Southern Culture

Southern Culture
An Introduction

Third Edition

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Contents

List of Figures ix

Introduction xiii

Chapter 1 • The Agrarian South 3

- Introduction 3
- The Birth of the Agrarian Tradition 4
- The Spread of the Agrarian Tradition 7
- The Agrarian Ideal 8
- The Agrarian Tradition before the Civil War 11
- The Transformation of the Agrarian Tradition after the Civil War 16
- The Growth of Towns and Industry 22
- The Decline of Agrarianism during the Modern Era 29

Chapter 2 • Social Class 47

- Social Class in Early Virginia 50
- Social Class before the Civil War 53
- The Planters 54
- The Small Farmers 65
- Poor Whites 70
- Slaves and Free Blacks 72
- Class after the Civil War 74
- Sharecroppers and Millhands 75
- The Middle 85
- Common Values Across Class and Race Lines 89
- The Upper Class: Planters, Merchants, Urban Professionals, and Mill Owners 92
- Class in the Modern Era 107

Chapter 3 • Race 121
Introduction 121
Race in the Western World: A Brief History of a Concept 122
Slavery and Race in the South 125
White Supremacy 133
Making Slaves 134
Slavery and Work 137
Black Culture in a White World 141
The End of Slavery and the Rise of Jim Crow 146
The Worlds Change Orbits: The Civil Rights Movement and the Death of Jim Crow 163
Race in the Contemporary South 175

Chapter 4 • Family and Gender in the South 181
Family in Early Virginia 183
Family, Marriage, and Gender before the Civil War: Whites 186
Family, Marriage, and Gender before the Civil War: Blacks 199
Family, Marriage, and Gender after the Civil War 204
Family and Gender in the Contemporary Era 215

Chapter 5 • Religion 225
Introduction 225
Religion in the Early South 227
The Great Awakening and the Introduction of Evangelical Protestantism to the South 231
The Triumph of Evangelical Protestantism 241
African-American Christianity 249
The Sanctified Church 256
The "Shared" Religion of the South 261
Modernism versus "The Old Time Religion" 269
The Black Church and the Quest for Social Justice 273
Modernism versus Conservatism: The Culture Wars 276
Conclusion 286

Chapter 6 • Politics 289
Introduction 289
Politics in Early Virginia 292
The Patrician Tradition of Politics 292
Patrician Politics in Crisis 295
The Populist Challenge 300
The Democrats Destroy the Populists and Break the Republican Party 305
The Patrician Tradition in Populist Clothes 309
Populism Today 313
The Progressive Tradition 315
Civil Rights and the Transformation of Contemporary Southern Politics 319
The Ascendancy of the Republican Party 322
Women Become Major Political Players 332
Conclusion 333

Chapter 7 • The Creative South: What People Made with Their Hands 339
Introduction: Creativity and Culture 339
The Cuisine of the South 342
The "Core" Cuisine 343
Pottery: From Kitchen Containers to Art 367
Architecture 373
Furniture 388
Quilts 392
Basket Making 393
Painting and Other Visual Arts 395

Chapter 8 • The Creative South: Words, Notes, Myths, and Icons 407
Introduction 407
Southern Dialect 408
Southern Music 411
Southern Music: The White Tradition 411
Southern Music: The Black Tradition 423
Literature 450
Icons, Myths, Symbols 468

Conclusion • Will Southern Culture Survive? Three Views. 477

Bibliography 485

Index 527

List of Figures

Introduction
Introduction: House xiii
Figure I.1: The South and the Nation xv

Chapter 1 Agrarian South
Introduction: Tobacco field 3
Figure 1.1: Tenant houses in the Mississippi Delta 17
Figure 1.2: Plowing with a Mule
(Photo courtesy of *Henderson* [NC] *Daily Dispatch)* 20
Figure 1.3: South Henderson mill village 25
Figure 1.4: Tractors replace mules
(Photo courtesy of *Henderson* [NC] *Daily Dispatch*) 31
Figure 1.5: Atlanta 36
Figure 1.6: Hilton Head 37

Chapter 2 Class
Introduction: Belles
(Photo courtesy of the *Henderson* [NC] *Daily Dispatch*) 47
Figure 2.1: Cooleemee plantation house 56
Figure 2.2: Furniture workers in Statesville, North Carolina
(Photograph courtesy of Wendy Lapish) 77
Figure 2.3: Mr. Bost's Café (Photo courtesy of Wendy Lapish) 82
Figure 2.4: The Citadel 104
Figure 2.5: A North Carolina State University football game 115
Figure 2.6: Terpsichorean Society debutante ball
(Photograph courtesy of Helen Holt) 118

Chapter 3 Race
Introduction: Man holding child (Photograph courtesy of Janis Evans) 121
Figure 3.1: Plantation overseer, Mississippi Delta
(Lange, Dorothea, photographer, "Plantation overseer."
Photograph. Library of Congress: American Memory:
America from the Great Depression to World War II,
Black and White Photographs from the FSA- OWI Collection,
1935–1945. http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-
bin/query/D?fsaall:46:./temp/~ammem_GPRu:) 159

Figure 3.2: W.E.B. Du Bois (Van Vechten, Carl, Photographer, "W.E.B. Du Bois." Photograph. Library of Congress: Carl Van Vechten Photographs Collection. http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/i?ammem/van:@field(NUMBER+@band(van+5a51944)):displayType=1:m856sd=van:m856sf=5a51944) 162

Chapter 4 Gender

Introduction: Suppertime (Wolcott, Marion Post, photographer, "Some of the Wilkins clan at dinner." Photograph. Library of Congress: American Memory: America from the Great Depression to World War II, Black and White Photographs from the FSA-OWI Collection, 1935–1945. http://memory.loc.gov/cgibin/query/I?fsaall:43:./temp/~ammem_adwG::displayType=1:m856sd=fsa:m856sf=8c11102:@@@) 181

Figure 4.1: Boyd Jones family, Greene County, Georgia (Delano, Jack, photographer, "Boyd Jones Family, Greene County, Georgia." Photograph. Library of Congress: American Memory: America from the Great Depression to World War II, Black and White Photographs from the FSA-OWI Collection, 1935–1945. http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/I?fsaall:1:./temp/~ammem_IPKP::displayType=1:m856sd=fsa:m856sf=8c07628:@@@) 206

