

## What Is the South?



Historian Michael O'Brien noted that "no man's South is the same as another's." Although there is general agreement that the South is (or at least was, at some time) distinctive from other parts of the United States, there is no consensus on either the nature or the duration of that difference. Definitions of the South have stressed everything from the obvious (for example, climate and white supremacy) to the obscure (the line below which grits replace hash browns).

Part of the problem is that there are many Souths. The folks who lived in the South Carolina lowcountry were very different in terms of ethnicity, accent, ideology, occupation, religion, music, and language from the people of the southern Appalachians. There are distinctions within states—lowcountry versus upcountry, piedmont versus coastal plain, and delta versus piney woods. These disparities have led some to contend that the South is more a state of mind than a geography.

Yet some thing or things draw these disparate areas together, and observers since the first settlements have tried to identify what, in fact, constitutes "the South." The task is more than a mere intellectual exercise. As with the study of any ethnic group, distinction helps to define identity. And the study of the South has helped to define our national identity as well. The South has often served as a counterpoint, both good and bad, to the rest of the country. In learning what is special about the South and how it became that way, we are learning about our national culture as well.

### ESSAYS

W. J. Cash's *The Mind of the South* is among the most eloquent and forceful statements of a southern identity, though the Charlotte journalist's emphasis on the continuity of southern history has provoked sharp responses from some historians, among them Yale University's C. Vann Woodward. The first two essays present Cash's and Woodward's differing views. Defining southern distinctiveness is a major academic industry and in fact, as Wake Forest historian David L. Smiley notes in the next essay, has become a distinctive element in itself. Assuming the South's difference, the obvious question is, "Different from what?" Sheldon Hackney, historian and president of the University of Pennsyl-

vania, demonstrates in the last essay that the North had a significant hand in creating a distinctive South, and the South often functioned as a mirror image of the rest of the nation.

## The Continuity of Southern History

W. J. CASH

There exists among us by ordinary—both North and South—a profound conviction that the South is another land, sharply differentiated from the rest of the American nation, and exhibiting within itself a remarkable homogeneity.

As to what its singularity may consist in, there is, of course, much conflict of opinion, and especially between Northerner and Southerner. But that it is different and that it is solid—on these things nearly everybody is agreed. Now and then, to be sure, there have arisen people, usually journalists or professors, to tell us that it is all a figment of the imagination, that the South really exists only as a geographical division of the United States and is distinguishable from New England or the Middle West only by such matters as the greater heat and the presence of a larger body of Negroes. Nobody, however, has ever taken them seriously. And rightly.

For the popular conviction is indubitably accurate: the South is, in Allen Tate's phrase, "Uncle Sam's other province." And when Carl Carmer said of Alabama that "The Congo is not more different from Massachusetts or Kansas or California," he fashioned a hyperbole which is applicable in one measure or another to the entire section.

This is not to suggest that the land does not display an enormous diversity within its borders. Anyone may see that it does simply by riding along any of the great new motor roads which spread across it—through brisk towns with tall white buildings in Nebraska Gothic; through smart suburbs, with their faces newly washed; through industrial and Negro slums, medieval in dirt and squalor and wretchedness, in all but redeeming beauty; past sleepy old hamlets and wide fields and black men singing their sad songs in the cotton, past log cabin and high grave houses, past hill and swamp and plain. . . . The distance from Charleston to Birmingham is in some respects measurable only in sidereal terms, as is the distance from the Great Smokies to Lake Pontchartrain. And Howard Odum has demonstrated that the economic and social difference between the Southeastern and Southwestern states is so great and growing that they have begun to deserve to be treated, for many purposes, as separate regions.

Nevertheless, if it can be said there are many Souths, the fact remains that there is also one South. That is to say, it is easy to trace throughout the region (roughly delimited by the boundaries of the former Confederate States of America, but shading over into some of the border states, notably Kentucky, also) a fairly definite mental pattern, associated with a fairly

definite social pattern—a complex of established relationships and habits of thought, sentiments, prejudices, standards and values, and associations of ideas, which, if it is not common strictly to every group of white people in the South, is still common in one appreciable measure or another, and in some part or another, to all but relatively negligible ones.

It is no product of Cloud-Cuckoo-Town, of course, but proceeds from the common American heritage, and many of its elements are readily recognizable as being simply variations on the primary American theme. To imagine it existing outside this continent would be quite impossible. But for all that, the peculiar history of the South has so greatly modified it from the general American norm that, when viewed as a whole, it decisively justifies the notion that the country is—not quite a nation within a nation, but the next thing to it.

To understand it, it is necessary to know the story of its development. And the best way to begin that story, I think, is by disabusing our minds of two correlated legends—those of the Old and the New Souths.

What the Old South of the legend in its classical form was like is more or less familiar to everyone. It was a sort of stage piece out of the eighteenth century, wherein gesturing gentlemen moved soft-spokenly against a background of rose gardens and dueling grounds, through always gallant deeds, and lovely ladies, in farthingales, never for a moment lost that exquisite remoteness which has been the dream of all men and the possession of none. Its social pattern was manorial, its civilization that of the Cavalier, its ruling class an aristocracy coextensive with the planter group—men often entitled to quarter the royal arms of St. George and St. Andrew on their shields, and in every case descended from the old gentlefolk who for many centuries had made up the ruling classes of Europe.

They dwelt in large and stately mansions, preferably white and with columns and Grecian entablature. Their estates were feudal baronies, their slaves quite too numerous ever to be counted, and their social life a thing of Old World splendor and delicacy. What had really happened here, indeed, was that the gentlemanly idea, driven from England by Cromwell, had taken refuge in the South and fashioned for itself a world to its heart's desire: a world singularly polished and mellow and poised, wholly dominated by ideals of honor and chivalry and *noblesse*—all those sentiments and values and habits of action which used to be, especially in Walter Scott, invariably assigned to the gentleman born and the Cavalier.

Beneath these was a vague race lumped together indiscriminately as the poor whites—very often, in fact, as the "white-trash." These people belonged in the main to a physically inferior type, having sprung for the most part from the convict servants, redemptioners, and debtors of old Virginia and Georgia, with a sprinkling of the most unsuccessful sort of European peasants and farm laborers and the dregs of the European town slums. And so, of course, the gulf between them and the master classes was impassable, and their ideas and feelings did not enter into the makeup of the prevailing Southern civilization.

But in the legend of the New South the Old South is supposed to have been destroyed by the Civil War and the thirty years that followed it, to

have been swept both socially and mentally into the limbo of things that were and are not, to give place to a society which has been rapidly and increasingly industrialized and modernized both in body and in mind—which now, indeed, save for a few quaint survivals and gentle sentimentalities and a few shocking and inexplicable brutalities such as lynching, is almost as industrialized and modernized in its outlook as the North. Such an idea is obviously inconsistent with the general assumption of the South's great difference, but paradox is the essence of popular thinking, and millions—even in the South itself—placidity believe in both notions.

These legends, however, bear little relation to reality. There was an Old South, to be sure, but it was another thing than this. And there is a New South. Industrialization and commercialization have greatly modified the land, including its ideology. . . . Nevertheless, the extent of the change and of the break between the Old South that was and the South of our time has been vastly exaggerated. The South, one might say, is a tree with many age rings, with its limbs and trunk bent and twisted by all the winds of the years, but with its tap root in the Old South. Or, better still, it is like one of those churches one sees in England. The facade and towers, the windows and clerestory, all the exterior and superstructure are late Gothic of one sort or another, but look into its nave, its aisles, and its choir and you find the old mighty Norman arches of the twelfth century. And if you look into its crypt, you may even find stones cut by Saxon, brick made by Roman hands.

The mind of the section, that is, is continuous with the past. And its primary form is determined not nearly so much by industry as by the purely agricultural conditions of that past. So far from being modernized, in many ways it has actually always marched away, as to this day it continues to do, from the present toward the past.

