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When I moved from North Carolina to Scotland two years ago, I was not especially worried about culture shock. I had grown up in northern England, only a couple of hundred miles away from Edinburgh, where I was to take up a position teaching U.S. history. But I did anticipate—with mixed feelings—a sort of pedagogical culture shock. Having completed my Ph.D. at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (unc) and having taught my first few courses in its vicinity, I was used to seeing American history through American eyes, or at least presenting it to American audiences. But what about teaching the subject in an Edinburgh classroom? With only hazy recollections of how American history had looked from my perspective as a British undergraduate years earlier, I worried. Would I pitch my lectures and discussions to the wrong level? Would I make the mistake of assuming too much prior knowledge? Or too little?

My main areas of expertise, secession and the Civil War, presented special concerns. In North Carolina there had been no need to think about the basics. Students knew what the Civil War was, when it had happened, who had won. They knew there was a North and a South, that the two had fought, that the Union had been preserved and slavery abolished, that the legacies of the conflict continued to influence American identity, politics, and culture. But British students might need to be led through much of this from scratch.

But as I prepared for my move, the results of the 2007 elections in the United Kingdom awakened me to the potential benefits of teaching the Civil War in Scotland. That year, the Scottish National party (snp) won a plurality of seats in the Scottish parliament and snp leader Alex Salmond became first minister. I would be teaching about secession and its consequences in a country whose own secession movement had just received a major boost. Think of the possibilities for cross-fertilization! My students and I would be continuing an old tradition of drawing connections between Scotland and the Confederacy. Mark Twain went a little far in *Life on the Mississippi* (1883) when he blamed the Civil War on Sir Walter Scott, but the link was not completely groundless. Some white southerners had been captivated by Scott's romances of noble Scots fighting against oppression. Confederates took further inspiration from Scotland in their battle flag—a more colorful, star-studded version of the blue-and-white St. Andrew's cross. More recently, their neo-Confederate descendants have claimed a Scottish connection too. Encouraged by Grady McWhiney's thesis of a neat cultural continuity from Britain's Celtic periphery to the American South, neo-Confederates have claimed a Scottish heritage that in their eyes bolsters their political agenda. They even persuaded the Scottish Tartans Authority to authorize a Confederate memorial tartan. And it was Mississippi senator Trent Lott who spearheaded the creation of an annual "Tartan Day" in the United States.^[1] Tenuous as they were, the historic links between Scotland and the American South could work to my advantage in the classroom. Imagine the insightful, animated, even effervescent discussions we would have about Southern secession—surrounded ourselves by a secession movement in full swing.

Unfortunately, imagining such classroom exchanges was as far as my plans went. On numerous occasions I have encouraged my students to compare Scotland's separatism with the South's—to little avail. It is not that they are uninterested in Southern secession; it is more that they are uninterested in the snp's crusade, viewing it as a pipe dream. (Many of my students are English; the city of Edinburgh, and especially its university, is a type of genteel colony for the well-heeled citizens of southern England.) In any case, my hopes for stimulating classroom discussions were dashed. I realized that instructors can assume too much about the influence of contemporary contexts on their students' engagement with the past.

One can also assume too little. The underlying premise of teaching U.S. history abroad is that there are consequential differences in the ways that students from various backgrounds approach a given historical subject, and it is worth taking those differences into account.^[2] In a crude and unscientific way, I survey such

differences at the beginning of each course. I divide the students into small groups and ask them to define, in one sentence, the major significance of the American Civil War.

American students' responses tend to fall into one of two categories: either the Civil War was fought over slavery—end of story—or the war was fought over states' rights (and definitely not over slavery). These categories tend to be mutually exclusive, and sometimes, but not always, they are determined by students' regional backgrounds. Because popular U.S. interpretations of the Civil War focus on the question of whether the war was fought over slavery, it can be difficult to teach about the subtleties of a war that clearly was about slavery, but not about slavery for all participants and not in the same way at different points in time. "Slavery: yes or no?" is a question phrased in a way that hides all the answers. One of my most disheartening student evaluations came from an undergraduate who had enjoyed the course and was especially grateful for the wisdom that the Civil War, contrary to her preconceptions, had not been about slavery after all. She had merely jumped from one category to its binary opposite, and, in doing so, had missed the real complexities of the story.

At the University of Edinburgh my "significance of the Civil War" exercise has elicited a different set of responses. Surprisingly, slavery and emancipation are rarely mentioned. Instead, at the outset of their study of the Civil War, British students tend to see its significance either in terms of global military history—as a precursor to the "total" wars of the twentieth century—or as a stage in the emergence of a unified American nationalism and a powerful central government. Their interest in the international perspective is a natural result of their location outside the United States. I suspect that British students emphasize the importance of the consolidation of the Union because this theme reminds them of their own history. Britain's history of separatism and national consolidation shapes, to some degree, my students' approach to the American Civil War. Present-day Scottish secessionism may not mean very much to them, but the narrative of convergence around a unifying nationalism—a narrative they instinctively apply to the United States as well as the United Kingdom—does.