Chapter 5 Religion

Introduction: Rural church 225

Figure 5.1: Singing in church, Greene County, Georgia (Delano, Jack, photographer, "Union Point, Greene County, Georgia. Community sing in the Negro Church" Photograph. Library of Congress: American Memory: America from the Great Depression to World War II, Black and White Photographs from the FSA-OWI Collection, 1935–1945. http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/D?fsaall:5:./temp/~ammem_Wfiv:) 255

Figure 5.2: Germantown Baptist Church, Memphis, Tennessee 283

Chapter 6 Politics

Introduction: President Jimmy Carter greets a young Bill Clinton, 12/01/1978 (White House staff photograph, Carter White House Photographs Collection, Jimmy Carter Library.) 289

Chapter 7 The Creative South: What People Made with Their Hands

Introduction: Woman making biscuits (Wolcott, Marion Post, photographer, "One of the Wilkins family making biscuits for dinner." Photograph. Library of Congress: American Memory: America from the Great Depression to World War II, Black and White Photographs from the FSA-OWI Collection, 1935–1945. http://memory.loc.gov/ cgibin/query/I?fsaall:56:./temp/~ammem_Xr2T::displayType=1:m856sd=fsa:m856sf=8c11154:@@@ 339
Figure 7.1: Payne's Bar B Q 362
Figure 7.2: Brennan's 363
Figure 7.3: Salt glazed pottery (Pottery from the Tom Hendrickson Collection) 370
Figure 7.4: Pot by Dave Drake (Pottery from the Tom Hendrickson Collection) 371
Figure 7.5: Pot by Pam Owens 373
Figure 7.6: Drayton Hall 376
Figure 7.7: Charleston single house 378
Figure 7.8: Oak Alley (Photograph courtesy of Brigitte Fitzgerald) 379
Figure 7.9: Double pen style house with an enclosed addition dogtrot 381
Figure 7.10: Baptist church designed by Jacob Holt, Wake Forest, North Carolina 382
Figure 7.11: Victorian shotguns, New Orleans 383
Figure 7.12: Art Deco city government building, Asheville, North Carolina 385
Figure 7.13: W.H. secretary (Tom Hendrickson Collection) 391
Figure 7.14: Charleston sea grass basket 394
Figure 7.15: Ricky Pearce's vision 405

Chapter 8 The Creative South: Words, Notes, Myths, and Icons

Introduction: Blues Alley 407
Figure 8.1: Blues artist Huddie Ledbetter (Leadbelly) and Martha Ledbetter (Lomax, John and Ruby, photographers, "Huddie Ledbetter and Martha Promise Ledbetter. Wilton, Conn., Feb. 1935." Photograph. Library of Congress: The John and Ruby Lomax 1939 Southern States Recording Collection. http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/I?lomaxbib:3:./temp/~ammem_UnWR::displayType=1:m856sd=ppmsc:m856sf=00660:@@@ 432
Figure 8.2: Couple Jitterbugging in Clarksdale, Mississippi jook joint (Wolcott, Marion Post, photographer, "Couple Jitterbugging in Clarksdale, Mississippi jook joint." Photograph. Library of Congress: American Memory: America from the Great Depression to World War II, Black and White

Photographs from the FSA-OWI Collection, 1935–1945. http://memory.loc.gov/cgi -bin/query/D?fsaall:76: ./temp/~ammem_UoqX:) 433
Figure 8.3: Stax Museum (The entrance is a reconstruction of the original Stax building façade.) 447
Figure 8.4: Zora Neale Hurston (Van Vechten, Carl, Photographer, "Zora Neale Hurston." Photograph. Library of Congress: Carl Van Vechten Photographs Collection. http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/I?van:1:./temp/~ammem_HkB9: :displayType=1:m856sd=van:m856sf=5a52142:@@@v) 455
Figure 8.5: Richard Wright (Van Vechten, Carl, Photographer, "Richard Wright." Photograph. Library of Congress: Carl Van Vechten Photographs Collection. http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/i?ammem/van:@field(NUMBER+@band(van+5a52815)):displayType=1:m856sd=van:m856sf=5a52815) 457
Figure 8.6: William Faulkner (Van Vechten, Carl, Photographer, "William Faulkner." Photograph. Library of Congress: Carl Van Vechten Photographs Collection. http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/I?van:4:./temp/~ammem_NB8e::displayType=1:m856sd=van:m856sf=5a51970:@@@) 459
Figure 8.7: Confederate memorial, Greenwood, Mississippi, court house 472
Figure 8.8: Elvis's grave at Graceland 474
Figure 8.9: Robert Johnson's grave 475
Figure 8.10: Stone Mountain 476

Conclusion

Mountains 477

Introduction

I wish I was in the land of cotton,
Old times there are not forgotten,
Look away! Look away! Look away! Dixie land.
From "Dixie"

The lazy, laughing South
With blood on its mouth;
The sunny-faced South,
Beast-strong,
Idiot-brained;
The child-minded South
Scratching in the dead fire's ashes
For a Negro's bones.
Cotton and the moon,
Warmth, earth, warmth,
The sky, the sun, the stars,
The magnolia-scented South.

From "The South" by Langston Hughes

From the very beginning the South was different. The source and significance of this "differentness" has been argued about, debated, and discussed for two hundred years. Various explanations have been offered to explain what makes the South uniquely different from the rest of the country: the presence of slavery and later segregation; the importance of agriculture; defeat in war (the Civil War); a sort of inborn conservatism; the unique ethnic origins of inhabitants of the South; and even the weather. It's a popular topic: a veritable industry—books, lectures, videos, conferences—has arisen in modern times to not only "explain" the South but also to prophesy its imminent demise or survival as a regional cultural entity. Aside from the inherent interest in all of this—at least to those who are interested—why bother? Some differences between people do not much matter—the English drink tea for breakfast while most Americans prefer coffee—but the differences between the South and the rest of the nation **have** mattered—the Civil War representing the most significant example of this. Indeed, from the very beginning, the nation's politics have been shaped by regional differences. Journalist Peter Applebome has made a convincing case in *Dixie Rising* that the contemporary South has finally put the defeat in the Civil War behind it and is now a "rising" region that is "putting its fingerprints on almost every aspect of the nation's soul, from race, to politics, to culture, to values."[1] If this is the case, both Southerners and non-Southerners alike should understand the culture of the South to better understand what the national culture may be becoming. Certainly if one is a Southerner, it is well, as the ancient Greeks told us, to "know thyself."

Where Is the South?

