



## Ron Paul Polo Ponies

by wjhamilton29464

*Charleston, SC*- If you show off, you may rouse the downtrodden and summon up the specter of servile insurrections. Last night I watched most of “Southern Charm” on the Bravo Network, the reality show claiming to show how Charleston’s aristocracy lives from party to party, riding its Polo Ponies and occasionally exerting itself to seek sex or political power. It stars Thomas Ravenel, our disgraced former State Treasurer. It’s already clear he’s plotting a political comeback from his cocaine conviction and resignation where his only legally available objectives at the present are US Congress, US Senate and the Presidency of the United States. Perhaps our Republican Governor could pardon him and open up state offices as well.

To his credit, Ravenel is the more substantive member of the cast. He has some real thoughts and he does play Polo. Several other members of the cast appear to do and think nothing at all, content to fill space with empty indulgence.

I managed to stay awake for most of the first episode. When my very political son woke me up from a short nap, I couldn’t tell that I had missed anything. I did notice however, that Ravenel’s talk of a political comeback had accreted neo libertarian trappings. He had a slogan, “Government should stay out of your board room and your bedroom.” He’s evidently now connected with the Koch controlled Cato Institute. When you live in the district represented by Mark Sanford, the man who took his Argentinean soul mate to Washington with him while shedding an influential, wealthy and politically competent wife, it’s dangerous to ignore things like Thomas Ravenel.

“Southern Charm” is scandalizing what remains of Charleston’s blue blood aristocracy because it reveals an enduring truth. This now shrinking class has always struggled with the risk that its profound sense of entitlement can go rouge in its offspring. The idea that you don’t really owe anything to ordinary people, your slaves, your employees or your society is only one degree of separation from the idea that you own nothing to your family and class. In a state where the “elite” is surrounded by poverty, ignorance and oppression along the lines of race and economic class, holding the system together requires restraint and discipline. It is tedious.

I've read letters between the State's elite and their offspring dating back 200 years. Sons sent to study law in England in 1820 would go wild. This has been a constant struggle.

I grew up around the real elite of Charleston, who were decent in many ways. They were serious, pleasant people. They treated the working class and the poor with superficial decency. They might live like Kings outside of town or out on their plantation, but they didn't drive flashy cars or wave their money around, never. They understood there were limits to their power and if they breached them and things caved in that their historic terror of insurrection could erupt. It took centuries of trial and error to evolve the system which contained the rage which simmers in South Carolina. The rage is lethal and toxic. When the elite indulged themselves, they were careful to keep it out of view. The discipline of the military and plantation were maintained. The occasional bad seed who ran through money and showed off could be ostracized or exiled.

The people sweating in the fields, agricultural packing houses, textile mills, down on the docks and more recently in our vast hospitality industry struggle with a rapidly rising cost of living here. It's no longer cheap to live on the coast since the price of housing and cost of living have been driven up by retirees from up North. Much of the City is now pricy. Parking spots now rent for more than apartments downtown did when I returned here after college in 1985. Then most people here drove worn cars and lived in worn houses. Now there are lots of people with money in Charleston, most from off, some from here and it's on display. You do see Italian sports cars worth over 100k on the street.

It won't cost much for Thomas Ravenel to mount an independent or third party campaign for US Senate against Lindsey Graham. Perhaps the Libertarians would put him on the ballot. There is plenty of loose right wing money out of state to pay for it. Lots of low level right wing political operatives are available to open an office, get petitions on the street and hand out bumper stickers. In a place like SC moving things further to the right and pulling more people into the right wing world requires extreme tactics. We have thousands of disaffected Ron Paul boys sitting in their parent's frog in front of their computers dreaming of a date. It wouldn't be hard to convince them that Barack Obama has robbed them of their polo ponies by trying to make sure working people can access healthcare. They're ready to believe that they could have a Plantation too if the taxes on their nine dollar an hour, part time hospitality job were lower. They would love to be Thomas Ravenel.