## The Discontinuity of Southern History

C. VANN WOODWARD

Among the major monuments of broken continuity in the South are slavery and secession; independence and defeat, emancipation and military occupation, reconstruction and redemption. Southerners, unlike other Americans, repeatedly felt the solid ground of continuity give way under their feet. An old order of slave society solidly supported by constitution, state, church and the authority of law and learning and cherished by a majority of the people collapsed, perished and disappeared. So did the short-lived experiment in national independence. So also the short-lived experiment in Radical Reconstruction. The succeeding order of Redeemers, the New South, lasted longer, but it too seems destined for the dump heap of history.

Perhaps it was because Cash wrote toward the end of the longest and

most stable of these successive orders, the one that lasted from 1877 to the 1950's, that he acquired his conviction of stability and unchanging continuity. At any rate, he was fully persuaded that "the mind of the section . . . is continuous with the past," and that the South has "always marched away, as to this day it continues to do, from the present toward the past." Just as he guardedly conceded diversity in advancing the thesis of unity, so he admits the existence of change in maintaining the thesis of continuity, change from which even the elusive Southern "mind" did not "come off scot-free." But it was the sort of change the French have in mind in saying, "*Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.*" Tidewater tobacco, up-country cotton, rampaging frontier, flush times in Alabama and Mississippi, slavery, secession, defeat, abolition, Reconstruction, New South, industrial revolution—*toujours la même chose!* Even the Yankee victory that "had smashed the Southern world" was "almost entirely illusory," since "it had left the essential Southern mind and will . . . entirely unshaken. Rather . . . it had operated enormously to fortify and confirm that mind and will." As for Reconstruction, again, "so far from having reconstructed the Southern mind in the large and in its essential character, it was still this Yankee's fate to have strengthened it almost beyond reckoning, and to have made it one of the most solidly established, one of the least reconstructible ever developed."

The continuity upon which Cash is most insistent is the one he sees between the Old South and the New South. He early announces his intention of "disabusing our minds of two correlated legends—those of the Old and New South." He promises in Rankean terms to tell us "exactly what the Old South was really like." He concedes that there was a New South as well. "Nevertheless, the extent of the change and of the break between the Old South that was and the New South of our time has been vastly exaggerated." The common denominator, the homogenizing touchstone is his "basic Southerner" or "the man at the center." He is described as "an exceedingly simple fellow," most likely a hillbilly from the backcountry, but fundamentally he is a petit bourgeois always on the make, yet ever bemused by his vision of becoming, imitating, or at least serving the planter aristocrat. Cash's crude Irish parvenu is pictured as the prototype of the planter aristocrat. Cash is confused about these aristocrats, mainly I think because he is confused about the nature and history of aristocracy. He admires their "beautiful courtesy and dignity and gesturing grace," but deplores their "grotesque exaggeration" and their "pomposity" and suspects that the genuine article should have been genteel. He grudgingly acknowledges their existence, but denies the legitimacy of their pretenses—all save those of a few negligible Virginians. He seems to be saying that they were all bourgeois, that therefore the Old South was bourgeois too, and therefore essentially indistinguishable from the New South. New and Old alike were spellbound by the spurious myth of aristocracy. This and the paradoxical fact that those parvenu aristocrats actually took charge, were a real ruling class, and the continuity of their rule spelled the continuity of the New South with the Old.

The masses came out of the ordeal of Civil War with "a deep affection

for these captains, a profound trust in them," a belief in the right "of the master class to ordain and command." And according to Cash, the old rulers continued to ordain and command right on through the collapse of the old order and the building of the new. He detects no change of guard at Redemption. So long as the industrialists and financiers who stepped into the shoes of the old rulers gave the Proto-Dorian password and adopted the old uniforms and gestures, he salutes them as the genuine article. In fact they were rather an improvement, for they represent "a striking extension of the so-called paternalism of the Old South: its passage in some fashion toward becoming a genuine paternalism." Cash enthusiastically embraces the thesis of Broadus Mitchell's "celebrated monograph" that the cotton-mill campaign was "a mighty folk movement," a philanthropic crusade of inspired paternalists. The textile-mill captains were "such men as belonged more or less distinctively within the limits of the old ruling class, the progeny of the plantation." Indeed they were responsible for "the bringing over of the plantation into industry," the company town. Even "the worst labor sweaters" were "full of the ancient Southern love for the splendid gesture," fulfilling "an essential part of the Southern paternalistic tradition that it was an essential duty of the upper classes to look after the moral welfare of these people."

To the cotton mills the neopaternalists add the public schools for the common whites and thus "mightily reaffirm the Proto-Dorian bond." The common poverty acted as a leveler (back to the Unity thesis) and brought "a very great increase in the social solidarity of the South," a "marked mitigation of the haughtiness" of the old captains, now "less boldly patronizing," and "a suppression of class feeling that went beyond anything that even the Old South had known." The common white felt "the hand on the shoulder . . . the jests, the rallying, the stories . . . the confiding reminders of the Proto-Dorian bond of white men." That, according to Cash, was what did in the Populist revolt and the strikes of the lint-head mill hands as well. For from the heart of the masses came "a wide, diffuse gratefulness pouring out upon the cotton-mill baron; upon the old captains, upon all the captains and preachers of Progress; upon the ruling class as a whole for having embraced the doctrine and brought these things about."

Of course Cash professes not to be taken in by Progress like the red-necks and the lint-heads. He realizes that Progress and Success had their prices and he sets them down scrupulously in the debit column of his ledger. "Few people can ever have been confronted with a crueller dilemma" than the old planter turned supply merchant to his former huntin' and fishin' companion as sharecropper: "The old monotonous pellagra-and-rickets-breeding diet had at least been abundant? Strip it rigidly to fatback, molasses, and cornbread, dole it out with an ever stingier hand . . . blind your eyes to peaked faces, seal up your ears to hungry whines. . . ." And that sunbonnet, straw-hat proletariat of the paternalistic mill villages? By the turn of the century they had become "a pretty distinct physical type . . . a dead white skin, a sunken chest, and stooping shoulders. . . . Chinless faces, microcephalic foreheads, rabbit teeth, goggling dead-fish eyes, rickety

limbs, and stunted bodies. . . . The women were characteristically stringy-haired and limp of breast at twenty, and shrunken hags at thirty or forty." Something admittedly was happening to the captains, too, what with "men of generally coarser kind coming steadily to the front." And in "all the elaborate built-up pattern of leisure and hedonistic drift; all the slow, cool, gracious and graceful gesturing of movement," there was a sad falling off, a decay of the ideal. "And along with it, the vague largeness of outlook which was so essentially a part of the same aristocratic complex; the magnanimity . . ."

Admitting all that, "But when the whole of this debit score of Progress is taken into account, we still inevitably come back to the fact that its total effect was as I have said." *Plus ça change!* "Here in a word, was triumph for the Southern will . . . an enormous renewal of confidence in the general Southern way." In [Henry W.] Grady's rhetoric, "Progress stood quite accurately for a sort of new charge at Gettysburg." To be sure, Southern Babbitts eventually appeared, but even they were "Tartarin, not Tartuffe . . . simpler, more naïve, less analytical than their compatriots in Babbittry at the North. . . . They go about making money . . . as boys go about stealing apples . . . in the high-hearted sense of being embarked upon capital sport." Yet, like the planter turned supply merchant or captain of industry, "they looked at you with level and proud gaze. The hallmark of their breed was identical with that of the masters of the Old South—a tremendous complacency." And Rotary, "sign-manual of the Yankee spirit"? Granting "an unfortunate decline in the dignity of the Southern manner," it was but "the grafting of Yankee backslapping upon the normal Southern geniality. . . . I am myself," Cash wrote, "indeed perpetually astonished to recall that Rotary was not invented in the South." And does one detect "strange notes—Yankee notes—in all this talk about the biggest factory, about bank clearings and car loadings and millions"? Strange? Not for Jack Cash. "But does anybody," he actually asked, "fail to hear once more the native accent of William L. Yancey and Barnwell Rhett, to glimpse again the waving plume of, say, Wade Hampton?"