While there is some dispute about the precise borders of the South, most Americans would agree that it is in the southern half of the United States and perhaps more precisely in the southeastern corner of the US. Then things get murky. Where does the region stop in the West? No one considers New Mexico "Southern"; some would argue that Texas is part of the South while others argue that it is more Western than Southern. Other areas like Miami may be indisputably part of the region geographically speaking, but today don't seem particularly "Southern" as that term is popularly understood. Most people who are interested in the issue of mapping the South start with the eleven states of the former Confederacy (the band of states stretching from Virginia to Texas and including Tennessee and Arkansas). Kentucky, Missouri, West Virginia (once a part of Virginia) and Maryland—slaveholding states and regions be-

1. Peter Applebome, *Dixie Rising: How the South is Shaping American Values, Politics, and Culture* (San Diego, New York, and London, 1997), 22.

fore the Civil War that did not secede from the Union—are also often included as part of the South. As border states, these states always were crossroads of values and customs, and today Missouri seems to have become more "Midwestern" in its values and allegiances than Southern, and parts of Maryland seem to have become part of the "Northeast." Despite the imprecision, this list of states gives us a good working definition of where the South "is," recognizing, of course, that what we are interested in here is not geography but culture. Indeed, it is culture that gives meaning to the term "the South."[2]

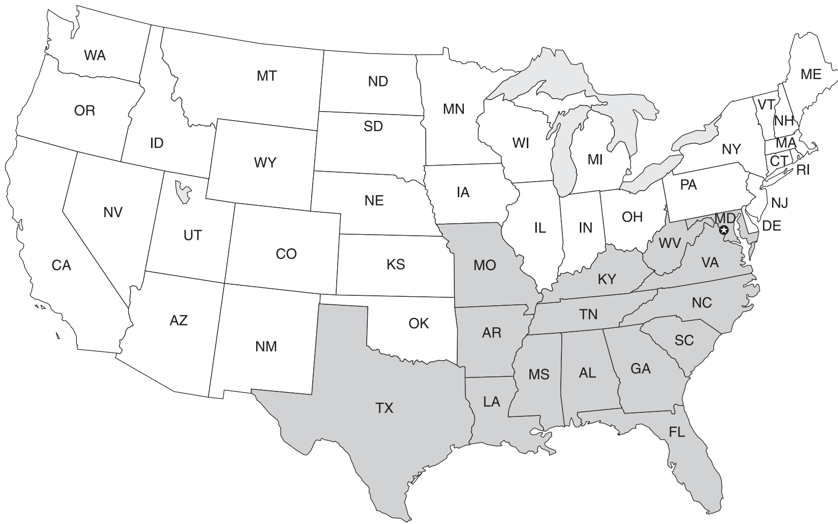

Figure I.1 The South and the Nation

What is culture? Culture is the shared values, behaviors (ways of doing things), and material creations (clothing styles, architecture, tools, art, etc.) that define a society and distinguish one society from another. We create culture, and culture creates us. Cultures vary tremendously, as anyone who has traveled knows firsthand. Cultures are normally created by people who live in proximity to each other—hence the connection to geography—and are shaped by a variety of factors—climate, resources, population density, presence or absence of external threats, and even geography itself may be a factor as some scholars have suggested. [3] In all societies of any size, subcultures are to

2. John Shelton Reed has explored this topic at length in several essays. One of the best—"The South: What Is It? Where Is It?" is found in *My Tears Spoiled My Aim and Other Reflections on Southern Culture* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1993), 5–28.

3. See Jared M. Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1997).

be found. Subcultures are variations of a culture—the values, behaviors, and material creations of some groups differ from those commonly found in the dominant culture. Sociologists once believed that mass society—a term used to describe the kind of society produced by industrialization, urbanization and the growth of mass communication, transportation and universal education—would gradually eliminate subcultures.[4] Certainly strip malls and franchise restaurants and the pervasive influence of the automobile have made one area of the country look more and more like another, but subcultures seem to be persisting.

The South, then, is a subculture of the broader national culture, and, complicated though it may be, subcultures are to be found within the South, too. This is not surprising: the South is a large region consisting of many subregions—coastal plains, mountains, swamps, deltas, and piedmont, with a varied climate ranging from the nearly tropical climate of southern Florida to the decidedly "Northern" climate (short summers and long winters) of northern Virginia, and differing patterns of settlement and development. Thanks to the growing interest in ethnic cuisines, one of the better known subcultures in the South is the Cajun culture of Louisiana. The Cajuns are descendants of a group of French-speaking immigrants expelled from Acadia (now called Nova Scotia) in Canada by the British in the 1700s. Many still speak a unique version of French and their Catholicism, spicy cuisine, and celebratory attitude about life and its pleasures set them apart from most of the rest of the South. Where else in the region do people gather Saturday morning to eat, drink, dance, and listen to music, sometimes well into the night? Mountain folk constitute another well-known subculture, perhaps most noted for birthing the country music industry. The Gullah people—descendants of slaves who speak a unique dialect and live in coastal areas in South Carolina and Georgia—are another. Still another are the "O'cockers"—residents of the Outer Banks' island of Ocracoke (North Carolina) who are noted for their colorful dialect and terms. (For example, they call off island folks "dingbatters.")[5] Along with these variations in Southern culture, there may also be "degrees" of "Southerness." Indeed, sociologist John Reed has studied this issue for years and has even developed a diagram of the region charting how "Southern" different areas of the region are.[6]

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4. See John Shelton Reed's discussion of this issue in *The Enduring South: Subcultural Persistence in Mass Society* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1972), 1–2. William Kornhauser's *The Politics of Mass Society* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1959) is the most famous exploration of the mass society thesis.

5. Walt Wofram and Natalie Schilling-Estes, *Hoi Toide on the Outer Banks: The Story of the Ocracoke Brogue* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 41, 45.

6. See Chapter 2, "Southerners: Who, What and Where," in John S. Reed's *The Enduring South: Subcultural Persistence in Mass Society* and Chapter 4, "The Heart of Dixie," in Reed, *One South: An Ethnic Approach to Regional Culture* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).

Historian James Cobb would agree; he has argued that the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta is *The Most Southern Place on Earth*.[7] Reed has found a waning of "Southerness" in a number of values and preferences over the years but still believes a number of unique cultural characteristics persist in the region that distinguish it from the rest of the country.

