homes with their two-storied piazzas and wrought iron gates."[49] In doing so, the vast majority of these articles attempted to showcase not only the *Historic Charleston Foundation*'s preservation efforts, but also harked back to the antebellum notion of Charleston being a quaint, idyllic city, one that wealthy white Charlestonians had control over.

In addition to newspaper articles showcasing Charleston's revitalized beauty for tourism, a few newspaper articles from the early 1960s also focused on how best to attract tourists to the city. One such *News and Courier* article from the summer of 1962 asks how best to balance the historic charms of the old city with the fast-paced, automobile-dependent tourist trends of the day. Comparing Charleston's tourism industry of "yesteryear" (the 1930s) to the more modern tourism of the 1960s, the article notes that in the 1930s the primary means for a tourist to visit Charleston was by train. Only occasionally did a car, bus, or boat factor in to a tourist's method of transportation. The train, the article argues, allowed for a tourist visiting Charleston to spend more time in the city and to have a more relaxed experience. The development of the interstate system in the 1950s changed the pace of travel drastically. No longer did people come to Charleston; they merely passed through on their way to more popular vacation destinations, such as Florida's resorts and beaches. In doing so, Charleston was left behind. The article continues to argue that, not only have other gardens and historic home

[49] Robert G. Breen, "Charm of Old Charleston Survives" in the *News and Courier*, April 2, 1960

tours appeared throughout the South, but many other historic towns throughout the country such as Gettysburg, PA and Alexandria, VA began to rival Charleston for the tourist dollar. The hopes of the *News and Courier* is that preservation efforts within Charleston can strike a balance between the re-creation of antebellum society and the fast-paced modernization of the national tourist industry.[50]

In addition to how best to drive the tourist industry in Charleston, the local press concerned itself with how best to attract homebuyers to the newly revitalized neighborhoods such as Ansonborough, as well as to neighborhoods that had not yet been rehabilitated; in other words, outside investors would use their own funds to revitalize neighborhoods, in many ways becoming an extension of the *Historic Charleston Foundation*. One such editorial titled "Buy Charleston" hopes that foreign investment can buy up dilapidated commercial districts within the city and convert them to high-end rental properties, properties that would essentially freeze out the lower class. As the editorial states: "We are not now talking about restoration of historic or architecturally interesting houses, though as readers well know we are committed to support of such projects. We are talking about the use of city land-with the convenience of a long settled community-for modern purposes, especially dwelling…We are interested in rebuilding an old community which has plenty of life and good prospects for future prosperity."[51] Again, there is a balancing act among real estate development similar to the balancing act involving the tourist industry. How best for Charleston to maintain its nineteenth-century charms with the modernization of mid-twentieth-century America?

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[50] Edward T. Pertuit, "The Tourist Trade: Is Charleston Losing Out?" in the *News and Courier*, July 8, 1962
[51] *News and Courier*, November 24, 1962

By 1963 local newspapers began to publish full-page advertisements regarding the sale of renovated historic homes in Ansonborough. Many of these attempted to balance the notion of returning to charming Southern roots with all the modern conveniences. One such advertisement, "Ansonborough Sketchbook: A Treasury of Distinctive Period Houses at Modest Cost", encourages the reader to "imagine owning one of these architectural gems…authentic picture-book houses with all the charm and flavor of Historic Old Charleston. Imagine, too, how adaptable they are to modern family living!" In the same advertisement, a paragraph is devoted to the mission of the *Historic Charleston Foundation*. According to the advertisement, the foundation is "dedicated to practical, modern use of our city's unique and valuable old buildings…It is based in the joint belief that retaining our special architectural flavor is a sound investment many times repaid in tourist dollars as well as in beauty, and that the heart of the city must be protected from blight if Charleston is to prosper spectacularly in the 20th century as it did in the 18th and 19th."[52] Similar to the concern about the ever-evolving tourist industry, as well as the desire for out-of-state homebuyers, the real estate advertisements attempt to balance old-world charm with modern living and do so with the ever-present fear of blight; in other words, if middle and upper-class whites don't buy these renovated homes, of which the majority were located in Ansonborough, then undesirables will take control of the historic neighborhoods once again.

By 1964, the majority of newspaper coverage had changed its view regarding the fear of federal involvement in local preservation efforts, claiming now that a small amount of federal involvement was acceptable (i.e., take the money but don't accept any

[52] *News and Courier*, January 20, 1963

federal regulations)[53], and the press also began to focus not only on the outcome of local restoration efforts (primarily spearheaded by the *Historic Charleston Foundation*), but also on what ideas and practices Charleston should borrow from other cities in regard to urban renewal. A multi-page article in the *News and Courier* from the spring of 1964 not only once again attacks the federal government's preservation efforts, but also discusses how cities such as Columbia, S.C. were able to balance grassroots preservation with the acceptance of federal funds. According to the *News and Courier,* Columbia's slum clearance proved a success because "the government-sponsored project fortunately has few of the more controversial features of the federally subsidized system. It is small and not complicated." In addition, Alexandria, V.A. was in the midst of a grassroots effort to prevent the destruction of "neat, clean older houses owned by Negroes whose families have lived there for many years." Not withstanding the *News and Courier*'s implication that neat and clean homes owned by African-Americans are the only African-American dwellings worth saving, the use of the word "grassroots" also implies that the residents of Alexandria were above seeking federal assistance because, according to the *News and Courier*, by 1964 "the primary purpose of urban renewal seems to have become something else [too much modernization and too much federal involvement]. City councils considering on calling on Uncle Sam might recall the story of Little Red Riding Hood."[54]

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[53] It is difficult to determine why the shift occurred in regard to local preservation groups accepting federal funds. It could simply be that more money allowed for more slum clearance and rehabilitation. In other words, moral conviction is often fluid; the notion of state's rights likely was used only when it was convenient.

