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Posted at 11:07 PM ET, 01/21/2012

## Gingrich win, or how to secede in South Carolina without really trying

By [Alexandra Petri](#)



Get Major Anderson in here to surrender. (MARY ANN CHASTAIN - REUTERS)

Columbia, S.C. -- Newt! Newt! Newt! Newt!

The last time a group of South Carolinians were so excited about something, they were shooting at a fort.

It seemed like a good idea at the time.

On Friday night, before the primary, speaking on the USS Yorktown in Charleston Harbor, one Newt Gingrich supporter invoked South Carolina history. Charleston is known for many events, he said. "Firing the first shot on Fort Sumter. Now begins the next historic firing: the firing of Barack Obama."

Remember how well the first firing went?

South Carolina is a whole state dedicated to remembering. It remembers everything about the Civil War, except who won. It remains a monument to contumacious persistence.

So it's appropriate that in this state Newt Gingrich – stubborn, persistent, pugnacious, equally unwilling to admit defeat, even in the face of fact--would prevail. What other failed cause has so many dedicated partisans? You don't see people selling bumper stickers with the Ottoman Empire's ensignia on them. Yet in South Carolina you can purchase Confederate kепis for less than \$10.

Visit the Confederate Museum run by the Daughters of the Confederacy in the heart of Charleston, where fragments of the mantelpiece of Major Robert Anderson at Fort Sumter, letters from still-defiant veterans, and

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lovingly preserved uniforms sit under glass cases – see! The original white flag used in the fort’s surrender. See! The original surrender note! — preserved as lovingly as holy relics.

“I guess as Americans and Southerners, a rebel lives in us all. To stand up for what we believe, fight the good fight, regardless of the loss or cost,” reads a quote from Honorary Col. Jeffrey Lee Cunningham, framed above a sculpture of a pensive-looking Confederate veteran, resting near a stand of cavalry swords.

How could Mitt Romney have thought he had a chance?

South Carolina does what it wants! The North can’t tell it what to do! The media can’t tell it what to do! Elect a Massachusetts moderate? And forget that nastiness 150 years ago?

When Oscar Wilde visited the South, he commented to a woman on the beauty of the moon. “Oh yes,” she said, “but you should have seen it before the war.”

It’s a tradition Gingrich understands well. Forget Bain. It’s enough that Romney’s affiliated with Massachusetts. Gingrich is one of those mythic, Southern Warriors, undefeated in his own retelling. Someone give him a statue next to General Lee. The Lost Cause? Who said anything about losing?

Those who forget history are doomed to spend what feels like eight hours listening to Newt Gingrich retell it. (Did you know that it took the Army Corps of Engineers longer to study the Port of Charleston than it took America to win World War II? Newt Gingrich does. If he recites this fact one more time, it will die of exhaustion and overwork.)

But never mind that. History is made to be forgotten.

At the Hilton in Columbia on Saturday night, the Newt Gingrich victory bash is hot and stuffy and full of excitement.

They jump. They dance. A pugnacious playlist blares.

Hit Me With Your Best Shot. Another One Bites The Dust. The Final Countdown. Glory Days. I’ve Got A Feeling. Ain’t No Stopping Us Now.

“Na na na na! Hey hey hey, goodbye.” Its an apt song for a campaign that has, at times, devolved into playground taunting.


Then it takes a turn for the weird. “Party Like It’s 1999.” Wasn’t 1999 part of Gingrich’s years in the wilderness? No matter.

These parties are no time for introspection. On the stage, a banner proclaims “Unleash the American People to Rebuild the America We Love” — perhaps the first time someone has used the prospect of reconstruction to appeal to a South Carolina crowd.


“MAKE SOME NOISE FOR THE SOUTH CAROLINA WINNER!” yells the DJ. The evening begins to take on the aspect of a middle school dance full of Newt enthusiasts. “I can’t hear you! C’mon put your hands in the air! C’mon pump it up!”

“NEWT NEWT NEWT” they chant. That’ll show Massachusetts!


Gingrich finally decants himself onto the stage and delivers another of his classic speeches, in the course of which he briefly crosses over into self-parody, promising to challenge President Obama to seven three-hour

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debates.

Everyone cheers wildly.

The first shot has been fired, and it's time to celebrate. There's a battle ahead — does anyone know people in Florida, Gingrich asks at one point -- but the forces are confident. The fight will be quick and decisive. South Carolina will assert its independence. Newt! Newt! Newt!

It always seems like a good idea at the time.

By [Alexandra Petri](#) | 11:07 PM ET, 01/21/2012

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