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Southern History as U.S. History

By Laura F. Edwards

WHAT IS SOUTHERN HISTORY? MORE TO THE POINT, WHAT IS "THE South"? It is a place defined as much by social, cultural, and political dynamics as it is by geography. I am reminded of that fact every time my scholarship is linked to my identity. When people find out that I am a southern historian, they invariably ask whether I am from the South. Actually, the question is less about *my* identity than the *region's* identity. Those outside academia are inquiring about my credentials to write about the South, which they see as utterly exotic or intimately familiar, depending on their own backgrounds. Either way, they construe the South as a place so mystifying that only insiders could fathom its secrets. My identity thus serves as the most important line on my curriculum vitae, establishing the expertise they consider necessary to study a unique region. For those inside academia, the question is informed by historiographical traditions drenched in southern exceptionalism, in which regional distinctiveness moves the South outside the major historical currents in U.S. history. Those presumptions put native daughters and sons in an academic bind, positioning them as either the best analysts of the region (because of their familiarity with this exceptional region) or the worst (because of their familiarity with this exceptional region). In the academic context, moreover, the privileges of southern exceptionalism are decidedly limited. For many professional historians, the South's unique identity relegates its historians to a subfield perceived to be as provincial and backward as the region itself. Southern historians study a particular place that is so different from the rest of the United States that it cannot represent the national experience.

Or can it? In this essay, I take issue with conceptions of the South and southern history that separate the region from the rest of the United States. I argue that southern distinctiveness exists more as a cultural and historiographical construct than as a useful description of southern history. In fact, many of the issues associated with the South in the historiography were actually national in scope. White southern slaveholders embedded slavery within the governing structures of the new republic, ensuring that the issue would remain a national one, even after northern

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states abolished the institution. At the same founding moment, black southerners also put slavery and racial inequality on the national agenda by highlighting the difference between the reality of their lives and the Revolutionary ideals of freedom and equality for all. In both instances, southerners turned regional concerns into national issues. But if slavery and racial inequality took particularly extreme forms in the South, they were never uniquely southern. Even as the nation teetered on the brink of civil war, support for slavery continued to cut across regional boundaries. If anything, region had even less to do with questions of racial equality. That was particularly evident during Reconstruction. Southern states, whose electorate included African American men, backed the Reconstruction amendments more enthusiastically than many northern states where the electorate was composed largely of white men with entrenched racial biases. Much later, in the twentieth century, as riots erupted in northern cities following Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination, it became less and less possible to pretend that racial inequality was just a southern problem. In these instances, as in so many others, the dynamics of southern history are inseparable from central themes in U.S. history.

That is why southern historians are often called on to represent U.S. history. In the past thirty years, half of the presidents of the Organization of American Historians (OAH) have worked in the field of southern history, a percentage far out of proportion to the South's share of the nation's population. In that same period, eight presidents of the Southern Historical Association have also served as presidents of the OAH.[1] In the United Kingdom and Europe, U.S. history and literature are often represented through scholars whose research focuses on the South. Not only does the region capture the dynamics of U.S. history, but over the years southern historians have been on the cutting edge in the use of a range of new conceptual frameworks as well. Scholarship that has

[1] The OAH presidents, from 1979 to 2009, who have produced work in the field of southern history are Carl N. Degler, Anne Firor Scott, Leon F. Litwack, Louis R. Harlan, Mary Frances Berry, Lawrence W. Levine, Eric Foner, George M. Fredrickson, William H. Chafe, Darlene Clark Hine, Ira Berlin, Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, James O. Horton, Nell Irvin Painter, and Pete Daniel. The Southern Historical Association presidents who also presided over the OAH in that time period are Degler, Scott, Harlan, Hall, Hine, Daniel, Painter, and Litwack. Moreover, the work of six of the OAH presidents in the period 1968–1978 focused on the South: C. Vann Woodward, David M. Potter, T. Harry Williams, John Hope Franklin, Kenneth M. Stampp, and Eugene D. Genovese. One could arguably add Edmund S. Morgan to the list. Further, since 1979 about a third of the books honored with the Bancroft Prize analyzed the South. I was honored to be invited write this piece and am deeply indebted to everyone at the *Journal of Southern History* for their help in turning an idea into an article. I am also indebted to Jacquelyn Hall, Nancy Bercaw, John Inscoe, Priscilla Wald, Esther Gabara, and Louise Meintjes, whose ideas and commentary improved this piece immeasurably.

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refocused the historiography through the combined lenses of gender, race, and class provides just one recent example.

Yet the *concept* of southern exceptionalism endures in the historiography, because it is such a productive analytical tool. Southern exceptionalism isolates national problems, allowing historians to explore them directly and critically. Within the historiography, the exceptional South has served as the literal and symbolic inversion of the United States, providing a convenient explanation for the persistence of the nation's most enduring problems and its most endearing qualities. The region hosted not only slavery, segregation, and the most extreme forms of racial inequality but also a range of other insidious practices supposedly at odds with national values: an exploitative economic system that resulted in impoverishment and underdevelopment; a political system that curtailed democratic participation and encouraged corruption; a legal system that flaunted individual rights and encouraged vigilante violence; a rejection of education that encouraged ignorance and retreat from the main currents of contemporary life; and a suspicion of government that led to stunted infrastructure and a landscape studded with jarring examples of neglect and decay. At the same time, however, the South is idealized for "authentic" American values, jeopardized elsewhere by economic and social change: close-knit families and communities, good manners, warm hospitality, hard work, honesty, firm religious beliefs, and an ethic of mutuality so strong that it could even soften the harsh edges of racism. Displacing these dynamics onto the exceptional South is to underscore their centrality to U.S. history.[2] The qualities that supposedly separated the South from broader currents of change also established connections to them. What made the South distinctive was always its comparison to somewhere else. In fact, the South's exceptionality is exceptionally telling: it is in the South where we come face-to-face with the most difficult, most enduring themes in U.S. history.

The Revolutionary generation produced the South's first historians and the first conception of southern exceptionalism. These historians did not write about their homeland as a unique region that existed apart from the rest of the United States. Instead, they saw southern states as

[2] This point is similar to the one made by Larry J. Griffin, "Why Was the South a Problem to America?" in Griffin and Don H. Doyle, eds., *The South as an American Problem* (Athens, Ga., 1995), 10–32. The classic statement—actually meditation—on southern exceptionalism and the connections between the South and the United States is C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* (3rd ed.; Baton Rouge, 1993). Also see Charles Grier Sellers Jr., ed., *The Southerner as American* (Chapel Hill, 1960).

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distinguished in a different sense: they were the most eminent states in the new republic and, as such, the best representatives of national values. In fact, these histories were part of a larger post-Revolutionary effort to solidify the contours of the new republic, a project that extended across the country and that took various forms. The genre of history proved to be a particularly effective tool in nation building, allowing national leaders to anchor an unstable present and an uncertain future in concrete, compelling narratives of the past. In this regard, southern historians were participating in broader intellectual and political currents that placed history at the center of nationalism and state formation more generally. In the United States, Britain, and Western Europe, historians have linked the development of professional history and the creation of archives to the project of nation building and the creation of empires. The archives and histories of European nations, for instance, provided the inspiration for Archibald D. Murphey's plans for a state archive and an eight-volume history of North Carolina, which he grandiosely likened to Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. "The history of each of the European nations has been long since written," Murphey wrote in his 1827 request to the General Assembly for funding. North Carolina needed to follow their example to maintain its place on the international stage.[3] The histories of this period acquired resonance over time, as succeeding generations of scholars followed their interpretative lead. Those later histories were based on the conceptual foundation laid in the post-Revolutionary decades, a foundation that connected southern states to the rest of the country. That nationalist orientation continued to frame the field, even

[3] A. D. Murphey, "His Memorial to the General Assembly of North Carolina, Regarding his Projected History of North Carolina," January 1, 1827, Folder 6, Archibald D. Murphey Papers #533 (Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; hereinafter SHC). Murphey's memorial was published as a pamphlet, *To the Honourable the General Assembly of North-Carolina, the Memorial of the Subscriber* (Hillsborough, N.C., 1827). David L. Swain, who served as governor and president of the University of North Carolina, followed up on Murphey's archival project; see David L. Swain, *Report of Hon. David L. Swain: On the Historical Agency for Procuring Documentary Evidence of the History of North-Carolina* (Raleigh, N.C., 1857). For links between the interest of European nations and their leaders in creating—and, in some cases, capturing existing—archives and larger expressions of national power, see Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, translated by A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York, 1972), 79–131; Thomas Richards, *The Imperial Archive: Knowledge and the Fantasy of Empire* (New York, 1993); Bonnie G. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women, and Historical Practice* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), 116–28; Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick, N.J., 2002); and James Vernon, "Narrating the Constitution: The Discourse of 'the Real' and the Fantasies of Nineteenth-Century Constitutional History," in Vernon, ed., *Re-Reading the Constitution: New Narratives in the Political History of England's Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, Eng., 1996), 204–29.

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after southern history became regional history where distinctiveness meant difference.