[54] Loutrel W. Briggs, "A Primer on Urban Renewal", in the *News and Courier,* April 12, 1964

By the early to mid-1960s, the majority of the local coverage of slum clearance and restoration began to focus primarily on the positive outcomes of rehabilitation (notwithstanding the ever-present jabs at Washington, D.C.) with emphasis being placed on the *Historic Charleston Foundation*'s efforts to revitalize Ansonborough. In addition, many news outlets from other parts of the United States began to cover Charleston's preservation efforts, efforts that were seen primarily as a success and a model for other cities throughout the country. From Boston's Chamber of Commerce referring to Charleston preservation as "an inspiration" and the revitalization of Ansonborough as being full of "useful ideas"[55], to the *Mobile Press* in Mobile, Alabama referring to the *Historic Charleston Foundation*'s efforts in Ansonborough as "magnificent"[56], no shortage of praise was being heaped on the ways in which Charleston, especially the *Historic Charleston Foundation*, handled slum clearance and rehabilitation in the late-1950s to the mid-1960s. The next chapter will show, through the use of private correspondence, newsletters, and memorandums, just what the *Historic Charleston Foundation* had done in those two decades to warrant such effusive praise.

Local newspaper coverage of Charleston's preservation efforts from 1958 to 1965 encompassed two essential elements, fear and racism. The fear of federal involvement in historic preservation and urban renewal, i.e. the fear that Washington, in giving money to revitalization projects, would in turn destroy them, was omnipresent throughout local press coverage. Unless Uncle Sam just wanted to donate money to locally controlled preservation efforts and then get out of the way, Uncle Sam was not to be trusted. Local preservationists wanted to be able to control a specific vision of the past, in Charleston's

[55] *News and Courier*, April 15, 1962
[56] "Charleston- City of Restoration" in the *Mobile Press*, April 8, 1964

case an idyllic antebellum past. However, federal housing plans primarily involved modernization that was architecturally uninteresting and was designed to offer affordable housing to minority populations in increasingly crowded urban centers. These two opposing visions simply could not coexist.

This fear of the federal government emerged in the rhetoric of State's Rights, a battle that had been waged off and on throughout the South since the antebellum era. In addition, racism was rampant in local coverage of Charleston's urban renewal efforts. It was black people (and their slumlords) who had created and perpetuated the slums. It was the black person who became the burden on developers and preservationists throughout Charleston. If and when the black population becomes displaced, what to do with it? If African-Americans are placed in government housing then the government has won the battle over states' rights. If they are left to relocate and repopulate Historic Charleston on their own, then who is to say more slums won't appear? In short, the fear of federal involvement and the fear of minorities are strongly associated. You can't have one without the other. If the fear and distrust of Uncle Sam had not existed then perhaps more federal involvement would have occurred in Charleston, involvement that could have potentially benefited the poor black population and historic preservation itself. Perhaps most telling is that there never appeared a voice for the African-American community. Not one editorial in the *News and Courier* ever sympathized with the poor nor did the newspaper offer any articles from the perspective of the poor. As the next chapter will show, the "undesirables" essentially had no chance in defending themselves from the power of the *Historic Charleston Foundation* and its supporters in the 1950s and 1960s.

Chapter Two

Historic Charleston Foundation

I.

"In essence, Historic Charleston Foundation's revolving fund was the seed money for the reclamation of the neighborhood. Turned over again and again, these funds have ultimately been responsible for the purchase and resale of sixty buildings. A residential neighborhood that is today one of the loveliest in America has been recaptured from an area where there was no market at all, where no one lived who had a choice." - Introduction to Ansonborough Walking Tour, Early-1960s

The first Charleston suburb, Ansonborough was founded by Captain George Anson of the British Royal Navy in 1726, when Anson purchased 64 acres of land from Thomas Gadsen with money acquired from successful gambling. Originally running from King Street east to the Cooper River and from Calhoun Street south to Society Street, George Anson's gambling winnings began to bear fruit by the mid-1700s, when the construction of homes began throughout the 64 acres of land. While the vast majority of homes in Ansonborough were constructed of wood in the 18th and early-19th centuries, a devastating fire in April of 1838 reduced many of these homes to ashes, requiring many to be rebuilt and upgraded to brick construction. During Reconstruction in the latter part of the 19th century, Ansonborough continued its growth unabated, with the vast majority of residents being upper-class whites.

Shortly after World War II, as white flight began in cities throughout the nation and many white families began to move to the modern definition of "suburbs", Ansonborough continued its steady descent into slum conditions. Many of the homes

continued as rental properties for poor African-Americans and the neighborhood continued its swift and steady economic decline.[57] It was into this new neighborhood culture that the *Historic Charleston Foundation*, under the leadership of Executive Director Frances Edmunds, began its quest for the city's rehabilitation and reclamation, a quest that would ultimately lead to the displacement of the minority population and the "redemption" of Ansonborough's "heritage".

By 1959, the *Historic Charleston Foundation*, with its implementation of the revolving fund, had begun to rehabilitate seven blocks of Ansonborough. In a few short years, 110 homes had been rehabilitated, purchased and resold, either by the foundation itself or through private investors. While it certainly can be argued that, in practice, Ansonborough rehabilitation was a success in terms of beautification, the increase in property values, the precedent that the revolving fund set for preservation on a national scale, and the spark given to Charleston's tourist industry, the cost paid by the minority population was high. Did the "undesirables" of Ansonborough have any voice, any resources in regard to keeping their homes or dignity? As this chapter will prove, the answer is no. Was racism prevalent throughout the dealings of the *Historic Charleston Foundation*? As this chapter will also prove, the answer is yes.

II.

