The South as “Other,” the Southerner as “Stranger”

BY ORVILLE VERNON BURTON

When I met my wife, Georganne, I told her I was in Illinois temporarily, that I would soon be going home to the South. Almost two score years later, I am back home in South Carolina, but I find that Thomas Wolfe (1900–1938) was right: “you can’t go home again.” Wolfe’s protagonist returns home to discover that no one can go back to a life “which once seemed everlasting” but of course is “changing all the time.”¹ Life means change, and history is the study of change over time.

Finally back in the South, I find that some of today’s best and brightest young scholars argue that the South is no longer out of the ordinary—that southern exceptionalism, as a recent collection of essays contends, is a myth. “[T]he notion of the exceptional South has served as a myth,” they argue, “one that has persistently distorted our understanding of American history.”²

The debate about southern exceptionalism is not merely academic; it has a direct and important implication for current and future public policies that will shape America’s destiny for generations to come.

¹ Thomas Wolfe, You Can’t Go Home Again (New York, 1940), 706.

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As I was writing this essay, I served as an expert witness in four voting rights or civil rights cases involving four southern states, cases in which southern history retains a shocking relevance.

Nearly all the contributors to The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism were born after passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. They grew up amid conflicts over affirmative action, busing, and at-large elections, and not over separate restrooms and drinking fountains, segregated schools and mills, and the right to vote.3 Sadly, the idea that the South is an exceptional and racist “Other” has functioned to allow white northerners to deny their own racism, so these academics feel the need to prove the South is not the exception. Instead, historians need to show how race works differently in different regions.

Like most scholars, these mythbusters mostly are not from rural areas or even small towns of the South but grew up in county seats or cities or suburbs, of which they write so authoritatively. Perhaps those urban American experiences have limited their understanding of a wider picture.4 While cities and suburbs have grown exponentially, the small-town and rural South should not be ignored. Get off the interstates that link the big cities and college campuses in the region today, turn on to one of the bobbing and weaving, rising and falling, state roads, where people reckon their whereabouts by the local church, or store, or cemetery, or the single stoplight up where the road forks and where the oak tree used to be, and you’ll find all the exceptionalism you can wish for.

It is perfectly reasonable that each generation of historians needs to figure out its own interpretation, to bring its own perspectives to bear on historical issues, and these scholars are right to do so. Our experiences and circumstances provide different points of view, and we can learn from each other. In that regard, I would like to pay tribute to those who most influenced my own intellectual heritage.

4 Ibid. What sociologist Howard W. Odum noted in his classic 1910 study of race in the South is still true: “The problem, in its immediate and practical aspects[,] is different in the cities from that in the towns; that in the towns differs from that in the country; conditions in the rural districts themselves vary widely.” Howard W. Odum, Social and Mental Traits of the Negro: Research into the Conditions of the Negro Race in Southern Towns: A Study in Race Traits, Tendencies and Prospects (New York, 1910), 16; Orville Vernon Burton, “The Rise and Fall of Afro-American Town Life: Town and Country in Reconstruction Edgefield, South Carolina,” in Orville Vernon Burton and Robert C. McMath Jr., eds., Toward a New South? Studies in Post–Civil War Southern Communities (Westport, Conn., 1982), 152–92, esp. 158n7. See also Orville Vernon Burton, In My Father’s House Are Many Mansions: Family and Community in Edgefield, South Carolina (Chapel Hill, 1985).
My two Ph.D. advisers were southerner F. Sheldon Hackney and Yankee James M. McPherson, whose ideas remain just as relevant today as when I was introduced to them in 1969. Arguing against southern exceptionalism and placing the South and American history in global perspective, McPherson wrote that “perhaps it was the North that was ‘different,’ the North that departed from the mainstream of historical development; and perhaps therefore we should speak not of Southern exceptionalism but of Northern exceptionalism.”⁵ According to Hackney, however, southerners “traditionally have had to define themselves in opposition to a presumed American norm.”⁶ I contend that both sentiments are true and that, understood together, the insights of McPherson and Hackney are key to explaining southern exceptionalism.

I like to fish. My attempt to interpret the South is like trying to untangle a fishing line. Just when I think I’m making progress, a thread of thought breaks apart completely. Or I come across a particularly nasty knot, and sometimes that knot turns into a heap of others. Nevertheless, I share the southerner’s compulsion to explain.⁷ In this address I explore the idea that the South is still an exceptional “Other” and the southerner is still in many ways a “Stranger.” The southern “Other” exists because the legacy of race has distorted southern history; I look especially at the remembrance of Reconstruction. Moreover, the legacy of race has effected multitudinous southern contradictions. In its role as “Other,” the South is often portrayed by stereotypes, so I will present instead evidence in the form of digital analyses and social media. In addition, I will look at maps of demographic patterns. Finally, I will touch on the role that the legacy of race holds in modern political developments and, in particular, in current court cases. I do not claim to have unraveled the various interconnections of the various knots, but I do offer them for further examination.

A friend told me recently, “I know there is still a South; I know it every time I go north.”⁸ Someone who wrote to “Dear Abby” in

⁷ As per C. Vann Woodward, The Burden of Southern History (Baton Rouge, 1960); and Fred Hobson, Tell About the South: The Southern Rage to Explain (Baton Rouge, 1983).
⁸ Conversation with Walter Whitmire, June 2012.
July 2012 knows there is still a South; that person felt like a southern “fish out of water” when coming face-to-face with the lack of manners in “the home of a 20-something Northerner.”9 North Carolinian Charles Kuralt in “The Barbecue Blues” expressed the estrangement of many expatriates who went North and discovered their southern-ness, warning others from his experiences: “Young folks, think on that man’s folly, / Before you board that bus in Raleigh.”10

Many of us, like Kuralt, have felt like strangers in the North. When Harriet Tubman crossed into a free state, she had conflicting feelings: “I had crossed the line of which I had so long been dreaming. I was free; but there was no one to welcome me to the land of freedom, I was a stranger in a strange land.”11 John C. Inscoe has noted, a little dolefully, that students in his classes on “Southern Autobiography as Southern History” do not see their upbringing within “a distinctly Southern context,” but even these generic Americans, when they travel outside the South, notice that they are singled out as “southern.”12

This sense of being the “Stranger” has affected my life after growing up near the rural farming and cotton mill town of Ninety Six, South Carolina. Those who know me might say my omphalos is Ninety Six, but it became so only when I left the South to become a stranger in the strange land of New York City. It was 1967, and I was a student at Furman University on my first trip north. There, at Columbia University under the direction of Eugene Genovese, I encountered a real American history course. (At Ninety Six High School our teacher was the coach.)13 This trip made me aware of my region in a new way. Nonsoutherners made me very aware that I was something Other.

At the University of Illinois, home of my Yankee wife and five Yankee daughters, I continued to be the Stranger. In the Midwest I was “a southern character”; to this day I am not sure why. Maybe it

11 Sarah H. Bradford, Harriet: The Moses of Her People (New York, 1886), 31. I have changed the dialect Bradford used to reflect what Tubman actually said. Tubman invoked a biblical metaphor; Moses in Midian felt like “a stranger in a strange land” (Exodus 2:22, King James Version).
12 John C. Inscoe, “Feeling Awful Southern,” essay to be published by the University of South Carolina Press in a forthcoming festschrift for Charles Joyner. Inscoe notes that students from rural areas more often identify themselves as southern. He also finds that Macon and Savannah often generate a stronger sense of southern identity than many other Georgia cities, including Athens, and that “African American students seem better able to identify themselves with a particular culture, often but not exclusively based on race.”
13 While we did not learn history, we did go on to win a state championship in football.
is the storytelling. Some of my nonsouthern friends think my stories run on too long; they think I should “get to the point,” but they do not understand what the point really is. Mary Hood, a white Georgia author, asks us to imagine a northerner and a southerner watching a man walking across a field and then being asked, “Who is that?” The southerner would say, “Wasn’t his granddaddy the one whose dog and him got struck by lightning on the steel bridge? Mama’s third cousin—dead before my time—found his railroad watch in that eight-pound catfish’s stomach the next summer just above the dam. Big as Eunice’s arm. The way he married for that new blue Cadillac automobile, reckon how come he’s walking like he has on Sunday shoes, if that’s who it is, and for sure it is.” The Yankee reply to the same question, Hood writes, would be “That’s Joe Smith.” At this point the southerner would think, but not be rude enough to say aloud, “They didn’t ask his name, they asked who he is!”

A storyteller among southern politicians in the past century was Senator Strom Thurmond (1902–2003), of Edgefield, South Carolina, who celebrated his region as a superior Other. He thought the South was a place where people were friendlier and more willing to help a person in need. He thought that “family life is sounder” and that “families are held together better, generally speaking.” His family, of course, did not. Ultimately, he concluded, “people down there seem to think more alike.” One who does not think alike may board that bus in Raleigh. Or one may take a stand more riveting, challenging, and quite exceptional; one may go against the grain and demand justice and equality, or blockade a schoolhouse door. For Thurmond, the proper white southerner would not create a scene at the schoolhouse door but would resist integration.