Post-Revolutionary historians from the South were politically active, elite white men who saw themselves as the vanguard of progressive change. In fact, the number of southern political leaders in this period who either wrote history or were active in efforts to collect and preserve historical records is remarkable. Their names are still familiar because they grace the archival collections and published records that historians today use: Thomas Jefferson, St. George Tucker, Joseph Gales, Thomas Ruffin, Archibald Murphey, John Drayton, David Ramsay, and Thomas Cooper, to name just a few. These men—and the effort primarily involved men—followed the political and intellectual currents of the Age of Reason with an enthusiasm that sometimes bordered on obsession. Enmeshed in networks that were not circumscribed by geography, they took active roles in state and national politics and international affairs. Their historical efforts solidified their ties to those networks. South Carolina's John Drayton, for example, distributed his two-volume history of the Revolution widely to his friends, including John Quincy Adams and Stephen Van Rensselaer. Thomas Jefferson was pleased to hear that U.S. Supreme Court justice William Johnson, a native South Carolinian, was nearing completion of his political history of the early republic. These men, who considered themselves the architects of the new republic, also assumed that they were its most qualified chroniclers.[4]

They penned histories that reflected their political commitments, blending state and national history in a single vision. David Ramsay, the noted historian from South Carolina, was typical in this regard. While most famous for his work on the nation's founding, including his acclaimed *The History of the American Revolution* (1789), Ramsay

[4] John Drayton to John Quincy Adams, August 8, 1821, and John Drayton to Stephen Van Rensselaer, July 31, 1821, both in John Drayton Papers (South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia); Thomas Jefferson, Monticello, to Judge William Johnson, Charleston, S.C., June 12, 1823, Manuscript 43/521 (South Carolina Historical Society, Charleston). For the importance of intellectualism and cosmopolitanism to elite southerners, see Maurie D. McInnis, *The Politics of Taste in Antebellum Charleston* (Chapel Hill, 2005); and Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810–1860* (2 vols.; Chapel Hill, 2004). As historian Joanne B. Freeman has argued, national leaders of the early republic developed an acute sense of the power they could wield through the historical record. She identifies elites' interest in history as an extension of the partisan political culture of the 1790s, which conflated personal reputation with party affiliation. Through the genre of history, these men were able to justify their positions and vindicate their reputations after the fact. Freeman, *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic* (New Haven, 2001), 262–88. Also see Laura F. Edwards, *The People and Their Peace: Legal Culture and the Transformation of Inequality in the Post-Revolutionary South* (Chapel Hill, 2009), 29–40.

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wrote state history as well.[5] Whether situated at the state or national level, the narratives of this period followed a decidedly Whiggish path, characterizing the colonial past as a prologue to the creation of a more perfect union. State histories from the time thus read as part of a broader, national narrative, with writers scrambling to establish the importance of their states in the Revolution and the nation's founding. Archibald Murphey's claims for North Carolina were overblown but not unusual. "In no state," he opined in his proposal to the legislature for a multivolume state history, "was a more early or effectual opposition made to the encroachments of power . . . or were the principles of civil liberty better understood, more ardently cherished, or more steadily defended."[6] Others might take issue, but only because they saw their states as dedicated to liberty far earlier and more enthusiastically than North Carolina. They would not have questioned the notion that southern states played a central role in pivotal events that led to the nation's founding.

The histories of this period turned the South's divided, unruly residents into a united front, squarely behind the pursuit of national independence. Indentured servants, religious dissenters, and an unlikely collection of European immigrants—French, German, Swiss, Scottish, and Scots-Irish—figured as the sturdy stock whose honesty, hard work, and independence explained the Revolution and the nation's founding. This stunning act of alchemy turned the backwoods settlers whom the South's colonial elite had derided as uncouth bumpkins into the nation's forebears. Similarly, these narratives recast southern colonists'

[5] David Ramsay, *The History of the American Revolution* (2 vols.; Philadelphia, 1789); Ramsay, *The History of the Revolution of South-Carolina, from a British Province to an Independent State* (2 vols.; Trenton, N.J., 1785); Ramsay, *The History of South-Carolina, from Its First Settlement in 1670, to the Year 1808* (2 vols.; Charleston, S.C., 1809); [Ramsay], *A Dissertation on the Manner of Acquiring the Character and Privileges of a Citizen of the United States* ([Charleston, S.C.], 1789). The blending of state, national, and even local history was common in this period. See John Drayton, *Memoirs of the American Revolution, from Its Commencement to the Year 1776, Inclusive; as Relating to the State of South-Carolina: and Occasionally Refering [sic] to the States of North-Carolina and Georgia* (2 vols.; Charleston, S.C., 1821); Drayton, *A View of South-Carolina, as Respects Her Natural and Civil Concerns* (Charleston, S.C., 1802); François-Xavier Martin, *The History of North Carolina, from the Earliest Period* (2 vols.; New Orleans, 1829); Martin, *The History of Louisiana, from the Earliest Period* (2 vols.; New Orleans, 1827–1829); William Loughton Smith, *A Comparative View of the Constitutions of the Several States with Each Other, and with That of the United States . . .* (Philadelphia, 1796); and John Haywood, *The Civil and Political History of the State of Tennessee, from Its Earliest Settlement up to the Year 1796 . . .* (Knoxville, 1823). The antebellum South Carolina jurist John Belton O'Neall also reflected the sensibility of the earlier generation. He published *Biographical Sketches of the Bench and Bar of South Carolina* (2 vols.; Charleston, S.C., 1859), which sought to establish the national reputation of the state bar, as well as an account of his boyhood home, *The Annals of Newberry, Historical, Biographical and Anecdotal* (Charleston, S.C., 1859).

[6] Murphey, "Memorial to the General Assembly of North Carolina, Regarding his Projected History of North Carolina," January 1, 1827, Folder 6, Murphey Papers.

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battles over economic resources and political power—such as Bacon's Rebellion in Virginia and the Regulator movements in the Carolinas—as early examples of homegrown opposition to British rule. No matter that those involved in Bacon's Rebellion never broached the subject of separation from the British empire or that many Regulators actually opposed the Revolution and its leaders. Archibald Murphey's boast about North Carolinians' love of liberty was typical of the genre, which co-opted all dissenters regardless of their politics and turned them into proto-Revolutionaries.[7]

Even the natural environment became a harbinger of national success. Historians of this generation lingered lovingly on the land, taking pride in its every aspect, from the economic potential of its soil and rivers to the salubrity of its air to the inspirational force of its beauty and scale. Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* provides an early example of a narrative form that would become conventional by the early nineteenth century. Other accounts rooted political promise in the land as well. Some followed Jefferson, creating a narrative in which the land's bounty supported the economic and political independence of white household heads. Others saw the foundations of wealth, political power, and cultural refinement that surpassed the modesty and simplicity of the Jeffersonian ideal. However the authors defined success, though, it was as if Mother Nature had given her blessing to the new republic by gracing it with the necessary resources.[8]

Historians of this generation also pioneered in the collection and preservation of artifacts from the past. Such efforts had been noticeably lacking in the colonial period, even at the highest levels of government. Colonial legislatures, for example, provided for the dissemination of statutes, printing them in pamphlet form and in newspapers following each session. But few colonies devised plans to save such materials or

[7] For examples of this transformation see *The Independent Citizen, Or, The Majesty of the People Asserted Against the Usurpations of the Legislature of North-Carolina, in Several Acts of Assembly, Passed in the Years 1783, 1785, 1786 and 1787* ([New Bern, N.C., 1787]); John Wilson Campbell, *A History of Virginia, from Its Discovery till the Year 1781 . . .* (Petersburg, Va., 1813); Drayton, *Memoirs of the American Revolution*; Ramsay, *History of the Revolution of South-Carolina*; William C. Rives, *Discourse on the Uses and Importance of History, Illustrated by a Comparison of the American and French Revolutions* (Richmond, 1847); and St. George Tucker, *Hansford: A Tale of Bacon's Rebellion* (Richmond, 1857). The implications still shaped the literature later: see William K. Boyd, ed., *Some Eighteenth Century Tracts Concerning North Carolina* (Raleigh, 1927).

[8] Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (Philadelphia, 1788). Also see Thomas Cooper, comp., *Some Information Respecting America* (Dublin, Ireland, 1794); Drayton, *View of South-Carolina*; and [François-Xavier Martin], *An Account of Louisiana, Exhibiting a Compendious Sketch of Its Political and Natural History and Topography: With a Copious Appendix Containing Several Important Documents* (New Bern, N.C., 1804).

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built places to house them permanently. At the end of the Revolution, most public records lay in private hands, if they existed at all. The preservation of individuals' private papers was even more uneven. After the Revolution, however, the links between the collection of archival materials and the legitimization of government authority drew southern political leaders into archival projects. Enterprising individuals stepped into the void immediately, drawing on private collections and producing their own digests of statutes, legal decisions, and other documents relating to colonial and state government.[9]

Privately produced collections, however, did not fill the same role as document collections issued with the imprimatur of the states or the nation: private collections might be useful, but they were not a body of officially recognized state law. Political leaders who appreciated the link between a documentary record of the past and the consolidation of government authority pushed legislatures to collect and archive a written record of their business—past and present. In the 1770s the Virginia legislature's decision to create a comprehensive collection of statutes signified this conceptual shift, one that linked the past—in the form of archival materials—to the present. Even then, it took time before the idea was widely practiced and accepted. Archibald Murphey's proposal for a state history and archive met a chilly reception in 1827. It was not until the 1830s that the North Carolina capitol had a designated space for the preservation of state records. Similarly, most county courthouses were not built with storage areas for legal records until the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Even the results of Virginia's record keeping were uneven. "Few gentlemen, even of the [legal] profession . . . have ever been able to boast of possessing a *complete* collection of its [Virginia's] laws," wrote St. George Tucker in his 1803 edition of *Blackstone's Commentaries*. His revision, which situated Blackstone's

[9] E. Merton Coulter, "What the South Has Done About Its History," *Journal of Southern History*, 2 (February 1936), 3–28; Leslie W. Dunlap, *American Historical Societies, 1790–1860* (Madison, Wis., 1944); H. G. Jones, ed., *Historical Consciousness in the Early Republic: The Origins of State Historical Societies, Museums, and Collections, 1791–1861* (Chapel Hill, 1995); and David D. Van Tassel, *Recording America's Past: An Interpretation of the Development of Historical Studies in America, 1607–1884* (Chicago, 1960). Many thanks to Paul Quigley for sharing these citations with me. The first efforts to collect and publish historical documents related to state governance—even documents now considered essential to state governance—were done privately. Statute collections were first published by individuals, not the state. For South Carolina see John Faucheraud Grimké, *The Public Laws of the State of South-Carolina, from Its First Establishment as a British Province Down to the Year 1790, Inclusive* . . . (Philadelphia, 1790); and Joseph Brevard, *An Alphabetical Digest of the Public Statute Law of South-Carolina* (3 vols.; Charleston, S.C., 1814). For the importance of history to the construction of state government and the slow process by which states took over the project of archiving documents relating to state business, see Edwards, *People and Their Peace*, 36–40.