The text of a meeting of the Ansonborough finance committee from September of 1961 indicates quite clearly what homeowners were willing to do to subscribe to, and promote, what essentially amounted to the *Historic Charleston Foundation*'s "No Negro

[57] Dan T. Henderson, "Ansonborough: Charleston's First Suburb Highly Regarded and Still Vibrant" in the *Charleston Mercury*, February 21, 2013

Policy". A portion of the text reads as follows: "The Dingles had received a firm offer of $3,500 from a gentleman of color for the purchase of their property at 57 Anson St…In support of the Foundation's program they were most unwilling to sell it to a Negro, and that they would be interested in an offer from the Foundation and would probably sell it to the Foundation for less than the $3,500 figure."[58] Homeowners would go so far as to lose money on the sale of 57 Anson Street to the *Historic Charleston Foundation* if it meant that African-Americans could not reside in Ansonborough only two years into the rehabilitation efforts of the *Historic Charleston Foundation.*

This white supremacist ideology was so prevalent in Ansonborough's rehabilitation throughout the 1960s that the *Historic Charleston Foundation* often kept records of the races of inhabitants of various homes throughout the neighborhood, many times noting that the remaining homes with African-American tenants were not *yet* restored, in effect painting a bullseye on the back of the poor minority holdouts through the 1960s. For instance, a list of properties owned by the *Historic Charleston Foundation* includes four that were not actually part of the historic boundaries of Ansonborough, but were nonetheless targeted for African-American removal by the Foundation. One such property owned by the *Historic Charleston Foundation*, 643 East Bay Street, is described as a "wooden house now rented to negroes, eventually to be raised for parking."[59]

In the same listing of homes purchased by the *Historic Charleston Foundation* a revealing story concerns an African-American doctor residing at the corner of Anson and Wentworth Streets. His home is one of six properties under consideration for purchase by the Foundation. As Frances Edmunds, the Executive Director of the *Historic Charleston*

[58] Meeting of the Ansonborough Finance Committee, September 21, 1961
[59] Ibid

Foundation writes in 1965, this home on the corner of Anson and Wentworth "belongs to negro doctor Purvis. Not an eyesore at present, but am alarmed at problems in clearing up such spots as area develops." Her concern with these "spots" extended to 45 Anson Street as well, another location the Foundation was considering purchasing. Edmunds writes: "Immediately to the rear of this [45 Anson Street]-real eyesore-a dreadful little negro shack on street-attractive masonry building to rear-said he would sell for $10,000-ridiculous price." In addition, 8 Alexander Street has a "dreadful negro shack on small lot-brings in monthly income of $75. Will swap for building producing $100 a month. Strongly recommend we make every effort to have complete control of Alexander Court by this purchase."[60]

Of note in Frances Edmunds' descriptions in her list of properties owned by the *Historic Charleston Foundation*, and those which the Foundation wished to purchase, is her seeming ability to allow the Foundation to pay more for dilapidated structures if the residents are white. For example, the southwest corner of Anson and Wentworth, directly across from Dr. Purvis, sits a "hideous asbestos shingled building-rented in two low class white units. Belongs to May Cathen. Offered $10,000-Refused-Might take $12,000." It is somewhat telling that Mrs. Edmunds was disgusted at the $10,000 asking price for the lot that included the "dreadful little negro shack" at 45 Anson Street, yet the "hideous asbestos shingled building" rented to lower-class whites gets a $10,000 offer from the Foundation, with the implication that the Foundation might pay as much as $12,000. Perhaps the property at the southwest corner of Anson and Wentworth was in that much better shape than 45 Anson Street, although Edmunds' description does not make it seem

[60] List of Properties Owned by Historic Charleston Foundation, 1966

that way. Rather, it is plausible that the simple fact that whites live in the property, regardless of their lower-class status, makes the property have, at least in Frances Edmunds' eyes, more value than a similarly dilapidated one that is inhabited by African-Americans.

III.

"Informed and representative citizens as part of the neighborhood." "Reclamation." "Bridgehead of stability." "Preserving the best of the past."[61] All words and phrases that appeared in a report to the Board of Trustees to the Historic Charleston Foundation in October of 1963. All words and phrases that certainly seem to exclude African-Americans from the equation, the implication being African-Americans are not informed and representative citizens, that poor black neighborhoods do not provide stability, and that African-American autonomy and advancement do not, and should not, represent the best of the past. All words and phrases that make consistent appearances in newspaper editorials, summaries of meetings about the *Historic Charleston Foundation*'s preservation efforts. The ever-present quest to acknowledge and reclaim elite white heritage makes constant appearances throughout documents and letters pertaining to the *Historic Charleston Foundation* and Executive Director Edmunds. For example, a letter addressed to Frances Edmunds from British citizen Alan B. Anson in 1962 sheds some light on the desire for white persons of foreign birth to reclaim their heritage in regard to Ansonborough.

[61] Report to the Board of Trustees, Historic Charleston Foundation, October 29, 1963

Alan B. Anson, a descendant of George Anson, the neighborhood's founder, wrote to Frances Edmunds with a noticeable glee in regard to the *Historic Charleston Foundation*'s attempts at reclaiming his heritage. In his words: " George Anson died on June 6, 1762- that is almost exactly two hundred years ago- and it is so interesting to find that the name of this man, who from all accounts dedicated his life to the service of his country and to the improvement of the conditions of the common seaman of his time, should be thus permanently enshrined as part of the heritage of your fine city [Alan B. Anson had, at the time of his writing, never actually visited Charleston]."[62]

Two weeks later, Frances Edmunds responded to Anson's letter. As seems to be the case with most of her correspondence, she could not resist explaining to him how the neighborhood that bore his descendant's name had fallen into a state of disrepair, a state of disrepair that only the organization that she directed, could remedy. She writes: "The section of the city in which *Historic Charleston Foundation* has launched its first Area Rehabilitation Project lies within the bounds of this property and, up until the early part of the century, was known as Ansonborough or, in not a very complimentary fashion, more generally as 'The Borough'. Until the first World War, there were a certain number of good families living in the area. However, by 1950, it was an interesting but definitely blighted area. The enclosed folder will tell you something of what we are doing there."[63] Is the word "interesting" a way to describe the lower-class population that resided in the neighborhood by 1950? If so, there can be little doubt that Edmunds is using racism as a scapegoat to describe the conditions in Ansonborough in 1950, After all, the "good families" were already gone.