The Creators of Southern Culture

Southern culture (we'll use the term culture in this book rather than subculture) began with four major groups that initially settled the region and contributed distinct cultural influences to the evolving Southern culture. The four groups were Native Americans; West Africans; settlers from the south of England; and settlers from the area of the British Isles bordering the Irish Sea. This last group is usually called "Scotch-Irish" although some now use the term Scots-Irish to be politically correct. (The Scots say Scotch is a drink, not a people.) Many of these settlers were Scots who had initially migrated to Ireland, but as historian David Hackett Fischer has persuasively argued, the group also included English settlers from northern England and Scots from southern Scotland. The major influence on Southern culture would come from the migrants from West Africa and the British Isles who migrated here in the 1600s and 1700s. These migrants brought values and traditions with them that influenced, in subtle and often profound ways, the creation of a new culture in a new land. While the rest of the nation received a steady infusion of new immigrants throughout the 1800s and the 1900s, migration **into** the South largely concluded by the end of the 1700s and would only resume on a significant scale in the 1960s and 1970s. So a fairly stable population was creating this regional culture.

Native Americans (the term American Indian is still in use, too) were the first to settle the region. Native Americans were migrants from Asia and came to the Americas by way of what is today Alaska. They migrated southward and eventually eastward over the course of many centuries. The earliest documented Native American in the South lived in Florida about 12,800 years ago.[8] By about 700 BC, a particular pattern of Native American culture called Woodland had arisen in the South—a region now climatically similar to what it is today—and as historians Theda Purdue and Michael Green note, this tradition would persist "until well after the European invasion that began in the six-

7. James Cobb, *The Most Southern Place on Earth: The Mississippi Delta and the Roots of Regional Identity* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

8. Theda Perdue and Michael D. Green, *The Columbia Guide to American Indians of the Southeast* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 20–22.

teenth century."[9] Woodland people belonged to tribes, each with a distinct language, and typically lived in small villages. Over time their cultures evolved and became more sedentary and less dependent on hunting and gathering and more dependent on agriculture. Women were the farmers while men hunted and fished. By about 1200 AD, cultivated corn had become, for most people in the South, a major part of the diet. Beans and squash were two other commonly grown staples.

Perdue and Green argue that the Woodland cultures were waning when Europeans were first setting foot in the Americas, and the Mississippian cultures were predominant in much of the region. Mississippian people are sometimes known as "moundbuilders" because of the large earth mounds they constructed in many of their villages. These mounds were topped by buildings used for government and religious purposes. The Mississippian tribes were more involved in trade than neighboring Woodland tribes, and some of their towns were quite large. They engaged in "cleared field" cultivation of corn, they lived in square houses (their neighbors built circular homes), and they crafted more delicate pottery in a wider range of shapes than their neighbors. They had elaborate chiefdoms and fairly complex social hierarchies as compared to the more egalitarian social structures of most Woodland peoples.[10]

Native Americans of the South first encountered Europeans in the early decades of the sixteenth century when Spanish expeditions led by such men as Ponce De Leon and Hernando de Soto began exploring the region. It is difficult today to determine how many Native Americans lived in the South at the time of the initial contact with Europeans, but in excess of one million seems a reasonable beginning point. Over the next two hundred years, disease and war took a tremendous toll, and by the first census the newly created United States conducted in 1790, the native population was a fraction of what it had been. In North and South Carolina east of the Appalachian Mountains, one scholar put the estimate at 600 survivors.[11] In the 1820s and 1830s, President Andrew Jackson attempted to "remove" the small numbers of Native Americans who still remained in the eastern United States to land west of the Mississippi, a policy that led to the "Trail of Tears" and even more deaths. Members of some Southern tribes successfully fought "removal," most notably the Cherokee in the mountains of North and South Carolina and the Seminole in Florida. Other Indian people who were able to remain in the East assimilated into white and black culture, took English and Scottish and Irish names, and lived as their neighbors lived. But interestingly, even though they assimilated, many retained some degree of Native American identity, sometimes creating a new tribal

9. *Ibid*., 25.
10. *Ibid*., 27–32.
11. *Ibid*, 40–41.

name to identify themselves. Perhaps the most well-known of these groups are the Lumbee of North Carolina. The Lumbee are an amalgam of the descendants of Native American people who lived in the southeastern part of the state. While sharing values and customs and even ancestry with local blacks and whites, the Lumbee still have retained a separate cultural identity and have been and are viewed by their neighbors as a distinct group of people. Groups similar to the Lumbee are to be found throughout the South.

Given the virtual annihilation of the Native American population in the South and the marginalization of the small numbers that remained, Native Americans have had the smallest influence on the region's culture as it developed and spread. Certainly their influence can be seen in many place names and in the region's cuisine, particularly its reliance on corn.

While the Spanish established the first permanent European settlement in the South at St. Augustine in Florida in 1585, migrants from the British Isles, by dint of sheer numbers, would come to dominate the region. English settlers established a short-lived colony on the island of Manteo (on the coast of present-day North Carolina) in the 1580s and later (1607) a settlement that would last on the banks of the James River in the newly established Virginia Colony. This settlement, Jamestown, began to grow after a rocky start, and by the mid-1600s, English settlements had spread throughout the coastal plain of the Virginia colony.

The settlers streaming to Virginia in the 1600s were primarily from the region of England south and west of London, historian David Hackett Fischer tells us in *Albion's Seed*. Fischer has argued persuasively that the regional culture of this area, carried to the New World by the migrants, would profoundly shape the culture of the Chesapeake—a region including coastal Virginia and Maryland—and ultimately the rest of the South. As he notes, "Both regions [the Chesapeake and southern England] were marked by deep and pervasive inequalities, by a staple agriculture and rural settlement patterns, by powerful oligarchies of large landowners with Royalist politics and an Anglican faith."[12] In southern England a small landed gentry owned large estates worked by landless tenants and laborers. Migrants to Virginia would recreate this same system with a small landed elite—derived from the gentry class in England—and a large pool of servants drawn from the landless tenants and laborers of southern England. While the settlers of New England and Pennsylvania brought with them a religion of dissent (Quakerism and Puritanism) and came to America to escape religious prosecution, settlers coming to Virginia belonged to the state-sponsored Church of England (Anglican) and established that faith as the official faith of Virginia. Fischer argues that the unique Southern dialect has its roots in the regional dialects

12. David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 246.

of southern England. In both Virginia and in Sussex County, England, for example, many people would have understood what "moonshine," "mess of greens," and "dis" (this) and "dat" (that) meant. Most residents of Hampshire County, England, and Virginia would probably have understood the meaning of such words as "chitlins" (intestines) and "passel" (bunch).[13]

In addition to settling coastal Virginia and Maryland, English colonists settled the coastal plains of the Carolinas and Georgia and later pushed into the Piedmont. Rivers, towns, counties and streets in this region were often named after English people and places. A small stream of English slaveholding planters migrated from the Caribbean to South Carolina and Georgia. Charleston and Savannah are today noted for their unique architecture, which was influenced by Caribbean building styles brought by these migrants.