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version of common law in the context of Virginia statute and case law, was intended to address that situation.[10]

Political leaders also began saving documents about themselves and their activities in state and national politics. In 1827, for instance, Chief Justice John Marshall wrote to Archibald Murphey praising his biographical sketches "of the eminent men of North Carolina," most of whom served in state or national government. "It was my happiness to be acquainted with those of whom you speak," wrote Marshall, "and I think you have given to the character of each, its true coloring." Similar concerns led to a friendly correspondence between Alexander Hamilton's son and William Gaston, who sat on the North Carolina appellate court in the 1830s and 1840s. Hamilton's son, who was collecting his father's correspondence and writing a biography, asked Gaston for documents or personal recollections as well as an account of North Carolina's credit laws, presumably for background about his father's monetary policies. Gaston was happy to comply. The lives of southern political leaders were meticulously documented in turn. These efforts preserved not just the legacies of state and national leaders but also their political visions.[11]

[10] St. George Tucker, *Blackstone's Commentaries: With Notes of Reference to the Constitution and Laws, of the Federal Government of the United States, and of the Commonwealth of Virginia* (5 vols.; Philadelphia, 1803), I, iv. The Virginia legislature commissioned William Waller Hening to put together a compilation of statutes; see Hening, [comp.], *The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619...* (13 vols.; Richmond, 1809–1823). By contrast, the South Carolina legislature did not approve such a project until the 1830s; see Thomas Cooper and David J. McCord, eds., *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina* (10 vols.; Columbia, S.C., 1836–1841). For a discussion of the issue, see Edwards, *People and Their Peace*, 36–40, 47–53. Also see Charles M. Cook, *The American Codification Movement: A Study of Antebellum Legal Reform* (Westport, Conn., 1981); Christopher M. Curtis, "Jefferson's Chosen People: Legal and Political Conceptions of the Freehold in the Old Dominion from Revolution to Reform" (Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 2002); and F. Thornton Miller, *Juries and Judges versus the Law: Virginia's Provincial Legal Perspective, 1783–1828* (Charlottesville, 1994).

[11] Chief Justice John Marshall to Archibald D. Murphey, October 6, 1827, in William Henry Hoyt, ed., *The Papers of Archibald D. Murphey* (2 vols.; Raleigh, 1914), I, 365 (quotation); William Gaston to John C. Hamilton, August 1, 1833, Folder 57; William Gaston to John C. Hamilton, August 30, 1833, Folder 58; John C. Hamilton to William Gaston, September 27, 1834, Folder 64, all in Box 4, William Gaston Papers #272 (SHC). William Gaston's son-in-law, Robert Donaldson, wanted to collect and publish Gaston's correspondence and writings while he was still alive, but Gaston declined. William Gaston to Robert Donaldson, November 5, 1832, Folder 54, *ibid.* Gaston family members, though, did preserve their father's papers, which are now housed in the Southern Historical Collection. For this process, see Freeman, *Affairs of Honor*, 262–88. The results are apparent in archival collections throughout the South and the rest of the country, where the papers of families active in state and national politics predominate. Such collections also made their way into print. See, for example, Thomas Jefferson Randolph, ed., *Memoir, Correspondence, and Miscellanies, from the Papers of Thomas Jefferson* (4 vols.; Charlottesville, 1829); and William Cabell Rives, *History of the Life and Times of James Madison* (3 vols.; Boston, 1859–1870). See also Francis D. Cogliano, *Thomas Jefferson: Reputation and Legacy* (Charlottesville, 2006).

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The historical projects of this period expressed the desires and designs of the authors, not the social and political realities around them. The new republic was struggling in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and so were its individual states. Plagued by economic instability and internal political conflicts, neither the nation nor the states were cohesive social or political units. Post-Revolutionary historians from the South addressed that tenuous situation through their narratives and archival efforts, all of which sought to establish social, cultural, and political coherence by drawing a straight line from the past to the present. Using written evidence and establishing connections through chronology, they made meaningful associations among unrelated events experienced by a haphazard assortment of people who happened to live in proximity to each other. The past thus brought meaning to the present, through a narrative that turned the chaos of European colonization into a collective project that resulted in the creation of a nation.

Post-Revolutionary historians emphasized southern states' enthusiastic embrace of what they deemed to be American values. The authors of these narratives, however, overstated the case—as did historians elsewhere, who all claimed the mantle of nationalism for their home states.[12] While featuring themselves and their concerns, these writers left out vast swaths of southern history. They did not acknowledge the fact that local government—magistrates, county courts, and town councils—performed the bulk of government business in this period. They ignored most of the South's residents, who understood Revolutionary ideals in very different terms. Nor did they address slavery's entrenched place within the social order, which actually did distinguish southern states from states elsewhere that accepted slavery but did not build their basic institutions around it. The influence of post-Revolutionary historians nonetheless echoes through the scholarship because they were so active in documenting the past. It is no accident that historians now gravitate toward those families with ties to state and national politics. It is no accident that we still anchor our narratives in changes in law and politics at those levels of government. The prominence of these people and these issues in the historical record, however, owes as much to political leaders' efforts in placing themselves at the center of the historical narrative as it does to their importance at the time. That hubris marked their careers more generally: these men moved through the world with the certainty that its fate lay in their hands. Their vision

[12] See, for instance, David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill, 1997).

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of the South reflected their ambitions: as they told the story, the history of southern states was the nation's history. That connection between the South and the nation continued to shape the scholarship, even when later generations constructed a distinctive, regional South using the archives their forefathers had created.

Participants in the South Carolina nullification movement, from 1827 to 1833, pioneered a new kind of southern history. Nullifiers built on existing historical narratives that linked their state to the nation's founding, portraying the nullification movement as the true heir to the Revolution. But the nullifiers also modified those narratives by situating South Carolina within a larger regional entity: "the South," a collection of slaveholding states united by a distinctive past, a unique culture, and common economic and political interests. According to the nullifiers, it was not South Carolina alone but all the states of the South that would join together to defend the Revolution's heritage. The nullifiers' South, however, was a fictional place conjured up to serve particular political interests. At the time, leaders in other slaveholding states rejected both the concept of nullification and the nullifiers' vision of regional solidarity.[13] Both theories gained traction later, during the secession movement and the founding of the Confederacy. But even during the Civil War, at the height of Confederate nationalism, the notion of regional solidarity was more powerful in theory than it was in practice: the Confederacy was not noted for internal cohesion, be it cultural, economic, or political. To the extent that the nullifiers' vision of the South exercised power, it was later, in narrative form, where it ruled the genre of southern history. The concept of a distinctive South had appeal within the region, particularly among whites, because it made sense of the Confederacy's rise and fall. But this version of southern history also acquired power because it provided the means of working through southern states' connection to the rest of the nation.

South Carolina figures in the nineteenth-century historiography as the most southern state in the South. The nullification crisis marked an important moment in the formation of an oppositional political identity, based in chattel slavery, that would come to define South Carolina and the South as a whole. During nullification, South Carolina leaders attacked the federal tariff with a brilliant political campaign that featured a militant doctrine of states' rights paired with a shrill defense

[13] Edwards, *People and Their Peace*, 256–85. Also see Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York, 1995), 208–38; and Manisha Sinha, *The Counterrevolution of Slavery: Politics and Ideology in Antebellum South Carolina* (Chapel Hill, 2000), 33–61.

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of slavery. They were so persuasive that they succeeded in calling a state constitutional convention that affirmed the principle of state sovereignty and annulled the tariff. This vision of states' rights entailed not just a rejection of federal authority and support for slavery but also a notion of regional solidarity based on those propositions. While focused on the wrongs done to their own state, nullifiers spoke to an audience of "southerners" and used the imagined past to bind them together. The South remained loyal to the nation's founding principles, whereas the rest of the nation had lost its way. The logic led to an inescapable conclusion: the South was southern because it was more American than anywhere else in the United States.[14]

The narrative to which nullifiers appealed was manufactured. There was no such place as "the South" at the time of the nullification movement. Despite the nullifiers' claims, South Carolina did not represent other southern states. In fact, southerners were a diverse, contentious lot whose interests did not coincide. Most obviously, nullifiers excluded African Americans and Indians from the term *southern*. But the South's white population also divided along social, economic, political, and ethnic lines. Even the Revolutionary experience did not unite them, since most people living in the 1830s had no direct experience of that conflict, and most southern states had been formed long after, some out of land acquired from other colonial powers.[15]

The concept of southern exceptionalism, however, was powerful. It posited the existence of a place—the South—that was defined through its unity, its devotion to purported American values, and its distance from the rest of the nation. That concept and its implied companion, "the North," proved particularly useful during the secession crisis and the Civil War. As the conflict over slavery escalated in the decades before the war, leaders on both sides increasingly explained their differences in terms of two distinct regions with incompatible social structures. The values projected on the two regions varied. In its most extreme formulation, the South appeared as a place organized along romanticized medieval lines, with slaves likened to loyal serfs, plantations to splendid manors, and slaveholders to gallant lords and gracious

[14] The scholarship on South Carolina tends to use the state as a means of explaining the coming of the Civil War. See James M. Banner Jr., "The Problem of South Carolina," in Stanley Elkins and Eric McKitrick, eds., *The Hofstadter Aegis: A Memorial* (New York, 1974), 60–93; William W. Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 1816–1836* (New York, 1966); Lacy K. Ford Jr., *Origins of Southern Radicalism: The South Carolina Upcountry, 1800–1860* (New York, 1988); and Sinha, *Counterrevolution of Slavery*.

