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The American South

A HISTORY

William J. Cooper, Jr.

Thomas E. Terrill

The American South

A HISTORY

Volume II / Third Edition



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THE AMERICAN SOUTH

A History

Volume II

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William J. Cooper, Jr., is a Boyd Professor at Louisiana State University. He received his A.B. degree from Princeton University and his Ph.D. from Johns Hopkins University. Professor Cooper has spent his entire professional career on the faculty at Louisiana State University, where he also served as dean of the Graduate School from 1982 to 1989. He has held fellowships from the Institute of Southern History at Johns Hopkins, from the Charles Warren Center at Harvard, from the Guggenheim Foundation, and from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

He is the author of *The Conservative Regime: South Carolina, 1877–1890* (1968); *The South and the Politics of Slavery, 1828–1856* (1978); *Liberty and Slavery: Southern Politics to 1860* (1983); and *Jefferson Davis American* (2000). He has also edited three books and written numerous articles.

Thomas E. Terrill, Professor of History at the University of South Carolina, received his B.A. degree from Westminster College, his M. Div. from Princeton Theological Seminary, and his M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin. He received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Rockefeller Foundation and was a Fulbright Senior Lecturer at the University of Genoa, Italy. As result of ties he developed there, more than a dozen young Italian scholars have come to the University of South Carolina to work on Southern history; this sponsorship has now been formalized by the Italian government. He is an affiliate of the Centro Studi Euro-Atlantici at the University of Genoa.

He is the author of *The Tariff, Politics and American Foreign Policy, 1874–1901* (1973), co-editor of *Such As Us: Southern Voices of the Thirties* (1978) and co-author of *The American South Comes of Age* (1986) and has many publications in journals and proceedings. He is currently writing a book on labor in the American South. He helped produce a Southern-based feature film (*The Gardener's Son*, screen play by: Cormac McCarthy) for national television, an award-winning documentary film on the General Textile Strike of 1934 ("The Uprising of '34"), and a television course on the modern South for undergraduate and graduate students.

*For
William Cooper and Holmes Cooper
and
Andrea Terrill and Mitchell Terrill*

Preface



This is the third edition of *The American South: A History*. That this edition is appearing means that over the past decade many people have found the first and second editions of the book useful. We are pleased and grateful.

In this new edition we have held to our basic themes and structure, including the chronological framework. *The American South* continues to reflect our fundamental assumption that the South is thoroughly American in its life and culture, yet is a distinctive region even today. The complex tension between being both like the rest of the country but distinctive has been continuous, though the tension has been expressed differently at different times, from a superpatriotism during the Mexican War and the Cold War to a sense of profound alienation that underlay secession and the bloodiest American war, the Civil War.

In addition, our book still evinces our conviction that blacks and whites together created and shaped the South. In our judgment it is impossible to understand southern history without comprehending the constant, complex interaction between the races. Yet for the sake of convenience, we follow the convention that "southerners" are white, though we explicitly deviate from that convention at several critical points. The dynamism of black-white relations from slavery to the civil rights revolution and thereafter is a central theme in these pages, as are class and gender roles. Although the southern lady may be a regional icon, women, black and white, have been vigorous participants and catalysts throughout the history of the South.

We have also retained basic changes made for the second edition. We present the South chiefly as proactive, not reactive. Dubbed "Uncle Sam's Other Province," the South has often been perceived as American, but equally often, it has been perceived as so dissimilar as to be an exotic dependent, peopled at various times by slaves and masters, southern ladies, shoeless dirt farmers, passive ex-slaves and their progeny, religious xenophobes, and paunchy courthouse politicians. But that image hardly correlates with the region's dynamism. Among other contributions, the South had a leading role in the American Revolution, had great influence on the making of the Constitution and on the creation of political parties, precipitated the Civil War, figured prominently in both Populism and

Progressivism, and provided the setting and the principal leaders for one of the most important movements in American history, the civil rights revolution. Moreover, post-World War II politics in America has been profoundly molded by developments and politicians in the South.

Throughout the book we have tried to incorporate the newer scholarship on the South. And scholarly interest in southern history has been intense. The product of that interest is remarkable and has transformed how historians understand traditional subjects such as political leadership, plantation economics, and Reconstruction. At the same time historians have given previously neglected topics, such as the slave family, postemancipation blacks, industrial workers, women, and gender relationships, a great deal more attention. The scope of the scholarship on the history of the South is revealed in the comprehensiveness of the bibliographical essay, including the section on biographies, which is intended to be a guide to the major literature on southern history.