The migration from what Fischer calls the border region of the British Isles—southern Scotland, northern Ireland, and northern England—came in waves, beginning in the late 1600s. These migrants (we'll call them Scots-Irish in this book) left in search of opportunity, and by the end of the 1700s in excess of 250,000 of them had arrived in America. They tended to be young, they came in family groups, and many came from the middling ranks of society—small landowners, tenant farmers and farm laborers, and small tradesmen—with a smattering from the upper ranks of landowners.[14] The land they left was anything but prosperous. The typical lowland Scot struggled to survive on a stony plot of land, huddled around a peat fire at night, the smoke billowing through a hole cut into the roof of the tiny one-room hut he and his family called home. He ate gruel (oats and water) for breakfast and for supper (the evening meal) fresh mutton and sometimes beef in the summer and salted mutton or beef in the winter. He liked his whiskey when he could get it.[15] Rising rents on the land that most worked as tenants (the so-called rack rent), drought, and the unpopular religious policies of the British government pushed many toward the plentiful, cheap land of North America.[16] The Scots were Presbyterian in their faith; the northern English, while generally Anglican, were often influenced by the New Light movement that was sweeping the British Isles. This movement fostered meetings in fields and pastures for believers (similar to the camp meeting revivals in America) and emphasized an intense, personal religion that ran counter to the ritual and ceremony of the Anglican Church.[17]

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13. *Ibid.*, 260–261.
14. Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 613–614.
15. Carlton Jackson, *A Social History of the Scotch Irish* (Lanham, NY and London: 1993), 5; Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 727–731.
16. James G. Leyburn, *The Scotch-Irish: A Social History* (Chapel Hill: UNC Press, 1962), 158–166.
17. Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 615–617.

Northern England and southern Scotland were battlegrounds over the centuries as the English fought the Scots for control and Scottish nobles fought each other. Membership in family and clan, the extended family, provided people with a degree of security. Retribution—"an eye for an eye"—was how families and clans protected their own. As one historian noted, "It is the lawlessness and violence of life in Scotland throughout the period from 1400–1600 that made the deepest impression on visitors from more stable countries and that justify one in speaking of the life of Lowland Scotland as barbarous."[18] During the 1600s the English government set out to pacify this "barbarous" region and pacify it it did, but this pacification often involved bloody reprisals that continued the cycle of violence. Ireland was also pacified by the English, and to **permanently** pacify the region, the English began to settle northern Ireland with lowland Scots (from whence we get the term Scots-Irish). Over three hundred years later, many of the descendants of these migrants to Northern Ireland and the native Irish were still at war and still following the principle of an "eye for an eye." The troubled history of the border areas, according to David Hackett Fischer, elevated the warrior over the worker, force over reason, and men over women.[19] This "warrior ethic" stressed a fierce independence, pride, and a sense of equality, but also an equally fierce loyalty to the leadership of one's family and clan.

Most of these migrants would arrive in America at Philadelphia or nearby ports. Many migrated west and settled western Pennsylvania. Others headed south from Lancaster, a small town west of Philadelphia, on the "Great Wagon Road." They settled in the mountain and piedmont areas of Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia. As at home, they established small farms and tended a variety of crops including wheat, corn, and oats. They raised sheep but found that hogs were hardier animals requiring less care than the sheep. Increasingly, pork, not mutton, became their meat of choice. Corn meal mush (grits) would replace the oatmeal mush from home. The contentiousness for which they were famous continued. In the mid-1700s, rebellions broke out in Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and North Carolina in areas dominated by settlers from the border regions of Britain. These rebellions, called Regulator movements, were fueled by a variety of grievances against colonial governments on the coast (Philadelphia, Charlestown, and New Bern) that seemed interested in the backcountry only as a source of tax revenue. The ancient animosity between the Scots and the English was also a major factor because the governments were dominated by Englishmen. The largest of the rebellions took place in North Carolina and was fi-

18. Leyburn, *The Scotch Irish*, 6; see also Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 628–629 and Grady McWhiney, *Cracker Culture: Celtic Ways in the Old South* (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1988), 149–152.

19. Fischer, *Albion's Seed*, 680.

nally crushed when a force commanded by the colonial governor, Lord Tryon, defeated a Regulator army at the battle of Alamance.

The African migration to the South was a forced migration that began in the early 1600s and had largely run its course by the early 1800s. According to one estimate, over five hundred thousand African immigrants would be brought to North America, and most of these people would settle in the South. This is a small fraction of the more than ten million people who were brought in chains to the Caribbean, Brazil, and elsewhere in the Americas as chattel slaves to serve the growing plantations of the New World.[20] The young men and women who made plantation agriculture in the New World feasible and profitable came mostly from long-established agricultural and herding societies of West Africa and to a lesser extent Central Africa. During the sixteenth century, more than a hundred different societies could be found along the West African coast such as the Fon, Yoruba, and Senegambian in the north and the Kongo further south.[21] A variety of political systems could be found in the region from small villages that might form loose alliances with neighboring villages to powerful nations ruled by kings. Between 900 and 1600, three great empires—Ghana, Mali, and Songhai—rose and declined in the western Sudan, a fertile belt of land located just below the Sahara desert which extends well into the interior. Songhai, the last of these empires, was a major mercantile power that thrived on the gold trade. Muhammad Touré was one of its greatest rulers. Touré was a devout Muslim and used his power to spread Islam in his kingdom; Timbuktu, one of the major trading cities in the empire, became a center of Muslim scholarship. Songhai was conquered in the late 1500s by a Moroccan army composed mostly of Spanish mercenaries dispatched south to gain control of the gold trade. The collapse of the empire of Songhai created a political vacuum and a significant increase in the trade in human beings, although some scholars believe the series of droughts that afflicted the region played a more important role in creating the sort of desperate economic and social conditions that would allow the slave trade to flourish. Further south, a number of other states—Benin, Dahomey, Oyo, Kongo to name several of the more prominent ones—flourished at one point or another during the 1500, 1600, and 1700s. The Kingdom of Kongo, for example, ruled an immense region in the Congo River basin in the 1400 and 1500s. This was a kingdom that maintained close ties to Portugal and thrived for a time on the trade with the Portuguese. Nzinga Mbemba, king in the early decades of the 1500s, embraced Portuguese culture and Christianity and tried his best to spread the religion throughout his

