



## **A New Golden Age for South Carolina**

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Ever since the first passenger from the ship Carolina set foot on the soft marshy ground at Albemarle Point in April 1670, South Carolina has been unique and different.

From the soaring heights of leaning, culture, riches and the arts, to the depths of depravity, degradation, and simple human sinfulness, our state has been different right from the start.

Now, in the early days of the 21st century, at the dawning of the Digital Age, we have the potential for a New Golden Age for South Carolina. The question is, will we be bold and seize this opportunity with big change and real reform, or will we shirk from the challenge and slowly slide back in to the dark abyss from which we have emerged. This is our choice.

As with everything about South Carolina, it begins with history.

Unlike other colonies founded in pursuit of religious liberty, freedom and other high purposes, Carolina began as a political payoff. It was set up as a money-making venture for eight men who were given the land as a reward by King Charles II of England for their help in returning him to the throne after the reign of Oliver Cromwell.

What began as a political payoff soon became a wildly successful experiment in the development of plantation economics. The formula was simple: use human labor (slaves) to grow crops (indigo, rice and cotton) on seemingly unlimited and rich soil (the Lowcountry and moving inland) to be sold to England and Europe at extraordinary profit margins to create nearly untold wealth.

Such was the success of this new plantation system that by the time of the American Revolution, nine of the ten richest men in America were South Carolinians. There were even rumblings at the

time of the Revolution of another political deal – George II so valued the wealth of our colony, it was said, that he offered to let all of the other colonies have independence, if only he could retain South Carolina.

With allowances for a few economic ups and downs, this system continued to yield steady and exorbitant wealth until the Civil War.

This great wealth created the first Golden Age of South Carolina – we were world leaders. In business, science, medicine, the arts, engineering, and many other fields, we produced a steady stream of the world's "first, best, most and only."

The other side of this system was slavery, which was as dark and depraved as the Golden Age story was glimmering and beautiful. It was the raw, brutal cruelty of terrorism, butchery and sin. There would have been no first Golden Age without the evils of slavery. As uncomfortable as it is for some of us to accept, that is the simple, unvarnished truth.

Following the Civil War, much of our state (black and white) was again plunged into another era of brutality, racism, and deprivation from which we only began to emerge in last half of the 20th century. With the emergence of air conditioning, civil rights, television and other factors, our state effectively, if reluctantly, rejoined the union (more or less).

Today, we live in a different South Carolina – a state of BMW and Boeing, of the Spoleto Festival and Pat Conroy, of astronauts, Nobel Prize winners, and Google facilities – and even a few world class schools. We are a state with some real bright spots, poised at the edge of the Digital Age. But we are also a state where whole regions are still stuck in relative conditions more reminiscent of the 19th century than the 21st. We as a state cannot be only half successful.

The truth is, our state is on the knife's edge. Our future could go either way.

There will be two big determinants of our state's future success – education and technology. If we can produce smart and creative people who can use and master the new technologies of the Internet and the Digital Age, we will prosper. If not, we will fail. It is just that simple, and that complicated.

All over the globe, we see the results of this new "leapfrog strategy" for success in countries big and small, especially those like South Carolina that have some serious historic problems to overcome. Whether it's the explosive economic growth of huge countries like China, powered by its millions of

newly-minted engineers and professionals, or little countries like Estonia using Internet technology to vault themselves from the gray oppression of Communism to a position of technological leadership and the highest economic growth rate in the European Union, the key components to success are the same— education and technology.

Sadly, the two big public institutions that will ultimately determine our success (or failure) in this race to the top (or bottom) are in deep crisis. First, our state government is broken and the political system that we are counting on to fix it has been thoroughly corrupted by special interests. Secondly, our education system is in deep trouble and arguably heading in the wrong direction.

These two factors are deeply intertwined. Extremist ideologues and corrupt politicians have made it a practice to open the public coffers to any and every corrupt special interest that hires a lobbyist. At the same time, they have slashed education spending by 25% in the last four years, more than any state in the union.

We can't fix one problem without fixing the other.

With BMW, Boeing, Google, a few good schools, and a state full of talented, hard-working people, we have some great assets for success, but these alone are not nearly enough for our state to achieve a new Golden Age.

While the first Golden Age came from the sweat and toil of slaves, the new Golden Age must come from the learning and creative minds of all of our people... we will all rise or fall together.

To achieve this success, we must first rid our state of the corruption and incompetence of a government that is holding us back – and then expand, many times over, our state's commitment to providing a world-class education.

If we do these two things, South Carolina can indeed have a New Golden Age.

We have done it once; we can do it again.