How could he? How could any historian? He sometimes reminds one of those who scribble facetious graffiti on Roman ruins. He betrays a want of feeling for the seriousness of human strivings, for the tragic theme in history. Looking back from mid-twentieth century over the absurd skyscrapers and wrecked-car bone piles set in the red-clay hills, how could he seriously say that the South believed it "was succeeding in creating a world which, if it was not made altogether in the image of that old world, half-remembered and half-dreamed, shimmering there forever behind the fateful smoke of Sumter's guns, was yet sufficiently of a piece with it in essentials to be acceptable." A great slave society, by far the largest and richest of those that had existed in the New World since the sixteenth century, had grown up and miraculously flourished in the heart of a thoroughly bourgeois and partly puritanical republic. It had renounced its bourgeois origins and elaborated and painfully rationalized its institutional, legal, metaphysical, and religious defenses. It had produced leaders of skill,

ingenuity, and strength who, unlike those of other slave societies, invested their honor and their lives, and not merely part of their capital, in that society. When the crisis came, they, unlike the others, chose to fight. It proved to be the death struggle of a society, which went down in ruins. And yet here is a historian who tells us that nothing essential changed. The ancient "mind," temperament, the aristocratic spirit, parvenu though he called it—call it what you will, *panache* perhaps—was perfectly preserved in a mythic amber. And so the present is continuous with the past, the ancient manifest in the new order, in Grady, Babbitt, Rotary, whatever, *c'est la même chose*.

I am afraid that Cash was taken in by the very myth he sought to explode—by the fancy-dress charade the New South put on in the cast-off finery of the old order, the cult of the Lost Cause, the Plantation Legend and the rest. The new actors threw themselves into the old roles with spirit and conviction and put on what was for some a convincing performance. But Cash himself, even though he sometimes took the Snopeses for the Sartorises, plainly saw how they betrayed to the core and essence every tenet of the old code. "And yet," he can write,

And yet—as regards the Southern mind, which is our theme, how essentially superficial and unrevolutionary remain the obvious changes; how certainly do these obvious changes take place within the ancient framework, and even sometimes contribute to the positive strengthening of the ancient pattern.

Look close at this scene as it stands in 1914. There is an atmosphere here, an air, shining from every word and deed. And the key to this atmosphere . . . is that familiar word without which it would be impossible to tell the story of the Old South, that familiar word "extravagant."

[Then, after a reference to the new skyscrapers in the clay hills:]

Softly; do you not hear behind that the gallop of Jeb Stuart's cavalrymen?

The answer is "No"! Not one ghostly echo of a gallop. And neither did Jack Cash. He only thought he did when he was bemused.

After some years in the profession, one has seen reputations of historians rise and fall. The books of Ulrich Phillips and later Frank Owsley began to collect dust on the shelves, and one thinks of Beard and Parrington. In America, historians, like politicians, are out as soon as they are down. There is no comfortable back bench, no House of Lords for them. It is a wasteful and rather brutal practice, unworthy of what Cash would agree are our best Southern traditions. I hope this will not happen to Cash. The man really had something to say, which is more than most, and he said it with passion and conviction and with style. Essentially what he had to say is something every historian eventually finds himself trying to say (always risking exaggeration) at some stage about every great historical subject. And that is that in spite of the revolution—any revolution—the English remain English, the French remain French, the Russians remain Russian, the Chinese remain Chinese—call them Elizabethans or Cromwellians, Royalists or Jacobean, Czarists or Communists, Mandarins or Maoists.

That was really what Cash, at his best, was saying about Southerners, and he said it better than anybody ever has—only he rather overdid the thing. But in that he was merely illustrating once more that ancient Southern trait that he summed up in the word "extravagant." And, for that matter, his critic, poured in the same mold, may have unintentionally added another illustration of the same trait. If so, Jack Cash would have been the first to understand and not the last to forgive. Peace to his troubled spirit.

## Quest for a Central Theme

DAVID L. SMILEY

In the history of Southern history in America the central theme has been the quest for the central theme. Local and state historians, students of regionalism and sectionalism, along with authors of American history surveys, have agreed in accepting the hypothesis that there is an American South and that it has had, historically, a unifying focus at its center. Furthermore, it has become customary among many historians to emphasize sectionalism as a key factor in American political history and to seek the causes for the apparent division of national patriotism. The man in the street, though his views may be hazy or overemotional, is confident that there are distinctive social and political patterns, perhaps traceable to a unique agricultural base, which combine to make the regions below the Potomac a recognizable entity, and most Americans at one time or another have engaged in the pursuit of a central theme in Southern history.

In its broadest sense the attempt to generalize regional folkways into an American South is part of the search for a national identity. Since the days of Noah Webster's early crusade for American English orthography and usage and Ralph Waldo Emerson's 1837 appeal for an American culture—Oliver Wendell Holmes called it "our intellectual Declaration of Independence"—Americans have earnestly sought to define the elusive qualities of their civilization and have squirmed uncomfortably when critics such as Harriet Martineau or Charles Dickens ridiculed their efforts. There are interesting parallels between the national response to Dickens' *American Notes* and the Southern umbrage at the publication of Fanny Kemble's *Georgia Journal*. Still, the search for a national identity went on, and alongside it, as if in overt denial of a homogeneous national character, the search for Southern distinctiveness continued.

The reasons for the dichotomy in the national personality are complex and often obscure. At the same time that it served the purposes of American patriotism to sound a bold trumpet for a native civilization, it was politically advantageous to assent to the proposition that that civilization contained two "nations," opposites in fundamental aspects. The subsequent defeat

David L. Smiley, "The Quest for the Central Theme in Southern History." Reprinted with permission from *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 71:3 (Summer 1972), pp. 307-325. Copyright 1972 by Duke University Press.

of one "nation" by the other had the effect, on both sides, of inspiring each to glamorize its superior civilization and to denigrate that of the other as alien, un-American, and lacking in enduring and essential values. Especially was this activity prevalent among Southerners, where it took the form of reverence for the Lost Cause and allegiance to the cult of the Old South. In paying homage to a mythical past they were but acting out a characteristic common to peoples defeated by material or military force, i.e., the tendency to emphasize the superiority of less tangible qualities which their civilization allegedly produced in great quantity. This happened in the post-Civil War South at a thousand veterans' campfires, in political orations on days set aside to the memory of the dead, and in graduation addresses replete with scholarly appurtenances, and soon the emphasis began to appear in presumably objective histories and biographies of the Confederacy and its leaders.

In these expressions, down to the latest Rebel yell or defiant wave of the Confederate battle flag, there was the axiomatic acceptance of the belief that there was in fact an American South and that it possessed clearly defined traits which set it apart from the rest of the nation. In some instances, notably in the rhetoric of ambitious politicians and regional promoters, these assumptions conveyed overtones of immediate advantage to the author. A widely accepted central theme or distinguishing characteristic of the American South, for example, might affect a person's vote for or against a party, a personality, or a platform. On other occasions it might encourage or discourage decisions concerning the migration of industries and the choice of sites for capital investments, or the transfer of individual talents to sunnier climes or a more favorable labor situation.

At the same time, other statements of the central theme emerged from the labors of those committed to the highest obligations of scholarship: to sift the evidence and to generalize its meaning into an idea whose purpose is to enlarge understanding and to stimulate additional study and thought. In each case the motivation, though vastly different in purpose and effect, remains confused and unclear, and a study of the themes and forces which have attracted scholarly attention is significant in illuminating the problems and clarifying the objectives of the broader quest for national identity.