20. Herbert S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 210–211.

21. Darlene Clark Hine et al., *The African-American Odyssey* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2000), 13–16.

kingdom. Ultimately, Kongo devolved into warring factions and became a puppet of Portugal, which greatly expanded the highly profitable trade in slaves.[22]

Prior to the arrival of the Europeans, slavery was a part of the social and economic life of most African societies; the Atlantic slave trade evolved slowly from this indigenous slave trade with Europeans—Portuguese, Spanish and later British, Dutch, and French—partnering with African slave traders and rulers such as the king of Dahomey to feed the growing demand for slave laborers in the plantations of the New World.[23] In Africa, there was a "continuum" between slave and free rather than a sharp division. People in slavery arrived at that status in a variety of ways: some were war captives, others had been kidnapped (possibly as war prizes from a neighboring society or village), some had been purchased, others were born slaves, and still others had "pawned" themselves to pay off a debt. What slavery meant varied according to who the enslaved person was, where he lived, and who his master was. Slaves might be concubines, soldiers, craftsmen, administrators, and, of course, laborers. Slavery could be permanent or temporary; a "pawned" man, for example, might be able to pay off his debt and earn his freedom, and a war captive might be freed when the war ended. In Muslim areas, Islamic law recognized certain rights for slaves. In many households, slaves were treated as members of the family and community, although ones without the same rights and privileges as higher status people.[24] As Olaudah Equiano (an Ibo who had been a slave in both West Africa and the West Indies) observed about West African slaves, "their food, clothing, and lodging were nearly the same as the others except they were not permitted to eat with those who were born free." In amazement he noted "how different was their condition from that of the slaves in the West Indies."[25] It was the West African familiarity with slavery, ironically, that made it possible for African and European traders to begin the trade in human cargoes to distant shores where a harsher form of slavery was instituted.

Sophisticated farming systems, hundreds of years old, formed the base of the economies of West African societies. Agricultural production involved the cultivation of millet on the flat savannas and root crops (especially the yam),

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22. *Ibid*., 9–17; Phillip Curtin, "Africa North of the Forest," in Phillip Curtin et al., *African History: From Earliest Times to Independence* (London: Longman, 1995), 168.

23. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 46, 50–72; Phillip Curtin, "The West African Coast in the Era of the Slave Trade," in Curtin, *African History*, 206, 211.

24. John Iliffe, *Honor in African History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 120–121; Paul Lovejoy, "Transformation in Slavery," in Robert O. Collins, ed., *Problems in African History* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2005), 284.

25. Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, edited by Robert J. Allison (1791; Boston : Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, c1995), 40–41.

fruits, and other vegetables in the tropical forests. Rice was also cultivated in some areas. Trade was often conducted by women in lively West African markets.[26] The local community was the basis of social organization, stability, and order in West African societies. Within communities, people were organized along kinship lines, by age with older free people occupying privileged positions, and by gender. Older males supervised the work of the family, organized hunting parties, and performed religious ceremonies. Councils of elders were often an important part of the local and even national political structure. Monogamy was the usual marriage pattern, but important elders were permitted to take a second, third, or fourth wife if they had the means to provide for them. A code of honor governed relationships with dependent people obligated to more powerful people and younger people to older people. In many societies, such as the Yoruba, honor was accorded to a man on the basis of his rank and reputation in the community; a woman earned honor by protecting her virtue and sacrificing for her children.[27]

Art was an important part of the lives of African peoples. Artisans and craftsmen worked with wood, ivory, gold, glass, terra cotta, iron, and clay and made pots, bowls, baskets, sculptures, furniture, masks, textiles, costumes, fly whisks, and wands. Pots, bowls, and baskets were a very practical part of everyday life; art objects like the masks and costumes served an important role in the religious and social rituals of African societies. Music, an important part of religious and social ceremonies and rituals, was polyrhythmic and was composed of layers of "simple and more complex rhythms." Dance was also ceremonial; it adapted to this polyrhythmic musical structure, and exhibited creativity, improvisation, great precision, and coordination. Musical instruments included flutes, a variety of stringed instruments, and many kinds of drums.[28]

People transported to America as slaves brought a variety of religions with them from Africa. Some captives were very likely Christian, some were Muslims, but most African captives practiced a diverse collection of religions unique to their societies. What most of these religions did share in common was an ethos that the world was an organic unity and that humans were part of a "Oneness that bound together all matter, animate and inanimate, all spirits, visible or not."[29] In the Yoruba culture, for example, àshe was a spiritual force

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26. Robert W. July, *A History of the African People* (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1980), 131–132, 135.

27. Iliffe, *Honor in African History*, 67, 80; Lovejoy, "Transformation," 283–285; John Lamphear and Toyin Falola, "Aspects of Early African History," in Phyllis M. Martin and Patrick O'Meara, eds., *Africa* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), 94–95.

28. Patrick R. McNaughton and Diane Pelrine, "African Art" in Martin and O'Meara, *Africa, 223–255;* Ruth Stone, "African Music Performed" in Martin and O'Meara, *Africa,* 257–271; quote p. 264.

29. Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 1978, 58.

that was given to the world by Yoruba Olorun, the supreme deity, and was invested in both living beings—humans, animals, and plants—and the nonliving parts of the natural world—mountains, rivers, etc. The spiritual ideal for a Yoruba was to "become possessed by the spirit of a Yoruban deity," to imbibe, in effect, àshe and let it flow through "one's body."[30] The role of the priests in Yoruba and other West African societies was to help believers reach this state of openness to the almighty and to perform religious ceremonies; they also served as foretellers of the future and as doctors.

Other migrants who arrived in the South in the late 1600s and early1700s included the French and later the Spanish who settled in Louisiana, Germans who traveled south from Lancaster, Pennsylvania and settled in the piedmont region of Virginia and the Carolinas, and the Irish who settled throughout the region. A smattering of other migrants from Europe settled here and there—in the 1700s Charleston received a small stream of French-speaking people and Sephardic Jews, and in the 1800s, New Orleans became home to a significant population of Irish and German immigrants. Small numbers of Greeks and Jews from Central and Eastern Europe established themselves in the towns and cities of the region. Texas was always home to a large population of Spanish-speaking people, and the border between Mexico and Texas was lengthy and porous with people and customs moving back and forth across it with ease.[31] These "other" migrants who settled in the South would constitute a small fraction of the population that was dwarfed in size and cultural influence by the descendants of the migrants from southern England, the British borderlands, and West Africa who came in the 1600s and 1700s.