Although our fundamental perspective remains unchanged, as does the basic narrative, we have added new material. Most obviously, the chronology has been extended through 2000, with particular coverage given to the presidential election of 2000, which underscores the increasing importance of the South in national affairs. Additional topics that have been substantially revised or expanded include colonial slavery, the role and influence of George C. Wallace, and religious fundamentalism in the twentieth century. Additionally, we have brought the bibliographical essay, including the section on biographies, up to date. There are also some new illustrations. Finally, we have striven to correct factual errors and to clarify the text.

Our story is set within the context of forces that recognized neither national nor regional boundaries: European overseas expansion and empires, plantation economies and involuntary labor, racial prejudice, the western expansion of the new nation, industrialization along with the revolutionary social and economic changes it brought, urbanization, the postindustrial revolution, and new directions in cultural and intellectual currents.

We start with the colonial era, with emphasis on British colonialism because it was so formative in the American South. The first half of the book covers the more than 250 years from European contact with the native peoples in the South and the following successful European settlements to the Civil War, in which the South, as the Confederate States of America, unsuccessfully attempted to establish its independence. The second part focuses on recovery from defeat in the Civil War to the New South and then to our own time, the Modern South.

Our debts to others remain large, and indeed have grown. Our wives, Patricia and Sarah, still stand as steadfast supporters of our commitment to this book.

The extent of our obligations to fellow scholars is indicated in the bibliographical essay. Former graduate students at Louisiana State University helped a great deal: Bradley Bond, Ralph Eckert, Kenneth Startup, Eric Walther, and Kevin Yeager. At the University of South Carolina James A. Dunlap III, Luther Faggart, Janet Hudson, and James Tidd did likewise. An LSU undergraduate, Amanda Gustavson, assisted with preparing the bibliography for this edition. Previous editions have been reviewed by Walter Buenger, David L. Carlton, Willard Gatewood, John Inscoe, and Bertram Wyatt-Brown. We especially appreciate the com-

ments from the five anonymous reviewers who provided our publisher with a critical assessment of the second edition. Although we did not agree with every point they made and constraints of space precluded incorporating all suggestions, their views informed our work. Additional friends and colleagues who over the years generously read portions of the manuscript or gave other invaluable advice and assistance include: Robert A. Becker, Keen Butterworth, Lacy K. Ford, Jr., Gaines M. Foster, Benjamin Franklin V, Michael F. Holt, David Katzman, Daniel Littlefield, David W. Murphy, Sydney Nathans, Paul F. Paskoff, George Rable, Charles Royster, W. Lynn Shirley, Allen H. Stokes, Jr., Robert M. Weir, John Scott Wilson, and R. Jackson Wilson. Three Italian colleagues provided valuable perspectives: Valeria Gennaro Lerda, Fernando Fasce, and Giovanni Fabbi.

We have had good luck with our editors. For the first edition, support came from Niels Aaboe, Jane Garrett, Jack Wilson, and especially David Follmer and Christopher Rogers. Peter Labella initiated the second edition; Lyn Uhl and Jane Vaicunas took up that effort and supervised its completion. In the rapidly changing world of publishing, we are fortunate that Lyn is still with us and remains a stalwart. For this edition, Kristen Mellitt has also been enormously helpful, as has Catherine Schultz, who oversaw production. Still, this book is ours, and we accept full responsibility for it.

William J. Cooper, Jr.
Thomas E. Terrill

Prologue

The Enduring South



The South, Wilbur Cash wrote in his celebrated book *The Mind of the South* (1941), is “not quite a nation within a nation but the next thing to it.” The sources of that enduring distinctiveness are many and complex. As early as 1750, a generation before Americans went to war against Great Britain to secure their political independence, clear differences distinguished the southern colonies from the northeastern and middle Atlantic colonies. Those differences persisted after the American Revolution and intensified during the first half of the nineteenth century. By 1860, though the similarities among the states remained powerful, the gap between the South and the rest of the country had grown into a chasm that seemingly could not be bridged by any compromise. The American South had become synonymous, though not entirely identical, with plantations, cotton, and black slavery—with places such as Davis Bend, Mississippi.