Literary criticism offers one way of using the “Other” as an analytical tool. Edward W. Said, in his treatise on Westerners’ efforts to grapple with the enigma of the Middle East (their “Orient”), has influenced scholars attempting to get at southern identity. These

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Western efforts (which he calls *Orientalism*) are hindered by “the sense of estrangement experienced by Orientalists as they dealt with . . . a culture so profoundly different from their own.” Such discourses, Said insisted, were “not ‘truth’ but representations,” “full of condescension and bad faith.” His harsh judgment was that “every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric.” In the following passages by Said, I have substituted the words *northern* or *Yankee* for Said’s *Orientalist*, *European*, *West*, and the like, and the words *South* or *southern* for *Orient*, *Arab*, *(Mid)East*, and so on; all the other words belong to Edward Said: “Every statement made by Yankees . . . conveyed a sense of the irreducible distance separating northern from southern . . . . [T]heir estrangement from the South simply intensified their feelings of superiority about northern culture . . . . [The] central argument is the myth of the arrested development of the South . . . . [and] theses of southern backwardness, degeneracy, and inequality with the North.”

John Green, in a YouTube “crash course” on world history, gives a more egalitarian view: “The definition of ‘savage’ tends to be ‘not me.’” But in Said’s construction, if I substitute *southern* for *European* and *North* for the *Orient*, it does not make sense, because the prism of U.S. culture defines the South as the Other. Southern literary critic Jefferson Humphries uses this assessment of Said’s definition of the Other: “Said writes, ‘It is enough for “us” to set up these arbitrary boundaries in our minds; “they” become “they” accordingly, and both their territory and their mentality are designated as

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18 These passages come from several different pages, recombined here with ellipses. Said, *Orientalism*, 228 (first and second parts of the quotation), 260 (third part), 307 (fourth part), 206 (fifth part).

different from “ours.”” . . . [T]he opposition is therefore diametrical, producing a single, symmetrical Other.”

Without the legacy of race, there would be no southern history and no southern “Other.” This is not to argue that Indians, Latinos, and Asians are not integral players in the region’s history, but instead to point out that the history of black and white supersedes the other in the South. Attorney General Eric Holder reminded us, in what became a controversial statement, that the whole nation has a legacy of race: “In things racial we have always been, and I believe continue to be, in too many ways essentially a nation of cowards.” And yet, the legacy of race features most heavily in the American South. Maya Angelou notes the key characteristic of southern history: “The black Southerner and the white Southerner are locked to the land and to history,” she says, “a painful history of guilt and cruelty and ignorance. It clings to us like the moss on the trees.”

That history began in the British colonies when enslaved African workers arrived in 1619. But it was the instigation of war and defeat in war that cemented the South’s role as the exceptional “Other.” Visitors to the South today notice something exceptional and often remark something along these lines: They are still fighting the Civil War! This is a hard knot to untangle, but I think it means that many of today’s white southerners want to deny that the Civil War was about slavery. Historians have shown unequivocally that the war was about slavery, but they have also shown that, in general, white northerners fought for the Union and not for abolition and that white southerners fought for the Confederacy and not for slavery. Nevertheless, in 1861 southern whites in their secession ordinances proclaimed proudly that the cause of war was slavery; many white southerners today prefer to ignore that part of southern heritage. It matters a great deal whether the war was about slavery or about honor, or something else. When slavery is left out, the history is distorted; and

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21 Biologists, and I hope historians, know race is a social and cultural construct; there is no such thing as different biological races. Whatever huge consequences its understanding has had over the course of southern history, race is not a reality.

22 Eric Holder quotation, from remarks to Justice Department employees at a Black History Month event, in “Perspectives,” Newsweek, March 2, 2009, p. 17.

23 Quoted in Charles Joyner, Shared Traditions: Southern History and Folk Culture (Urbana, 1999), 25.
when history is distorted, people feel justified in harboring anger, bitterness, and resentment.

One hundred years after the Civil War, Robert Penn Warren offered an explanation of the southern “Other”: “In defeat the Solid South was born—not only the witless automatism of fidelity to the Democratic Party but the mystique of prideful ‘difference,’ identity, and defensiveness.”

Sons of the Confederacy might say the Civil War was a “War Between the States.” But is this a difference in perspective, or is it, as Big Daddy might say, “mendacity”? The phrase “War Between the States” only came into general use in the South well after the war itself. The National Park Service, which is usually careful to get the history right, erred in using this wording. A 1991 National Park Service document reads, “Like a bolt of lightning out of a darkening sky, war burst upon the American landscape in the spring of 1861, climaxing decades of bitter wrangling and pitting two vast sections of a young and vigorous nation against each other. Northerners called it the War of the Rebellion, Southerners the War Between the States. We know it simply as the Civil War.” But from 1861 until 1920, both sides called it the Civil War. The North Carolina War Between the States Sesquicentennial Commission’s website on “Civil War or War Between the States?” demonstrates that the terminology had come into common usage by the 1920s, but it does not acknowledge that this time frame coincided with the “nadir” of American race relations.

We are in the sesquicentennial of our Civil War, when for four years Americans killed one another. As I reminded a gathering in Charleston, South Carolina, in April 2011 for the Fort Sumter commemoration, Americans remember December 7, 1941, when Japanese

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forces fired on American flags at Pearl Harbor, as a “day of infamy,”
but we do not celebrate it. We remember September 11, 2001, when the
United States was under attack, but we do not celebrate it. And we can
remember the firing on the flag of the United States on April 12, 1861,
but we should not celebrate it.

Part of the tangled knot of race is the way the country remembers
Reconstruction, which is probably more important to public memory
than memory of the war itself. We should, but do not, celebrate
Reconstruction. And sadly, many black and white students do not even
get the history of Reconstruction in school. During Reconstruction,
many African Americans and whites actually tried to live together in
an interracial democracy. In the late 1860s and early 1870s nearly all
African American men exercised the right to vote. Whites and African
Americans throughout the South forged tentative but real economic
and social bonds. Despite tax revolts and hard times, a biracial politi-
cal coalition proved viable at addressing issues of the day.

Yet white southerners, back in power after a successful, bloody
coup d’état, wrote new state constitutions in the 1890s that disenfran-
chised African Americans and legalized segregation. It was at this
stage in American history when African Americans were mostly
written out of the public memory of the South, including their vital
role in helping defeat the Confederacy. Black men and women fought
the new system—and were successful for a time in certain places—but
history books of this period, written by whites, were largely silent about
African Americans’ positive contributions though vocal in describing
African Americans negatively. This period also saw the blossoming of
an African American historiographical tradition. 29

As the heritage of white supremacy took center stage throughout
the entire United States at this time, as the whole nation largely turned
its back on its African American citizens, as whites across the country
were also racist, why did the South continue as “Other”? One reason
is that the South, which adopted Jim Crow from northern custom,
institutionalized segregation to a greater extent and more overtly

29 Orville Vernon Burton, The Age of Lincoln (New York, 2007), chaps. 10–14; W. E.
Burghardt Du Bois, Black Reconstruction: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which
Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880 (New York,
1935); Eric Foner, Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877 (New York,
1988). For high school history books, see James W. Loewen, Lies My Teacher Told Me:
Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong (New York, 1995), esp. 149–63. On black
history and culture during the nadir, see W. E. B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk (Chicago,
1903). Carter G. Woodson, the son of former slaves, founded the Journal of Negro History,
which began publication in 1916; the Harlem Renaissance flourished in the 1920s and 1930s.
than did most of America. Another source was the Confederate myth-making of the Lost Cause, when southern writers such as Thomas Dixon Jr. (1864–1946) and Margaret Mitchell (1900–1949) presented the story to the public.\footnote{Michele K. Gillespie and Randal L. Hall, eds., Thomas Dixon Jr. and the Birth of Modern America (Baton Rouge, 2006); Gaines M. Foster, Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913 (New York, 1987); Charles Reagan Wilson, Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865–1920 (Athens, Ga., 1980); Cox, Dixie’s Daughters.} When, as a student at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine, Benjamin E. Mays finally allowed himself to go to the movies (he refused to attend segregated theaters), the first movie he saw was *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), based on Dixon’s novel *The Clansman* (1905). This future president of Morehouse College and future mentor of Martin Luther King Jr. was deeply hurt by the enthusiastic response of the New England audience; only his closest white friends were outraged.\footnote{John Herbert Roper Sr., The Magnificent Mays: A Biography of Benjamin Elijah Mays (Columbia, S.C., 2012), 67–68. Mays saw the movie in 1918 or 1919. See also Randal Maurice Jels, Benjamin Elijah Mays, Schoolmaster of the Movement: A Biography (Chapel Hill, 2012), 45.} Twenty-five years later, another film about the South during the Civil War and Reconstruction took the nation by popular storm, and many Americans today still think *Gone with the Wind* (1939) is the true story of Reconstruction and the best movie ever.\footnote{Gone with the Wind (1936) author Margaret Mitchell was a major donor to Morehouse, and she and Mays worked together on projects. See Ira Joe Johnson and William G. Pickens, Benjamin E. Mays and Margaret Mitchell: A Unique Legacy in Medicine (Winter Park, Fla., 1996). On *Gone with the Wind*, book and movie, in American culture, see Darden Asbury Pyron, Southern Daughter: The Life of Margaret Mitchell (New York, 1991), esp. 330–38, 374, 392–93, 457–60; Pyron, ed., Recasting: Gone with the Wind in American Culture (Miami, 1983); and James F. Tracy, “Revisiting a Polysemic Text: The African American Press’s Reception of Gone With the Wind,” Mass Communication and Society, 4 (Fall 2001), 419–36.} Less popular recognition has attached to the novel *Jubilee* (1966) by African American writer Margaret Walker, but her story of Vyry, an enslaved and then free woman during the Civil War and Reconstruction, was based on the life of Walker’s great-grandmother.\footnote{Margaret Walker, Jubilee (Boston, 1966).}