Migrant streams mixed; some Scots-Irish migrated to coastal areas while English settlers on the coast moved west. Scots-Irish married English, and African women bore the children of men from both groups. In the years before and after the Revolution, settlers, led by such men as Daniel Boone, crossed over the Appalachians and established settlements in Tennessee and later Kentucky. Later still, in the early and middle decades of the nineteenth century, settlers from Virginia and South Carolina and North Carolina and Georgia pushed into Florida, Mississippi, Alabama, Texas, Louisiana, and Arkansas. Wars were fought to protect and promote this migration: wars with Native

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30. Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 5–9, quote p. 9.

31. Bennett H. Wall et al, *Louisiana: A History* (Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davidson Inc., 2008), 32–35, 67; Randall Miller, "A Church in Cultural Captivity: Some Speculations on Catholic Identity," in Randall Miller and Jon L. Wakelyn, eds., *Catholics in the Old South* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1983), 29; Eli N. Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1997), 49; Lee Shai Weisback, "East European Immigrants and the Image of Jews in the Small Town South," in Mark K. Bauman, ed., *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 108–110.

American tribes, a war with the Spanish in Florida, and several wars with Mexico in Texas. In the 1850s a guerrilla war broke out between Missouri men who supported slavery ("Bushwackers") and opponents of slavery (including John Brown) in the border state of Kansas. The expansiveness of the South—the desire of its people to settle in new and far off places—is often considered by many historians one of the causes (along with the expansiveness of the North) of the Civil War.

For a hundred years following the Civil War, migration was primarily one way: out of the region. Tens of thousands of blacks left the South for Kansas in the 1880s in the so-called Exoduster migration. The big out-migration of blacks, however, really began around the First World War, picked up momentum during the Depression and finally tapered off in the 1960s. Millions of Southern blacks left the South for the Northeast, Midwest, and far West. Several million whites left the region, too, more often making their way to the Midwest and far West. At the same time, millions of other Southerners, black and white, left the land and moved to the growing cities and towns of the South. By the 1970s many of the rural areas of the South looked like wartime evacuation zones with expanses of crop land gone to weeds and scrub pine, small towns full of boarded up stores, and abandoned, collapsing houses begging to be bulldozed.[32]

Migration **into** the South began again on a significant scale in the 1950s and early 1960s from two regions: Cuba and the Northeast. The northeastern migration was made up largely of retirees from the cities of the North who were drawn to the east coast of Florida by its sunny weather and beaches. Railroad entrepreneur Samuel Flagler had actually gotten the east coast of Florida off the ground as a tourist mecca in the early years of the twentieth century. Flagler had constructed a railroad line linking the eastern coast of Florida to the cities of the Northeast and had built a string of luxurious hotels up and down the coast. By the 1950s retirees were coming to stay permanently and began packing the highrises going up on Miami Beach and other resort communities on the coast. Migrants brought a piece of northeastern big city life to the formerly sleepy south of Florida. Big name acts—Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra, and others—appeared at Miami Beach hotels, and for a time Jackie Gleason's variety television show broadcast from Miami. Stores and restaurants catered to the tastes and interests of the northeastern migrants. Jewish retirees, for example, could eat real New York-style kosher delicatessen food at Wolfie Cowan's Rascal House restaurant, and gamblers could find racetracks—dog and horse—just like home. In the 1960s this stream of migrants was joined by another; Cuban exiles escaping Fidel Castro's communist revolution poured

32. Jack Temple Kirby, *Rural Worlds Lost: The American South, 1920–1960* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), xv.

into Miami and south Florida. The Cubans brought their own distinctive culture with them and began the transformation of Miami into a Latino city.

In the 1960s a new stream of migrants began trickling into the South; by the 1980s this trickle had become a flood. This migration—millions strong by the early 1990s—was made up of people from the Midwest and the Northeast who came south to work in the jobs created by the region's expanding economy. While parts of the Northeast and Midwest were in economic decline (a swath of the region was called the "Rust Belt"), the economies of portions of the South—Houston, Dallas, Atlanta, Charlotte—were growing, even flourishing. Joining this stream of internal migrants into the South was a growing migration from foreign countries. Foreign-born residents of the South increased from 1.8% of the population in 1960 to 5.4% of the population in 1990 and jumped to 9.1% in 2000. Asia was one source of migrants: migrants from India, Pakistan, China, and other parts of Asia settled in the growing metropolitan regions and even the small towns in the region. The largest foreign migration into the region, however, was the growing throng of people coming from the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. As we saw, this began with the Cuban migration to South Florida in the 1960s. For most of the region, Mexico was the largest source of foreign immigrants. There had always been a significant movement of people from Mexico across the border into Texas and other Southwestern states; by the 1970s a sizeable stream of Mexican migrant workers began moving up the east coast of the United States planting and harvesting the crops of farms from Florida to New England. Some began to settle in cities and small rural communities, and these numbers grew even more in the 1990s. Today it is rare to find even the smallest town in the rural South without at least one bodega or tienda that caters to this growing population.[33]

Creating Southern Culture

The English, Scots-Irish, and African migrants to the South who arrived in the 1600 and 1700s established the basic patterns of Southern culture by the late 1700s, and these patterns proved to be remarkably resistant to change well

33. Campbell J. Gibson and Emily Lennon, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-born Population of the Unites States: 1850–1990," U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population Division (Washington, D.C.: G PO, February, 1999), http:// www.census.gov/popu lation/www/documentation/twps0029/twps0029.html.; "Current Population Survey: Population in U.S. Regions by Sex and Citizenship Status," U.S. Bureau of the Census, Ethnic and Hispanic Statistics Branch, Population Division (Washington, D.C.: GPO, March 2002), Table 1.14, http://www.census.gov/population/socdemo/foreign/ppl-162/tab01-14.pdf.

into the 20th century. The most important pattern was the predominance of farming and rural living and a set of values supporting this agrarian lifestyle. This agrarian pattern dictated much about how the rest of Southern culture developed, and even today, when very few people farm or live the rural lifestyle any more, agrarian traditions still influence the region's culture in all sorts of ways. The next chapter of this book is devoted to this farming, rural pattern known as agrarianism.