Thirty-odd miles south of Vicksburg, Mississippi, Davis Bend was a fertile peninsula formed by a large horseshoe curve of the Mississippi River. Today, more than four generations since the flood tides of war swept over it, Davis Bend and the people who lived there in 1860 provide important clues to southern identity before that time and since. The bend got its name from Joseph Davis, a large landholder in the area and the eldest brother of Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederacy. Joseph Davis had prospered as a lawyer in Natchez, Mississippi, a booming cotton and commercial center that served as the capital of Mississippi until 1817, when the territory became a state. He was intensely interested in politics, and when his youngest brother, Jefferson, developed an interest in a political career, Jefferson frequently turned to Joseph for advice.

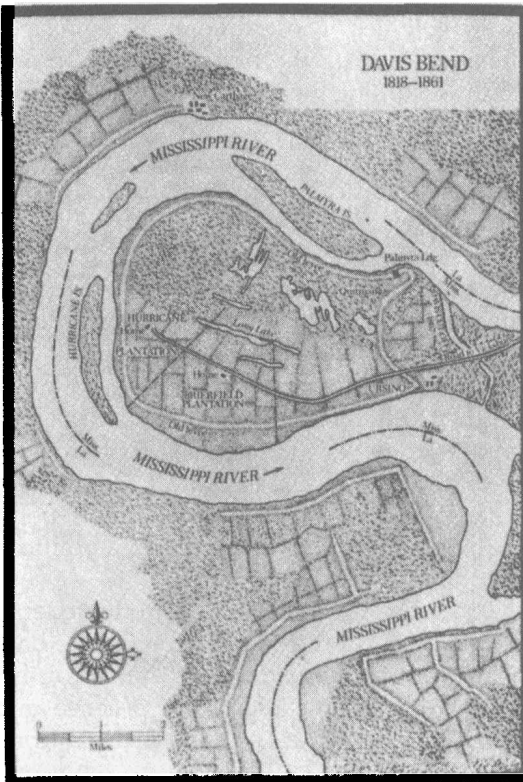
Joseph Davis bought most of the 11,000 acres of Davis Bend from the federal government in 1818 and obtained the rest from several frontier farmers who had been the first whites to settle and clear the area. Davis sold off 6,000 acres of the bend to friends. Then in 1827, when he was forty-two, he left his law practice and with his sixteen-year-old, three daughters, and a few slaves he had inherited from

his father established a plantation at the bend. Eight years later, Jefferson Davis started a plantation of his own on 900 acres that Joseph had given him.

During the next three decades, Joseph Davis became a very wealthy man. In 1860 he was one of only nine planters in Mississippi with more than 300 slaves. He had a spacious mansion and almost a village of outbuildings, which included a cluster of slave cottages. To protect his holdings from flooding by the great river that almost encircled it, Davis and the other leading planters at Davis Bend built a mile-and-a-half-long levee that was six to eighteen feet high. Davis's twenty-five-acre flower garden was so spectacular that passengers disembarked from river steamboats to tour it. No doubt the tourists knew they were in the American South and that their host was a southerner. Neither Davis nor his plantation was typical of the South, though both were typical of what many southerners aspired to.

Davis's background did resemble that of a majority of antebellum southerners. His grandfather, son of a Welsh immigrant, was born in Philadelphia around 1730 and moved as a young man to the colonial South, first to South Carolina, then to Georgia. Joseph's father, Samuel, fought in the American Revolution, married a South Carolina woman he met while serving in the military, and took up farming near Augusta, Georgia, on land the state had given him for his military

DAVIS BEND, MISSISSIPPI (New York Public Library, Schaumborg Collection)



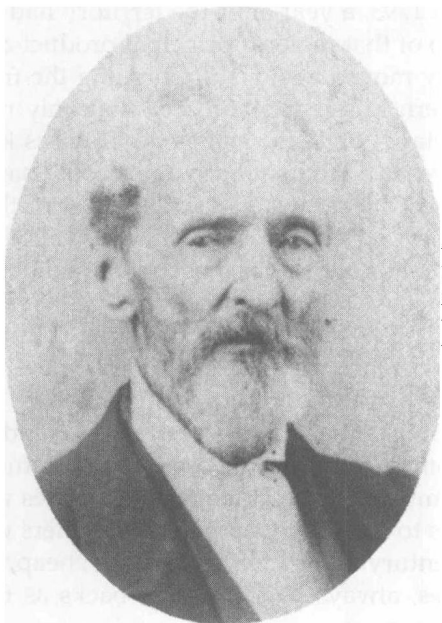
service. The family moved to Kentucky in 1793, a year after the territory had become a state, and there they produced two of that region's principal products: tobacco and horses. In 1810 the Davis family moved again, still pursuing the frontier; eventually they settled in southwestern Mississippi, an area that only nine years earlier had been ceded by the Choctaws. Settlers such as the Davises kept continual pressure on Indians to vacate western land so that whites could safely settle there. In the 1830s the Choctaws and Chickasaws gave up the last of their holdings in Mississippi and moved west beyond Arkansas to what was called Indian Territory. Whites later followed the Indians, took over most of their land, and created the state of Oklahoma; the name means "home of the Indian."