[15] Although there was support for South Carolina nullifiers in other southern states, it was not widespread enough to cause any other state to support nullification.

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ladies. While less fantastical, other versions of the South rested on similar assumptions. They too posited a cohesive region, devoted to the preservation of the nation's founding principles and united by a common culture, superior to and at odds with that found in "the North." More than that, proponents of southern exceptionalism projected values onto their region—social harmony and political consensus—that they saw lacking elsewhere. The South was exceptional in the sense that it served as a model for the rest of the nation.[16]

Even as the rhetoric of sectionalism divided the nation into distinct geographic parts, it spoke to national concerns that transcended region. Self-styled southerners did not have a monopoly on regionalism. Leaders elsewhere used the same framework, drawing different conclusions from it. While abolitionists identified slavery as a national problem, they located its source in the slave South and blamed that region for its perpetuation. In the context of party politics, regionalism provided a convenient explanation for the growing divide over slavery and the inability to resolve it. As the conflict escalated, the South became a foil that established the superiority of positions taken by its opposite, the North. Ultimately, the logic legitimized armed conflict by casting it as unavoidable, even necessary. In the process, the exceptional South became a self-fulfilling prophecy. To be sure, historians have found ample evidence of differences between northern states and southern states in this period. The most obvious example is racial slavery—and all the attendant institutional and social practices associated with it. Yet, in reflecting the contentious presence of race and slavery, the narrative of regionalism also reshaped those issues, turning national issues into sectional ones and obscuring political differences within the two sections. The results naturalized politics in geography. Even today, many people use "the South" to refer to the Confederacy, a political entity; similarly, they use "the North" to refer to the states remaining under the political rule of the United States. Stylized, oversimplified versions of the South tended to hold up best on the printed page and in the rhetoric of skilled orators, where it was possible to spin out ideas without

[16] For the creation of a unified South in the decades leading up to the Civil War, see Sinha, *Counterrevolution of Slavery*, esp. 63–93; and Paul D. H. Quigley, "Patchwork Nation: Sources of Confederate Nationalism, 1848–1865" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006), esp. chaps. 1 and 2. Also see Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge, 1988); and Anne Sarah Rubin, *A Shattered Nation: The Rise and Fall of the Confederacy, 1861–1868* (Chapel Hill, 2005). Northern history, however, was not regionalized like southern history. Instead, the North came to represent dynamics in U.S. history directly and unproblematically, while the South represented difficult issues that were hard to accommodate within national narratives.

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bothering with the inconvenient facts of everyday life. Once readers and listeners entered into the narrative and accepted its terms, they began to see conflicts in that way: North and South, two opposing and irreconcilable cultures within one nation. It was a perspective that made the chaos and destruction of the Civil War comprehensible.[17]

The Confederacy's defeat breathed new life into this conception of southern exceptionalism, as historians who study the cult of the Lost Cause have argued. Confederates and their descendants needed a justification for the staggering losses sustained in pursuit of a failed, discredited political cause. They found it in the Old South, an idyllic place populated by white women who were always beautiful and virtuous, white men who were always brave and honorable, and slaves who were always loyal and happy. Prosperous farms and gracious plantations flourished against a backdrop of peace, prosperity, and general contentment. The specific mix of positive qualities varied, depending on the writer. But whatever the combination, life was infinitely better before than after the Civil War. In fact, the Old South generated by the cult of the Lost Cause resembled nothing so much as Eden before the fall. It was the North that introduced evil into this world, through the Civil War and Reconstruction. Confederates—or "southerners"—fought valiantly against the invaders. Their sacrifice, while futile, was ultimately heroic. In Lost Cause narratives, the Old South was less an actual place than it was a character in a nineteenth-century romance. Like an angelic child or a beautiful young maiden, the Old South had to die, because it was too pure to live. Its spirit still lived on, in attenuated form, marking the South as exceptional—both different and superior.[18]

[17] For discussions of the image of the benighted South, see Don H. Doyle, "Slavery, Secession, and Reconstruction as American Problems," in Griffin and Doyle, eds., *South as an American Problem*, 102–25; Fred Hobson, "The Savage South: An Inquiry into the Origins, Endurance and Presumed Demise of an Image," *Virginia Quarterly Review*, 61 (Summer 1985), 377–95; and George B. Tindall, "Mythology: A New Frontier in Southern History," in Frank E. Vandiver, ed., *The Idea of the South: Pursuit of a Central Theme* (Chicago, 1964), 1–15. For regional difference in the political conflicts leading up to the Civil War, see, for instance, Eric Foner, *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War* (New York, 1970); Foner, *Politics and Ideology in the Age of the Civil War* (New York, 1980); Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (New York, 1965); and Michael F. Holt, *The Political Crisis of the 1850s* (New York, 1978).

[18] Gaines M. Foster, *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865 to 1913* (New York, 1987); James Oakes, "The Present Becomes the Past: The Planter Class in the Postbellum South," in Robert H. Abzug and Stephen E. Maizlish, eds., *New Perspectives on Race and Slavery in America: Essays in Honor of Kenneth M. Stampp* (Lexington, Ky., 1986), 149–63; Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865–1920* (Athens, Ga., 1980).

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As the nation put distance between itself and the Civil War, Lost Cause tales of loss found an appreciative audience outside the states of the former Confederacy. They provided a way for white Americans to work through the meaning of the Civil War, particularly its implications for the status of former Confederates and all African Americans. As Lost Cause narratives gained wider audience, they facilitated sectional reconciliation among whites through white supremacy.[19] Racism also found an academic home in the influential scholarship associated with Columbia University's so-called Dunning School, named for William A. Dunning's pioneering analysis, first articulated in his *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction and Related Topics* (1898). While drawing on Lost Cause narratives, Dunning School historians also revised them in important ways. They tended to downplay the conflicts that led to the Civil War and focused instead on Reconstruction as the pivotal moment of sectional discord. Rather than casting aspersion on the North generally, they blamed radical elements within the North for the South's woes. Specifically, northern radicals gave African Americans too much power during Reconstruction. A race not yet ready for freedom, African Americans supposedly abused their new privileges and threw the entire region into political chaos, corruption, and economic despair.[20]

The South's post–Civil War brand of white supremacy became the means of sectional reunion in the narratives of Dunning School historians. The garb of academic professionalism created an aura of legitimacy: racism sounded better when told in the authoritative third-person voice, backed with archival evidence and supporting authorities.

[19] For the importance of white supremacy in sectional reconciliation as well as the efforts of African Americans to preserve alternative narratives, see David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001); W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, Mass., 2005); Kathleen Ann Clark, *Defining Moments: African American Commemoration and Political Culture in the South, 1863–1913* (Chapel Hill, 2005); and Bethany Leigh Johnson, "Regionalism, Race, and the Meaning of the Southern Past: Professional History in the American South, 1896–1961" (Ph.D. dissertation, Rice University, 2001), esp. chap. 1.

[20] William Archibald Dunning, *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction and Related Topics* (New York, 1898). For a particularly insightful analysis of the connection between professionalism and southern history, see Johnson, "Regionalism, Race, and the Meaning of the Southern Past." For Dunning's protégés, see William Watson Davis, *The Civil War and Reconstruction in Florida* (New York, 1913); John Rose Ficklen, *History of Reconstruction in Louisiana (Through 1868)* (Baltimore, 1910); Hamilton James Eckenrode, *The Political History of Virginia during the Reconstruction* (Baltimore, 1904); Walter L. Fleming, *Civil War and Reconstruction in Alabama* (New York, 1905); James Wilford Garner, *Reconstruction in Mississippi* (New York, 1901); J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton, *Reconstruction in North Carolina* (New York, 1914); Charles William Ramsdell, *Reconstruction in Texas* (New York, 1910); John S. Reynolds, *Reconstruction in South Carolina, 1865–1877* (Columbia, S.C., 1905); and C. Mildred Thompson, *Reconstruction in Georgia: Economic, Social, Political, 1865–1872* (New York, 1915).