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[62] Alan B. Anson to Frances Edmunds, April 30, 1962
[63] Frances Edmunds to Alan B. Anson, May 15, 1962

IV.

Beginning in 1960 and revised continuously throughout the decade, the *Historic Charleston Foundation*'s "Progress in Ansonborough" report attempted to showcase the continued rehabilitation of the neighborhood to the public. An attempt to encourage private investment and to drum up what is now the ubiquitous tourist dollar, the report nevertheless continued the rhetoric of white, upper-class residents being the only ones capable of living in, and maintaining Ansonborough as the *Historic Charleston Foundation* saw fit. The report strongly implies that only white upper-class citizens are capable of being informed and represented, and that they are the only ones with "buying potential." It is worth noting as well that these "transient occupants of low income"[64], who had resided in Ansonborough a few short years prior, were often the same people who had worked for the Charleston Shipbuilders and Dry Dock Company, many of whom contributed directly to the success of the American war effort during World War II. The irony is that, during the 1950s, when the United States was still riding high from the defeat of Germany and Japan, a high that manifested itself in the Baby Boom and a new consumer culture, many of those who had contributed to the War's success, such as those in Ansonborough, were no longer considered economically viable and were ultimately displaced.

The notion of what it meant to be an "informed and representative citizen", in other words a white middle-to-upper-class citizen, manifested itself in similar ways

[64] *Progress in Ansonborough: Highlights of the Annual Report of the Area Projects Committee to the Board of Trustees, Historic Charleston Foundation*. April, 1965

throughout the South in the 1950s and 60s. Historian Kevin Kruse argues that after World War II, many middle class whites began to view the Great Migration[65] as an invasion of their cities. While these elite whites initially resisted with violence by joining the Ku Klux Klan and other hate groups, they soon began to realize that it was more efficient to "put aside the…white sheets of the Klan and instead present themselves as simple homeowners and concerned citizens."[66] In effect, this shift in tactics created two real estate markets, one for whites and one for blacks. Also, the idea of community integrity began to take hold. If a community had integrity, meaning that its residents knew each other, shopped at the same local businesses, had children who went to the same schools etc., then all efforts were made to insure that a particular community's integrity remained intact. In other words, it was decided at the local level that communities with integrity were to remain so through racial purity.[67] This idea of community integrity in many ways worked retroactively in Charleston under the direction of the *Historic Charleston Foundation*. Neighborhoods that were considered slums (i.e., that had a sizeable black population) were returned (through historic preservation) to the notion of community integrity, in Charleston's case an integrity that drew heavily on the Antebellum ideals of an elite white dominated culture.

The *Historic Charleston Foundation*'s race-and class-based rhetoric manifested itself in other publications throughout the 1960s as well. A newsletter from 1961 that was

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[65] This influx of African-Americans to urban centers post-World War II was a catalyst for much of the racist rhetoric that dominated American culture in the 1950s and 60s. Racism had always existed but for the first time elite whites felt directly threatened by this postwar population shift.

[66] Kevin M. Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2005) p. 44.

[67] Kruse, 79-80.

distributed to the visitors of Ansonborough's first Open House continues the rhetoric of heritage and an exclusive view of upper-class whites as being the only social class who can be considered citizens. For example, the publication states: "The basic goal of the Foundation, established in 1947 by Charlestonians, is practical contemporary use…These buildings give our city the unique flavor and beauty which attracts visitors from all over the world, and are a constant source of pleasure and pride in its own citizens."[68] As in *This is Charleston*, the Open House newsletter refers to Charleston as "our city" and to Ansonborough as a source of pride for its own citizens. Again, it seems likely that "our city" is reserved exclusively for white upper-class residents, the only kind of people that can really be considered "citizens."

Of note is the fact that, at least in print, the *Historic Charleston Foundation* never really saw their preservation efforts as a states' rights issue, even though the local press certainly did. However, the way in which the revolving fund developed and the way in which the *Historic Charleston Foundation* constantly trumpeted its efforts as being the first of its kind and a model for other cities and organizations, definitely leads one to believe that its members prided themselves on a grassroots effort in regard to slum clearance and rehabilitation.

The revolving fund, established in 1957 and long a source of pride for the *Historic Charleston Foundation*, worked as follows:

1. The fund will be flexible.
2. It will operate on a non-profit basis wherever possible

[68] "Welcome to Ansonborough: Area Rehabilitation Project of Historic Charleston Foundation" distributed May 6 and 7, 1961, to the two thousand visitors to the Foundation's first Open House

3. An entire area, rather than individual structures, will be targeted for renewal. That way, if a neighborhood is at least partially restored by the Foundation, then private investment should be able to restore the rest.
4. The architectural integrity of all buildings should be maintained wherever possible.
5. Any properties the Foundation wishes to purchase should be bought in a way that secures commissions for realtors, so that said realtors will essentially operate in collusion with the Foundation.
6. The Foundation will pay all professional fees in regard to purchasing and restoring structures deemed worthy of preservation.[69]

This revolving fund became the most trumpeted single effort the *Historic Charleston Foundation* implemented. The foundation's progress reports constantly lauded it, stories of its success appeared in many press releases, newspaper articles, and brochures available to the public, and was often advertised in a way that made the *Historic Charleston Foundation* seem benevolent to the point of almost being willing to sacrifice itself for the greater good of the city. For example, a newsletter published in 1967 states the following: "The Foundation recognizes that in the rehabilitation of a rundown area, its resales may sometimes be at a loss. This deficit is considered the contribution of the Foundation- and of its benefactors- to the cultural heritage and urban vitality of our city.