On their newly acquired land in Mississippi the Davises cultivated cotton as their major cash crop. To clear the land and plant, cultivate, and harvest the cotton, they relied on their own labor and the handful of slaves Samuel owned. Improving fortunes allowed them to build a substantial home graced by a veranda—a large step up from the four-room log cabin the family had occupied in Kentucky. The family of Samuel Davis strongly resembled the great majority of whites who populated the South from its earliest years to the Civil War: yeoman farmers who pushed south and west for more than a century and a half in search of cheap, fertile soil, frequently acquiring a few slaves, always bending their backs as they tried to improve their lot and station.

Their pursuit of the southern version of the American dream propelled such families from Virginia into the Carolinas and Georgia, southward into Florida, and westward as far as Texas before 1860. These pioneering farmers often settled in areas very different from the great plantation regions of which Davis Bend was a part. They made up the great majority of farmers in the mountains of Appalachia and the Ozarks and were predominant in the valleys and rolling hills of the piedmont and along the vast coastal plain that ran from the Chesapeake through Florida and on to the Texas gulf coast. Other southerners made their places in the cities and towns of the overwhelmingly agricultural South. Such places were sites for commercial enterprise and some manufacturing. Urban areas also afforded desired refinements for their residents and for the surrounding countryside.

Joseph Davis found Natchez a good place for an ambitious attorney, and Jefferson Davis attended a private academy near there as well as one in Kentucky. Like many ambitious Americans at the time, the youngest Davis believed that advanced education could improve his prospects. Thus, Jefferson graduated from academies to Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky, where he spent a year. Founded in 1780, Transylvania developed into the first center of learning west of the Appalachians and south of the Ohio River. Jefferson Davis completed his formal education at West Point. After an unexceptional academic career, he spent most of his seven-year army career at frontier posts in Wisconsin, Illinois, and Oklahoma.

Jefferson Davis briefly returned to the military in the 1840s, where he fought with distinction in the Mexican War. After 1835, however, he devoted most of his energies to his plantation and to his highly successful political career. Despite ill health, Davis drove himself to build first an impressive plantation estate and then an impressive political career. The latter pursuit required innumerable stump



JOSEPH DAVIS (Eleanor S.
Brockenbrough Library,
Museum of the Confederacy,
Richmond, Virginia)

speeches, interminable rounds of political meetings, and mountains of correspondence with constituents and fellow politicians. Several heated disputes stopped just short of duels. Davis survived horrible weather, dirt roads, mud roads, carts, wagons, carriages, lurching spark-spewing trains, steamboats, inns, hotels, good food, bad food, and tobacco-spitting, importuning, and sometimes sweaty constituents from Mississippi to Washington and back. Davis represented his state in the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate and served as a highly competent, dedicated secretary of war in the administration of President Franklin Pierce. Like other southerners in his day and later, Jefferson Davis was an American in his efforts to succeed and in his national loyalties. Indeed, Davis was convinced that as a leader first of the South in Congress and later of the Confederate States of America he was risking civil war and his life and fortune to preserve the Constitution, which he saw as the bulwark of liberty.

To Davis, the election of Abraham Lincoln posed a revolutionary threat; Lincoln's election meant the triumph of the antislavery movement—a movement dedicated to destroying southern rights. Announcing his resignation from the Senate in January 1861, Davis told his fellow senators and the nation that the southern states had been forced to secede from the Union because the Republicans who were coming to power “denie[d] us equality . . . refuse[d] to recognize our domestic institutions which preexisted the formation of the Union, our property which was guarded by the Constitution.” He accused Lincoln of making “a distinct declaration of war upon our institutions.” Davis asked that the states that chose to secede be allowed to do so peacefully, but if the North insisted that the South “remain as subjects to you, then, gentlemen of the North, a war is to be inaugurated the like of which men have not seen.”

