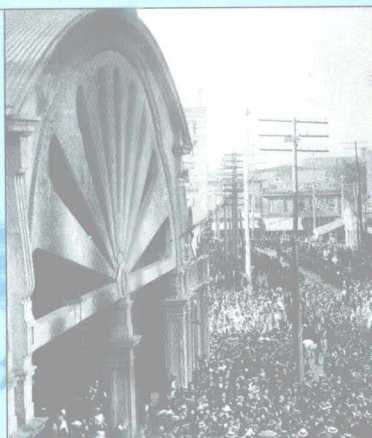


# Southern Hospitality

Tourism and the Growth of Atlanta



Harvey K. Newman

*Southern  
Hospitality*

TOURISM AND  
THE GROWTH OF ATLANTA

HARVEY K. NEWMAN

The University of  
Alabama  
Press

Tuscaloosa and  
London

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Tuscaloosa, Alabama 34587-0380  
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The paper on which this book is printed meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Science—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Newman, Harvey K.  
Southern hospitality : tourism and the growth of Atlanta /  
Harvey K. Newman.  
p. cm.  
Includes bibliographical references (p. ) and index.

ISBN 0-8173-0961-6 (alk. paper)  
ISBN 0-8173-0972-1 (paper : alk. paper)  
1. Tourist industry—Georgia—Atlanta—History. 2. Hospitality  
industry—Georgia—Atlanta—History. 3. Heritage  
tourism—Georgia—Atlanta—History. 4. Atlanta (Ga.)—Social life and  
customs—History. I. Title.  
G155.U6 N49 1999  
338.4'791758231—dc21  
98-58014

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data available

## *Preface*

ONE CAN LEARN ABOUT THE CULTURE OF A REGION from both experience and study. I was fortunate to be born and raised in the South, where I learned the lessons of hospitality in a household that represented both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line. This gave me a perspective on the South that was shaped by the region but also was sufficiently detached to observe its way of life with fascination. My ambivalent perspective toward the South was reinforced by the experience of being an outsider in the small North Carolina town where my family lived for most of my youth. In a community with no hotels, our house seemed like a stopover for the constant stream of people who received bed and board from my family. From this experience, I developed the interest in hospitality that fired my curiosity for this project.

My experience had to be combined with a great deal of research. In the process, I was assisted by colleagues and students at Georgia State University. Their suggestions and questions helped me along the way. One former colleague, Dr. Harold Davis, was especially encouraging with his comments on the early drafts of the book. This friend, who was so generous with his time and gracious in his hospitality, did not live to see the completion of my work; however, I will always appreciate his kindness. Another person who was invaluable in the completion of this work was

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Martha Martin, administrative coordinator in the Department of Public Administration and Urban Studies. Other help was provided by the Georgia State University librarians in the reference, interlibrary loan, and circulation departments. The librarians at the Atlanta History Center and the Atlanta–Fulton County Library’s African-American Research Center also provided much-needed research assistance. Special thanks are also offered for the patience and assistance shown by Nicole Mitchell and the staff at The University of Alabama Press.

My deepest gratitude goes to my family, each member of which has made special contributions to this project. My wife’s mother, Elsie Bane Hewitt, is a member of our household and has provided much of the Southern food that gave me both sustenance and inspiration. To my son, Nathan, I extend my thanks for his devotion to Southern culture—its food, art, and music. Most of all, I thank my wife, Patricia Hewitt Newman, for her love and unfailing support as well as her skills as an editor. Without her help, I would not have understood Southern hospitality; and, so, to her this book is dedicated.