It was during the so-called Second Reconstruction—the civil rights movement—when the southern “Other” again became the nation’s focus. The domestic history of the United States became the history of North/South relations during the Civil War era and during the civil rights movement. Two things have changed the modern South: air conditioning and the Voting Rights Act. Sadly, Americans understand better how air conditioning operates than how the Voting Rights Act works. Democracy is not static; it advances and retreats, sometimes with all the contradictions inherent in life and politics.
No other part of the United States shares the number of intriguing contradictions that the South generates. James Cobb has written, “I’ve always said that southern historians would simply be forced to go out of business if we were no longer allowed to use any form of the word ‘irony.’” I agree wholeheartedly, and since we do not want to go out of business, let’s add contradiction and exceptional. The South is both Tara and Tobacco Road, Cat on a Hot Tin Roof and The Color Purple. The legacy of race feeds the idea that the South is “Other,” and this exceptional South offers intriguing ironies and contradictions that confuse and confound, titillate and testify. Southern contradictions appeal to television audiences, and the South of redneck humor and gothic horror has become the darling of television. A current popular TV show plays upon the allure of the southern “Other,” or maybe the southern “Weird.” Forget past shows like The Andy Griffith Show (1960–1968) and The Waltons (1971–1981), which portrayed southerners, all white, with solid values of family and honest living without extreme affluence. Forget the reality redneck shows, which portray southerners, again all white, as dim-witted beer swiggers or cute, chubby Honey Boo Boos. All the rage is the southern “Other” of the vampire. HBO’s True Blood (2008– ), set in Louisiana, has a fascinating combination of white and black characters; the vampires are also both black and white. The main protagonist vampire fought as a Confederate lieutenant. When he spoke to the historical society at the church, white southerners had to confront contradictory feelings of revulsion for vampires and honor for Confederate soldiers. In The Vampire Diaries (2009– ), a show popular among teens, race relations are a throwback to the founding days of Mystic Falls, Virginia. With no analysis or nuance, black characters are subservient to the whites, whether vampires or townsfolk.

In the 2010 novel Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter, author Seth Grahame-Smith, who grew up in Connecticut, portrays southerners as antidemocratic; as Jefferson Davis tells Abraham Lincoln, “vampires are superior to man, just as man is superior to the Negro. It’s the natural order of things, you see.” When Lincoln points out the contradiction of southern slavery and American democracy, Davis points north and says, “America is that away, Mr. Lincoln. . . . You’re

in Mississippi now.” The notion of a southern “Other” leads to the popularity of this connection among southerners, Confederates, and vampires.\textsuperscript{35}

Southern contradictions are more intriguing in real life than on television. One conundrum is southern patriotism. Kidnapped Africans, transported here to be enslaved workers, did not want to come to America. Only the southern states violently rebelled and tried to leave the Union (until they were stymied in their plans for a nation by another white southerner, Abraham Lincoln). Today the South is the seat of super-patriotism. In a striking contrast to attitudes during Reconstruction, southern states now love their military bases. Eighteen of the thirty-six U.S. Army bases in the continental United States are in the former Confederate states.\textsuperscript{36} In many communities those military bases drive the local economy. Moreover, despite today’s conservative political climate, where socialism is deemed the acme of all that is un-American, these bases form a kind of heartland of socialism, providing government-run single-payer health care, pensions, day care, education, job training, antidiscriminatory housing, shopping, and worship, better banking and car insurance—and even halfway decent treatment for gays and lesbians. Some have called such installations “Canada with guns.”

The South is declared the “Other” because its hospitality is so grand. Well-meaning and sincere is the familiar phrase, “Y’all come back now.” Many southbound travelers notice a change in friendliness as they head into southern states, in willingness to help with car troubles or to engage in a friendly hello. Before his role as mayor of Charlotte and before his candidacies against Jesse Helms for a seat in the U.S. Senate representing North Carolina, Harvey B. Gantt was a college student interested in architecture in a state that did not offer that discipline at a black college. When he became the first student in the state of South Carolina to integrate any school since Reconstruction, he remarked, “If you can’t appeal to the morals of a South Carolinian, you can appeal to his manners.”\textsuperscript{37} Other African Americans who tried to integrate schools were not treated politely, and certainly the civil rights movement was a time of brutality and violence.

\textsuperscript{35}Seth Grahame-Smith, \textit{Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter} (New York, 2010), 251–52.
Indeed, southern hospitality has always existed next to southern violence. Among the ten states with the highest murder rates in 2009, five are former Confederate states. A colloquial saying is that a southerner will be polite to you up until the very moment he or she is mad enough to kill you. The historical necessity to enforce enslaved labor made violence an integral part of southern culture. School systems throughout the United States allow corporal punishment, but those in Mississippi, Arkansas, and Alabama are the most likely to apply “the paddle.”

Violence shaped gender relations in the antebellum South. It was the interaction of black and white and the need for white dominance that defined, or warped, white southern men’s understanding of manhood. To keep the slave system in place, the white South needed white supremacy, violence or the continuous threat of violence, and a hierarchical and patriarchal society. A defense of southern manhood and family honor famously led to the beating of a senator on the floor of the U.S. Senate. The tradition of masculinity and violence, I suggest, also helps the South excel at football. Chris Trainor, writing for the Greenwood (S.C.) Index-Journal, notes about football season: “It can’t get here soon enough.” “Unlike other areas of the country,” he writes, “in the South, college football is directly tied to the identity of the region. We live it, we breathe it.” Asked why he thought this was so, Trainor answered with southern pride: “when Alabama went and played Michigan, they weren’t just playing for themselves, by God, they were playing for THE SOUTH.”

Figures 1 and 2 provide empirical evidence for the success of southern football. Figure 1 depicts the eleven former Confederate states; Figure 2 also includes Oklahoma and Kentucky. Each graph charts the percentage of southern states and the percentage of the population living in southern states against the percentage of southern college football

38 “Table 308. Crime Rates by State, 2008 and 2009, and by Type, 2009,” http://www.census.gov/compendia/statatab/2012/tables/12s0308.pdf. These statistics show the murder rates per 100,000 population. The five states are Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Tennessee.


40 On southern honor see Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South (New York, 1982). On Preston Brooks, see Burton, In My Father’s House Are Many Mansions, 93–95.

41 Chris Trainor, “It Can’t Get Here Soon Enough,” Greenwood Index-Journal, August 12, 2012 (first, second, and third quotations); Chris Trainor e-mail to the author, August 12, 2012 (fourth quotation).
Even before integration, when the great African American players had to play at historically black colleges in the South or play on integrated teams outside the South, southern football teams have been consistently top-ranked, more so than the region’s population would suggest. I assume southerners are not larger or faster than other players, so I would contend that the legacy of violence, and the threat of violence from slavery, just made them meaner.

The masculine characteristics of derring-do that we think of as southern characteristics in football are also on exhibit in stock-car racing, where the skill and courage of individual drivers are more important than the speed of the machinery. Almost any white adult southerner today can tell about when Dale hit the wall and describe the scar it left on the fan’s own life. Long before that, Tom Wolfe’s

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42 The years 1943 and 1944 were not included because football teams on military bases during World War II skewed the results. Also, note that the proportion of southern states to the rest of the nation changed with the addition of Alaska and Hawaii in 1959. Listings of top-ten and top-twenty college football teams are found at http://www.collegefootballpoll.com/polls_1936_present.html. For many years the southern states did not have a professional football team to identify with, and that might also account for both the emphasis on high school and college football and the strong sense of identity and community surrounding the high school and college teams in the South.

“Last American Hero” (1965) portrayed Junior Johnson as the hard-charging king of the stock-car world. One of the good ol’ boys memorialized in literature and country music, a romantic and individualistic type W. J. Cash described as a “hell of a fellow,” Johnson exemplified the white southern male.44 At its start in 1948, NASCAR was a southern phenomenon. Today, its website declares NASCAR to be a national sport, but the fan base is focused more heavily in the South.45 Although NASCAR allows women drivers, racing is still considered a masculine sport. The film Talladega Nights: The Legend of Ricky Bobby (2006) offers a spoof of the masculine redneck culture that begat NASCAR. Similarly, Burt Reynolds, playing a daredevil driver in Smokey and the Bandit (1977), tells Sally Field’s character that what he does best is show off. Masculine show-offs were also there at Cemetery Ridge, Gettysburg.