[69] "Plan as Adopted at a Meeting of the Board of Trustees of Historic Charleston Foundation, February 6, 1957"

The basic reason for the Foundation's existence is to take the financial burden of 'showing the way' to practical modern use of fine old buildings before it is too late."[70]

One outcome of the *Historic Charleston Foundation*'s implementation of the revolving fund, and of the foundation's preservation efforts as a whole, was the creation of restrictive covenants for the various homes the Foundation had restored. These covenants, so commonplace now on the lower peninsula, restricted a homeowners ability to modify their property without the express written consent of the *Historic Charleston Foundation*. For instance, no modifications to a building's exterior could be made without approval from the Foundation, a potential seller first had to notify the Foundation of the plans to sell, including the monetary offer accepted and the names and addresses of all buyers, and perhaps most telling in regard to slum clearance, all homes had to be used solely as single family residences, unless written approval was granted by the *Historic Charleston Foundation*, approval which was almost never granted. This forcing of all dwellings to be single-family is yet another example of the Foundation ensuring that the "undesirables" could never return to Ansonborough, as single family dwellings were, by the mid-1960s, almost exclusively white upper-class.[71]

V.

The balancing act between the *Historic Charleston Foundation*'s desire to rehabilitate Ansonborough and its desire to ensure that all "undesirables" were

[70] "Ansonborough: An Historic Residential Area in Old Charleston", Area Rehabilitation Project of Historic Charleston Foundation, Charleston, South Carolina, 1967
[71] List of restrictive and protective covenants, 1965

permanently removed from the area was often difficult to maintain, and sometimes extended beyond poor African-Americans. Perhaps there is no greater example of this than the story of Gordon Langley Hall. Born and raised in England, Hall gained fame and wealth as an author, known primarily for writing biographies of famous First Ladies, including Mary Todd Lincoln, Jacqueline Kennedy, and Lady Bird Johnson. By late 1961, when Hall lived in New York City, he expressed a desire to purchase a home in Ansonborough at 56 Society Street. With a penchant for acquiring opulent furniture, Hall essentially sold himself as a potential white upper-class resident to Frances Edmunds in a series of letters beginning in 1961. Stating that "I have a great love of the American South as it reminds me of home", Hall also viewed Charleston as a place where "people have good manners which they do not always have here [New York City]. Out of all the cities I have visited in this country I liked Charleston the best." He even went so far to say that his pet parrot, Marilyn, "will be happy to return to the South- from whence she came. Even in New York she defies the populace and whistles 'Dixie' every night before she retires."[72]

By early 1962, Hall purchased his home in Ansonborough at 56 Society Street, the Dr. Joseph Johnson House, and began regular correspondence with Frances Edmunds. The correspondence in February 1962 included Frances Edmunds' genuine appreciation of a pair of stone lion lawn ornaments that Hall had given her and her husband as a gift. In her thank-you letter to Hall, Edmunds describes how she could 'not be more intrigued or appreciative" in receiving the gift. In addition, as always seemed to be the case with her, she took the opportunity to comment on the social makeup of the neighborhood as it

[72] Gordon Langley Hall to the Charleston Historical Foundation, December 9, 1961

related to the *Historic Charleston Foundation*'s rehabilitation efforts. She writes: "We have two young couples, both with children, seriously considering 66 Anson Street and this I especially like. Certainly, to have a balanced neighborhood we need more young families up there." A balanced neighborhood, in Frances Edmunds' eyes, obviously has to include young couples with children to ensure the neighborhoods success and conform to her idea of diversity, as long as the young couples are white upper-class citizens.[73]

By the spring of 1963, Gordon Langley Hall seemed to be agreeing with the *Historic Charleston Foundation*'s mission that the newly-rehabilitated Ansonborough must conform to a white upper-class social structure. In a letter to Edmunds in May of that year, Hall seems to suggest that his wealth and opulence have gone a long way in assuring that Ansonborough will continue to only attract wealthy white citizens. He writes: "You will be glad to know that the horrible people next door have moved. My campaign seems to have taken effect quickly. It amused me to see the police down here inspecting everything they were taking away with them. This sort of speaks for itself. We have been very lively with the Canadian sailors on this street. I really think it is a smart thing to get this street and Anson Street off limits to service personnel…I think that with this source of remuneration gone many of the rooming houses on the street would be forced to close or sell out cheap. This is only a suggestion, but I think may be a feasible one. I don't think that the Citadel cadets are innocent either."[74] In effect, Hall is arguing that Ansonborough should be entirely insular, a neighborhood reserved solely for upper-class whites who have very limited contact with the outside world (Canadian sailors), and even with other residents of the city itself (Citadel cadets).

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[73] Frances Edmunds to Gordon Langley Hall, February 5, 1962
[74] Gordon Langley Hall to Frances Edmunds, May 13, 1963

However, Gordon Langley Hall led a life that Frances Edmunds was initially perhaps unaware of or simply chose to ignore. He was a flamboyant homosexual in a city that was not ready to embrace the lifestyle. In addition, Ansonborough, perhaps because of the arrival of famous resident Gordon Langley Hall, was quickly becoming a neighborhood with a sizeable (for Charleston in the 1960s anyway) gay population. Nevertheless, in 1968 Hall underwent a sex change operation and soon after married her 22-year-old African-American butler, John-Paul Simmons, thus becoming Dawn Langley Simmons. It was, by many accounts, the first documented interracial marriage in Charleston history.[75] This one-two punch of sex change, coupled with a marriage to an African-American, did not sit well with Frances Edmunds. Edmunds, with the assistance of city officials, began to attack Dawn Langley Simmons under the pretext of having too many pets in the home. After much legal wrangling, Simmons decided on moving out of Ansonborough. In a 1969 letter to attorney A.T. Smythe, Simmons writes in regard to attempting to relocate in Charleston: "I have particularly wanted to see Frances [Edmunds] as we are not desirous of staying in Ansonborough but she controls the property that we want and which is in an area that I do not think any white people would want to buy. I wish that a happy medium would be reached. I am sort of 'respectable' again. At least the Archbishop of Canterbury has invited us to tea!"[76]