*Southern Hospitality*

TOURISM AND  
THE GROWTH OF ATLANTA

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## *Introduction*

URBAN SCHOLAR LEWIS MUMFORD HAS REMARKED that one finds in the history of a city the concentration of the culture of a community. He acknowledged the role that larger influences such as economics and politics might have on an urban area, but emphasized that the city “accumulates and embodies the heritage of a region.”<sup>1</sup> This implies an ongoing relationship between a city and its rural hinterland. The urban and rural are not a dichotomy of distinct ways of life, as sociologists such as Louis Wirth have suggested.<sup>2</sup> Instead, rural folk carry their cultural patterns with them as they move to the city; once there, they become part of a continuing relationship between the urban area and the region.<sup>3</sup>

It has been observed by urban scholars that the culture of a region distinguishes one city from another.<sup>4</sup> These cultural patterns are based on the daily routines and the shared patterns of belief and behavior of the people within a region—routines and patterns they carry with them as they move from the countryside to the city. In the Old South, many cultural patterns revolved around the production of staple crops such as tobacco and cotton. For example, slaves were imported from Africa to cultivate the crops. The cities that developed in the South reflected the distinctive way of life based on agriculture, providing the connecting points between the rural hinterland and markets located

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elsewhere. Towns and cities developed initially along coastal areas and rivers as shipping points for agricultural products and distribution centers for goods imported from outside the region. Atlanta was an interior city that served as a gateway to the agricultural areas of the South, but unlike the older coastal and river cities of the region, it was a new place built astride “rivers of steel”—the railroads.

In a perceptive essay, historian Blaine Brownell reminds us that cities have always been repositories of regional culture. He adds, “The process of urbanization doubtless heightened the contrasts between older customs and newer habits, and the inconsistencies that always existed in the South—hospitality and violence, racism and tolerance, ingenuity and fatalism—were apparent in the region’s cities.”<sup>5</sup> Numerous writers have explored the cultural influences described by Brownell on the cities of the South. For instance, historian Don Doyle examines the ingenuity of the men who led the New South movement in Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, and Mobile.<sup>6</sup> Racism in the South has been the subject of works by C. Vann Woodward and Howard Rabinowitz.<sup>7</sup> Dickson Bruce and Bertram Wyatt-Brown have written about violence in the region.<sup>8</sup> Sociologist John Shelton Reed discusses tolerance as a Southern cultural trait in his essay “The Same Old Stand?”<sup>9</sup> Fatalism is a dominant idea in William Alexander Percy’s autobiography,<sup>10</sup> and it is a recurring theme in Southern fiction such as William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!*<sup>11</sup> One aspect of Southern culture that has received scant attention, however, is hospitality. Other than Joe Gray Taylor’s history of eating, drinking, and visiting in the region and Wyatt-Brown’s discussion of hospitality as part of the code of honor, there has been little written on the topic of Southern hospitality.<sup>12</sup> This work proposes to address that gap by focusing on hospitality and the commercial application of this value in the history of Atlanta and its tourism businesses.

Throughout much of its history, the South has enjoyed a reputation for warmly welcoming its visitors. Among the first to describe hospitality among colonial Virginians was Robert Beverley

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in 1705. Beverley, a first-generation native of the colony, described hospitality in these words:

The Inhabitants are very Courteous to Travellers. . . . A Stranger has no more to do, but to inquire upon the Road, where any Gentleman or good House-Keeper Lives, and there he may depend upon being received with Hospitality. This good Nature is so general . . . that the Gentry when they go abroad, order their Principal Servant to entertain all Visitors. . . . And the poor Planters, who have but one Bed, will very often sit up, or lie upon a Form or Couch all Night, to make room for a weary Traveller. . . . If there happen to be a Curl, that either out of Covetousness, or Ill-nature, won't comply with this generous Custom, he has a mark of Infamy set upon him, and is abhorr'd by all.<sup>13</sup>

English parson Hugh Jones, sent as a minister to Jamestown, Virginia, provided another description of Southern hospitality. In his 1724 observations on the Virginia colony, Jones wrote, "No People can entertain their Friends with better Cheer and Welcome; and Strangers and Travellers are here treated in the most free, plentiful, and hospitable Manner; so that a few Inns or Ordinaries on the Road are sufficient."<sup>14</sup> The extending of hospitality during the colonial period was not only an obligation but also a source of intense personal gratification. Even though most houses were cramped and small, they were the centers of hospitality for family, neighbors, and guests.<sup>15</sup>