Basically and historically the effort to express the essence of the American South in a central theme has turned upon two related streams of thought. One has been to emphasize the causal effects of environment, while the other has put uppermost the development of certain acquired characteristics of the people called Southern. The work of the scholar Ulrich B. Phillips well illustrates the dual thrust of the endeavor. The South, he declared in a famous article, was a section dominated by racial conflict. It was "a land with a unity despite its diversity, with a people having common joys and common sorrows, and, above all, as to the white folk a people with a common resolve indomitably maintained—that it shall be and remain a white man's country." The "cardinal test of a Southerner and the central theme of Southern history," he said, was the desire to preserve the supremacy of the white race.

A few months after the article appeared, however, Phillips published

*Life and Labor in the Old South*, in which he defined the South in terms of environmental causation. "Let us begin by discussing the weather," he wrote, "for that has been the chief agency in making the South distinctive." Behind the central theme of white supremacy Phillips could now discern a determinative meteorological pattern. Climate encouraged the production of staple crops, he declared, and staple crops promoted the plantation as the most efficient institution for their cultivation; the plantation's demand for large quantities of cheap labor led to slave importations; the presence of large numbers of Africans resulted in turn in a continuing race problem and the effort to maintain white supremacy. The acquired characteristic of racism now became a "house that Jack built" upon the foundation of a causative weather pattern.

Although critics have eroded much of Phillips' work, searchers for the central theme continued to follow the twin trails that he blazed. Generally they have undertaken to document either the theme of a dominant pattern of life or they have looked beyond the characteristic itself to seek geographical, meteorological, or psychological determinants of the significant traits. Sometimes a student has combined all of these in a single sentence. "The South," wrote Wendell H. Stephenson, "is a geographical location, a group of factors that differentiated the region and its inhabitants from other sections of the United States, and a state of mind to which these factors gave rise."

Thus, in one way or another, seekers for the central theme in Southern history have illustrated Phillips' observations that the South was either the home of a peculiar behavior pattern—all but universally present among people who considered themselves Southern and all but universally absent elsewhere in the land (the inheritance theory)—or a place where men's lives were molded by impersonal forces of climate or geography (the environmental view).

Perhaps the earliest assumption among those in quest of the central theme has been that the South is the product of a dictatorial environment. Phillips himself spoke of climate, in the form of heavy rainfall and an overheated sun, as causative factors in Southern life. Deluges eroded the topsoil, packed plowed lands, and ran off in floods, he said, and these rains conditioned the soils of the South. The sun was "bakingly hot"; it parched vegetation and enervated Europeans. Clarence Cason agreed that the South was a hot land. It was that part of the United States where the mercury reached 90 degrees in the shade at least one hundred afternoons a year. According to the climate theory, the tyrant sun slowed life to a languid crawl, impelled men to choose the shaded sides of streets, and induced cooks to concoct gastronomical delights to tempt heat-jaded appetites. It also dictated an emphasis upon staple crops, and as a consequence influenced the labor system of the South. Cason related with approval the Mississippi proverb that "only mules and black men can face the sun in July" in support of the comforting philosophy that only dark-skinned menials, presumably equipped by an all-wise Creator to endure the heat, should perform physical labor.

The idea that the central theme of Southern history may be found in

the environment, in a causal relationship between a tropical climate and a peculiar way of life, has been a persistent one. In 1778 Judge William Henry Drayton told the South Carolina Assembly that "from the nature of the climate, soil and produce of the several states, a northern and southern interest naturally and unavoidably arise," and this view found ready acceptance. In his *Notes on Virginia* Thomas Jefferson remarked that "in a warm climate, no man will labor for himself who can make another labor for him." For this reason, he said, "of the proprietors of slaves a very small proportion indeed are ever seen to labor." Not only did the sun dictate a Southern interest and an aversion to toil; it also purified the Anglo-Saxon blood lines. In 1852 a newspaper editor pointed out that South Carolina lay in the same latitude as Greece and Rome, which was a "pretty good latitude for a 'breed of noble men.'" Six years later an observer commented that the "gentleman and lady of England and France, born to command, were especially fitted for their God given mission of uplifting and Christianizing the Negroes because they were softened and refined under our Southern sky." These views continued into the present century. Hamilton J. Eckenrode declared that in the warm climate of the American South a superior Nordic race became "tropicized" and thus improved in quality, and Francis B. Simkins also defined the South as the result of an adjustment of Anglo-Saxon peoples to a subtropical climate. He went on to deplore the modern preference for sun-tanned women and architectural styles that broke with the ante-bellum tradition, and—perhaps with tongue in cheek—he regarded all admiration for Southern temperatures as a form of Yankee carpetbagery. "Because of the tyranny of books and magazines imported from strange climates," he said, Southerners had lost their fear of the sun, and in so doing had denied their birthright. They were "prompted to construct artificial lakes, treeless lawns, and low-roofed houses without porches or blinds."

Such is the environmental view—the causal effects of climate upon Southern folkways—and its inaccuracies are manifest. There is no unity in Southern climate, for the section includes startling variations in pattern and is wholly temperate rather than tropical in nature. William A. Foran pointed out that it was climate of opinion rather than climate in fact that influenced the configurations of life and thought among Europeans inhabiting the Southern regions of North America. "The Great South of 1860," Foran said, "began at Mason's and Dixon's line, just twenty-five miles south of the Liberty Bell on Independence Square, and ranged on through fifteen degrees of latitude." It encompassed almost every type of North American climate, "from pleasantly-tempered Virginia and magnolia-scented Charleston to the arctic blizzards of Texas. . . . Can historians speak glibly of a southern climate, much less of a tropical one," he asked, "of a land whose rainfall varies from zero to seventy inches a year?"

But the important question concerns the causal relationship between high temperatures and a distinctive life style. Even if there were a demonstrable meteorological unity to Southern weather, that would not of itself determine a particular social order, an agricultural pattern, or a way

of life. That it did so in fact is the basic assumption of the advocates of the environmental theory. Yet climate neither forecast nor foreordained a staple crop-slave labor-race segregation cycle such as Phillips and others have described. Edgar T. Thompson explicitly rejected the Phillips thesis. "The plantation was not to be accounted for by climate," he said; the climate-plantation-slavery syndrome was instead a defense mechanism. "A theory which makes the plantation depend upon something outside the processes of human interaction, that is, a theory which makes the plantation depend upon a fixed and static something like climate," he declared, "is a theory which operates to justify an existing social order and the vested interests connected with that order."

Whatever forces produced the plantation—perhaps a complex combination of the English manorial tradition and the immediate need for a social unit that could provide a measure of economic independence and military defense—it has existed in low-country regions of the South as an important institution. Many seekers for the central theme have considered it, therefore, as the distinctive characteristic of Southern life. First used to describe a group of "planted" colonists, the word came to mean a system of farming with tenants, indentured servants, peons, or slaves working under the direction of proprietors who owned great estates and who used their wealth and social position to play active roles in their communities' affairs. As a close-knit social and political group, the planters exerted an influence that was indeed often predominant. In some regions they were able to define their interests as those of the entire population, and their way of life as typical of the whole. With the enthusiastic co-operation of nostalgic novelists, poets, song composers, and advertising agents, the plantation and its gentlemen of distinction became the epitome of the Southern ideal. For a generation prior to the Civil War its proponents were able to impose the "plantation platform" of opposition to national banks, internal improvements at federal government expense, and tariffs of protection upon the policies of the general government. At the same time, opponents of the Jeffersonian agricultural Arcadia and the Calhounian logic of dominant particularism came to view the plantation as the symbol of all that was evil or amiss about America. It represented wealth amassed by exploiting an immoral labor system, disunionist and antinationalistic sentiments, support for policies that tied the whole country to a humiliating economic colonialism, and political power resting upon a snobbish and superficial aristocracy. For these reasons, enemies of the plantation regarded it as "un-American." Still, it served as a definition of the South. The plantation system was an ancient one; in varying forms it antedated the rise of chattel slavery, and after emancipation it persisted in fact and fancy as a distinctive entity. It was also fairly well distributed over the coastal plains and river valleys, regions earliest settled and seat of preponderant voting strength, and it extended into a roughly similar topography as settlement advanced into the Southwest. The plantation pattern of production was therefore general enough to serve as an archetype, however superficial, of a recognizable Southern society.