An October 1969 New York Post article perhaps sums up the Hall/Edmunds saga best. Titled "Ex-He Says She's Borne a Child", the Post states that, somehow, Dawn Langley Simmons gave birth to a seven-pound baby girl. Simmons, in the article,

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[75] Dinita Smith, "Dawn Langley Simmons, Flamboyant Writer, Dies at 77" in the *New York Times*, September 24, 2000

[76] Dawn Langley Simmons to A.T. Smythe, July 23, 1969

threatens to "put her in a baby carriage and walk her right down on the lily-white Battery." The Post continues: "The antebellum mansions on the Battery, Charleston's historic waterfront, house many of the aristocratic Charlestonians in whose society Gordon Langley Hall was once welcome. Mrs. Simmons said many of her former friends were responsible for "the persecution that forced me to go away and have my baby in secrecy."[77]

By 1972, Charleston and its intolerance had won out. That year, Simmons claimed that someone in a ski mask had broken into her home and beat her. In 1974, the family left Charleston and settled in upstate New York, where Mr. Simmons lived for many years in a mental institution near Albany. Dawn Langley Simmons died on September 18, 2000 at her daughter's home in Charleston.[78] In short, although the story of Gordon Langley Hall becoming Dawn Langley Simmons is unusual, especially for 1960s Charleston, it goes without saying that the reaction of Frances Edmunds is perhaps the most high-profile example of her intolerance. She initially embraced Hall when he was a wealthy, famous man, likely under the pretext of using his fame and wealth to advance her own desires to racially purify Ansonborough, yet when Hall became a female and, likely most shocking to Edmunds, married her African-American butler, Edmunds did all she could to remove Simmons from the neighborhood. This is the most publicized example of the *Historic Charleston Foundation*'s desire to use white supremacy to maintain Ansonborough completely backfiring. After 1969, the rhetoric of reclamation and heritage, as it was preached by the *Historic Charleston Foundation*, slowly began to wane.

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[77] *New York Post*, October 9, 1969
[78] *New York Times*, September 24, 2000

VI.

By the end of 1969, residents of Ansonborough formed the *Historic Ansonborough Neighborhood Association*. Essentially an offshoot of the *Historic Charleston Foundation*, the new neighborhood association was, in the words of the association's president Frederick M. Ehni, "founded with the prime objective of fostering and promoting the continued development of the Ansonborough community…We have set in motion an organization of resident property owners in Ansonborough which will reflect the needs, desires and responsibilities of a contemporary urban residential community within the context and fabric of the unique and distinguished architectural heritage which is ours here in Charleston."[79]

The creation of the *Historic Ansonborough Neighborhood Association* was in many ways the outcome of a paradigm shift that occurred after 1966 in regard to federal involvement in historic preservation. As has been shown, the rhetoric of Charleston preservation in the late-1950s and early-1960s was rife with talk of states' rights and a fear of governmental control in regard to urban renewal. However, the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 changed the ways in which many organizations approached historic preservation.

The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 created three distinct components in regard to historic preservation, the National Register of Historic Places, the National Historic Landmarks program, and the State Historic Preservation Offices. These three

[79] Frederick M. Ehni, President of the Historic Ansonborough Neighborhood Association to Thomas C. Stevenson, Jr., President of the Historic Charleston Foundation, January 9, 1970

components caused a dramatic shift in the way many local organizations, such as the *Historic Charleston Foundation*, viewed federal preservation efforts. Instead of federal projects ignoring and often compromising historic sites as had happened so often under the Eisenhower Administration, the new act included the Section 106 process, a process designed to account for any historical damage a federally funded project may do to a proposed site. In addition, the State Historic Preservation Offices now acted as a middleman between local organizations such as the *Historic Charleston Foundation* and the federal government. These State Historic Preservation Offices now had the responsibilities of maintaining a list of historic properties for inclusion into the National Register of Historic Places or the National Historic Landmarks program, creating and maintaining a statewide preservation program, and working with and educating locals about how best to preserve their history. Perhaps most telling, the federal government was willing to provide local organizations with financial and technical assistance in preservation efforts. Whereas publications such as the *News and Courier* were wary of this federal assistance at the turn of the decade, by 1966 the local press was conspicuously silent. Perhaps the clarity of the National Historic Preservation Act appealed to local citizens, citizens who would create grassroots organizations such as the *Historic Ansonborough Neighborhood Association*, more than any other federal attempts at preservation on a local scale had.

The newly formed *Historic Ansonborough Neighborhood Association* was determined to work with the federal government from its creation in 1969. Just prior to its creation, in May of 1969, Chairman of *the Historic Ansonborough Neighborhood Association*'s Charter Committee Perry Woods wrote to James Biddle, President of the

National Trust for Historic Preservation in Washington, DC, essentially asking for any assistance that the Trust could give in regard to the fledgling neighborhood association. In the letter, Woods writes: "As you know, the *Historic Charleston Foundation* has done much to further the restoration of Ansonborough. However, we the citizens therein feel it time that we take the ball. Would you have any suggestions or ideas as to the formation of a charter for our group? Essentially what we want to do is just further the work the *Historic Charleston Foundation* has begun. Get down to the nitty-gritty so to speak."[80]

In January of 1968, less than two years prior to the creation of the *Historic Ansonborough Neighborhood Association,* the Department of Community Affairs of the Citizens and Southern National Bank of South Carolina prepared a lengthy report titled "Possible Sources of Federal Assistance for Beautification of Ansonborough." The majority of possible sources of federal assistance came from the Department of Housing and Urban Development and were desired to be used to "attack urban problems in a combined effort with the Federal government", for the 'rebuilding or restoring of slum and blighted areas through coordinated use of all available Federal programs and private and local resources", and for "public tourism and community facilities" among others. With the passage of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, this Federal assistance was more readily available than ever before and the Charleston preservation community was willing to embrace federal assistance more than ever before. In an about face from 1958, when the *News and Courier*, among other publications, was arguing strongly against federal involvement in historic preservation, re-raising the 19th century

[80] Perry Woods, Chairman of the Charter Committee for the Historic Ansonborough Neighborhood Association to James Biddle, President of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, May 18 1969

notion of states' rights, the report from 1968 stated that, with federal assistance, the "intent of this project is to show what can be done in the Ansonborough area and to show what work and detail is necessary for complete plans for the redevelopment and revitalization of the neighborhood…With each step toward completion of the project, local property values would rise and more important, more tourists would visit the city and more buyers would visit Ansonborough. After completion, the neighborhood would be an example to other areas, showing what can and needs to be done throughout the city of Charleston and other cities in the country."[81]

VII.