Southern men are prone to such exceptionally self-defeating efforts because of a warped sense of the need to control. Tom Wolfe’s

character Charlie Croker, in *A Man in Full* (1998), embraces this attitude in one of his “cardinal rules”: “In dealing with subordinates and women, never justify, never explain, never back off.”\(^\text{46}\) Patriarchal southern culture exaggerated stereotypes of masculinity, including the necessity to protect helpless women. As Langston Hughes wrote to a “Southern gentle lady” in 1949, “They’ve hung a black man / To a roadside tree / In the dark of the moon / For the world to see / How Dixie protects / Its white womanhood.” The universal excuse for lynching, the rape or attempted rape of a white woman by an African American, has been shown to be untrue in most cases; this white reaction to the presence of African Americans, however, set the tone for the role of white women in the South. Feminist scholars have found that “national as well as regional discursive needs . . . to represent the South as Other, have used gender as a tool.”\(^\text{47}\)

The southern belle on the pedestal has been a symbol of southern white civilization.\(^\text{48}\) Southern belles were supposed to be passively beautiful—admired from afar and even up close; southern women from the mid-nineteenth century, however, took this icon and gave it their own analysis. Over time white southern women took the image of belledom and gave it an agency that their menfolk never intended. Southern women writers as diverse as Augusta Jane Evans and Sherwood Bonner insisted that the protagonist belle have her own thoughts as well as her own way. Famous southern belle Lucy Pickens wrote a novel in 1854 in which her women characters had brains and wisdom even as they proclaimed no ambition but that of a helpmeet for a fine southern gentleman.\(^\text{49}\)

While southern belles, like southern ladies, were thought in the antebellum period to come only from the elite white classes, other southern women have incorporated the belle’s arts of fascination even


\(^{47}\) “Silhouette,” in Langston Hughes, *One-Way Ticket* (New York, 1949), 56 (first quotation); Anne Goodwyn Jones and Susan V. Donaldson, eds., *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts* (Charlottesville, 1997), 3–4 (second quotation). Jane Turner Censer has written extensively on this issue, and I thank her for her help with this essay; see especially Censer, *The Reconstruction of White Southern Womanhood, 1865–1895* (Baton Rouge, 2003).


in the more hardscrabble lives they lived and worked. For these “steel magnolias,” the image of the belle is only the window dressing.

To be sure, the image of the belle has lived on so long that some recent versions appear more burlesque than historical. A modern advice giver to would-be belles suggests that fake bosoms, eyelashes, and smiles are acceptable, “but your pearls and your silver must be real.” According to A Southern Belle Primer, one cannot become a belle without the proper background: “Real southern tradition is taught at birth by doting mothers, aunts, and grandmothers and passed down from generation to generation.” One of the rules is “Never chew gum in public and never smoke on the street.” Another is “Buy low. Sell high.”

The Internet today offers similar tips: “Never talk or gossip about people. Southern belles would call that ‘tacky.’” Basically, the advice is to be a good person: “Remember to always be polite to everyone, dress well, smile, and have a nice charm.”

Today’s southern charmer has expanded opportunity in the proliferation of beauty pageants. In June 2012 girls in Alabama had twenty-seven pageants to choose from; girls in Kansas only three. The website Pageantcenter.com listed twenty-one pageants in Georgia, two in Wisconsin. Among Texas’s thirty beauty pageants was a “Father & Son Swagger Competition.”

On a more meaningful level, the Center for American Women and Politics reports that of the nine states with the fewest number of women in their state legislatures in 2012, five were in the South, with South Carolina ranking fiftieth. Yet in 2012 South Carolina had a sitting woman governor, as did North Carolina and Oklahoma, three of six states that had women governors. Like other southern contradictions, gender attitudes are perplexing. The South has always had women in the workforce, including agricultural labor on the family farm and mill work since before the Civil War. In North Carolina in the early 1970s, Crystal Lee Sutton was fired for trying to organize a union in the textile plant; her story is better known from the film Norma Rae (1979), starring Sally Field. Lilly M.

50 Maryln Schwartz, A Southern Belle Primer: or Why Princess Margaret Will Never Be a Kappa Kappa Gamma (New York, 1991), vii (first and second quotations), 18 (third quotation), 28 (fourth quotation).
Ledbetter of Gadsden, Alabama, who lobbied long and successfully for the Fair Pay Act, is the symbol of both gender discrimination and of the fight against it.\textsuperscript{54}

One of the contradictions troubling to me, as a person of faith, is southern religion.\textsuperscript{55} While the New England colonies were founded for religious purposes—to be a city upon a hill, to show the rest of the world how to live—the South was generally not considered a religious section of the nation during the colonial and Revolutionary eras. Now it is the Bible Belt and seat of religious fundamentalism.\textsuperscript{56} The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life has a website that shows maps of religions and religious beliefs by state. The evangelical Protestant tradition clearly has a southern home and is heaviest in Tennessee, Arkansas, and Oklahoma.\textsuperscript{57} This Bible Belt is pro-life but offers staunch support of capital punishment. According to death penalty opponent and activist the Reverend Joe Ingle of Nashville, “The Bible Belt is also the ‘Death Belt.’”\textsuperscript{58} Between 1976, when the U.S. Supreme Court allowed the reinstatement of capital punishment, and late September 2012, 943 inmates in the eleven former Confederate states have been put to death, compared with 364 elsewhere in the nation.\textsuperscript{59}

People in the Bible Belt tend to give the most to charity, and many people tithe. The ten most generous states are in the southern Bible


\textsuperscript{55} On a trip from Houston to Galveston, Texas, in 2003, I noticed a dichotomy of religion and hedonism. On that busy highway were two prominent billboards, almost side by side. One was the sign for Heartbreakers strip club; the other, posted by the Abundant Life Christian Center, proclaimed, “Jesus Heals the Broken Hearted.” See Laura Elder, “Heartbreaker’s vs. Abundant Life,” November 17, 2009, Galveston \textit{Daily News} blog, http://galvestondailynews.com/blog/2783.


\textsuperscript{58} Amy Green, “Death Penalty Popular in Bible Belt,” Bowling Green (Ky.) \textit{Daily News}, March 19, 2000, p. 7A.

Belt, the Dakotas, and strongly Mormon Utah. Although it is one of the poorest states in the country, Mississippi often leads the nation in per capita charitable giving. In 2000 Mississippi topped one list with an average itemized charitable contribution of $4,070, despite an average adjusted gross income of $31,056, which ranked forty-ninth in the nation. "Mississippians give freely of their time, efforts, talent and finances to help others in need," Mississippi governor Ronnie Musgrove said.\(^{60}\)

Religion is part of that tangled fishing line that is particularly hard for me to unravel. Why would the most religious part of the country, the most charitable part of the country, be so opposed to a food-stamp program to feed those in need? Be so opposed to admitting that our own blessings are by the grace of God and that we need to be blessings to others? One might expect the stereotypical Yankee to be the one saying, *I made it on my own and do not want to help anyone else*. But how can a southern religious person say such a thing? How can an audience of southerners applaud the idea that someone who cannot afford hospitalization should simply be left outside, possibly to die?\(^{61}\)

How can we accept that of the thirteen states that have 25 percent or more of their children in poverty, nine are in the former Confederacy, that the eleven states with the highest infant mortality rates are Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, Tennessee, South Carolina, North Carolina, Maryland, Georgia, Delaware, Oklahoma, and Arkansas?\(^{62}\)

\(^{60}\) Associated Press, “Mississippi First, Massachusetts Last in Charity Survey,” Lawrence (Kans.) *Journal World*, September 19, 2000, http://www2.ljworld.com/news/2000/sep/19/mississippi_first_massachusetts. The survey was compiled by the Urban Institute’s National Center for Charitable Statistics. The 24/7 Wall St. website offered different results. It looked at charitable giving per capita and at the number of people who make more than $200,000. This study shows that the states with more rich people tend to give the most to charity. One exception was Utah; though the state claims fewer super-rich, it was the most generous. Besides Utah, Georgia and Alabama are also exceptionally generous, but so is Kansas. This study uses data from the Internal Revenue Service; poor people are less likely to use Schedule A to deduct charitable giving, so the data are skewed toward the economically middle class and above. “America’s Most (and Least) Charitable States,” December 15, 2011, http://247wallst.com/2011/12/15/americas-most-and-least-charitable-states/.


\(^{62}\) For child poverty statistics—Mississippi (33 percent), New Mexico (30 percent), Arkansas and Alabama (28 percent), Louisiana (27 percent), South Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Texas (26 percent), North Carolina, Oklahoma, West Virginia, and Georgia (25 percent), see Annie E. Casey Foundation, Kids Count Data Center, “Data Across States: Children in Poverty (Percent)—2000,” http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/acrossstates/Rankings.aspx?loct=2&by=v&order=a&ind=43&dtm=322&utf=133; for infant mortality, see Kaiser Family Foundation, State Health Facts, “Infant Mortality Rate (Deaths per 1,000 Live Births), Linked Files, 2006–2008.” http://www.statehealthfacts.org/comparemaptable.jsp?ind=47&cat=2&sort=a. The District of Columbia has the highest infant mortality rate.
The dilemma of rugged individualism versus good of the community is a national one: *Do your best, take care of yourself and your family, but be willing to lend a helping hand.* Today’s political climate, however, calls for a model of individualism that takes little account of community good.

