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Your Clan or Ours ?

For many Scottish­Americans, Scotland stands for authenticity, racial "purity," and social order. It's not a big stretch to see Scotland morphing into a metaphor for the Old South.

UNDER THE WIDE LIMBS OF OAK TREES, four girls, maybe fifteen or sixteen years old, with gray­ blue eyes like lake water, are dancing. They cock one hand on a plaid ­skirted hip, fling the other in the air. Their heads are held high, rib cages motionless, while their feet in soft black leather lace­ ups trace intricate patterns on the grass. Just a hammer's throw away, tomato­ faced, big­ necked young men, chests bare over MacKenzie or MacLeod kilts, vie with each other to chunk what looks like a telephone pole across the lawn. On the porch of the old house nearby, four bearded pipers play "Scotland the Brave."

This isn't Scotland, of course: Scotland isn't so self-­consciously *Scottish.*Here there are dry­ cleaned tartars, new black velvet ribbons tying back coppery hair, creaseless flags of St. Andrew waving in the breeze, honey dark whiskies-Ardbeg and Talisker, Islay and Orkney-flowing into polished glasses. Here there are Rep Cherokees with bumper stickers shouting "Celtic and Proud of It!"; here there's a balding guy with a red and yellow tattoo on his arm reading "1314"-"It's the date of the Battle of Bannockburn," he says, "when Robert the Bruce kicked English butt."

This is, in fact, Jefferson County, Florida. The Highland Games at Trelawn Plantation, to be exact, where the highest land is probably about three hundred feet above sea level. The food is more barbeque than haggis, and half the guys in kilts also wear Florida State t­-shirts. But they've come to celebrate a place-or at least the idea of a place-most of them have never even seen.

Scottishness is back in fashion for American white folks, muscling Irishness out of the way as the Celtic flavor du jour. Something like three hundred highland games and "Clan Gatherings" happen all across the country. The current women's world caber­tossing champ is from California. *Braveheart*and *Rob Roy*are in heavy rotation at your local Blockbuster, and Ewan McGregor, the hottest actor to come out of Scotland since Seam Connery, wields a light saber while spouting Celto­Zen

philosophy in the new *Star Wars.*As if this weren't enough, Congress has declared April 6 National Tartan Day. Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, who, according to his press release, is entitled to wear the tarts of Clam Buchanan, sponsored the resolution. Nobody's quite sure what you're supposed to do on National Tartan Day (Bake shortbread? Drink single ­malt? Kick an Englishman?), but no doubt Hallmark is on the case.

April 6 was chosen because it marks the day in 1320 when the Declaration of Arbroath was signed. The Declaration was a letter from forty ­six Scottish earls and barons asking the Pope to make Edward II of England leave them alone and while he was at it, lift the excommunication on Robert the Bruce. The U.S. Senate resolution claims that the patriotically ringing tones of the Arbroath document had a formative influence on the American state, since "almost half of the signers of the Declaration of Independence were of Scottish descent., This conclusion is historically dubious. Still, the symmetry is satisfying: April 6 is also the day in 1789 when Gorge Washington became president, and-surely this was not lost on Senator Lott's researchers - the date of the Battle of Shiloh in 1862 when thousands of Americans died fighting over slavery.

In Scotland nobody denies the power of the past. History is a hot ­button issue: who owns it, what it teaches, and increasingly, how to sell it to America. The Scottish National Party is built on a justified historical sense of grievance that their country declined into junior partnership with England in 1707 when the Scottish Parliament dissolved itself and the Act of Union was ratified. Now Scotland has its parliament back, reopened this year on July 1 in Edinburgh by Queen Elizabeth (I of Scotland and II of England) in a ceremony larded with symbols, including the ancient crown of Mary, Queen of Scots. Nonetheless, the Scottish National Party (SNP), a serious challenger to Tony Blair's majority Labour Party in Scotland, demands a Scottish republic independent of the United Kingdom.

The left­wing SNP has recently been criticized for seeking support in the New World at Scottish heritage events also attended by neo­-Nazis and Klansmen. No one accuses the SNP of being racists, but they have picked up what some of their own supporters deem dubious friends: neo-Confederates and white supremacists who connect their political projects with Scottish nationhood. Euan Hague, a Scottish academic who spent three years in America studying the interplay between Scotland and Scottish-Americans, says some of these heritage groups see Scotland as a white nation with an overlay of Celtic mystery, "a pure white culture where the men are strong and the women dance. For most, Scottish games mean standing around having a beer and a laugh with ten thousand other people. But for some, it can be a way to assert their whiteness.

At the Jefferson County games, several participants showed up in Confederate uniform. Other games are held in places associated with white supremacists, like Stone Mountain, Georgia, where the Klan reignited itself in 1915. This is not confined to the South: according to Hague, a leaflet distributed by a devotee of "Aryan Genius" at a California Scottish gathering read, "I am here because this event is one of the only places left in Sam Diego County where a WHITE person can gather with others of his or her own race in a peaceful and harmonious celebration of pride!"