The great estate, with its paternalistic Massa and Missus, and the values it allegedly conserved, has provided much of the romantic Southern tradition. "The plantation," said Sheldon Van Auken, "is central to any understanding of the South." Since before there were white men in New England, he declared, it has been the most significant aspect of a South differentiated by it from the rest of the nation. More than other forms of economic and social organization the plantation provided security to laborers and a satisfying way of life to its operators. It set the standards for the entire South, Van Auken concluded, and it has remained the ideal image of the South. Earlier, Francis P. Gaines studied the plantation as a Southern tradition and declared that "the supremacy of the great estate in the thinking of the South cannot be successfully challenged."

But despite the plantation's exalted place in tradition, at no time was it the typical pattern of life in the Southern regions. It was a hothouse flower that could not hold its own in the low country and could not survive the cooler breezes of the uplands. Many students, including both Gaines and Van Auken, pointed out that the plantation did not penetrate into the hilly regions where yeoman farmers predominated and where a different way of life prevailed; except for isolated regions in the Virginia tidewater and the South Carolina low country, it did not monopolize life anywhere. The Owsleys have demonstrated that the plantation was not typical even of the Alabama black belt and was becoming less important in the decade of the 1850's. And according to Avery Craven, by 1860 Virginia and Maryland had "come largely to the small farm and the small farmer." The governor of Virginia reported that the state was no longer characterized by the "large plantation system," but had developed into an agriculture of "smaller horticultural and arboricultural farming." . . .

The plantation was, presumably, the home of other significant factors in the Southern image—the planter and his code of honor, and the institution of slavery—and students turned to these as central characteristics. As Avery Craven put it, "Only two factors seem to have contributed to the making of anything Southern—an old-world country-gentleman ideal and the presence of negroes in large numbers." The small minority of well-to-do planters lived in conscious imitation of the old English squires, stocking their homes with books and musical instruments, importing furnishings and clothing, and providing tutors for their children. In their personal relationships the more refined among them practiced a gallant chivalry. "When you institute a comparison between the men of the North and the South, does it not result in favor of those of the South?" a speaker in the Kentucky constitutional convention of 1849 asked. "Has not the South acquired for itself a character for frankness, generosity, high-toned honor, and chivalry which is unknown in the North?"

This was the country-gentleman ideal as a characteristic of the South. Though many planters ignored the demands of the code, in theory it set Cavalier Southerner apart from Roundhead Yankee. It provided a theme for the Southern Agrarians, who saw in it a conservative civilization which

had, in the words of John Crowe Ransom, come "to terms with nature." Living "materially along the inherited line of least resistance," the planters sought "to put the surplus of energy into the free life of the mind." But to emphasize the country-gentleman as the typical inhabitant of the Southern regions, and to pretend that he alone possessed a code of disinterested obligation to public service or polite manners, ignored a host of other types equally Southern and overlooked commendable contributions to statecraft made by men who lived in other quadrants of the country.

Much more common as a unifying factor was another by-product of the plantation system of production, slavery and the Negro. Thomas P. Govan declared that the South was that part of the United States in which slavery continued for sixty years after it was abandoned elsewhere, but was in all other respects similar to the rest of the country. The only important sectional conflict in America, he said, arose from the fact that Negroes were held as slaves; emancipation eliminated the single Southern distinctive and removed the cause of its desire to be independent. The subsequent insistence upon white supremacy, Govan contended, merely meant that Southerners acted like other men of European origins when they confronted large numbers of people of differing ethnic types. To define the South as the land of white supremacy, he concluded, overlooked the very real racism among non-Southern Americans and incorrectly suggested that only Southerners were capable of bigotry and intolerance. Yet Charles S. Sydnor cited the presence of the Negro as the most popular of the monocausationist theories explaining the differences between Southerners and other Americans.

The plantation also fostered a rural environment with its strange mixture of the polished and the primitive, and some students have defined the South in terms of its folkways. Andrew N. Lytle stated the central theme as a "backwoods progression" of an agrarian Arcadia, and others of the Agrarian School have emphasized the essential "South-ness" of a slowed pace of life, enjoyment of living, and leisure for contemplation and meditation. John Hope Franklin saw a different product of a rural South. It was a land of violence whose peoples possessed a "penchant for militancy which at times assumed excessive proportions." The Southern reputation for pugnacity, he added, "did not always command respect, nor even serious consideration; but it came to be identified as an important ingredient of Southern civilization."

Another critique of the Agrarian School came from David Potter. Declaring that the agrarian formula fitted the South remarkably badly, he defined the section as a place where older folkways persisted. "The culture of the folk survived in the South long after it succumbed to the onslaught of urban-industrial culture elsewhere," he said. "It was an aspect of this culture that the relations between the land and the people remained more direct and more primal in the South than in other parts of the country." In addition, relationships of people to one another "imparted a distinctive texture as well as a distinctive tempo to their lives." Americans regarded



the South with a kind of nostalgia, he noted; its basis was not an ideal utopian society that never existed, but a "yearning of men in a mass culture for the life of a folk culture which really did exist."

Thus the climate and its alleged offspring, the plantation, the planter, the staple crop, and the Negro, all set in a rural scene surrounded by primitive folkways, have provided students with the ingredients for a central theme. Another avenue into the character of the Southern regions has been to pursue the second of Phillips' hypotheses and to describe the South on the basis of social patterns. Charles S. Sydnor suggested both the problem and the possibilities. Southern historians, he pointed out, studied a region which had no definite boundaries and therefore faced the prior necessity of delimiting their subject. In doing so, they pioneered in the study of social history. They considered the distinctive traits of the people called Southern and then sought "to discover the geographical incidence of these characteristics." Thus the student of the South "was driven from the problem of area back to the prior problem of essence," Sydnor declared; "his initial task was to discover what the Old South was. From the nature of the case he was compelled to be a social historian."

Elaborating upon his own analysis, in another article Sydnor listed some distinctively Southern culture patterns. Among them he described an inherited way of life modeled after that of the English gentry, slavery, malaria, hookworm, lynching, farm tenancy, the advocacy of states' rights, mockingbirds, and a unique attitude toward law and order. Following Sydnor's suggestions, other South-seekers offered additional criteria: the South is the place where people celebrate Christmas but not the Fourth of July with fireworks; it is where cooks add salt pork to the extended boiling of green vegetables; it is the domain of hominy grits; it is the land of one-party politics, one-horse plowing, and one-crop agriculture. Charles F. Lane declared that "the preference for the mule as a draft animal is one of the least-considered traits characterizing Southern culture" and proposed a map showing the mule population of the country as a way of marking boundaries around the South.

Other observers defined the South as the center of Protestant evangelical fundamentalism. Edwin McNeill Poteat declared that "the South is religiously solid" in much the same way that it was, to him, politically solid. To most Southerners heresy remained heresy, he said, and "they still in the main submit readily to demagoguery in the pulpit, and enjoy the thrill of denominational competition." The religious South exhibited a "more homogeneous quality than any other section," Poteat concluded. There was some agreement with this idea. "The distinctiveness of the Old South," said Francis B. Simkins, "is perhaps best illustrated by its religion. Historic Protestantism was reduced to the consistencies of the Southern environment without sacrificing inherent fundamentals." Charles W. Ramsdell noted that religious fundamentalism was a Southern characteristic, and pointed out its effects in the reaction to the biological discoveries of the evolution of species, the effort to prohibit the manufacture and sale of

beverage alcohol by constitutional amendment, and the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan.