People can do better; people can say no to cruelty. We historians can talk about ironies and burdens and contradictions, and historical context is essential. Ultimately, however, context does not mitigate immorality or inhumanity. Ultimately, history needs to trace out the complexity of choices, looking at all the ways the ripples expand. When I was the stranger in Illinois, my religious faith put me outside the academic box. Now that I am at Clemson, no one assumes a diminished intellect simply because of spiritual belief, but sometimes it seems that southern Christian faith is an easy label without any cost of commitment or analysis about what it means in daily life and attitude. How sad that this is true, especially, in the religious South.

Before the Civil War, when white southerners talked of community, they included everyone in the locale. Some elite white southerners mythically viewed their plantation as an extended family, “our family, white and black.” Slavery, of course, required integration; it could not exist without the interaction of blacks and whites, with whites serving a policing or military role. With increased segregation after emancipation, especially in the growing cities and towns, even these defective interactions ceased. W. E. B. Du Bois was one of several scholars who noted that as the New South began to urbanize and as the older generations of whites and African Americans who had interacted under the slave system passed away, blacks and whites had less knowledge of each other, that is, had become strangers to each other.

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And for the most part, despite the legal end of Jim Crow, America remains segregated. So community across racial lines is hard to find.

The South as “Other,” the exceptional South, the contradictory South—all offer fodder for overstatements and anecdotal evidence. And while we historians of the postmodern generation weave our own interpretations, I hope we also know that these interpretations, these constructions so to speak, have to be built on a solid foundation of historical data, on evidence. I remember the three little pigs and the difference that building materials made for them. We historians have tried analyses that are both metaphorical and metaphysical, so I decided to use an analysis that is meta-phantasmagorical—that is, I decided to go for the magic of digital. I wanted to show hard evidence from computing and quantitative techniques.

First was my use of Google to see what people say about the South. Renee DiResta has created an interactive map to show the adjectives that most people apply to each state. Start typing, “Why is Illinois so . . .” and Google will fill in with a suggested word: on the day I tried it, the word was corrupt because the search algorithm showed that most people in a particular period typed “corrupt.” Among states with the word racist as the top choice were South Carolina and Alabama. With racist among the top four autocomplete suggestions were Georgia, Mississippi, and Kentucky—and Arizona. Another term commonly used with the southern states was backwards. These responses are simply making predictions based on what others have searched for. Is this evidence? Certainly it is not evidence that Georgia, Mississippi, Kentucky, and Arizona are the most racist states, but it is evidence that, on a certain date, people who Googled the question thought they were. I put in, “Why do southerners . . . ?” and that day Google filled in, “hate northerners.” I put in, “Why do northerners . . . ?” and Google filled in, “hate southerners?” When I put in “Why are southerners so . . . ?” Google suggested the following: fat, dumb, religious, conservative, mean, nice, patriotic, slow, rude, proud.65

Next was a digital analysis of the concept of “the South” using the Google Books Ngrams feature. Figure 3 graphs the usage of the phrase “the South,” which shows an increase beginning in the 1820s

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with the intensification of abolitionist rhetoric and the response that “slavery is a positive good.” A significant spike in references to “the South” occurs during the Civil War period, and usage steadily increases between 1880 and 1940; another spike in the 1960s correlates to the civil rights movement of that decade. The last forty years have witnessed a decline in the relative number of references to that phrase in Google Books’s database. This graphing tool, while not hard to employ, produces simply a snapshot that is limited in its usefulness because it divorces the words from their context and represents a raw count rather than a detailed analysis.

For a more complicated and nuanced analysis, my team at the Clemson CyberInstitute turned to HathiTrust, an archive that contains the single most comprehensive digitized collection of printed discourse. The goal for our project was to explore how attitudes expressed in print about slavery, southerners, and nonsoutherners have changed over both time and space. We are searching for the changing views of the Civil War and examining such questions as how the “Lost Cause ideology” was born, evolved, and spread, and how stereotypes of southerners, both whites and African Americans, have

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66 Simon Appleford, associate director for humanities computing, leads the Clemson CyberInstitute team on these projects. Kalev H. Leetaru, a Ph.D. candidate in the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, is developing the computer programs for the HathiTrust analysis.
changed over time. The HathiTrust Digital Library contains approximately one million works relevant to these questions, a number impossible for a scholar to explore adequately without the benefit of computational techniques. Our team is working with computer scientists to develop algorithms that will make such large explorations possible. While this approach has exceptional potential for the research of future scholars of southern history, computing comes with its own set of frustrations as well. Problems of obtaining the HathiTrust data, the issues of getting it on the computer, and the time it takes for analysis (literally months of running on a supercomputer) have meant that, whereas I had hoped to include some findings from this work in my address, we are only now beginning to see some early results.

We are, for example, developing a computational tool that will allow researchers to type into the computer a word or phrase and pick a time period to generate a map of the locations of writers during that period who were most closely associated with that particular word or phrase. Computer algorithms were used to process all 67,000 books published during Reconstruction (1868–1878) available to us and to identify every mention of a location (from the name of a city to the name of a hill or creek). Every mention of the words Confederate, Confederates, and Confederacy was identified in each book, and a list was made of all place-names appearing within two sentences of any mention of the Confederacy. Taking into account the size and overall discussion of each city, Map 1 shows the locations that Reconstruction-era authors most closely associated with the Confederacy, and it also captures the emotional response—that is, whether the writing was positive or negative. This so-called heat map primarily reveals the locations of the major Civil War battles and the hometowns of major northern units who fought against the Confederacy in those battles. The very dark areas show negative feelings. Though we did not learn anything new about the South or the Confederacy, our first venture into the HathiTrust data suggests that the technique will offer powerful new insights to the concept of what it means to be “southern.”

The fourth and final digital analysis is an exciting new way of ascertaining popular opinion by analyzing social media. This type of analysis is very difficult to conduct. Most scholars researching social media rely primarily on user-specified hashtags to narrow the size of their datasets to posts that are immediately relevant to the topic under discussion. When attempting to study a concept such as “the South,” however, this methodology is not adequate. As the majority of users do not tag their casual online conversations with these types of
metadata, we have to use different strategies. For example, we had to limit use of “Southerns” such as South America, South Africa, South Chicago, South Pole, South Park, and so on. In a drill down of discussion captured after the Democratic National Convention in Charlotte in September 2012, we saw that many Twitter users questioned Bill Clinton’s accent and wondered if he was from the South. Putting together the Tweets, Facebook postings, and other social media for three months, we were able to see that southern history is significantly less important to users of social media than southern food! Positive reactions to the South include Food, and very positive was Culture. Negative on the South was History and Religion, and very negative was Gender.

Figure 4 shows a word cloud summary of the most used words across all social media profiles for the American South. The more frequent the word, the larger it appears in the cloud. Associated with

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67 We use software designed by the company Radian6 for business analytics. Again, Simon Appleford, associate director for humanities computing at the Clemson CyberInstitute, leads this analysis. Currently, Clemson is the only academic institution that has a center for the analysis of social media.
southern are words such as family, accent, life, and free. Figure 5 shows words associated with southern food: blessing, family, and home. This social media analysis will continue to develop as researchers at Clemson investigate ways of improving methods of collecting, visualizing, and evaluating data.

Popular perceptions as seen in social media support the idea of an exceptional South. Yet, discussion that the South is no longer an exceptional “Other” is manifold. Within the last three decades, part of this fashionable debate is the argument that the South’s increasing prosperity and its growing cities have led to an in-migration of people who were not born or reared in the South. Many theories suggest that a South with increasing urban and suburban areas looks much like any other place in the United States.

Migration statistics from the American Community Survey (ACS) and Internal Revenue Service tax data do reveal massive migrations into the South. And yet, while the economic and political consequences of these migrations should not be underestimated, focusing
on migration into the South may blind us to a larger and just as significant event: migration within the South. South Carolina serves as an example. A Deep South state, South Carolina has a conservative, anti-union, business-friendly reputation that has brought corporations from across the country and around the world to the state, and the state’s Sea Islands and beaches are an attraction for retirees. The ACS one-year migration estimates suggest that nearly 153,000 people who lived in South Carolina in 2010 lived somewhere else the previous year. Of the newcomers, 58 percent—88,000 people—migrated to the state from the sixteen-state region the U.S. Census defines as the South. Even when making allowances for a smaller geographic South than the census version, migration into South Carolina from other
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The pattern holds true for the entire southern region. Map 2 shows
by county the percentage of residents who were born in the same state
as the county. For example, in Lee, Union, and Williamsburg Counties
in South Carolina, at least 75 percent of residents in 2010 were born
somewhere in South Carolina. On the opposite end of the spectrum, in

southern states is significant. The Deep South states of Alabama,
Georgia, and Mississippi contributed some 20,000 people to the
Palmetto State—more than the combined contributions of the three
leading northeastern states, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania,
which sent a collective 17,500. Some 20,000 North Carolinians moved
to their southern sister state, more than all that came from the census-
de fined Midwest.68

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/State_to_State_Migrations_Table_2010.xls. The U.S. Census defines the South as the states of
the former Confederacy plus Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia, Kentucky, Oklahoma, and the
District of Columbia.
69 Maps 2 and 3 are taken from 2010 census data and show nativity to state and nativity to
region in the southern United States. The research for these maps and for the information in
the following paragraphs was done by Jonathan D. Hepworth, “Making Census of It”
factfinder2.census.gov.
2010 fewer than 25 percent of residents in Chattahoochee County, in west central Georgia, were born in Georgia. Chattahoochee County is home to Fort Benning, and military bases affect the in-state residences across the South; for another example see Coryell County in Texas, adjacent to Fort Hood.