The Alabama ­based League of the South, whose members aspire to resecede from the Union, sport a link to the SNP, "our Celtic cousins," on their copious Website, as well as position papers identifying the "Confederate struggle" with that of the Scots. Ed Sebesta, a Texas ­based investigator of the neo-Confederate movement, has documented a great many examples of the Southern fetish for Scotland, including ardent reviews of the film Rob Roy likening the violated Scottish heroine to the brave white women of the Confederacy. Klan Websites praise the SNP, play bagpipe music, and display the blue and white flag of Scotland painted on Mel Gibson's Braveheart face. Southern separatists defend the Confederate battle flag on the grounds that it is based on "a Christian symbol, the Cross of St. Andrew, familiar in the movie Braveheart," while Michael Hill, president of the League of the South, attributes Americans' "natural" gun lust to the Celts, who "realized that the true foundation of independence was that every man be armed."

The SNP disavows all knowledge of their American acolytes. Yet SNP sympathizers have distributed SNP membership leaflets at highland games and festivals across the U.S. and Canada, complete with toll ­free numbers. One such leaflet exhorts readers to "Help the Scottish Lion Break Free-Join the Scottish National Party" and promises that contributors will be named on a "Roll of Honour" to be ceremonially presented "to the first Prime Minister of an Independent Scotland." The SNP claim they've raised only about £2,000 ($3,400) from America in the past couple of years and that they actively discourage racists. "From time to time rednecks will e­mail you or get in touch," says Michael Russell, chief executive of the SNR "1 find it easy to convince them that the SNP is not their home." But the League of the South and the Council of Conservative Citizens, the white supremacist group to which the Scottish­American Senator Lott has been tied, support the SNP, even if their love is unrequited.

AMERICANS OF EVERY RACE, CREED, AND sports affiliation spend a lot of time mulling who they are, choosing a hyphenation-Italian-American? African­American? Asian­American?-and living in a perpetual existential crisis that started in 1776 and hasn't let up yet. For most of the twelve million U.S. citizens (more than twice the population of Scotland itself) who claim it, Scottish heritage is decorative, easy to consume, a link with a paradox ­free past. Nobody's much interested in the Scotland of today, the country that's as modem as it is ancient, the country that's undergoing a cultural renaissance, especially in its film and literature (think of Danny Boyle's *Shallow Grave* and the fiction of Irvine Welsh), and that's struggling with crime, drug use, and unemployment in both the inner cities and remote rural regions. Scottish­ Americans want the Scotland of Braveheart, not the Scotland of Trainspotting The modern country of Scotland can be a shock for Americans who want to see it as an eldritch Celtic kingdom, just as the theo politics of America can be a shock for the Scots. Early this summer, the Bank of Scotland thought it was onto a winner, hiring Pat Robertson! sometime presidential candidate, televangelist, and speaker-in-­tongues to set up a telephone bank in the U.S. But, maybe because the Reverend had a good Presbyterian name, The Bank of Scotland didn't do its homework and so was appalled when its Scottish customers took to defacing money, picketing its branches, and withdrawing their accounts, citing what they saw as Robertson's retrograde views on women, gays, and nonwhites. Robertson, thinking he was doing a deal with the premier financial institution of the nation of Robert The Bruce and William Wallace (a muscular Christian if there ever was one), retaliated, suggesting Scotland was a "darkland" overrun by homosexuals. In the end, it cost the Bank of Scotland $16 million to make Robertson go away.

For many Scottish­ Americans, Scotland stands for authenticity, racial "purity," and social order, for resistance to urbanization and central government-a nation of romantic outlaws and do ­it­ yourself spirituality, a place where men are men, women are ladies, and nature is always photogenic. It's not a big stretch to see Scotland morphing into a metaphor for the Old South, the Never-Never Dixie of old times not forgotten, where slavery didn't rip the place apart but just dissipated into benign paternalism, where feminism is unheard of, Christianity is unchallenged, multiculturalism a bad dream. In Braveheart, Mel Gibson plays Sir William Wallace, the thirteenth-century "guardian" of Scotland, a self-­made guy who's nice to women, children, and animals, likes drinking, hates the English king, and is good at guerrilla warfare. If you scrub off his anachronistic blue paint, trade his kilt for butternut and his Scots accent for a Tennessee one, you'd swear he was General Nathan Bedford Forrest, military genius and first Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan.