Another proposal in the quest for cultural distinctives held that the South was a collection of "settlement characteristics." The geographer Wilbur Zelinsky catalogued these traits as the pattern in which men house themselves. "In the course of field observations of house types, urban morphology, farmsteads, and other settlement characteristics," he said, "I have discovered a constellation of traits that are apparently co-terminous with the South and function collectively as a regional label." Some of the traits he emphasized were houses placed well back from the street and from each other, low or nonexistent curbs, sidewalk arcades in front of town shops, a central location for courthouses in county seats, a large number of rural nonfarm homes, a lack of "spatial pattern" to farm buildings, and a high rate of building abandonment. "The observer can be reasonably certain that he is within the Southern culture area when the bulk of these traits recur with great frequency," Zelinsky concluded, "and particularly when they are assembled into one or another of the regional house types."

Related to the description of the South as a land of rather slovenly dwelling patterns is David Bertelson's idea that the distinguishing characteristic of Southerners is laziness. By his definition, however, they were afflicted not with a lack of energy but with a dearth of social unity. Southerners sought individual rather than social goals and were motivated by a desire for private gain, he said. They were prototypes of the "robber barons" who sought wealth without social responsibility, and were so thoroughly committed to economic motivation that the relatively un-self-seeking abolitionists baffled them. To Bertelson the South was an individualistic, chaotic economy in an America whose other inhabitants held some idea of community purpose, and this gave Southerners a sense of apartness and led both to the formation and to the failure of the Confederacy. Before and during the war, he said, the idea that labor meant liberty for private gain destroyed all efforts to create community and strengthened the view of outsiders that Southerners were lazy.

A similar view was that of Earl E. Thorpe, who also argued that freedom was a chief characteristic of Southerners. To Thorpe, however, its emphasis was upon sexual license. Easy access to black females who "desperately wanted displays of recognition and affection" meant that there was less repression in the South than elsewhere, and freedom led to romanticism, hedonism, and pugnacity. The Southern white male, confronting the criticism of a more inhibited outside world, became militant in the defense of his society and his frequently deceived womenfolk. Thorpe thus described a Freudian South lying just below the land of Id, a harem of sexual freedom rather than a place of economic individualism.

Another recent proposal, offered by C. Vann Woodward, held that the only distinguishing feature that may survive the social revolution of the post-1945 era is the memory of the Southern past. "The collective expe-

rience of the Southern people," he said, has made the South "the most distinctive region of the country." It was an experience that repudiated the most cherished aspects of the American self-image, for it was a record of poverty in a land of plenty, pessimism and frustration among a people wedded to optimism and unending success, and guilt complexes in a naively innocent America. Indeed, Woodward comes close to saying that the central theme of Southern history is Southern history. However helpful the idea may be in interpreting the dreary years after Appomattox, it ignores the peculiarities and events that caused such an aberrant history in the first place.

Another currently popular thesis, also based upon the harsh unpleasantness that surrounds much of Southern existence, contends that the Southerner is more inclined to romanticism than are other Americans. The Southerner is distinguished by his preference for fantasy and myth. "The quality that makes him unique among Americans," said T. Harry Williams, is his ability to conjure up "mind-pictures of his world or of the larger world around him—images that he wants to believe, that are real to him, and that he will insist others accept." George B. Tindall suggested the possibility that "we shall encounter the central theme of Southern history at last on the new frontier of mythology," and he listed some of the myths about the South that have at one time or another gained support: the Pro-Slavery South, the Confederate South, the Demagogic South, the States' Rights South, the Lazy South, and the Booster South. "There are few areas of the modern world," he declared, "that have bred a regional mythology so potent, so profuse and diverse, even so paradoxical, as the American South." Here again the searcher finds the results of an allegedly distinctive South, one of the inheritance family of character traits, but provides little illumination as to its cause.

The effort to locate the South by defining it as a single characteristic produced still another statement of the central theme. Outlined by Avery Craven and Frank L. Owsley and amplified by others, it argued that the South was the product of attacks from without. In this view the South was a state of mind, a conscious minority reacting to criticism by forging a unity as a defense mechanism. Opposition drew people together in defense of their peculiarities when their natural course would have been to fight among themselves. It began, according to Craven, with the tariff controversy in the 1820's and it became full grown in the abolition crusade.

Frank L. Owsley further developed the theme that the South came into being only when it became the victim of outside attack. "There was very little defense or justification of slavery until the commencement of a vigorous abolitionist assault from the North," he said. But "the attack upon slavery and the South resulted in the development of a philosophical defense of slavery. . . . So violent and dangerous did this new crusade appear to Southerners that a revolution in Southern thought immediately took place." Owsley declared that attacks upon the South had continued since the Civil War, but these merely succeeded in making the section more united than before. Charles W. Ramsdell, B. B. Kendrick, and A. B. Moore, along

with others, defended the "outside attack" thesis, while Frank E. Vandiver emphasized an "offensive-defensive" pattern of Southern response to external criticism. Implicit in this argument is the assumption that a united South began as a Yankee invention.

The contention that the idea of a South grew out of external attacks produced its corollary—that the South was the result of a conscious effort to create a sense of unity among a diverse population with conflicting interests. In the effort, Southern leaders used all available arguments—climate, race, soil, staple-crop similarities, the agrarian philosophy with its country-gentleman ideal and the plantation as a romantic tradition, and slavery as a positive good. Some of them dramatized, if they did not actually invent, attacks from without as aids to their campaign for sectional unity. "If there is a central theme," said Robert S. Cotterill, "it is the rise of Southern nationalism." The study of the emergence of a divergent nationalism attracted many scholars. The South "was an emotion," Avery Craven wrote, "produced by an assumption on the part of outsiders of a unity there which did not exist, by propaganda within which emphasized likenesses rather than differences and created a unity of fear where none other existed."

In the conscious effort to create a South, every hint of attack from outside the section came as a godsend. William Lloyd Garrison and his abolition newspaper might well have passed unnoticed had not Southern publicists called attention to him by putting a price upon his head. Critics of the Southern system such as Elijah P. Lovejoy in Illinois and Cassius M. Clay in Kentucky found themselves the objects of violent mob resistance. In 1859 Edmund Ruffin, an energetic Southern unifier, expressed gratitude for the John Brown raid upon Harpers Ferry because of its beneficial effects upon "the sluggish blood of the South," and he took it upon himself to send samples of Brown's pikes to the governors of the slave states lest they forgot. After the war, Reconstruction again called forth a movement for white unity in the face of political and economic coercion—new attacks from without—and into the twentieth century there appeared leaders willing to evoke memories of the past as weapons against proposed changes in existing social or educational arrangements.

The flaw in the hypothesis of a movement to unify a people in the face of real or imaginary attacks from without has two aspects. First, as with all devil theories of historical motivation, it assumes almost magical powers of clairvoyance among promoters of the movement; and second, what it describes are but activities common to politicians practicing their profession wherever found, not uniquely Southern behavior at all. It was not surprising that Southern leaders should appeal for unanimity in support of their programs and candidacies; indeed, it would require explanation had any not done so. And that they could have foreseen the consequences of their conduct places a severe strain upon credulity.

From this confusing and sometimes contradictory survey of central themes in Southern history and life the suspicion emerges that the American South defies either location or analysis. It appears to be in fact an enigma

challenging comprehension, "a kind of Sphinx on the American land." Its geographical boundaries are imprecise at best, and the characteristics of its population resist valid generalization. To say this is not to say that the South does not exist; it is to suggest that it exists only as a controlling idea or belief upon which men acted, risked, and died. The idea of the South is real; it is one of the most important ideas in American history, and that gives it significance.