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Dunning School scholars, who had imbibed the pseudoscientific racism of the era, were convinced that African Americans were biologically inferior beings, incapable of ever exercising full civil and political rights. Yet Dunning School racism also had a distinctly paternalistic cast, perhaps best captured in Yale University historian Ulrich Bonnell Phillips's classic study, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Régime* (1918), which characterized the system as a distasteful necessity to educate an uncivilized race and to save African Americans from their own self-destructive instincts. Dunning School scholars never entertained the possibility that education would lead to racial equality, so convinced were they of slaves' innate inferiority. These historians nonetheless accepted African Americans as a necessary part of southern society, portraying them as easily manipulated children who needed proper supervision. In this analysis, emancipation was problematic because it destroyed the system—slavery—that had contained African Americans. The challenge with emancipation was to establish a new system of control to replace the old one. In the work of the Dunning School, it was northern radicals who prevented white southerners from doing so. These radicals, a lunatic fringe that managed to seize power by deceit and manipulation, did not act out of concern for the South, the nation, or even the welfare of African Americans. Rather, northern radicals wanted to enrich themselves, enhance their power, and punish Confederates for the war. By irresponsibly and selfishly turning African Americans against whites, these northerners wrecked the whole region. The results then tainted the nation, leaving a legacy of problematic race relations and perpetuating ill will between North and South. What made the South distinctive was its ability to hold on to its core values in the face of aggressive oppression. In these narratives, moreover, southern values were closer to mainstream American values than those of the radical Republicans in charge.[21]

For Dunning School historians, Reconstruction's end represented not just a political victory but also a moral "redemption"—a term they coined. As they saw it, redemption applied to the nation, not just the South, a view that reached well beyond the ivory towers of academia. By the early twentieth century, many white Americans embraced the central tenets of this body of work as fundamentally true, exemplified

[21] Ulrich Bonnell Phillips, *American Negro Slavery: A Survey of the Supply, Employment and Control of Negro Labor as Determined by the Plantation Régime* (New York, 1918). Also see John David Smith, *An Old Creed for the New South: Proslavery Ideology and Historiography, 1865–1918* (Westport, Conn., 1985).

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in the popularity of Thomas Dixon Jr.'s novel *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (1905) and—even more so—in its cinematic adaptation, *The Birth of a Nation* (1915). Drawing on Dunning School scholarship, *The Birth of a Nation* animated that narrative in a form so realistic that it had the air of a documentary to audiences of white Americans. The film ends with national reconciliation through a particularly violent, gendered form of white supremacy. The Confederacy went down in defeat, but the regional vision on which it rested did not. That concept—the South—reunited the nation, at least in theory.[22]

The highly stylized "South" that facilitated national reunion has had a long life in academia as well as popular culture. Claude G. Bowers's *The Tragic Era: The Revolution after Lincoln*, the title of which became synonymous with Dunning School historical paradigms that dismissed Reconstruction as an unmitigated failure, was not published until 1929.[23] The remnants linger today, as suggested in the sentimental reunion of white veterans that ended Ken Burns's *The Civil War*, a still-popular documentary first broadcast in 1990. Yet, even as the influence of this construction of the South reached into the twentieth century and beyond, an emerging group of dissident scholars, writers, and activists were creating a different kind of southern exceptionalism.

Beginning in the 1920s, critics from all parts of the political spectrum used the concept of southern exceptionalism to explore dynamics within the region and, by extension, the nation. These writers employed southern exceptionalism to explain the region's *distance* from national ideas. Regional distinctiveness, however, did not necessarily signal a retreat from questions of broad, national significance. In fact, the paradigms on which this scholarship relied made it impossible to separate the region from the rest of the United States. That was true even when regionalism invoked a place suspended in space and time, untouched by historical forces that worked through the rest of the nation. Such a South took shape in dialogue with U.S. history more generally: it acquired a

[22] Thomas Dixon Jr., *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (New York, 1905). The reunification of North and South through marriage, which ended both *The Clansman* and *The Birth of a Nation*, was a common literary trope; see Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865–1900* (Chapel Hill, 1993). Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York, 2008) argues that the experience of death formed another important bond between the two sections in this period.

[23] Claude G. Bowers, *The Tragic Era: The Revolution after Lincoln* (Cambridge, Mass., 1929). Other histories from this era deemphasized the inevitability of the war, lessening the distance between North and South. See, for instance, Avery Craven, *The Repressible Conflict, 1830–1861* (Baton Rouge, 1939); Craven, *The Coming of the Civil War* (New York, 1942); and J. G. Randall, "The Blundering Generation," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 27 (June 1940), 3–28.

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peculiar form of distinctiveness through comparison to national currents of the twentieth century. Historians working in the late twentieth century have amplified those connections, using the South's unique past to make generalizations about the nation's history. That relationship—between the South and the nation—was built into existing literature and established archives, which provided the foundations for this scholarship. It was also rooted in various twentieth-century political movements, which concentrated on questions that knew no regional bounds: economic development, poverty, and patriarchy as well as racial inequality. The South's exceptionally dramatic experience with these dynamics made it an ideal location from which to speak critically about the United States as a whole.

The distinctly problematic South actually emerged in the late nineteenth century, in the work of African American intellectuals who located the rising tide of racism in the southern past. Black activists, from Alexander Crummell to Frederick Douglass to Ida B. Wells, fully understood the importance of the past in framing contemporary issues. They struggled with its meaning and its memory, countering popular versions that turned slavery into a charitable institution, the Civil War into tragic mistake, and white supremacy into responsible public policy.[24] In a period that became known as the nadir in race relations, they were unable to get a hearing among whites. Charles W. Chesnutt, who wrestled with history in all his southern novels, ultimately gave up, left the South, and took up other subjects. His last southern novel, *The Marrow of Tradition*, is a fictionalized account of the 1898 Wilmington, North Carolina, race riot and reaches deep into the past to narrate the tragedy of that particular event. Chesnutt reconstructs the intimate relations that tie the protagonists' lives together and, ultimately, tear them apart. As such, the race riot is more about the tortured history of racism that both established and distorted those relations than it is about a conflict over party politics between Republicans and Democrats. There is no easy escape from the legacy of racism in the novel.[25]

As the civil rights, labor, and feminist movements gained ground in the twentieth century, white writers, scholars, and activists joined the

[24] David W. Blight, "Quarrel Forgotten or a Revolution Remembered? Reunion and Race in the Memory of the Civil War, 1875–1913," in Blight and Brooks D. Simpson, eds., *Union and Emancipation: Essays on Politics and Race in the Civil War Era* (Kent, Ohio, 1997), 151–79.

[25] Charles W. Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition* (Boston, 1901). For analyses of Chesnutt's novel and its relation to the Wilmington massacre, see the essays in David S. Cecelski and Timothy B. Tyson, eds., *Democracy Betrayed: The Wilmington Race Riot of 1898 and Its Legacy* (Chapel Hill, 1998), esp. Richard Yarborough, "Violence, Manhood, and Black Heroism: The Wilmington Riot in Two Turn-of-the-Century African American Novels," 225–51.

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critique of the South and began to characterize the region as exceptionally problematic. At the turn of the twentieth century, progressive critics were appalled by what they saw in the South: the legacy of slavery and racism, class oppression, gender inequality, endemic poverty, and persistent underdevelopment. They wrote across genres, engaging these issues in various combinations. Their concern with social justice tended to outweigh a singular fascination with the South as a region apart. This body of scholarship dealt with problems—capitalism, patriarchy, and racism—that were national, even international in scope. For these writers, the South was a place where the racial, class, and—for feminists—gendered dimensions of capitalist development came together in particularly dramatic ways. As such, the South exposed larger truths that transcended the region.[26]

One of the best examples of the internationalist approach to the South is W. E. B. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction: An Essay Toward a History of the Part which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880* (1935). For Du Bois, emancipation was a democratic revolution that restored property in labor to its rightful owners and promised to fulfill the nation's founding ideals. By redistributing power, emancipation opened all sorts of social, economic, and political possibilities for African Americans, ordinary white southerners, and the South as a whole. African Americans are central in Du Bois's analysis, as suggested in the subtitle. His opening section shows how slaves emancipated themselves and undermined the Confederacy by running to Federal lines. Subsequent chapters trace African Americans' efforts to achieve economic independence and full civil and political rights. Du Bois, moreover, links the South's future to the status of black people. The great tragedy in *Black Reconstruction* is that ordinary white southerners did not make this same connection. Instead of identifying with blacks, they chose race over class and supported the policies of reactionary white leaders. Ordinary white southerners not only wiped out the gains African Americans had made but also destroyed their own position as well. They were left only with a psychological sense of racial superiority, a poor replacement for the tangible rewards they could have had.[27]

[26] Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Writing a Way Home* (forthcoming); Hall, "Broadus Mitchell (1892–1988)," *Radical History Review*, no. 45 (Fall 1989), 30–38; Hall, "Women Writers, the 'Southern Front,' and the Dialectical Imagination," *Journal of Southern History*, 69 (February 2003), 3–38. Also see Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Defying Dixie: The Radical Roots of Civil Rights, 1919–1950* (New York, 2008).