In 1860 and 1861 the southern states seceded from the Union to prevent the federal government from intruding on their rights and abolishing slavery, the cornerstone of white southern society. To preserve the society the South took up arms against the Union. As a consequence, the Union intruded massively in the South—and with devastating impact—from 1861 until the end of Reconstruction in 1877. After the Civil War, the South erected a defense to ward off unwelcome outside intrusions in its race relations and other aspects of its life. The most concrete form of that defense was the “Solid South,” or the thorough dominance of the South by the Democratic party. Fashioning itself as “the party of white supremacy,” the Democratic party grounded its appeal on maintaining white unity in the South, keeping southern blacks subordinate (“in their place”), and preventing interference with that arrangement.

Erected during the 1870s and 1880s, the Solid South remained in place until after World War II. Breaches in the one-party politics of the Democratic South appeared earlier, however, under the federal government’s efforts to combat the depression of the 1930s. The Solid South cracked during the 1948 presidential election, then shattered during the Civil Rights revolution of the 1950s and 1960s. Propelled by America’s post-1940 economic boom and by massive federal spending in the region, a more prosperous, two-party South found a comfortable place in the Sunbelt and in national politics and became a much greater force in the nation than it had been at any previous time since the 1860s.

The South’s failed attempt to reshape America by leaving the Union in 1860 defined the region and its people for all the generations that have followed. The South and southerners can be defined as the states that seceded and the people who supported secession and identified themselves then and later with what they believed was its noble cause. But defining the South and southerners only in terms of the Civil War is too narrow. Though that definition has the advantage of clarity, it seriously distorts the past and even the present. In this book, the southern states are defined as the eleven Confederate states plus Kentucky, Maryland, and, after the Civil War, Oklahoma, the creation of latter-day pioneers who erected a Dixie on the plains. Kentucky and Maryland nearly seceded. Both provided troops for the Confederacy, as did Missouri, a state deeply divided by the Civil War. This state-based definition of the South is hardly free of ambiguities. Parts of West Virginia, for instance, are more southern than west Texas, southern Florida, and parts of Kentucky and Oklahoma ever were, and substantial numbers of West Virginians served in the Confederate armed forces.

Using the Civil War as a reference point to define southerners is even more misleading. Not all southerners in the 1860s supported secession or identified with its cause, though they often suffered from the defeat of the Confederacy. Unionist sentiment was strongest in the South among mountain whites. Depredations during the war reinforced the Unionist feelings of many people, particularly in Appalachia. Black southerners celebrated the defeat of the Confederacy for obvious reasons. African Americans lived all over the South in 1860, but usually on plantations such as those at Davis Bend, and they had interacted with whites since the seventeenth century to create much of what made the South. Without that interaction there would have been no “South” as the term and the region are commonly understood. Moreover, southern blacks and whites had and have

striking cultural similarities and strikingly similar historical experiences. Both have experienced economic inferiority, and both have been disdained as cultural and moral inferiors. The labor, skills, and ideas of blacks have been critical to the development and evolution of the South. For the sake of convenience and clarity, however, southerners are white in this book unless we explicitly state otherwise or unless the context implies a different interpretation.

The Davises, especially Joseph Davis, certainly knew how important blacks were to them. They acknowledged the importance of blacks to their lives, in part by being humane masters. Some local whites disparaged Joseph Davis's slaves as "Mr. Davis's free negroes." The neighbors may have had Benjamin Thornton Montgomery in mind when they said such things. Born into slavery in northern Virginia in 1819, Montgomery grew up as the companion of his young master. He moved westward involuntarily to Natchez in 1836 when, without notice or explanation, he was sold to a slave trader. The trader took Montgomery with a gang of other recently purchased slaves to the booming slave markets of Mississippi's black belt. There Joseph Davis bought Montgomery, but the young slave soon ran away. Unfamiliar with his new surroundings, Montgomery was caught almost immediately. When Davis questioned Montgomery about his attempted escape, he quickly realized Montgomery's considerable capacities and encouraged them. Montgomery, who had learned to read and write from his former master in Virginia, eventually became a mechanic, inventor, surveyor, builder, and merchant. He and his wife, Mary Lewis Montgomery, who was also literate, arranged, with Davis's approval, for the schooling of their children. Montgomery played a major role in the life of Davis Bend before and after the war reached the peninsula.