The South idea has played a fundamental role in national development. In the early days of the Republic, as part of the debate between Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton which formed the basis of the first party divisions under the Constitution, the idea of a South contributed to the definition of public policy. As the internal dispute became more heated, it entered into the compromises that Americans made over the admission of Missouri, in the tariff settlement in 1833, and in the agreements of 1850. The idea appeared in party platforms and in the selection of candidates, and in 1860 it was an essential element in the division within the Democratic party.

The idea of a South produced an internal civil war whose outcome established the American nation. That result might have occurred in the absence of civil war, and also without the South idea, temporarily expressed as a Confederacy of states hostile to national union. But as it happened, the emergence of American nationality depended upon the idea of a South that posed a challenge to national citizenship and solidarity. In the postwar settlement—the constitutional amendments comprised in the peace treaty between the sections—the idea of the South profoundly affected the nature of the re-established Union upon national and pluralistic foundations. Later, when war emotions had cooled and industrial production expanded, it was the idea of the South that influenced the form and the content of the reactionary compromises of 1877. In the twentieth century the idea of a South re-emerged as men debated the meaning of national citizenship and the civil liberties the nation owed its citizens.

The American South is therefore not a place or a thing; it is not a collection of folkways or cultural distinctives. It is an idea. Those of whatever persuasion or tradition who believe themselves to be Southern are indeed Southern, and the South exists wherever Southerners form the predominant portion of the population. The study of the idea of Southness is thus a part of intellectual history, or, because it is an exercise in faith, it belongs among the academic offerings in the department of religion.

Perhaps a more fruitful question for students of the American South would be, not *what* the South is or has been, but *why* the idea of the South began, and *how* it came to be accepted as axiomatic among Americans. Whose interests were served when people spoke and thought of the South as an entity? How did the agents of the opinion-forming and opinion-disseminating institutions transmit the idea that allegiance to a section should transcend loyalty to the nation? What have been the effects upon American history of the belief in the idea of a South? Answers to these questions will go far to remove the study of the South from the realm of

classifying and cataloguing to the tasks of probing causes and effects and the weighing of motivations. These are the true functions of the historian.

## The South as a Counterculture

SHELDON HACKNEY

All around us extraordinary crises threaten to intrude into the serenity of our daily lives, and we are aware as seldom before of the striking disjunction between the personal and the public realms. At this time, when the habits of mind formed by our national historical experiences with individualism, affluence, progressive growth and military victory seem to be interfering with our ability to face up to the problems of racial justice, poverty, environmental despoliation and war, we should ask how our regional heritage speaks to our present needs. As the nation's largest and oldest counterculture, the South has much to teach us.

This, no doubt, seems a bizarre assertion to those familiar with the making of the contemporary counterculture. Much of the impetus for the cultural rebellion of youth lately has come from the assault of the civil rights movement on the South in the 1960s, so it would be a supreme irony if there were strong resemblances between the culture of the South and the culture created by young Americans seeking alternative values.

As analyzed sympathetically by Theodore Roszak in *The Making of a Counter Culture*, today's counterculture is at bottom a revolt against the dehumanizing effect of scientific and technological values, and against the bureaucratic society whose very efficiency depends upon desensitizing people to individual needs and differences. Artificial barriers that separate people, be they psychological, institutional, or social, say the current rebels, have to be torn down. In contrast to the ideal of material progress through rational analysis, the counterculture focuses on the quality of life and the need for individuals to have more power over the decisions that affect their lives.

The revolt against authoritarianism in favor of the New Left's ideal of participatory democracy has become more generally a revolt against authority of any kind. Only personal experience can serve as the basis of belief, a precept that should be appreciated by Southern Protestants who trace their form of worship back to the frontier. . . .

. . . In simplistic terms, it is a matter of the heart versus the head. There is a widespread feeling that the life of reason has failed us because so many barbarities are perpetrated in its name and so many evils exist within its sight. The technocratic rationalism of the war in Vietnam is the thing that lends it a special horror.

Furthermore, so the argument goes, technocracy and bureaucracy stultify spontaneity and thus make individual authenticity impossible. In con-

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trast to the innovative thinkers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as Sigmund Freud, who were interested in the nonrational in order to control it better, we are confronted with Normal O. Brown, who argues that civilization's discontents will remain unless currently repressed instinctual drives are released from control by the superego. At the risk of putting the matter even more simplistically, the counterculture is a protest against the commercialization of life.

What are we to make of all this from our special vantage point in the South? I begin with history, because I accept as truth what Jack Burden says in Robert Penn Warren's novel, *All the King's Men*: "If you could not accept the past and its burden there was no future, for without one there cannot be the other, and . . . if you could accept the past you might hope for the future, for only out of the past can you make the future."

The key to the Southern past is that Southerners are Americans who have taken on an additional identity through conflict with the North. The process differentiating the South from the American non-South in the early nineteenth century was based on divergent economic interests growing from differing labor systems, and depending in part upon the Southern context of a sparse, occupationally homogeneous population and the lack of an urban middle class. With that beginning, the Southern sense of separateness has been constructed of many layers of defensiveness, particularism, isolation, guilt, defeat and the reactions to changes initiated from without: abolitionism, the Civil War, Reconstruction, poverty, depressions, industrialization and lately the civil rights movement. Through all this, white Southerners learned to see themselves as an oppressed minority with a giant sense of grievance, an identity they share with blacks, although for different reasons.

The counterattack of the Southern press against the hypocrisy and self-righteousness of the North during the Second Reconstruction is but another activation of this traditional defensive mentality. The same siege mentality can be seen subtly at work among historians and others who attribute the slow pace of modernization in the South to the region's colonial status and the imperial domination of Northern economic interests. Furthermore, the sense of persecution can be seen influencing the literature of the region. When Quentin Compson in *Absalom! Absalom!* comes to call on Rosa Coldfield before going off to Harvard, he is reminded, as he must have been a thousand times before, of the Yankee's persecution of the South. "So," says Rosa Coldfield, "I don't imagine you will ever come back here and settle down as a country lawyer in a little town like Jefferson since Northern people have already seen to it that there is little left in the South for a young man."

Nevertheless, Southerners are Americans, and in a real sense the need to be different was forced upon them by circumstances and by outsiders. The resulting approach-avoidance relationship of South to North explains why one finds in the South the coexistence of hyper-Americanism and cultural peculiarity.

The "approach" side of this curious psychological transaction can be

seen best since the Civil War in the New South movement, beautifully dissected by Paul Gaston in *The New South Creed*, one of whose messages is that a conquered people frequently will imitate its conquerors. The chief tenet of the New South crusade is that industrialization is the way to secular salvation, and its optimistic dogma has from the first been that the South is destined to be the most prosperous place on earth, a new Eden. The bearers of these glad tidings were not only wise men out of the North, but local prophets as well, of whom Henry Grady was the most renowned in the nineteenth century. Today's champions of the New South tend to be the more institutional, hungry utilities and state industrial development offices, but the message is the same: The South is the land of milk and honey, or at least of water and electricity, and one can move into this land of low taxes and docile labor with little of the difficulty experienced by the children of Israel.

Southerners, when operating on the "avoidance" side of the American mirror, traditionally have had to define themselves in opposition to a presumed American norm, and in that sense at least, the South is a real counterculture. When the South was first created, the North was becoming the special carrier of Yankee commercial culture with its stress upon hard work, thrift and the cash basis of value. The mythical Southern planter, created in novels as an alternative to the emerging Yankee, was therefore a noneconomic man, the result of the South's need for a myth that would distinguish it from, and make it morally superior to, the North. . . .