Map 3 shows the percentage of each county’s population that was born in the South rather than in that state. The differences between the two are dramatic. With the elimination of the state-by-state distinction, some counties near state borders are now darker because most of their residents were born in the South if not the state the county is in. For example, Map 2 indicates that a minority of the population in De Soto County, Mississippi, was born in Mississippi. Map 3, however, shows that over 75 percent of that county’s population was born in the South. Chattahoochee County, with Fort Benning, similarly registers a majority of southern-born denizens.

It becomes apparent from these maps that people born in the South still outnumber those born outside the region. The counties for major cities such as Atlanta, Charlotte, Raleigh, Houston, Dallas, Jacksonville, and Nashville all have southern-born populations of 50 percent and higher. Metro D.C. counties and the Florida
peninsula are the lone exceptions where southerners fall into a minority, but southern-born residents still make up at least 25 percent of those populations. Even in 2010, save for the D.C. area and Florida, southern-born residents made up the majority of the South’s population, even in urban areas, which remain the likeliest place to find a wayward Yankee.\textsuperscript{70}

These maps lead to three conclusions. First, while today’s South is much more fluid than the region was fifty years ago, much southern migration has occurred within the South. Second, this interior migration does not support the idea that southern exceptionalism is at an end. Consider the “flag flaps” in 2000 when South Carolina removed the Confederate battle flag from its statehouse dome and in 2001 when Georgia removed the symbol from the state’s flag.\textsuperscript{71} Southern-born people made up an even greater majority of the population of those states at the start of the twenty-first century than they do today; whatever role outsiders may have played, the removal of the battle flag must be credited to the vast majority of southerners who opted for change.

Third, the migration among southern states has contributed to a homogenization of southern culture between the states; distinctions among the various subregions that once characterized much of the South may be in decline. The Mississippi Delta, the South Carolina Lowcountry, the Blue Ridge of North Carolina, the Virginia Tidewater, the Alabama Wiregrass, the Georgia piedmont, and the Arkansas Ozarks are widely different areas—yet in all of them one can eat standard southern fast food from Zaxby’s, Shoney’s, and Chick-fil-A.

The South’s otherness may have declined because more Hispanics are moving into the region. The total U.S. Hispanic population was 50.5 million in 2010; in the South it was 18.2 million.\textsuperscript{72} The numbers

\textsuperscript{70} Hepworth also examined and collected the data for 1990 and 2000. As with any presentation of large statistics, there is a problem with this data. These maps show counties by percentage and not actual numbers. One urban county might have a larger nonsouthern population than several small counties. The wide distribution of counties with more than 75 percent may give the false impression that nonsoutherners are an extreme rarity, but some counties have a large number of non-southern-born citizens. A state could easily have seventy-nine counties with populations of a thousand people, three-quarters of whom are southern, and have one county with three million people, half of whom are southern. As a result, counties in the state look overwhelmingly southern, but in population the state is nearly half and half. These maps show the overall distribution of high to low southern percentages, but they do not reveal how many southerners and nonsoutherners are present overall.


are such that some are shouting “No More Juan Crow” and calling for more attention to the “[s]ystemic discrimination against Latinos in the region.”

Sociologist Barbara Ellen Smith and geographer Jamie Winders suggest an approach to southern history that looks beyond the powerful binary of black and white relationships. They contend that a focus on southern slavery, the Civil War, segregation and Jim Crow, and civil rights movements “render[s] immigration invisible.” Winders also questions the effect of immigration on southern history when that history, “which is so central to understanding the place of the South,” is not familiar to newcomers, “who may or may not identify, or be identified, as ‘southern.”’ In a study of Nashville, Winders has found that new immigrants showed no inclination to define themselves as “southerner”; they defined themselves as “American.”

One might surmise that as immigration continues, southern distinctiveness will lessen. And yet, that pattern again is changing. Immigration from Mexico has almost stopped. Moreover, with the current bad economy in the United States, some Mexican families are returning to Mexico, so the most recent numbers may show a net loss. Demographer Jeffrey Passel at the Pew Hispanic Center has said, “I don’t think we will ever get back to the levels we saw in 2000. I doubt that we’ll get no immigrants, but I would be very surprised if it ramped up a lot in the future.” Winders, however, points out that “even when numbers leveled off in the Midwest, the South continued to see growing immigrant populations.” We’ll have to wait and see. It is possible that the influx of new residents will change the southern “Other.” We also need to pay attention to whether the region shows

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75 Jamie Winders, “Re-Placing Southern Geographies: The Role of Latino Migration in Transforming the South, Its Identities, and Its Study,” *Southeastern Geographer*, 51 (Summer 2011), 342–58 (quotations on 351, emphasis in original).


78 Jamie Winders e-mail to the author, July 12, 2012.
its face of southern hospitality and graciousness or its face of xenophobia to future immigrants.79

It is also possible that the South is less of a distinct “Other” because African American expatriates are moving back into the region. The majority of African Americans throughout the nation’s history have lived in the census-defined South. On the eve of the Civil War, 95 percent of all black people lived in the South, composing one-third of the South’s population; in the non-South, the other 5 percent of African Americans represented only 1 percent of the population.80 By 1900, even though Jim Crow was strengthening its grip across the South, 90 percent of African Americans still lived in the former Confederate states. And while African Americans left during the great migrations surrounding World War I and World War II for both jobs and the civic ability to cast a vote, African Americans are now moving into the South.81

In 2010, 57 percent of black Americans lived in the census-defined South, and 47 percent lived in the former Confederate South.82 More significant, African Americans make up a larger proportion of most southern states’ population than they do of northern states’. The proportion of African Americans ranges from a low in Texas of about 12 percent to 15 percent of the population in Arkansas, 30 percent in Georgia, 32 percent in Louisiana, and 37 percent in Mississippi. Of the twenty-five counties whose black population increased most over the decade from 2000 to 2010, three-quarters are in the South.83

80 McPherson, Drawn with the Sword, 15.
82 Sonya Rastogi et al. for the U.S. Census Bureau, “The Black Population: 2010,” p. 7, http://www.census.gov/prod/cen2010/briefs/c2010br-06.pdf. For the African American population in the former Confederate states, the research was done by Ryan Conway, who used census data (http://quickfacts.census.gov) to find the percentage of total black population, and then divided that by the population in the eleven former Confederate states.
83 Rastogi et al., “Black Population: 2010,” p. 8 (state-by-state data); Sabrina Tavernise and Robert Gebeloff, “Many U.S. Blacks Moving to South, Reversing Trend,” New York Times, March 25, 2011, p. A1; Carol Stack, Call to Home: African Americans Reclaim the Rural South (New York, 1996). Some midwestern states have higher proportions of African Americans in their populations than does Texas: Ohio (12.4 percent), Michigan (14.3 percent), and Illinois (14.8 percent). These numbers represent a proportion to the state’s population, so a larger percentage does not necessarily mean there are more African Americans living in the state. Thus California is home to about 2.5 million African Americans, but they make up only 6.6 percent of the state’s total population of 37.7 million. U.S. Census Bureau, “State and County QuickFacts,” http://quickfacts.census.gov.
One new black southerner, who moved to suburban Atlanta from Maryland, reported that “moving South felt a little bit like coming home. ‘There’s a piece of me that is Southern, that thing of speaking to everybody I see.’” According to James Sims, a retiree from New York City, “We’re all like family here.” When African American writer Denene Millner and her family moved in 2005 from New Jersey to a small town outside Atlanta, none of her friends could understand why they would move South, “infamous for enslaving, subjugating and killing humans with brown skin.” But her family has decided it was the right move: “It is in the South that we found peace.” The actor Morgan Freeman could hardly wait to get back to his home in Clarksdale, Mississippi: “[O]f any place I’ve ever been, this feels most like home. When I come here, when I hit Mississippi, everything is right.” It reminds me of the song by Alabama called “Down Home”: “Down home where they know you by name and treat you like family / Down home a man’s good word and a handshake are all you need / Folks know if they’re fallin’ on hard times they can fall back on / Those of us raised up down home. / When I was a boy I couldn’t wait to leave this place / But now I wanna see my children raised / Down home.”

These sentiments are true for southern blacks and whites, just as southern music that extols family and religion is an amalgam of black and white. Music contains the contradictions and strangeness of the South as nothing else. Country singers like Lee Greenwood and Hank Williams Jr. are symbolic of the simultaneous assertion and desertion of southern; and nothing speaks to the paradoxes and contradictions of southern history like the blues. Blues lyrics suggest that the South is an Other within itself. That is, the counterpoint is not perhaps so much an alien or outsider culture, such as the “North,” but itself in constant discursive tension with its development, its history, its culture of self-expression, examination, and explanation, and even its generations of remembrance, something a little beyond tension or contradiction or paradox or irony. As Lead Belly sings in his great refrain: “Home of the brave, land of the free / I don’t want to be mistreated by no bourgeoisie!”