[27] 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*

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History appeared as an unshakable presence that stalked the present, extracting its price in human suffering for past sins. It would continue to do so until the living settled the accounts of the dead—a difficult but not impossible task. Grace Lumpkin's *To Make My Bread* (1932) provides a particularly striking example. She begins her story of the 1929 Gastonia textile strike in the achingly beautiful, poverty-stricken mountains of western North Carolina. Tracing the dynamics that forced families off the land and into mill villages, she indicts both capitalism and patriarchy: the grasping men-on-the-make who take advantage of struggling families to buy up land can do so only because of the selfish, inept choices of white men who refuse to surrender control over their households, even though they are incapable of exercising patriarchal authority. If the modern forces of economic change are at fault, so is the South's past, which prevents workers from seeing their common plight and uniting across the divides of gender and race. Despite the obstacles, some southerners in the novel do throw off the deadweight of the past and imagine a new future.[28]

Writers of history echoed Lumpkin's themes. Picking up the threads of African American activists' earlier critiques, they rooted contemporary problems deep in southern soil. W. J. Cash's *The Mind of the South* (1941) blames southern culture for the region's problems, singling out the entwined influence of honor, violence, and white supremacy for particular censure. Other writers focused on the structural causes of those cultural currents. Margaret Jarman Hagood's classic study, *Mothers of the South: Portraiture of the White Tenant Farm Woman* (1939), characterizes her subjects as hardworking, well-meaning women who did the best they could under crushing burdens not of their own making. The real problem is an entrenched economic system that offered them only bad choices. Similarly, Arthur F. Raper locates rural poverty and lynching in a history of intertwined racial and class inequalities, which entrapped both black

(New York, 1935). As David W. Blight has argued in "W. E. B. Du Bois and the Struggle for American Historical Memory," in Blight, ed., *Beyond the Battlefield: Race, Memory, and the American Civil War* (Amherst, Mass., 2002), 223–57, much of Du Bois's work was about creating an alternate history of the South, one not framed around the racist ideals of white supremacy. Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction*, moreover, was not just about the South. It focused on the South to explain a dynamic—the relationship between class and race—that had much wider implications. As Robin D. G. Kelley has argued in "'But a Local Phase of a World Problem': Black History's Global Vision, 1883–1950," *Journal of American History*, 86 (December 1999), 1045–77, Du Bois's work represents the global reach of scholarship among African American historians in this period more generally. As a group, they tended to situate African American history within a diaspora that also linked southern history to global currents.

[28] Grace Lumpkin, *To Make My Bread* (New York, 1932). My reading of Lumpkin's novel is indebted to Hall, *Writing a Way Home*.

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and white southerners in its destructive morass. C. Vann Woodward elaborates on the history of those dynamics in his groundbreaking book *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (1938), which tells the history of the Populist movement as a tragic tale of biracial cooperation gone bad.[29]

Regionalism took a very different political form in the pages of *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (1930), a conservative manifesto critical of capitalism but not of the South. Written by a group of Vanderbilt University intellectuals known as the Southern Agrarians, *I'll Take My Stand* cleanly severed the region from the rest of the nation. According to the Agrarians, the South was not only different from but also better than the rest of the United States. The region's superiority derived from its backwardness, specifically its distance from all the dehumanizing changes associated with industrial capitalism. Incorporating existing conceptions of the South elaborated by Dunning School historians, the Southern Agrarians turned the South's past into a pastoral ideal, characterized by all the values threatened by industrial capitalism: hard work, independence, religious values, and social responsibility.[30] Like the South created by the nullifiers, this South never existed outside the confines of the Agrarians' active imaginations. It was a creative invention with a political purpose—the Agrarians' South provided the means to highlight changes they feared and opposed. In this sense, the exceptional South functioned as a mythic model of what the nation as a whole could be. Setting that model in a specific place in the past gave it substance and authority. America could return to something tangible: what the South had been. Yet the resulting engagement with the Agrarians' vision tended to turn this imaginary South into a real place, producing a voluminous body of literature and scholarship that filled in its outlines. The tendency to treat the Agrarians' South as real had the effect of obscuring their critique of capitalism and its effects on twentieth-century America.[31]

[29] W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York, 1941); Margaret Jarman Hagood, *Mothers of the South: Portraiture of the White Tenant Farm Woman* (Chapel Hill, 1939); C. Vann Woodward, *Tom Watson: Agrarian Rebel* (New York, 1938); Arthur F. Raper, *The Tragedy of Lynching* (Chapel Hill, 1933); Raper, *Preface to Peasantry; A Tale of Two Black Belt Counties* (Chapel Hill, 1936); Raper and Ira De A. Reid, *Sharecroppers All* (Chapel Hill, 1941). Also see Julia Cherry Spruill, *Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies* (Chapel Hill, 1938); Guion Griffis Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina: A Social History* (Chapel Hill, 1937); Broadus Mitchell, *The Rise of Cotton Mills in the South* (Baltimore, 1921); Mitchell, *Frederick Law Olmsted: A Critic of the Old South* (Baltimore, 1924); and Broadus Mitchell and George Sinclair Mitchell, *The Industrial Revolution in the South* (Baltimore, 1930).

[30] Twelve Southerners, *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (New York, 1930).

[31] See Paul V. Murphy, *The Rebuke of History: The Southern Agrarians and American Conservative Thought* (Chapel Hill, 2001), for the continuing influence of the Southern Agrarians on conservative thought.

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Despite deep political differences, this body of scholarship sketched the outlines of an exceptional South that was very different from the one found in mainstream scholarship and popular culture.[32] As a group, these scholars tended to define the South's distinctiveness in terms of its *distance* from national ideals. At this point, though, Agrarians parted ways with progressive scholars, who saw that distance as a problem for the South and who located the source of those problems in the region's past, drawing a straight line from slavery, through the failed policies of Reconstruction, to the present. Although the progressive historians emphasized social structures, they saw those structures as the product of human action. Their faith in human agency also contained a strong undertone of optimism, despite the harsh judgments they leveled against the region. Southerners had made their history, which meant that they could reset their course and set off in a different direction, if they chose. Many of the progressive writers found hope in the lives of ordinary southerners, black and white. Perhaps the most powerful meditation on these issues is Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin's memoir, *The Making of a Southerner* (1947). As Jacquelyn Dowd Hall shows, Lumpkin made productive use of her own past and the region's past: she was not just confronting the dynamics of inequality that she had rejected; she was also creating a usable past for future progress. To the extent that the South was tragic, it was because its residents had not yet turned their attention to that task.[33]

While focused on the South, many progressive scholars of this period operated within conceptual frameworks that militated against a parochial conception of the region. The political ideology of the Left connected the sharecroppers' shacks and the mill villages of the South to the rest of the world. If anything, the region's distinctiveness meant that it functioned as a critical wedge slicing into the social, economic, and political issues that defined the modern era. The research techniques of dissident scholars in the early twentieth century strengthened those connections. Rejecting the methods and archives as well as the conclusions of previous generations, they applied the new tools of social science and created their own evidence, in the form of statistical data, interviews, and new kinds of archival sources, such as local records. In so

[32] Southern Agrarians and the other writers, such as William Faulkner, are usually associated with the literary movement known as the Southern Renaissance. For the Southern Renaissance and the notion of the South as a problematic place, see Johnson, "Regionalism, Race, and the Meaning of the Southern Past," chap. 4.

[33] Katharine Du Pre Lumpkin, *The Making of a Southerner* (New York, 1947); Hall, *Writing a Way Home*.

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doing, they escaped the intellectual framework that informed existing archives and that established the South's connection to the rest of the nation primarily in terms of party politics, legal institutions, and government at the state and national levels. Instead, these scholars established the broader significance of southern history through the experiences of southerners and the region's social structures. By extension, the South embodied the possibilities for national progress.

Dissident scholarship from the early twentieth century has had a bumpy historiographical reception. African American authors reached a small circle of readers at the time but were largely ignored by white academics and all but forgotten until recently. The crushing weight of McCarthyism silenced many of the writers associated with left-wing politics and then swept their work from view. Other scholars labored in relative obscurity, never receiving the professional recognition that went to colleagues whose work affirmed what then passed as conventional wisdom. Key elements of this body of scholarship did obtain a toehold within academia and then gained traction in the changing political climate of the late twentieth century. Its influence, however, remained muted in the decades immediately following World War II, even as the tide of the historiography began turning away from the conventional views of the Dunning School.[34]

The Holocaust gave new, dire meanings to racial inequality within the United States and transformed questions about race and the South in the nation's past. The combination of Fascism and racism that resulted in Hitler's death camps made it difficult to accept apologias for slavery as anything other than thinly disguised excuses for the continuation of racial oppression. At the end of World War II, the parallels between the two countries' acceptance of racism seemed all too real: the United States was moving along the same track as Nazi Germany and would end up in the same place if something were not done to change the course. Those assumptions—and those fears—informed much of the scholarship during and after the war. Sometimes they took center stage, as in Stanley M. Elkins's *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (1959), which compared the psychological effects of the institution of slavery on slaves to those of the death camps on Holocaust victims. While less obvious, the parallels between the United States and Nazi Germany were no less influential in scholarship that

[34] Hall, *Writing a Way Home*. Lillian Smith's *Strange Fruit* (New York, 1944) and *Killers of the Dream* (New York, 1949) also drew on her experiences as a southerner and denounced racism for its corrosive effects on the entire region. Smith, however, was far less optimistic about the positive elements of southern culture.

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simply noted the difference between the rhetoric and reality of democracy at home. Racism was a problem, one that threatened to overwhelm the nation. The title of Gunnar Myrdal's landmark study, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (1944), distilled that connection.[35]

Unsettled by the ugly, distorted images they saw through this lens, postwar historians revisited the nation's racial past. In the 1950s and early 1960s, however, they tended to explore the history of race by fixing their attention on the South, as if it were the carrier of a particularly virulent disease: the region served as the incubator for racism, which then spread wildly, infecting the national culture. Revisionist historians, as they came to be called, essentially turned the Dunning School's characterizations of the South on their head. One of the first myths to go was the romanticized, pastoral portrayal of slavery as a system that served the best interests of masters and slaves. In *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (1956), Kenneth M. Stampp eviscerated that image using the very sources collected by slaveholders and preserved by their apologists. As Stampp argued, the peculiar institution was an exploitative labor system, designed to enrich whites and to maintain white supremacy. In fact, slavery appeared so dehumanizing in Stampp's analysis that it was difficult to imagine how any slave could have survived it with body, psyche, and soul intact.[36]

Stampp's grinding narrative offered no way out, for either masters or slaves or for those dealing with slavery's legacy. But other revisionists did, by shifting their focus to Reconstruction and identifying it as a moment of possibility when the United States could have righted its course but did not. As if retelling that era's history could reset the nation's current path, they searched to find the reasons for failure and to assign blame. Early revisionists rescued the so-called radical Republicans from the place of infamy that they occupied in Dunning School histories. In revisionist narratives, radicals became idealistic, self-sacrificing leaders who wanted to fulfill America's democratic ideals. As radical Republicans' stock rose, that of moderate Republicans plummeted. According to revisionists, moderates' racism and their willingness to work with former Confederates undermined policies that would have

[35] Stanley M. Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago, 1959); Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (New York, 1944).