In January 1861, Jefferson Davis left Washington and returned home. In February he left Davis Bend to be inaugurated as president of the Confederacy. In April 1862, Joseph Davis took his family and about a hundred slaves and fled his river home to escape the advance of Union forces. Most of their slaves deserted during the hasty retreat, and some of them later descended upon the mansion to pillage clothing and furniture. Union troops did even more damage when they arrived. Not long afterward, Benjamin Montgomery reasserted his leadership. Eventually, after the war, he bought the plantation from Joseph Davis, with whom he had maintained regular communication. For several years Montgomery struggled, but forces beyond his control doomed his efforts. Eventually the community at Davis Bend dissolved. Even the river took its toll: in 1867 the main channel of the Mississippi swept across the neck of the peninsula and turned Davis Bend into Davis Island.

The war destroyed the slave-based plantation society of the antebellum South: the South of planters, slaves, and highly profitable cash crops, which once was so easily identifiable, faded. Within a generation another, also easily identifiable South emerged: a region of chronic underdevelopment, poverty, one-party politics, and Jim Crow, a rigid racial caste system. Once again, to the rest of Americans the South was the deviant region. And it seemed not to change at all until World War II. That perception was wrong, however, just as was the perception that the antebellum South had been unchanging.

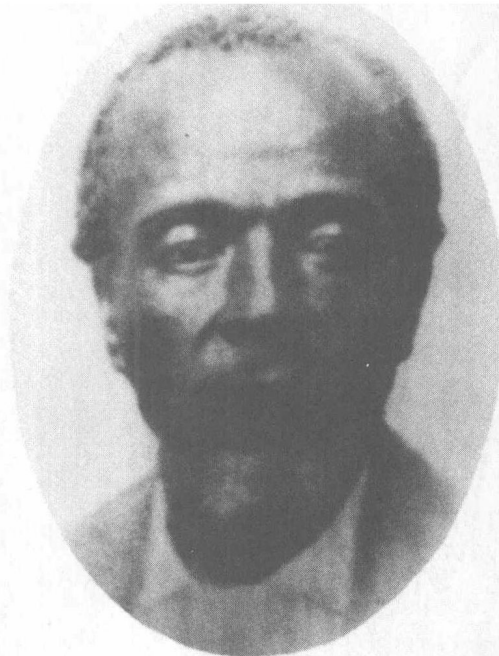
The South did not stand still from 1865 to 1940. The New South, a more urban, industrial South, began to appear soon after the Civil War, but it did not

emerge fully until the 1920s. Still, low incomes persisted, race relations remained frozen, and one-party politics and impotence on the national scene seemed permanent conditions. But before World War II, each of these fundamental characteristics of the South after the Civil War began to change. The depression of the 1930s and the New Deal of President Franklin Roosevelt hastened change, and World War II accelerated the process by which the Sunbelt South emerged.

In the years since 1945, the economics, politics, and race relations of the South have changed so much that the South of the twenty-first century, the Sunbelt South, seems to have almost no connection with the South of Jefferson Davis or the South after the Civil War, even with the South of the 1930s. The South is now more prosperous than it has been since the 1850s. Unlike the antebellum South, however, the Sunbelt South resembles the rest of the country in its politics and its race relations. Though vestiges of poverty, one-party politics, and Jim Crow remain, the picture of the poor, backward South has dissolved into an image of prosperity.

Defining southerner or southern identity is not so easy as it once was. One of the region's loyal sons and keen observers declared in 1973 that "the South is just about over as a separate . . . place." But a decade later another perceptive student of the South said that he "knows when he is in the South." The South may have lost some of its distinctiveness, but much remains. The South remains the United States' most obviously distinctive region in ways that are still very important: in culture and religion, in ethnic composition, in its sense of having a unique past, and in its sense of place. Southerners have deep attachments to their region. Those attachments have been expressed, among other ways, in the determination

BENJAMIN THORNTON
MONTGOMERY (Library of
Congress)



of southerners to remain Americans with a special regional identity even in the homogenized culture of the early twenty-first century. That determination helps explain why the South has endured as the United States' most distinctive region for more than two hundred years and why the history of the South continues to fascinate so many people.

This book tries to answer two questions: What was and is the American South? What was and is a southerner? The answers to these questions depend largely on where and when they are asked. The answers are easier and clearer at some times than at others. The answer to the question about southern identity is harder and less clear now than at any time since the mid-eighteenth century. Still, the South endures. It endures in part because not even a flood of changes has washed away critical connections between the past and the present in the South.

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