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84 Copeland, “For Blacks, a Return to Southern Roots.”
African Americans coming to the South feel more down-home and no longer will accept mistreatment. With the success of the civil rights movement, the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act, and the one-person/one-vote U.S. Supreme Court ruling (Baker v. Carr [1962]), African Americans have served on school boards, county and city councils, and in state legislatures. Today more African Americans are elected and appointed, at all levels—local, state, and national—in the South than in any other region. Moreover, the American South now benefits from the contributions of these minority citizens to the civic dialogue as they bring both their perspectives and their resources.

At the same time, heavily black areas have an influence on how whites in the area self-identify. The U.S. Census last recorded ancestry and ethnicity in 2000. In the North, respondents selected different ethnicities: German, English, Mexican, Irish, Chinese, and so on. In the South, however, most whites across the southern states, and particularly near areas of black predominance in the population, felt that the only ancestry they needed to claim was American, that is to say, of the non-African variety. This distribution mirrors closely a


1988 study by John Shelton Reed. To explore where a southern identity began to eclipse an American one, Reed conducted a study of the identifiers “American” and “southern,” as used by businesses listed in phonebooks. Map 4 overlays the 2000 census ancestry map with that done by Reed twelve years earlier. The areas that used “southern” as the identifier in 1988 match closely with the areas that used “American” in the 2000 census.

For myself, I know the South is still an exceptional “Other” because of my current work trying to rectify some of the historical experiences of our southern history. When South Carolina, which had been first in nullification and first in secession, was also the first state to challenge the constitutionality of the Voting Rights Act in 1966, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Earl Warren noted the long history of racial discrimination in the voter registration process in South Carolina. He quoted directly some of the most outrageous remarks Benjamin R. “Pitchfork Ben” Tillman made at the 1895

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91 John Shelton Reed with James M. Kohls and Carol Hanchette, “The Incredible Shrinking South,” in Reed, Surveying the South: Studies in Regional Sociology (Columbia, Mo., 1993), 51–65, esp. 64, figure 7.
disenfranchising constitutional convention as evidence of the discriminatory purpose of the literacy test suspended by the act. Warren stated, “The constitutional propriety of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 must be judged with reference to the historical experience which it reflects.”

History finally caught up with South Carolina and the South.

In cases today, those fighting the Voting Rights Act ask, which is more probative: historical evidence from the 1960s or more recent evidence? They consider population shifts and the end of institutionalized Jim Crow as the beginning of a postracial South, a consideration implied by some scholars today. Southerner Stephen Colbert, on *The Colbert Report*, said that rewriting history is a good thing because we can make it better. He facetiously recommended that now that an African American is president, we can say that slavery never existed.

Although Colbert spoke in humor, there are indications that in the court of popular opinion, as well as with some judges, this is to some degree happening. The Chicago *Tribune* asks, “Does the election of a black president mean racism is no longer a factor in American politics? And are civil rights laws outdated in the age of Obama?”

That article examines legal briefs filed in a tiny jurisdiction in Austin, Texas, that challenged the constitutionality of a section of the Voting Rights Act, as reauthorized in 2006. The jurisdiction lost at the trial court level and appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court. Chief Justice John Roberts authored the 8-1 opinion, in which the Court found that the jurisdiction was entitled to opt out of the Voting Rights Act. That decision allowed the Court to dodge the issue of constitutionality while disparaging the preclearance requirements under Section 5 of the act. Echoing traditional states’ rights rhetoric used to defend slavery, segregation, and disenfranchisement, Roberts wrote that the Voting Rights Act “also differentiates between the States, despite our historic tradition that all the States enjoy ‘equal sovereignty.’” Unlike the Warren Court, which believed that the equal protection of individuals against racial discrimination was one of the principal duties of the U.S. Supreme Court, the Roberts Court argued that the Court’s role is more to protect the rights of the states to deal with voting as

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they wish. Chief Justice Roberts continued, “But a departure from the fundamental principle of equal sovereignty requires a showing that a statute’s disparate geographic coverage is sufficiently related to the problem that it targets.” And, “Things have changed in the South.” In a not so veiled threat to overturn Section 5, he stated, “Whether conditions continue to justify such legislation is a difficult constitutional question we do not answer today.” Conservative opinion seemed to agree, as reported by the Chicago Tribune, that “Obama’s election heralds the emergence of a colorblind society in which special legal safeguards for minorities are no longer required.”

I think we know better than that. Racial polarization, an oversimplification of which is that whites tend to vote for whites and blacks tend to vote for blacks, proves that a color-blind society has not arrived. Civil rights advocates have presented state-by-state data that shows persistent racial polarization in the Deep South and elsewhere. Expert testimony in voting rights cases supports the view that southern states have far higher rates of racial polarization in voting, though voting is also highly polarized outside the South. (In 2008 Barack Obama won a majority of white voters’ votes in only eighteen of the fifty states. None were in the South.) Historians need to remember that the former Confederate states undermined the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments after Reconstruction. It took the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 to reestablish those rights and the vigorous enforcement through litigation throughout the American South since to ensure that African Americans and minorities in the South have a meaningful vote, the very essence of citizenship. Revolutions can and do go backward, especially in economically difficult times, as in the great depression of 1873 into the 1890s; racial justice is often sacrificed when the economic pie shrinks.

95 Northwest Austin Municipal Utility District No. 1 v. Holder, 557 U.S. 193 (2009), final pagination pending (first and second quotations on 8, third quotation on 7, fourth quotation on 16 of the slip opinion), available at http://moritzlaw.osu.edu/electionlaw/litigation/NorthwestAustinMunicipalUtilityDistrictNumberOnev.Gonzales.php. Other ongoing challenges to Section 5 are the Shelby County v. Holder (Alabama) and Nix v. Holder (North Carolina) cases. Both the South Carolina and Texas voter identification cases, Texas v. Holder and South Carolina v. Holder, will probably go to the Supreme Court and challenge Section 5. I was asked by National Public Radio (NPR) to comment on a similar case from North Carolina, Bartlett v. Strickland, 566 U.S. 1 (2009). In that case, decided March 9, 2009, the Supreme Court with a 5-4 decision struck down a North Carolina redistricting plan that would have preserved minority voting power in a district where African Americans were a significant minority, 39 percent.

96 Wallsten and Savage, “Voting Rights Act Opponents Point to Barack Obama’s Election as Reason to Scale Back Civil Rights Laws.”

97 In addition to the eighteen states, Obama won a majority of white votes in the District of Columbia. Racial polarization is often defined as groups voting differently. Generally, it
Just as I was about to start working on this presidential address, I had a call from officials at the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) in Texas asking for help in a challenge to the state’s redistricting plan; I had given such aid to them and LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens) in 2003. The U.S. Justice Department also objected to Texas’s redistricting plan because it diminished minority voting strength. The three-judge panel of the District Court for the District of Columbia has now ruled that in this case the state’s plans were drawn with the purpose and intent of diluting the minority vote in Texas, but of course, Texas will appeal to the Supreme Court. 98

Just as that case finished up, I received a call from the Georgia Black Legislative Caucus, also fighting the redistricting plans of that state’s Republicans. This time the U.S. Justice Department did not object to the plan because it did not reduce the number of black-majority districts, but only white Democratic districts. The Georgia Republican plan was not retrogressive on race in itself; however, since most black representatives are Democrats, African Americans will have less influence in Georgia politics because of fewer white Democratic allies.

Just as that case finished up, I received a call from civil rights attorneys who were representing a Mr. Albert Woodfox, whose tragic

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98 Texas v. United States (case number 1:11-cv-01303 D.D.C.), decided August 28, 2012; final judgment (case number 1:11-cv-01303-RMC-TBG-BAH, document 231) and other documents related to this pending case are available at http://moritzlaw.osu.edu/electionlaw/litigation/TexasvUS.php.
case I had heard about on NPR.\textsuperscript{99} The novelist John Grisham could not have created a more bizarre and strange story than that of Mr. Woodfox, who has been in solitary confinement since 1972. The attorneys wanted help with the habeas proceeding of Woodfox’s claim of racial discrimination in the selection of the grand jury foreperson, the only appeal available as a constitutional issue. Woodfox was indicted by a grand jury in West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana, and a second time in 1993, in connection with the 1972 murder of white corrections officer Brent Miller at Louisiana State Penitentiary, also known as Angola prison. This time I had to say no; I explained that I had no time to do this case because I had to write this essay for the Southern Historical Association. That night, however, I had one of the worst nightmares of my life; I was on death row and innocent, and my daughters would not allow my grandchildren to visit so that their last memory of me would not be of me in prison. That nightmare plus some prayer time changed my mind. Race relations profoundly affect this Louisiana case; it appears that Woodfox is guilty only of organizing a Black Panthers group in the prison. Part of my report for that case was to explain how a good person, a southern white judge in Louisiana who was “moderate” on race issues in the 1990s, still might be uncomfortable placing an African American in charge of whites on a jury. In eighteen cases in West Feliciana Parish, the judge had only once appointed an African American as the grand jury foreman. Two attorneys from New York, part of Mr. Woodfox’s counsel, were too fearful of the South as “Other” to spend the night in that rural parish, instead insisting on the fifty-five-mile drive back and forth from Baton Rouge. This was in 2012, not the 1970s. The case was heard in May, and as of early November, there still had not been a ruling.