So much of the Lost Cause South's sense of itself is inherited from Scotland's genius at

working on failure like an oyster works on a grain of sand. Sir Walter Scott believed passionately in The union between Scotland and England, but he earned a fortune making fiction out of Scotland's poignant past, especially the life of Charles Edward Stuart, "Bonnie Prince Charlie," who lost his bid for the throne at the Battle of Culloden in 1746. Scotland the glamorous victim was thus born, even though the historical record shows that as many Scots fought against the Young Pretender as for him. It didn't matter. The romance of defeat translated well to the imitative, status­obsessed Old South. Scott became the planter class's court poet, "bodily taken over," as WJ. Cash says in flee Mind of the South, "and incorporated into the Southern people's vision of themselves." In the nineteenth century, white landowners called their plantations Waverley and Midlothian, their horses and dogs Rob Roy and Redgauntlet. In Pineville, South Carolina, and Tallahassee, Florida, jousts were held-complete with tin armor, maypoles, and Queens of Beauty and Love- modeled on Scott's popular 1819 novel Ivanhoe. The elite South tried so hard to imitate feudalism that the region was called "Sir Walter Scotland"; Mark Twain, sneeringly citing the "shams" of honor and aristocracy, blamed the Civil War on poor Sir Walter.

During Reconstruction, Scotland (and Scott) offered still more models for Southern behavior, from glamorizing suffering to organizing vigilante violence on the spurious grounds of "chivalry." The Ku Klux Klan, founded in 1866 in Tennessee, may have been patterned after the mysterious Society of the Horseman's Word from eastern Scotland as well as the Knights Templar, a group said to have outlasted papal suppression in Scotland through the Reformation down to the present day.

Some Klan rituals were created out of Scottish ­American and Scottish literary sources, especially cross­ burning, which Thomas Dixon in his 1905 best­seller The Clansman (dine basis for D.W Griffith's film The Birth of a Nation) calls The ancient symbol of an unconquered race of men." Dixon pushed all the Lost Muse buttons: feckless black folks running legislatures, white trash taking over the plantation, teenage virgins raped by apelike ex­slaves. His novel told the glorified tale of how "dine reincarnated souls

of The Clansmen of Old Scotland. . .saved The life of a people." Dixon called it one of the "most dramatic chapters in The history of the Aryan race." But the Klan robes and The cross­burnings are not an "ancient tradition"; there's an obvious literary source. Andrew Hook, Bradley Professor of English at Glasgow University, who studies the influence of Scottish culture on The South, says that the Klan derives many of its trappings from Scott's novel *Anne of Gelerstein*, while the cross­ burnings come from Canto III of Scott's wildly popular Lady of the Lake.

The white South often chose to define itself as Celtic, as opposed to Anglo­-Saxon, brushing off The claims of settlers of French, Spanish, or God forbid, African backgrounds. The writer Marshall Frady has called the South "overly memoried," as if our history went back to King Arthur-who was, of course, a Celt. Celticism burnished the idea of the South as "special," Celtic whiteness being somehow whiter than other whites. Reactionary historians explain all of Southern culture as Celtic. Grady McWhiney's 1988 study Cracker Culture, a sacred text for neo-­Confederate groups like the League of the South and the Council of Conservative Citizens, parades every stereotype you ever heard in a Jeff Foxworthy routine-lazy, drunk, honor ­obsessed, violent, sentimental-claiming that Celts are the same, ergo, we are all Celts. The prologue to Cracker Culture declares that the Celts' whole two­thousand-year history prepared them to be Southerners."

Certainly, many Southerners were prepared to see themselves as Celts, even claiming that the nation owed its existence to Celts. A fifteenth ­century Orcadian Scot named Henry Sinclair was said to have "discovered" America way before Columbus. Even earlier, the medieval Welsh prince Madog supposedly sailed into Mobile Bay and up the Alabama River. Euan Hague met someone at a U.S. highland "adhering who believed that the Celts not only had got to America first but had somehow influenced Native Americans to paint their faces with "Druidic" symbols.

Celtic chic allows Americans to choose what Hague calls "an ancient and spiritual" identity that underlines their whiteness. In Christian Identity Theology (Identity is more or less the established religion of The Klan), Celts are the true Children of Israel, Jews are spawn of Satan, and black people aren't even human. Pastor Dave Barley of America's Promise Ministries in Sandpoint, Idaho, has never been to Scotland but insists it is central to Identity's racial philosophy: "We believe The Declaration of Arbroath categorically proves the Celtic people are the most pure of the lost tribes of Israel."

Combining selective history and medieval spin­ doctoring, the Declaration asserts Scotland's independence on The grounds of its "racial" distinctiveness from England, claiming that The Scots were a homogeneous people, ignoring the Scandinavians, Anglo-Saxons, and Normans who had been mixing their blood with The Celts for hundreds of years. Along with this anti­-miscegenation fantasy comes the ersatz mysticism: Christian Identity holds that the piece of rock on which ancient Irish and Scottish kings were crowned (and every English monarch since Edward I, who stole The thing in 1296), the *Lia Fail*, also known as The Stone of Destiny, is the pillow where Jacob laid his head and dreamed of angels ascending to heaven. Jacob must have been, therefore, a Scotsman. In 1996 the stone was returned to Scotland. If it's the real one, that is. Rumors, generated in fringe nationalist circles, say it's a fake and that the real one is in the keeping of the Scottish Knights Templar, who also have The Holy Grail, the Ark of The Covenant, William Wallace's magic sword, and some large pieces of the True Cross lying around in Their hermetic closets.