"Dear Ansonborough Homeowner:

Excuse this informal way of writing you, but on Saturday night the Ansonborough Tour was just the most exciting thing I have ever seen.

Many of you remember Ansonborough fifteen years ago, or even ten years ago; some of you did not see it then, but to think that the beautiful fairyland of Saturday night could have come about so quickly was really magic- quite unbelievable.

Thank you for all you have done and are doing for the Foundation. The candles, the houses, the music, the streets, the hostesses- it was all simply perfect.
Thank you.

Sincerely,
Frances
Mrs. S. Henry Edmunds
Director"- April 8, 1974

By the mid-1970s, the efforts of the *Historic Charleston Foundation* and the *Historic Ansonborough Neighborhood Association* had turned Ansonborough into a

[81] "Ansonborough", A Preliminary Report Prepared by the Department of Community Affairs of the Citizens and Southern National Bank of South Carolina, Possible Sources of Federal Assistance for Beautification of Ansonborough, January 10, 1968

picturesque neighborhood, one that on the surface proved a classic example of how effective historic preservation could be. Over 100 homes had been rehabilitated since the Foundation took control in the late-1950s. The *Historic Ansonborough Neighborhood Association* had done its part in erecting new street signs, beautifying the neighborhood with landscaping, and turning the corner of East Bay and Wentworth Streets into a park. Now tourists flocked to the area for guided tours and white upper-class families lived in domestic bliss. But at what cost? Ansonborough's "undesirables", many of whom had worked so hard contributing to the war effort in the 1940s, had been completely displaced thanks to the cloaked white supremacy that dominated Ansonborough's renewal. The lower-class African-Americans had, by the 1970s, either moved from Charleston altogether, or in many instances, been forced into public housing farther up the Peninsula and into North Charleston, places that were designated for the "undesirables." During their removal throughout the 1960s, there was remarkably little in the way of a concerted effort to stop it. While the Civil Rights movement was in full swing, attention was hardly paid to urban renewal as a race issue. Instead, much of the focus on Civil Rights was on more basic issues of human dignity, such as the right to vote and the right to use something as fundamental as a public water fountain.

The resurrected states' rights battle, so often used to justify the South's secession as cause for the Civil War, held a prominent place in the initial rhetoric associated with Charleston's urban renewal. However, as is often the case, the money that the federal government offered in regard to urban renewal, money that became even more accessible after 1966, eventually became irresistible to the *Historic Charleston Foundation* and the *Historic Ansonborough Neighborhood Association*. In short, the insatiable desire to evict

the poor African-Americans, and to worship at the altar of tourism, rendered Charleston's initial opposition to federal involvement obsolete. Not unlike the current Confederate Battle Flag controversy, many of those in power are willing to bend, and sometimes break, history to advance their personal goals.

Conclusion

I.

By the fall of 1876, federal efforts at Reconstruction in the South had hit a major roadblock. Corruption had run rampant in the Grant administration and a counterrevolution was taking shape in South Carolina, a "Redemption" that spelled the end of Reconstruction in the South and a return to African-American subjugation through Jim Crow laws and threats of physical violence by the Ku Klux Klan, the Redshirts, and other quasi-political vigilante groups. This social and political contest that formed in South Carolina was known as the Redemption of 1876.

The Redemption of 1876 encompassed four states: North Carolina, Florida, Louisiana, and South Carolina. As historian Eric Foner writes: "More than any other Southern state, however, national attention focused on South Carolina. Here, Democrats entered 1876 divided between Charleston 'fusionists'- who, in the face of the state's substantial black voting majority and the conciliatory policies of Gov. Daniel H. Chamberlain, advocated conceding the gubernatorial race and concentrating on local and legislative contests- and partisans of a 'straight-out' campaign for white supremacy. A contest modeled on that of Mississippi, insisted upcountry planter-lawyer Martin W. Gary, could redeem South Carolina. Gary's 'Plan of Campaign' called upon each Democrat to 'control the vote of at least one negro by intimidation, purchase, keeping

him away or as each individual may determine,' always bearing in mind that 'argument has no effect on them: They can only be influenced by their fears."[82]

The Charleston 'fusionists' did indeed concede the gubernatorial race- to none other than wealthy South Carolina planter and former Confederate cavalry general Wade Hampton, a man whose facial features represented the classic dashing Confederate from Southern mythology. Hampton's supporters quickly adopted the red shirt as their uniform of choice, a uniform whose origins are disputed[83], yet quickly came to represent violent intimidation of the black population of Reconstruction-era South Carolina, intimidation that was shielded by the cloak of the Lost Cause.

The Lost Cause, at its core, memorialized and mythologized Confederate defeat. However, it also became a rallying cry for the end of Reconstruction in the South. Under the banner of the Lost Cause, men such as Wade Hampton and his Redshirts, the Ku Klux Klan, and Benjamin Tillman, white supremacist and eventual governor of South Carolina and U.S. Senator, used the Lost Cause as a way to extol their racist version of Southern pride, heritage, and redemption, three key components that allowed the Jim Crow South to exist and thrive for almost another full century.

II.