They don't understand that the reason SC's economy isn't working for them is because Government here actively works to keep wages and benefits low. They probably aren't aware that there has been a massive redistribution of the tax burden towards the working class and poor here, cutting property taxes and increasing sales taxes. The massive subsidies granted to businesses which locate here or expand reach billions of dollars.

Though they earn only a dollar or two more than the African American frying hamburgers, our racial politics keeps them on Thomas Ravenel's side. In a state where the Republican margin of victory is stubbornly stuck in single digits, reaching 5% of the conservative electorate buys a lot of leverage. Such leverage is necessary to override conservative caution and finally force South Carolina into the libertarian social and economic experiment people like the Koch brothers so

desperately want to implement here. The Governor's legislative reports cards didn't do it. The Tea Party hasn't been able to do it.

Putting up a long shot candidate with a past is a cheap experiment. After all, they just need to break Government. Their problem is to get past those conservatives in the legislatures who recognize Government must be powerful enough to contain the states social and economic conflicts. The Koch brothers need a State Government which will block the Medicaid expansion and solve the problem of our overworked Emergency Rooms by letting the rural hospitals all go into bankruptcy and close. They need to run the public schools down to the point where vouchers and home schooling are competitive. Once there, they can start letting the actual value of the vouchers slide to the point where Parents working at our low paying jobs are attempting to pay most of the cost of their children's education. They need to privatize the roads in a state which hates tolls and paying for parking. They need to sell off the state parks and shut down whole sections of Government. Finally they can drive off or allow to die off everyone who is dependent on Government services, leaving the state a playground for the rich where the costs of the poor have been "driven out of the system." Then they can import more guest workers from Eastern Europe to clean the hotel rooms. Those people won't ever vote or burden the state with children to educate.

They can't get that agenda approved by most of the Conservative Republicans in State Government. Those Conservatives trust the system in South Carolina which contains the rage, frustration and fear. When that has broken out of control in slave rebellions, after the American Revolution in the rebellion of the mechanics, after the civil war, during the progressive era, the civil rights movement and in occasional labor unrest, people have had to be killed to stop it.

You can defund the arts here, but a tiny amount of inadequate funding keeps a lot of artistic types busy fighting for grants. You can shut down the schools, but the PTA burns up a lot of volunteer fundraising hours replacing computers in the library. State contract payments create a lot of control. Turning it all off shuts down the control.

To take such risks you have to push South Carolina's government so far to the right that radical, dangerous risks outside of the historic experience can be taken. It's worth a few hundred thousand dollars in PAC money to fund a Thomas Ravenel Campaign for US Senate to help do that. He can't win, but he's bored. His friends are bored. Those Ron Paul boys in the frogs need to get out of the house. The cost is a fortune to the Democrats. It's peanuts to the right wing money machine. At the very least it keeps people distracted.

The problem is that no one can recognize the shape of the risk. South Carolina is already one of the most violent, crime ridden and narcotic contaminated states in America. Most people don't recognize the apparently random shootings and high levels of other violence as an expression of social and economic failure. It's just bad values caused by Obama. The obvious similarities between Ravenel's lifestyle and criminal history and that of a North Charleston drug gang leader cross a racial barrier which prevents most people in SC from seeing them. Both are devoted to a libertarian pursuit of wealth, power and sex. The right keeps looking for something from the movies with recognizable structure and a leadership which shows up with banners and demands. They don't grasp the reality that the drug gang shooting up a neighborhood is also revolutionary. So are the homeless who have unplugged from the economy in such numbers that

the State Capital has resorted to a “shelter” in which they are near prisoners, shuttled around town in vans to keep them off the sidewalk. So also are the legions of young workers in Charleston in their 30s working for peanuts, who haven’t started families and aren't going to be middle class.

Behind the petty amusements of “Southern Charm” parties, drinking and sex is the opening to take political risks South Carolina has resisted through most of its history. That is what frightens Charleston’s old elite. They have always been most afraid of being betrayed by their own offspring who would carelessly allow the delicate mechanisms which contain the rage here to fail.