At the University of Edinburgh the single-sentence definitions tend to be rather vague; British students enter the classroom with less knowledge about the subject than their American counterparts. But this does not necessarily make them inferior. When I asked my current students for their thoughts on teaching American history outside the United States, one of them said, "We bring a different set of misconceptions to the topic." Though I might be a little more charitable and replace "misconceptions" with "preconceptions," he is fundamentally correct. British preconceptions are different, not inferior. For one thing, that Edinburgh students represent a relatively blank slate on the "slavery: yes or no?" question has made the development of a more complex understanding of the relationship between slavery and the Civil War easier. And even as they differ in significant ways, American and British students' preconceptions can actually be quite similar in other, also significant ways. *Gone with the Wind* (novel, 1936; film, 1939) is almost as well known in Scotland as it is in the United States, as are more recent productions such as *Glory* (1989) and *Cold Mountain* (novel, 1997; film, 2003).^[3]

Indeed, although cultural preconceptions can make a difference, I have found practical circumstances to be more important. Here I am thinking of issues such as the availability of resources, methods of assessment, and what the experts would call the teaching and learning cultures of different institutions. At UNC, for example, I assigned specific readings for each syllabus topic, drawn primarily from books that students are expected to purchase. But at the University of Edinburgh, required book purchases are uncommon. Instead, instructors provide a list of optional readings and each student picks those that are most interesting. Each system has its advantages and drawbacks. The American way leads to focused, in-depth discussions of one or two readings, whereas the British method, when it works properly, produces broad exchanges of ideas drawn from an extensive range of readings. Different cultures of instruction and learning have influenced my teaching at least as much as the differing cultural preconceptions that might, at first glance, seem more significant.

Whether measured by the number of books in the library, the number of courses offered, or the quantity of lectures and conferences available, students of U.S. history in the United States have access to more resources and opportunities than do students in Britain. Of course, the Internet is making available a wide range of secondary literature and primary documents that students all over the world can access in precisely the same

way. Even so, inequity remains. One of my best teaching experiences in North Carolina was a small undergraduate seminar on the Civil War era at Duke University. The opportunities for special activities outside the classroom were astounding. One of the assigned books was the edited diary of a female slaveholder. The special collections section of Duke's library happened to own the original, and the class was able to view the manuscript and, with expert staff guidance, compare it to the edited version. Several students went back to special collections—presumably walking there from their dorm rooms—to read other original manuscripts for their research papers. One day, I cancelled class so that my students and I could attend a Civil War conference, replete with famous historians, on the Duke campus. It is difficult to imagine a richer environment in which to teach the American Civil War. Edinburgh cannot, understandably, offer these kinds of extras. Even so, teaching this subject is not a poorer experience, for myself or for my students, because of the relative lack of resources. Although Edinburgh might lack the special collections and the conferences, it does boast its own statue of Abraham Lincoln, erected in the 1890s in honor of Scottish soldiers who had fought for the Union. I visited the statue with my most recent crop of Civil War students and, at Lincoln's feet, we had a memorable conversation about the Great Emancipator, including discussion of his international reputation. The grim Edinburgh drizzle, such a stark contrast to the storied "Carolina blue" skies of Chapel Hill and Durham, somehow made the experience even more rewarding—perhaps by evoking the tragedy of the Civil War and the unfulfilled promise of emancipation.

Inside and outside the classroom, I use whatever resources I can to help my students grapple with the past. Whether in Edinburgh or North Carolina, this process involves my attempt to impart what small wisdom I have managed to accumulate, students reading on their own and listening in the classroom, and all of us talking together to try to better understand this momentous event. Students' backgrounds and cultural contexts do influence the way they approach historical topics, especially controversial ones such as the American Civil War. Practical issues such as resources and teaching methods make a difference, too. But my day-to-day teaching concentrates on nineteenth-century events, not on twenty-first-century contexts. When all is said and done, students are still students, the Civil War is still the Civil War, and the two come together in broadly similar ways whether the classroom window looks out onto Carolina blue or Edinburgh grey.

[1] Grady McWhiney, *Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South* (Tuscaloosa, 1988); Euan Hague, "The Scottish Diaspora: Tartan Day and the Appropriation of Scottish Identities in the United States," in *Celtic Geographies: Old Cultures, New Times*, ed. David C. Harvey, et al. (London, 2002), 139–56, esp. 149–51; Diane Roberts, "Your Clan or Ours?" *Oxford American*, 29 (Sept.–Oct. 1999), 24–30, <http://templeofdemocracy.com/YourClanOrOurs.htm>. A sample of the Confederate memorial tartan can be viewed at "Tartan Details: Confederate Memorial," *The Scottish Register of Tartans*, <http://www.tartanregister.gov.uk/tartanDetails.aspx?ref=732>.

[2] For a helpful discussion—albeit one that does not cover the issue of national backgrounds—see Peter Filene, *The Joy of Teaching: A Practical Guide for New College Instructors* (Chapel Hill, 2005), 13–22.

[3] Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind* (New York, 1936); *Gone with the Wind*, dir. Victor Fleming (Selznick International Pictures, 1939); *Glory*, dir. Edward Zwick (TriStar Pictures, 1989); Charles Frazier, *Cold Mountain* (New York, 1997); *Cold Mountain*, dir. Anthony Minghella (Miramax Films, 2003).

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