[82] Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*. (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 1988) p. 570.
[83] W. Scott Poole, *Never Surrender: Confederate Memory and Conservatism in the South Carolina Upcountry.* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2004) p. 122.

"Charleston has *always* been a city of comfortable homes. We hope it stays that way."[84] These last sentences of a *News and Courier* editorial from July of 1960 tie in directly to Ansonborough's rehabilitation being considered a "redemption of a heritage." Since the city has always had comfortable homes, then the redemption of this comfort must come to fruition, even if, or perhaps especially if, the African-American population is subjugated in the process. In addition, it shows that the efforts of the *Historic Charleston Foundation* in the 1950s and 60s were a direct continuation of the Redemption of 1876. However, instead of the direct threat of physical violence playing a role in the intimidation of the African-American population, said population was intimidated and ultimately subjugated by a wave of preservation and rehabilitation efforts cloaked in the notion of the confluence of progress and a return to Antebellum heritage, much the same way the Redemption of 1876 used the Lost Cause as a cloak for African-American subjugation.

In addition, local press coverage of preservation efforts in the 1950s and 60s tended to focus on the notion of a struggle over states' rights, in many ways hijacking and reforming history in much the same way the Lost Cause did in the 1870s. Rather than being a symbol of oppression, the local press viewed historic preservation as an image of pride and heritage, the struggle for the individual to have autonomy over neighborhood rehabilitation, unless the individual happens to be black of course. Both the Lost Cause and the view of the press in regard to historic preservation, effectively hijacked history, turning it into something that could be used as a justification for the oppression of African-Americans.

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[84] *News and Courier*. July, 19, 1960

III.

On April 4th, 2002, the *Charleston Post and Courier* published an article titled "Art, Film to Help Recapture Memories of Ansonborough." Memorializing Ansonborough through the eyes of its minority inhabitants, the article is one of the very few examples of a conversation about Ansonborough's rehabilitation and minority displacement as viewed by the African-American population. Primarily discussing the Ansonborough Homes (the Borough, as its residents called it), low-income housing that was built at Calhoun and East Bay Street in the 1940s to house the influx of dockworkers during World War II, the article relates how a sense of community among the Borough's African-American residents offset the less than desirable living conditions the housing project offered. As a former resident of the Borough, well-known local blacksmith Philip Simmons recalled his time there as a young boy in the 1940s: "The corner stores, the vegetable shops and the lumber yards. The houses were in bad shape but the people were truly genuine."[85]

Even with the thriving micro-economy that the Ansonborough Homes created for its residents, by the 1980s many of the structures had been torn down, leaving a smaller housing project that was home to 160 families. By 1992, in the aftermath of Hurricane Hugo, the last remnants of the Borough were torn down to make way for new condos and commercial space, transforming the area into a place for whites, much like what the *Historic Charleston Foundation* was able to accomplish thirty years prior. Longtime resident of the Borough, Viola Smalls recalled being removed from the homes due to soil

[85] Frances McCormack, "Art, Film to Help Recapture Memories of Ansonborough" in the *Charleston Post and Courier*, April 4, 2002

contamination from benzopyrene, a contaminant found in coal tar: "We were just renting, so we didn't have much of a say, but maybe they shouldn't have built those homes there in the first place. The way they got us out of there (the housing project) was wrong, but I'm not angry." Charleston County School Board member Elizabeth Alston remembers the removal of the Borough's residents as follows: "many people grew up on that side, and people are very angry because they've been displaced. A good word to describe what was done to the city is gentrification. A lot of these people who've been displaced have not been able to move back into the city limits."[86]

IV.

In 2008, local author Pat Brennan gave an interview in regard to Mayor Joe Riley's overall plan for rehabilitating and preserving Charleston's lower peninsula. Brennan's opinion is that two specific things summarized Riley's mayoral career in regard to preservation and gentrification. First, "he [Riley] saw the potential of Charleston, and Charleston- when we were growing up- was a poor city. There were very few wealthy families in Charleston. Charleston had never recovered from the Civil War. In the late 60s, we used to always make fun of the historical society, the 'hysterical society' and sort of the prevailing solution all across the South at least was that if it's an old building, to tear it down. That's what we all thought, not including Joe…Joe saw the potential of preservation, and with that, the economy and economic development of Charleston…During the civil rights struggle, there was a huge amount of white flight out

[86] Ibid

of Southern cities, and all across the South, the downtown area, the main streets, just died…But Joe saw that the key to making a city a city was the downtown area."

Second, "Joe was not a civil rights activist or anything, but he believed in treating people as individuals, and if they were African-American, fine, if they were white, fine, but everyone was an individual…I'm sure you've heard people call him 'Little Black Joe', but he was seen early on as being partial- although he certainly is not partial- to the African-Americans, but he was not opposed to their progress, and very much supported it."[87]

The irony of Brennan's memory of Mayor Riley's preservation ideals is that, as we have seen, there was almost no progress in regard to the African-American role in peninsular Charleston's historic preservation and rehabilitation. In fact, not withstanding a few published retrospectives by the local press, the African-American voice was completely silent.[88] Instead, newspapers such as the *News and Courier* used preservation as a way to oppress the minority population through the Civil War-era imagery of a state's rights struggle to preserve Charleston's past. In addition, the *Historic Charleston Foundation*, under the racist leadership of its director Frances Edmunds, put these Civil War-era notions of minority oppression into practice in the twentieth century, via backroom dealings and price gouging. Thus the Redemption of 1876 became the redemption of a heritage in 1960s' Ansonborough. A common question in the field of historic preservation is whether preservation is strictly an elite, white enterprise. As far as Charleston is concerned, the answer is yes.

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[87] "Pat Brennan Interview About Joe Riley and Downtown Renewal: Interview by Steve Estes". (Charleston History Project, Charleston, SC: November 4, 2008) p. 6-9

[88] This author had a high degree of difficulty in locating any definitive sources in regard to the African-American perspective.

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