[36] Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Peculiar Institution: Slavery in the Ante-Bellum South* (New York, 1956).

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achieved racial equality. Not even Abraham Lincoln escaped censure: the great emancipator became the infamous compromiser.[37]

Yet, because this body of scholarship used the master's tools to dismantle the master's house, the new approach remained constrained by the same structures it criticized. Revisionists not only reworked the conclusions of Dunning School scholarship, but they also relied on the archives created by slaveholders and expanded by Dunning School protégés in the early twentieth century. Those materials tended to tell the South's past from the perspective of wealthy white southerners whose families were prominent in law and politics at the state and national levels. It was a perspective that left out everything that those southerners did not see or chose not to acknowledge.[38] Those neglected elements remained obscure, even when researchers were sympathetic to them. The problem is apparent in one-dimensional images of ordinary southerners—that is, southerners who were not prominent political leaders. These people anchor the revisionist project, in the sense that the central aim of such work was to expose their suffering. In the actual narratives, however, ordinary southerners remain either hapless victims or nameless members of organizations doomed to failure because of the corruption and cowardice of their political leaders. Ordinary people's lack of agency echoes their place in histories and archival collections from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But it is curious and contradictory in the context of revisionist scholarship, given these historians' stated aims.

Like Dunning School scholars and the nineteenth-century southern historians on whose work those scholars built, revisionists imagined the region in terms of a national frame with a distinct political vision.

[37] For foundational revisionist scholarship, see David M. Potter, *The Impending Crisis, 1848–1861* (New York, 1976); Kenneth M. Stampp, *And the War Came: The North and the Secession Crisis, 1860–1861* (Baton Rouge, 1950); and Stampp, *The Era of Reconstruction, 1865–1877* (New York, 1965).

[38] For the efforts to build up archives in the early twentieth century, see Brundage, *Southern Past*, 105–37. The Southern Historical Collection at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill was one such archive, created through the efforts of the Dunning School protégé J. G. de Roulhac Hamilton. The SHC turned the seventy-fifth anniversary of its founding into an opportunity to assess its past. Particularly interesting was the discussion at its conference, "Southern Sources: A Symposium Celebrating Seventy-Five Years of the Southern Historical Collection," held March 18–19, 2005. See http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/shc/southern_sources_intro.html. Also see Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The 'Ceaseless Quest for Truth': The Southern Historical Collection and the Making and Remaking of the Southern Past," January 13, 2005, which opened the exhibit commemorating the SHC's founding. The paper is available at http://dc.lib.unc.edu/cgi-bin/showfile.exe?CISOROOT=/scholarly&CISOPTR=0. As Hall points out, Hamilton was more inclusive as an archivist than he was as a historian. Responding to the interest in social history, he moved beyond the focus on elite white families whose members were prominent in state and national politics. As Bethany Johnson argues, Dunning School protégés were not just racist reactionaries; they also laid the foundations for a different kind of southern history that came later. Johnson, "Regionalism, Race, and the Meaning of the Southern Past," 98–100.

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Following prevailing scholarly fashions that have since been labeled "consensus historiography," revisionists accepted the tenets of liberal individualism without question. They focused their analyses on the attainment of civil and political rights through the political process, positioning the rights-bearing individual as the primary subject of history and positing fundamental similarities among all such individuals. This view located significant differences among groups of people in social circumstances, not human nature. It also assumed the possibility for change, since social circumstances could be altered through government policy. To be sure, those presumptions provided a powerful counterweight to Dunning-era justifications for white supremacy based on immutable racial differences that made all African Americans inherently inferior to all whites. But even as postwar liberalism supported racial equality and democracy in theory, it understated the difficulty of achieving those goals by assuming consensus about what they meant. Revisionists tended to assume that human nature consisted of a specific constellation of values, namely those of market-oriented capitalism and liberal political democracy. Once social aberrations such as racism or dictatorial political regimes were eliminated, all people would revert to their true nature: self-interested, profit-maximizing individuals who embraced wage labor and defined freedom in terms of the ability to pursue their own economic interests and to participate in electoral politics. Revisionists did not consider that the Reconstruction-era political leaders who worked to realize liberal objectives did not have widespread support or that ordinary southerners might have had good reason to reject elements of liberalism. Instead, the revisionists looked for resistance in members of the conservative, southern elite who remained perversely invested in the past. In the end, the revisionists' South contained strong elements of the South in the scholarship they sought to overturn, except in the revisionist version the region represented the worst, not the best, of the nation. The South was a regional aberration that would acquire its proper form, given the right policies. The region thus acquired its distinctiveness in comparison with a national political culture defined by liberalism, which ultimately extended even to the South.[39]

[39] This critique was leveled most directly at neoliberal economic history of the South, notably Roger L. Ransom and Richard Sutch, *One Kind of Freedom: The Economic Consequences of Emancipation* (Cambridge, Eng., 1977). The terms of the critique, however, apply to the work of revisionism more generally. For the critique, see Harold D. Woodman, "Sequel to Slavery: The New History Views the Postbellum South," *Journal of Southern History*, 43 (November 1977), 523–54; and a forum made up of Jonathan M. Wiener, "Class Structure and Economic Development in the American South, 1865–1955," *American Historical Review*, 84 (October 1979), 970–92; Woodman, "Comments," *ibid.*, 993–1001; and Wiener, "Reply," *ibid.*, 1002–6.

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In the 1950s the terms of revisionist scholarship accorded with the goals of the civil rights movement and other progressive political efforts. But the revisionist view of southern history failed to accommodate critiques of liberalism that came from within the civil rights movement, feminism, and the New Left. Liberalism was indicted for perpetuating class oppression and patriarchy as well as racial inequality, problems that seemed particularly intractable in the South. Unlike revisionists, this generation of historians, critics, and political activists reached back to the work of dissident scholars in the early twentieth century and built on their legacy—although the younger critics often failed to acknowledge or even recognize the extent of their intellectual debt. They created new archival sources, reorganized existing collections, and rehabilitated sources that had long gone ignored.[40] They elaborated on the topics of earlier scholarship, recovering and reconstructing the lives of southerners who were not rights-bearing individuals and, therefore, not the subjects of mainstream academic scholarship: African Americans, middling and poor whites, and all women. The new wave of scholars embraced the political sensibilities of the progressive early-twentieth-century scholarship, rejecting the notion of a liberal consensus in the past, maintaining a critical perspective on liberalism and capitalism, and emphasizing social and economic structures over the decisions of individual political leaders. The emphasis on social structures also facilitated scholarship that explored connections among relations of power and that linked racial inequality, class oppression, and patriarchy.

While regional in its focus, this body of scholarship—by highlighting diversity and conflict—exploded the myth of the solid South as a uniquely unified region. One of the best, earliest examples is Willie Lee Rose's *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (1964), which focused on federal policy but also explored how such measures actually thwarted African Americans' goals and limited their freedom.[41] Subsequent work homed in on the experiences of slaves,

[40] Oral history collections, such as the one maintained through the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, represent efforts to create new sources. So do efforts to re-index and recatalog existing collections so as to highlight the presence of materials on women, African Americans, and poor whites.

[41] Willie Lee Rose, *Rehearsal for Reconstruction: The Port Royal Experiment* (Indianapolis, 1964). Also see W. McKee Evans, *Ballots and Fence Rails: Reconstruction on the Lower Cape Fear* (Chapel Hill, 1967); John Hope Franklin, *The Free Negro in North Carolina, 1790–1860* (Chapel Hill, 1943); Louis S. Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman: Federal Policy Toward Southern Blacks, 1861–1865* (Westport, Conn., 1973); Edward Magdol, *A Right to the Land: Essays on the Freedmen's Community* (Westport, Conn., 1977); George Brown Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes, 1877–1900* (Columbia, S.C., 1952); and Joel Williamson, *After Slavery: The Negro in South Carolina during Reconstruction, 1861–1877* (Chapel Hill, 1965).

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African Americans, and a wide range of other southerners previously left out of historical narratives. After four decades of such scholarship, the historiography now characterizes the South as such a diverse region that it is difficult to use the term *southerner* without adding a modifier to indicate *which* southerners are being referenced. More than just adding new faces, this work emphasized the vast differences between these southerners' goals and those of the political elite, North and South. The South now appears as a place that nurtured radical political alternatives and offered them up to the rest of the nation: yeoman farmers resisted the forces of capitalist economic change;[42] slaves pushed the nation toward emancipation;[43] southern farmers set aside white supremacy to unite across racial lines at various moments;[44] women worked for political equality and social reform during the Progressive era;[45] industrial

[42] In fact, there is considerable debate about the ideological distance between the southern yeomanry and their wealthier white neighbors. See Bill Cecil-Fronsman, *Common Whites: Class and Culture in Antebellum North Carolina* (Lexington, Ky., 1992); Ford, *Origins of Southern Radicalism*; Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism: Yeoman Farmers and the Transformation of the Georgia Upcountry, 1850–1890* (New York, 1983); McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*; and J. Mills Thornton III, *Politics and Power in a Slave Society: Alabama, 1800–1860* (Baton Rouge, 1978).