With that case over, I had the summer to work on my presidential address, a tighter time squeeze than I wanted, but manageable. Then I received a call from two of my heroes, Armand Derfner and Laughlin McDonald, both civil rights attorneys. They wanted me to help in an effort to stop the South Carolina voter identification law. How could I say no? In \textit{The Age of Lincoln}, I argued that the forces of repression, that those who overthrew the South’s first attempt at an interracial

democracy, were a minority of white southerners. The problem was that the majority, usually law-abiding, did nothing to stop them. At the end of August I finished testifying in that case before a three-judge panel in Washington, D.C. On October 12, 2012, we learned the judges’ decision. The panel blocked enforcement of the law until after the 2012 election. Moreover, based on the Justice Department’s objections, the judges specified the importance of a provision that people without IDs may still vote if they sign affidavits stating any reason why they do not have voter identification. The South Carolina voter ID law transitioned from one of the most stringent to one of the most lenient, where even those without identification are eligible to vote.

An important factor in understanding the motivation behind these voter identification laws is the integral link between race and party in the South. The development of the modern Republican Party is inextricably tied to distinguishing Republicans from the heavily black Democratic Party. Since the 1960s, the South has undergone a remarkable political revolution. The party of white supremacy was the Democratic Party, and southern whites would supposedly vote for a yellow dog before they would vote for a Republican, the party of Lincoln. Until the 1960 election, most southern African Americans were Republicans, even if they could not register to vote in the South. After passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, while the Democratic Party welcomed black voters to counter the growing number of Republican voters, white Democrats were nevertheless reluctant to create majority-minority districts where black candidates could be elected. It seems odd, but the Republican Party in the South was more willing to work with civil rights organizations like the NAACP to create more majority-minority districts from which African Americans could be elected. Initially, white Democrats fought these efforts instead of accepting that elected African Americans were also part of the Democratic Party.

In 1964 the Republican Party’s nominee for president, Senator Barry Goldwater, announced that he did not support the Civil Rights Act of 1964. As he told a group of Republicans from southern states,

100 Burton, Age of Lincoln, esp. 301–3.
101 South Carolina v. United States (case number 1:12-cv-00203 D.D.C.), decided October 10, 2012. I was gratified that the Justice Department cited my initial report when it objected to the South Carolina voter ID law. Thomas E. Perez, assistant attorney general, U.S. Department of Justice, to H. Christopher Bartolomucci, June 29, 2012, South Carolina v. United States, case 1:12-cv-00203-CKK-BMK-JDB, document 118-1. This and other documents relating to this case are available at http://moritzlaw.osu.edu/electionlaw/litigation/SCvUS.php. I could not have done this report without the help of Beatrice Burton.
it was better for the Republican Party to forgo the “Negro vote” and instead court white southerners who opposed equal rights. Historians agree that Goldwater “sought to create a general polarization of southern voters along racial lines.” The effectiveness of what was called the southern strategy during Richard M. Nixon’s presidency had a profound effect on the development of the nearly all-white modern Republican Party in the South. In 1980 candidate Ronald Reagan spoke in Neshoba County, Mississippi, place of the brutal murders of three civil rights activists in 1964. Without mentioning any civil rights, Reagan used the term states’ rights, long recognized as a code word, and thus reassured white southerners of the direction of the Republican Party. By the 1990s—as a result of decades of racial polarization—the Republican Party in the South was almost exclusively white, and African Americans who wanted input in the political process had no practical alternative to the Democratic Party. Racial polarization means that efforts to diminish the vote among Democrats, and particularly poor Democrats, will automatically strike at the African American community. With strong racially polarized voting in a state, any reduction in African American turnout benefits that state’s Republican Party. Conversely, significant gains in African American voting strength are a threat to the state Republican Party’s electoral success.102

Of the eleven states that require photo identification to vote, in effect for 2012, four are southern states.103 Of the six additional states with laws on the books but not in effect for 2012 because of legal challenges or no implementation, four are southern. The Department of Justice can object to these laws only for the states under the jurisdiction of the Voting Rights Act’s Section 5, the automatic “trigger.” Seven of the nine states covered by this trigger are southern because the trigger requires a proven history of discrimination.104 Frank Parker,


104 Also covered are certain counties in Florida, North Carolina, California, New York, and South Dakota and certain townships in New Hampshire and Michigan. If the Department of
a voting rights attorney, used to his advantage a prevailing northern attitude of disparaging southern race relations when working for passage of the Voting Rights Act. He wrote that Section 5 of the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the crucial preclearance clause that requires the Justice Department to approve changes in election laws, was passed only because the South was portrayed as “Other”: “We could always get a majority of Congress to beat up on the southern minority.” He knew it would have been impossible to pass the law if it included northern states, and that is why he fought against amendments to make the coverage nationwide.105

The Voting Rights Act is crucial for protection of minority voting, but I see no guarantees that it will continue into the future. When it was passed in 1965, the act had considerable bipartisan support, and the same has been true for its re-passage. Today the partisan divisions in Congress are too intense to predict the future for voting rights. Already it is difficult for me to believe that in 2012 we saw purges of voter lists and draconian voter ID laws that discriminate against poor people, minorities, the elderly, and the disabled. These tragedies should have been left behind in the nineteenth century, but a powerful element in the United States today, while not taking away the right to vote, is taking away the ability to vote.

Some of the questions I was asked in my depositions remind me of historians’ arguments for the end of southern history. In Louisiana and South Carolina, I was asked why the elections of the first minority governors in the states’ histories, that is, of Bobby Jindal and Nikki Haley, both of South Asian (Indian) heritage, did not mean that race was no longer an issue in either state. There is no probative value in the racial or ethnic heritage of Louisiana’s or South Carolina’s governor. Historically Louisiana and South Carolina have not had a history of racial polarization and discrimination against people from Asia. Louisiana State University and Clemson University allowed foreign students from Asia to attend long before African Americans, and the University of Mississippi allowed foreign students to attend long before James Meredith.106 A parallel example is the situation of

Justice finds discriminatory election laws in states not listed under Section 5, it has to pursue a remedy under Section 2. U.S. Department of Justice, “About Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act.” http://www.justice.gov/crt/about/vot/sec_5/about.php.

105 Frank Parker to Vernon Burton, 1990, letter in possession of author.
Chinese Americans in Mississippi. Mississippi had a Chinese American mayor before the Voting Rights Act, but no one would claim that white supremacy and black voter suppression were not common in Mississippi in 1965.\(^\text{107}\) There is an old tradition of so-called honorary whites that predates the Civil War in the South. By not being black in the South, one may become white.

Rather than a white/black binary to focus the legacy of race, some suggest a more accurate and useful binary is a white/nonwhite or—often much better—a black/nonblack binary. This category changes through southern history, depending on locale and issues of education or housing or marriage. As scholars have noted, this was one reason that anti-Semitism was less prevalent in the South as compared with the North, and there were a number of Jewish leaders elected to offices in the

South. In rebuttal to my two reports on the South Carolina voter ID law, political science professor Scott E. Buchanan sounded remarkably like scholars who believe that the in-migration of northerners has helped end southern history. He argued that it was the in-migration to South Carolina of people from the Northeast, who are more likely to be Republican, that has changed the partisan composition of the state, that it was not the southern strategy of race. But as shown above, most of the migrants to South Carolina are from other southern states, not from “New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania,” as stated by Professor Buchanan.

These cases show, again and again, that there is an exceptional South. What we have in the South is black and white as proxies for ethnicity, and what plays out in power issues is racial politics. I learned a valuable lesson when I was an expert witness in the mid-1990s in El Centro, California. There only 3 percent of the population was African American, but African Americans were elected to the city council and school board; Hispanics made up more than 40 percent of voting-age citizens but were not elected in the at-large elections. The issue was not white and black, but white and brown. The convergence of ethnicity and class, and how those play out historically, is what has made race a critical ingredient in the southern political arena.

In the South today, despite dramatic transformations in many areas, old perceptions of the South’s racial “Otherness” are closer to the


mark than some realize or want to acknowledge. The peculiar history of the South, of blacks and whites, of the mix and timing of folks’ arrivals and the frictions along the way, made the South the “Other,” and continues to do so.

Just as a tangled fishing line needs a close look, the issues of American democracy need a focused examination. Whether as a reflection or as a contrast, southern history illuminates U.S. history, and even world history. The important issues that the United States has confronted and still confronts are drawn in stark relief in the American South—individual rights versus liberty, independence versus community. Some embrace their history, celebrate it, and take it uncritically: my history, my country, my region, right or wrong. But many, and certainly those of us white southerners who came of age with segregation and the civil right movement, have been tormented by the tragedy and the horror of our region’s history, especially the racial injustice and terror inflicted on African Americans by whites. Neither is an adequate way to read history, and I want to suggest that an ambiguous reading is much better than either of these alternatives. Rather than using a loaded word like exceptionalism, historians need to recognize commonalities and distinctions. There is much we can learn from the lessons of southern history. How do we live in this world, where do we draw lines, where do we find our place? I believe in data, in evidence, but evidence alone does not tell the entire story. We historians need to look at the people, their personal choices, their misfortunes and joys, their grief and laughter, their dreams and nightmares; people made, and make, the South the place it is.