If American Scotophiles can't make the pilgrimage to Scotland, They can, at least, rent Braveheart. Mark Potok of the Southern Poverty Law Center says, "Virtually all white supremacists have it in Their video libraries." According to Potok, "The Celtic thing is huge with white supremacists: Celtic tattoos, Celtic crosses-it's like a Conan the Barbarian comic book." Ed Sebesta reports that at a recent League of The South conference in Biloxi, the attendees shouted "Buaidh! Buaidh!"-Gaelic for "victory."

The League's Website displays its new "Confederate tartan" (mostly gray, of course) and has a Braveheart page spelling it out: "Unreconstructed Southerners will find it difficult to miss the parallels between the Scots and our Confederate forebears." To Them Braveheart is pointedly political: "If The Scots can do it, why cam's we?"

THE CULTURAL TRAFFIC BETWEEN fringe elements in Scotland and America is two-way. A couple of years ago Ku Klux Klan leaflets were distributed in Cupar, a small town in eastern Scotland. Borrowing tactics from the Klan, a group variously called "Scotwatch" or "Settlerwatch" has been known to burn the houses of English people living in Scotland. Another group, Siol­nan Gaidheal, or "Seed of the Gael," advocates overthrow of The "English oppressor" to create a "Scotland for the Scots," while the Scottish Nationalists, the second ­largest party in the Edinburgh Parliament, say they mean to use the electoral process to achieve statehood. They insist They welcome all races and creeds, and even harbor a subgroup called "Asians for Independence." Siol­nan Gaidheal used to be part of the Scottish National Party (and some commentators claim that a Siol­nan­ Gaidheal tendency is still active in the main party) but had been involved in terrorist acts. They were expelled from the SNP in 1982 for their right-wing militancy and fixation with finding heirs to Bonnie Prince Charlie. Yet both of these political groups use the emotive, historically dubious, sentimental power of Celtic chic as effective propaganda, and both seek support Tom the children of the Scottish diaspora in the New World. The SNP has used Braveheart-"shamelessly," according to some commentators-to whip up nationalist sentiment. Siol­nan ­Gaidheal celebrates Tartan Day on its Website with the Confederate battle flag prominently displayed alongside banners of the U.S. and Scotland and gushing quotations from Trent Lott.

Despite his right­wing credentials, the Senate majority leader is also popular with the leftist SNP; nationalist leader Alex Salmond praises his "friend" Lott not only for pushing Tartan Day in the U.S. (in the hope it will boost tourism and U.S. investment) but for trying to soften the blow of trade sanctions imposed on the Scottish cashmere industry as a result of the "banana wars" currently raging between the U.S. and the European Union. (The American government wants the European market open to Chiquita and ocher American fruit companies with substantial interests in Latin America. They charge European nations with offering preferential banana deals to Their former colonies in The Caribbean.)

The Hollywood William Wallace, the conservative Mississippian Trent Lott, and the SNP leader (and onetime radical socialist) Alex Salmond make strange bedfellows indeed. But They are bound together by a vision of Scotland as exceptional, a sort of chosen nation along the lines of America as "God's country." At best, This involves willful ignorance, as in the Tartan Day resolution, which gives Scots credit for creating the United States, or in the cartoonish Middle Ages presented by Braveheart. At worst, it's a racist rewrite of the history of a nation that, while hardly free of prejudices against people of color (not to mention Irish Catholics), is nonetheless proudly multi­ethnic and broadly tolerant.

Deviating from the script Scottish-Americans have handed them, many Scots regard American admiration with suspicion, sometimes contempt. Reports of Tartan Day moved The Scotsman newspaper to sigh, "Kitsch has been a blight on Scotland for two centuries." Professor Andrew Hook called it "exploitative and phony from the word 'go."' Braveheart was said to be "historical hogs wash" by a Glasgow editorialist, while the culture critic Colin McArthur called it "execrable," an inhabitant of the "same ideological universe" as Tartan Day, The Loch Ness monster, mountains, fairies, castles, cattle rushing, and Mel Gibson. The Bravebeart tendency, what Scots call "tartanry," denies Scotland modernity; the nation isn't allowed to have a future, only a past imagineered as if by Disney, and packaged for transatlantic consumption. It was an American who hatched the idea of Brigadoon, the enchanted Scottish village Flat appears out of the mist only once every hundred years.

It was a Scot who invented the telephone. \*