[43] Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867*. Ser. 2: *The Black Military Experience* (Cambridge, Eng., 1982); Berlin et al., eds., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867*. Ser. 1, Vol. I: *The Destruction of Slavery* (Cambridge, Eng., 1985); Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, 1985); Steven Hahn, *A Nation under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, Mass., 2003); Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832–1938* (Baltimore, 1992); Julie Saville, *The Work of Reconstruction: From Slave to Wage Laborer in South Carolina, 1860–1870* (New York, 1994); Leslie A. Schwalm, *A Hard Fight for We: Women's Transition from Slavery to Freedom in South Carolina* (Urbana, 1997).

[44] Paul D. Escott, *Many Excellent People: Power and Privilege in North Carolina, 1850–1900* (Chapel Hill, 1985); Lawrence C. Goodwyn, "Populist Dreams and Negro Rights: East Texas as a Case Study," *American Historical Review*, 76 (December 1971), 1435–56; Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York, 1976); Armstead L. Robinson, "Beyond the Realm of Social Consensus: New Meanings of Reconstruction for American History," *Journal of American History*, 68 (September 1981), 276–97.

[45] Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896–1920* (Chapel Hill, 1996); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, *Revolt Against Chivalry: Jessie Daniel Ames and the Women's Campaign Against Lynching* (1979; rev. ed., New York, 1993); Hall, "O. Delight Smith's Progressive Era: Labor, Feminism, and Reform in the Urban South," in Nancy A. Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsock, eds., *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism* (Urbana, 1993), 166–98; Hall, "Private Eyes, Public Women: Images of Class and Sex in the Urban South, Atlanta, Georgia, 1913–1915," in Ava Baron, ed., *Work Engendered: Toward a New History of American Labor* (Ithaca, 1991), 243–72; Nancy A. Hewitt, "'The Voice of Virile Labor': Labor Militancy, Community Solidarity, and Gender Identity among Tampa's Latin Workers, 1880–1921," in Baron, ed., *Work Engendered*, 142–67; Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993); Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830–1930* (Chicago, 1970); Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, *New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the Southern States* (New York, 1993).

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workers organized to fight the oppressive hegemony of the business elite;[46] and African Americans' constant struggle against white supremacy made the civil rights movement possible.[47] Instead of lagging behind the rest of the nation, these southerners led the way in efforts to realize the nation's ideals. That they did so on the South's distinctively difficult political terrain made their efforts all the more noteworthy.

The scholarship also extended its analytical reach beyond the Civil War era, where so many previous historians had labored. Reaching further back and further forward in time, historians scoured the record for dramatic disruptions and unexpected continuities that would explain the region's problems. One of the most enduring examples is C. Vann Woodward's *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (1955), which characterized segregation as a relatively recent phenomenon, designed to sustain white supremacy at a time when countervailing forces threatened it. By implication, segregation was a conscious agenda intended to support specific political ends, not an immutable manifestation of natural circumstances and timeless values.[48] Another example is the early work of Eugene D. Genovese, who analyzed the slave South's social, economic, and political structures within a Marxist framework that explained southern distinctiveness as specific historical adaptations to broader, international currents of change.[49] Southern historians applied the same approach to a range of issues, knocking down the conventional pillars of the historiography by making the inevitable contingent. The reassessment of the establishment of slavery is illustrative. Winthrop D. Jordan's *White over Black: American Attitudes Toward*

[46] Cindy Hahamovitch, *The Fruits of Their Labor: Atlantic Coast Farmworkers and the Making of Migrant Poverty, 1870–1945* (Chapel Hill, 1997); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall et al., *Like a Family: The Making of a Southern Cotton Mill World* (Chapel Hill, 1987); Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997); Brian Kelly, *Race, Class, and Power in the Alabama Coalfields, 1908–21* (Urbana, 2001); Robin D. G. Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe : Alabama Communists during the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill, 1990); Robert Rodgers Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth-Century South* (Chapel Hill, 2003); Bryant Simon, *A Fabric of Defeat: The Politics of South Carolina Millhands, 1910–1948* (Chapel Hill, 1998).

[47] Jane Dailey, Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, and Bryant Simon, eds., *Jumpin' Jim Crow: Southern Politics from Civil War to Civil Rights* (Princeton, 2000); Gilmore, *Defying Dixie*; Laurie B. Green, *Battling the Plantation Mentality: Memphis and the Black Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill, 2007); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *Journal of American History*, 91 (March 2005), 1233–63; Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley, 1995).

[48] C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York, 1955).

[49] Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (New York, 1965); Genovese, *The World the Slaveholders Made: Two Essays in Interpretation* (New York, 1969); Genovese, *In Red and Black: Marxian Explorations in Southern and Afro-American History* (New York, 1971); Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1974).

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the Negro, 1550–1812 (1968) and Edmund S. Morgan's *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (1975) both approached slavery not as a given but as a puzzle that required an explanation. Jordan emphasized the intellectual and cultural milieu of early modern Europe; Morgan identified class tensions in the colonies and the labor requirements of colonial planters. Yet both conceived of slavery as a product of the moment, set in motion because of particular circumstances.[50] The outcome could have been different had people then decided on another path. While that past could no longer be changed, its legacy certainly could. That same sensibility structured studies of other events and issues—and still does. The result is a body of scholarship that views southern history as a series of turning points, rather than as a product of a single, defining moment: all roads in southern history no longer lead to and from the Civil War. Southern historians, moreover, no longer see even that conflict as foreordained or inevitable. Southern history now goes in new directions, revealing new possibilities.

If anything, conceptions of southern exceptionalism in this body of scholarship have tied southern history more closely to the nation's history, just as the Revolutionary generation did, although the points of connection are now different. In particular, the emphasis on structures—social, economic, and political—in recent scholarship has revealed new connections not just between the South and the nation but also between the South and the rest of the world. As a result, the stock figures whose presence affirmed the existence of a distinctive southern culture in earlier scholarship now occupy very different roles. Southern slaves are now part of a broader African diaspora, composed of people who were taken from their homes, forced into the slave trade, and scattered across three continents. Southern slaveholders are now part of the intellectual community of the Atlantic world. Their children, who set about industrializing the South, now keep company with aspiring capitalists elsewhere. Southern yeomen are now like subsistence farmers all over the globe who struggled to find their way through the economic thickets of capitalism. Freedpeople are similar to rural laborers in other times and places who made the difficult transition to wage labor in an

[50] Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill, 1968); Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975). Southern history now reaches back in time to include the colonial era more generally, although colonialists' connections to southern history remain tenuous, precisely because the period has been a recent addition to the field. In August 2007 the *Journal of Southern History* addressed this issue directly with a special edition devoted to southern colonial history.

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industrializing economy. So are white southern mill workers, although they undertook that journey under different circumstances than did former slaves. And slavery is now connected, structurally, to inequalities of race, class, and gender that know no regional bounds.[51]

Regional distinctiveness still figures into these analyses, but in the form of amplification or variation: the specific circumstances of the South highlight dynamics found elsewhere or result in interesting variations of them. If anything, those peculiarities make the South more representative in the sense that its features call attention to aspects of history operative in other places but in forms so subtle that they might be missed. Historians have used the South's distinctively oppressive social system, for instance, to explore the historical connections among race, class, and gender. While focused on the South, the implications have extended beyond the region to reshape the fields of African American, labor, and women's history and, ultimately, basic conceptions of political power. What once distinguished the South is now what makes the region representative.

The exceptional South, however, still traps historians. The very notion of exceptionalism provides an easy way out of difficult problems. It functions as a crutch for historians who wish to use the concept as an explanation for what they see in the region. Exceptionalism also serves as a convenient excuse for historians who wish to dismiss southern history as unimportant and unrepresentative. The insistence on keeping the South separate, however, contains the nation's most persistent problems there, locating them in a distinctive southern past. In historiographical terms, that notion of southern exceptionalism leaves

[51] The authors of the literature in notes 42 to 47 draw on these broader analytical frameworks in their work. The literature on emancipation and labor history, in particular, connected race and class. Feminist scholars then built on that foundation to connect gender to those other structures of power. See Peter W. Bardaglio, *Reconstructing the Household: Families, Sex, and the Law in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill, 1995); Nancy Bercaw, *Gendered Freedoms: Race, Rights, and the Politics of Household in the Delta, 1861–1875* (Gainesville, 2003); Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill, 1996); Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill, 1992); Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill, 1988); Noralee Frankel, *Freedom's Women: Black Women and Families in Civil War Era Mississippi* (Bloomington, 1999); Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow*; Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "'The Mind That Burns in Each Body': Women, Rape, and Racial Violence," in Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, eds., *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality* (New York, 1983), 328–49; McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds*; Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (New York, 1994); Susan Eva O'Donovan, *Becoming Free in the Cotton South* (Cambridge, Mass., 2007); Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill, 2009); Schwalm, *Hard Fight for We*; and Diane Miller Sommerville, *Rape and Race in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill, 2004).

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comfortable historical assumptions in place. Segregating the South obviates the need to confront the most difficult truths and contradictions in the nation's past. In political terms, southern exceptionalism performs a similar role, absolving the rest of the country of responsibility for endemic social problems. If the problem is a southern issue, then there is no need to tamper with the broader political culture. Yet recent scholarship has shown that southern history *is* U.S. history. As southern history reminds us, it is a connection that we ignore at our own peril.

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