Most colonial settlement in the South took place in the tide-water areas of the coast, first in Virginia and then in the Carolinas and Georgia. The cultivation of tobacco, rice, indigo, and cotton in these areas was centered in large plantations, with smaller farms scattered on less desirable land. Even though three-fourths of the families in the antebellum South owned no slaves, the small minority at the top of society shaped the culture of the region. Slaves were imported from Africa to provide labor for the larger estates. While slave labor was considered essential for the cultivation of the staple crops that dominated the

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colonial economy, blacks also made possible the gracious entertaining that characterized the plantation owners. Those whites occupying lower stations imitated as best they could the manners of those at the top of society.

The culture of colonial Virginia described by Beverley, Jones, and others was a mixture of elements taken from England and adapted to the economy and social conditions of the region. Historians Clement Eaton and William R. Taylor have described this transformation of the ideals of the English country gentleman to the Old South. This English culture included the practice of hospitality among the “Cavaliers” of colonial Virginia.<sup>16</sup> One facet of that Cavalier heritage was the domination of society by the white male heads of plantation households. Men dominated the extended families of wives, children, and slaves, exercising a pattern of paternalism that intensified the subordination of women, making it difficult for Southern females to escape from positions of inferiority.<sup>17</sup> This meant that much of the work of providing hospitality fell on women, which has been a pattern in Southern society since the colonial period.

Other influences also contributed to a distinctly Southern way of life. From the native inhabitants, the colonists learned the cultivation of tobacco and corn, the twin staffs of life for the Virginia settlers. Tobacco was the cash crop that provided the livelihood for most, and corn provided bread for everyone except the wealthiest, who could afford wheat flour. The variety of foods reflected the many components of the culture of the South. English livestock provided pork, beef, and chicken. Other meat came from game and fish. Indian corn was made into the hominy, mush, pone, and hoecake that were staples in the colonial diet. Slaves had regular rations of corn, bacon, and salt that could be supplemented with potatoes, greens, fruit, and chickens raised near their quarters.

In spite of their position at the bottom of colonial society, slaves made significant contributions to the culture of the region. Their dwellings reflected African communal living patterns shaped by their inhabitants for their needs. On Sunday, the day of rest, slaves gathered in their quarters for relaxation, which

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often included singing and dancing. The routine existence of slaves was segregated from their masters so that some aspects of life evolved separately, but with many influences shared by both blacks and whites.<sup>18</sup> For example, slaves who cooked for white masters influenced the types and preparation of food in the South. Whites also imitated the music and dances performed by slaves. Both races influenced Southern culture, even though blacks and whites were segregated during the colonial period.

The interior of the South formed a vast frontier that was sparsely settled until after the Revolutionary War. As farmers moved upland to the interior, they carried their way of life, including hospitality, with them. In his history of the growth of Southern civilization, Clement Eaton noted that emigrating Virginians and Carolinians carried this way of life to remote corners of the South, including the interior of north Georgia.<sup>19</sup> Travel through Georgia's interior was difficult, but made bearable by the hospitality of frontier settlers. In 1828 Scotchman Basil Hall journeyed from Savannah to Darien, Macon, and Columbus on his way to Montgomery, Alabama. Shortly after leaving Darien on the Georgia coast, Hall writes,

we fairly plunged into the forest, from which we did not emerge for many a weary day of rugged travelling. Towards sunset, we came to a spot where three roads branched off. After a pause, we took the wrong one, as it afterwards proved. It cost us twelve very hard hours' work to make out between thirty and forty miles on this day, and we were right glad, at last, to find ourselves in a solitary log-house, kept by a widow, who welcomed us with all she had, and though she kept no public house, she very cheerfully took us in, according to the universal custom of those wild countries where no regular accommodations are to be found. Of course, these poor people cannot afford to entertain travellers for nothing, but their charges were always as moderate as their means would allow.<sup>20</sup>