Social class also exerted a tremendous influence on the evolving culture of the South. Attitudes about class shaped in southern England and in the border regions of Britain coupled with the appearance early on of race-based slavery would produce a class system that consigned blacks to the bottom and that paradoxically fostered both the idea of equality for whites and large differences between upper and lower class whites in terms of power, privilege and wealth. On the one hand, less affluent whites were generally anything but deferential to the wealthy, and upper class men sometimes affected the speech patterns of the less affluent (even today an educated, affluent man is not considered odd for using the word "ain't") and enjoyed the same outdoor pastimes—hunting and fishing—as their less well-off neighbors. But looked at another way, the South for much of its history has seemed as oppressively class conscious as an "old" European society. Indeed, before the Civil War, English aristocrats apparently felt some kinship for Southern planters and vice versa. Certainly, classes produced their own unique subcultures. Less affluent Southern whites produced a distinctive religion, music (called "country" today), stories, and spoke dialects that set them off from their neighbors. Affluent white Southerners tended to worship in ways that differed from their less affluent neighbors, often spoke their own unique dialects, and by the twentieth century were inclined to spend time at "the club." Because of the power of race, a separate black class system, with its own unique class-based subcultures, coexisted with the white class system. Culturally, the power and influence of class cannot be denied.

Race—the division of the South into white and black—was another major influence on the culture. Slavery created this division, and segregation would maintain it well into the twentieth century. Race for blacks was destiny: it determined where they could live, whom they could marry and socialize with, and where they could work. Rigid rules and laws created by whites defined what was permissible for blacks to say and do. Violators of these rules and laws were dealt with harshly. For the slave, it might be a whipping; after the Civil War, for the black man or woman who violated one of the rules or laws of segregation, it might be a harsh prison sentence or extralegal violence, which in its most extreme form was lynching. For whites, race established a sense of privilege even for the poorest white person. As a consequence of slavery and segregation, blacks and whites developed two versions of Southern culture that coexisted side by side. However, despite the rigid separation of white and

black, whites and blacks and their cultures intermingled and intermixed, each influencing the other and each sharing in the creation of a broader Southern culture. The meaning and impact of race has evolved in contemporary times, but it continues to shape the culture in profound ways.

In modern post-industrial societies, a host of institutions—schools and colleges, families, the mass media, government agencies, churches, groups like the Boy Scouts and the Kiwanis—define and transmit the culture. In the agrarian society that was the South for so long, it was the family that did this with little competition from any other institution save the church. Until the twentieth century, the South was mostly rural with few cities, and many Southerners lived on farms. Each farm was like a small isolated kingdom unto itself, and, particularly on small farms, family members worked, socialized, and played primarily with other family members. Often, only the head of the household had much regular contact with those outside the family. One's values, notions of how to behave, social status and even one's identity came primarily from the family. The prominence of the male head of the household in this traditional family has led many to refer to the family structure as patriarchal (male dominated), and, until recently, the laws and customs of the South promoted and supported this role for the male. For blacks, family and gender roles would play out differently; slavery and segregation would have a tremendous impact on the black family and gender roles. Understanding family and gender and how Southern families and gender roles have changed are keys to understanding the culture of the South.

Politics in the South, as with politics anywhere, reflected the culture, and in turn shaped it. Given the importance of race, not surprisingly Southern politics devoted a considerable amount of attention to it. Indeed, slavery and later segregation were as much political creations as they were social and economic creations. Even today, race is a topic of most Southern political campaigns if only in an unspoken sense as an overwhelmingly white Republican Party contends for power with a multiracial Democratic Party in the region. Class, too, has played an important role in shaping the region's politics and has had a decisive influence on the distinct "styles" of politics, each a creation of a specific era, that have defined the options available to voters on election day. Understanding these styles is a key to understanding contemporary Southern politics and Southern politicians like George W. Bush, Newt Gingrich, and Bill Clinton.

The South is the most overtly Christian region of the country, the most Protestant region of the country, and the most Baptist region of the country. When the Presbyterian churchman James McBride Dabbs wrote his reflection on the South and being a Southerner, he tellingly entitled it *Haunted by God.* (The novelist Flannery O'Conner has also referred to the region as "Christ haunted.") What Dabbs meant by this is that it is a region where religion is pervasive. Understanding the unique brand of Christianity practiced in the South by most people is, therefore, critical to understanding Southern culture.

Finally, certain well-known and not-so-well-known icons, symbols and myths define the South, set it apart from the rest of the nation, and help Southerners make sense of themselves and their history. People understand themselves as different and unique by comparing themselves to others, and these myths and symbols set Southerners apart from the rest of the nation—known collectively in the decades leading up to the Civil War and for over a hundred years later as "the North." The Civil War itself became a myth and a symbol of the South—it was called the "Lost Cause"—and loomed large in the psyches of white Southerners for over one hundred years and played a major role in defining "Southerness." Although it is waning in its influence in the culture as the insularity of the South is eroded by mobility into and out of the region and a rising level of multi-cultural cosmopolitanism, even today, a migrant from the North who offends a native of the region might be denounced as a "damn Yankee," and even today the ceremonial display of the Confederate flag on a government building can draw its passionate defenders. Elvis, moonshine, the cross, the pickup truck, fried chicken, even kudzu, a ubiquitous plant that may grow several feet a day, all represent the region to its inhabitants and outsiders.

Just as important as myths and symbols and institutions in shaping how people understand and define the region's culture are the creative products of Southerners. Building styles, crafts such as pottery-making, cuisine, music—perhaps the South's major creative contribution to the world—story-telling and literature reflect the agrarian heritage of the region as well as the influences of race, class, family, religion, and gender. The cultural products of the South—fried chicken, the Baptist religion, even Elvis—have all, in recent decades, been subject to the same mass production forces that roll over everything in American society for good and ill. These forces, driven by the dollar, seem to be creating a franchised, mass produced, electronically mediated culture that varies only in the consumption patterns of different market segments. So a form of fried chicken joins pizza and hamburgers in the pantheon of American franchise restaurant food, and Elvis is a major interior design element in the franchised nostalgia of rock and roll restaurants found all over the globe. The Baptist faith is still primarily a Southern faith, but PowerPoint, praise songs, and the influences of a national conservative movement seem to be emptying it of "Southerness." But people have been predicting the decline or disappearance of the South as a meaningful entity for a long time, and the South's dogged resistance to change has an equally long history.

Southerners and non-Southerners alike have different perceptions of the region and its culture. For some, it is the last bastion of traditional values—"old times there are not forgotten"—while for others, the progress of the region is what's important and some traditions—slavery and segregation, for example—are best forgotten. Getting at the truth about the region's culture is difficult—the truth is, after all, often elusive—but the "searching for" is as important as the finding and has its own rewards.