Another careful observer of the culture of the South was Alabama lawyer Daniel R. Hundley, who came from a Virginia family and had been educated at the University of Virginia and Harvard

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College. In 1860, as a response to what he regarded as many false depictions of the South, Hundley wrote his own analysis of the social structure of the region in *Social Relations in Our Southern States*. He described the hospitality of Southern gentlemen as a crucial aspect of their way of life. While he conceded that the houses of the upper classes lacked some of the elegance of the homes of the wealthy in the North, Hundley insisted that the visitor to the home of a Southern gentleman would find “a much heartier welcome, a warmer shake of the hand, a greater desire to please, and less frigidity of deportment, than will be found in any walled town upon the earth’s circumference.” Hundley also observed that, while they lacked some of the polished manners of the upper class, middle-class folks in the South were also “extremely hospitable.”<sup>21</sup>

As in most matters of behavior, this tradition of hospitality in the antebellum South had both limits and rules of conduct. Most hospitality was family-centered, since few agencies of any kind were available to welcome or care for visitors. The rules of hospitality to strangers in the Old South were somewhat different from the obligations to members of the family. Wayfarers who stopped for the night, for example, could be greeted with considerable suspicion, especially if they arrived unexpectedly. However, a traveler who came with a special claim to hospitality through a letter of introduction or a kinship was cordially received.<sup>22</sup> One who came without these but rode a good horse, wore good clothes, and had the speech of a gentleman would similarly be hospitably received by equals and inferiors. But the traveler who lacked these was likely to be received grudgingly if at all.

Widespread regional poverty meant that standards of cleanliness in homes or public accommodations were frequently not up to travelers’ requirements. Even among the planter class, living quarters were uncomfortable for residents and visitors alike, with dust, heat, and insects to endure. Travelers not staying with relatives or close friends in the South were expected to pay for their lodging. Frederick Law Olmsted wrote perhaps the most extensive accounts of travels in the region before the Civil War. During



his journeys, he stayed more often in private homes than in hotels but was obliged to pay for his lodging in both settings: "Only twice, in a journey of four thousand miles, made independently of public conveyances, did I receive a night's lodging or a repast from a native Southerner, without having the exact price in money which I was expected to pay for it stated to me."<sup>23</sup>

While paying for lodging surprised some visitors to the South, it seems to have been necessary to defray the expenses of hosts whose standards of living were not high. The practice seems to have been a widely accepted part of the rules of hospitality in the region. These rules created a relationship of obligation between the guest and host. Each was supposed to show respect for the other, and failure to do so severed the code of honor that governed the giving and receiving of hospitality. In this system of obligations surrounding the custom of hospitality in the Old South, Bertram Wyatt-Brown suggests there was an undercurrent of deep mistrust, anxiety, and personal competition.<sup>24</sup> For instance, hosts were often suspicious of the status of the traveler who arrived seeking hospitality. Was the visitor of at least an equal status and, therefore, entitled to receive hospitality? There was also the anxiety of worrying about the suitability of the welcome being provided. What would the guest think of the house, the accommodations, or the food? The hosts also endeavored to keep up with the level of hospitality provided by friends and neighbors. How would the house and its furnishings compare with the ones offered by those who were now guests? Wyatt-Brown says these concerns reflect three components of the Southern code of honor. First, there is a sense of graciousness to others that is part of the sense of self-worth for residents of the region. Second, hospitality is the claim of this graciousness before the public so that Southerners long to appear gracious and hospitable to others. Finally, hospitality is also the assessment of behavior by others. It is part of the reputation of the community. The great charm of the South has been the willingness to create good times with others.<sup>25</sup>

In 1914 an Atlanta journalist and orator of some renown, Colonel John Temple Graves, welcomed the national convention of