The planters of the legend, explains William R. Taylor in *Cavalier and Yankee*, were exemplars of noncompetitiveness. They were generous, loving, gentle, noble and true to their word. Rather than the instinctive nobility of the unspoiled savage, however, the planter had the benefits of a benign and salubrious country life and rigorous training in a civilized code. But it was not the code of the Yankee. The legendary planter was free of personal ambition, particularly of the material sort, and his natural impulses were disciplined, not by calculation of gain, but by his concern for family and racial traditions, by rigid standards of decorum and a complicated code of personal honor. That our fictive hero was also weak, improvident, indolent and ineffectual betrays a flaw of disbelief on the part of his creators and explains why (Oh, confounder of women's liberation) Scarlet O'Hara always ended up running Tara. Southern writers shared more than they realized of the mainstream cultural values of the nation.

Northern writers, conversely, played an important part in the creation of the plantation legend, but for reasons differing from those of their Southern brothers. Faced with severe social dislocations growing out of geographic mobility, industrialization, immigration and urbanization, some Northerners began to fear the erosion of the old republican style of life characterized by simplicity and prudence. In growing numbers during the decades before the Civil War, such men began to focus their discontent on the planter and the slave system upon which he depended, as the primary threat to the Puritan virtues upon which the republic was founded. At the same time, many other Northerners were becoming painfully aware that

the helter-skelter process of social mobility in America could not monitor the conditions under which men competed, and thus could not guarantee the moral worth of the men who succeeded. The image of the Yankee as an acquisitive, grasping, uncultivated and amoral man was not acceptable to many sensitive Northerners. Some reacted by imputing to the Yankee a transcending social virtue. They argued in effect that the ascetic, single-minded, materialistic and opportunistic Yankee benefited society by making a profit. Others, however, helped to create the planter or the Southern gentleman as the counterpoint to the Yankee. The Southern gentleman was made to possess all of the virtues that the Yankee lacked. He had honor and integrity, indifference to money questions and business, a decorous concern for the amenities of life and a high sense of social responsibility. In the age of democratic expansion, anxious men sought an antidemocratic Good Society and they found it in the mythical, static, Southern plantation.

Southern intellectuals responded obligingly by spending an enormous amount of energy romantically constructing Biblical or feudal or classical Greek alternatives to the liberal capitalism of the nation at large. John C. Calhoun, to an extent, and George Fitzhugh, more fundamentally, attacked the dehumanization inherent in the wage slavery of free enterprise. According to Fitzhugh in his books, *Sociology for the South or The Failure of Free Society* and *Cannibals All: or, Slaves Without Masters*, free competition was only legalized exploitation. It was merely freedom for the strong to oppress the weak. Anticipating Herbert Marcuse, one of the political philosophers of the New Left, Fitzhugh pointed out that not only was physical wretchedness the result of this war of all against all, but psychological wretchedness as well. For under capitalism one man's success was marked by another man's failure; fortunes shifted rapidly, and the result was that the human personality was marked by insecurity, anxiety and unhappiness. To complete his rejection of Jefferson, Fitzhugh advocated strong and positive action by the government to build up industries and cities in the South. Rejecting the doctrine of progress and the principle of equality, Fitzhugh held that only within the framework of absolute dependence and superiority could genuine reciprocal affection exist between human beings. A society seeking solutions in fantasy could scarcely get further away from the American consensus.

After the Civil War, the mutual symbolic interaction of North and South continued under the new conditions. While the myth of the New South was being created in a great rush of popular fervor, the myth of the Old South was simultaneously being created, packaged and marketed in the North and the South. Reflecting this divided mind of the South, Joel Chandler Harris recorded his Uncle Remus stories at the same desk where he wrote for the *Atlanta Constitution* editorials infused with New South boosterism. Harris, George Washington Cable, Thomas Nelson Page, Mary Noailles Murfree and their fellow writers in the 1880s established the primacy of Southern themes in American letters. Archaic romance and local color stories appealed to Northern audiences facing the reality of rapid social change in their daily lives. Southern sensibilities called for pathos

balanced with the theme of sectional reconciliation. Through it all ran an intense sense of place and awareness of the past-in-the-present that are trademarks of Southern literature. The stock Southern character, for Northern as well as Southern writers, was still the embodiment of noncommercial nobility, the counterpoint to the shrewd but crude robber baron who ruled the Gilded Age.

The Agrarians, a group of Southern intellectuals centered at Vanderbilt University in the 1920s and 1930s, did not perpetuate this cavalier myth, but they were nonetheless engaged in the old Southern sport of defining an alternative to the national consensus. As their manifesto, *I'll Take My Stand*, put it in 1930, "All the articles bear in the same sense upon the book's title-subject: all tend to support a southern way of life against what may be called the American way; and all as much as agree that the best terms in which to represent the distinction are contained in the phrase, Agrarian versus Industrial." It was a frontal assault on the principles of Northern and modern civilization, a continuing comparison between the disordered present and the heroic past, which has always been the currency of groups disturbed by change.

The Agrarians, echoing George Fitzhugh, denied the virtue of machine-produced wealth and decried the brutalization of man and the philistinization of society that inevitably resulted from an industrial order. As humanists, they insisted that labor, the largest item in human life, should be enjoyed. This was impossible under industrialism. The art and culture they held most valuable was that which grew out of natural folk ways of doing, living and thinking. All else was superficial. Present day devotees of the *Whole Earth Catalog*, organic gardening and the handicraft industry would find this pretty heavy stuff.

More abstractly, the Agrarians placed the relationship of man to nature close to the center of their philosophy. They believed that "there is possible no deep sense of beauty, human heroism of conduct, and no sublimity of religion, which is not informed by the humble sense of man's precarious position in the universe." In other words, "there is more in the land than there is in the man," or, as John Crowe Ransom put it, "Nature wears out man before man can wear out nature. . . . It seems wiser to be moderate in our expectations of nature, and respectful; and out of so simple a thing as respect for the physical earth and its teeming life, comes a primary joy, which is an inexhaustible source of arts and religions and philosophies." The thing that differentiates these romantic conservatives most clearly from their descendants among today's youthful counterculturists is that the Agrarians linked community with continuity. They thought that "tradition is not simply a fact, but a fact that must be constantly defended." Nevertheless, paradoxical as it might seem, there is a large area of agreement between the culture of the South as understood by the Agrarians and the contemporary counterculture.

Like all paradoxes, the similarity between the culture of the South and the counterculture has its limitations. The world view of Southern Protestantism, which dominates the mind of the region, makes a virtue out of

suffering in a way members of the counterculture would not understand or accept, even though the emphasis upon redemption through a personal conversion experience might find some resonance among young Americans seeking instant salvation along various secular and spiritual paths. Just as the counterculture is unthinkable in a country lacking the affluence provided by the work ethic in league with technocracy, Southern culture would not long survive apart from the rationalism whose hegemony it was created to challenge. The problems of human survival are not going to be solved by consulting the *I Ching* or Tarot cards.

Even so, at the present, when ten times more college students take courses in astrology than in astrophysics, when middle Americans, numbered by their lives as members of endless audiences, are in search of affective relationships, the South has much to offer. To an increasingly fragmented world the South offers an integrated view of life. There is no such thing as being "in fashion" now; styles in clothes and in most areas of life are too various and are multiplying too rapidly for a single standard to exist even for a short time. Contemporary art runs a gamut from the Wyeths to Helen Frankenthaler, and style has become a collective noun. Such currently popular writers as Donald Barthelme and Jerzy Kosinski render life into brilliant snippets of experience that coagulate without melding. Compare this to the vision of William Faulkner in which past, present and future are linked together; in which individuals don't merely rub up against each other in fleeting encounters but are enmeshed in each other's lives; in which individual lives over long periods of time are bound together by their connection to place. There is a wholeness to life in the South, even in its harsh and ugly aspects, and this is a useful antidote to a world in which increasing individuality means increasing isolation.

The price of wholeness is finitude. Freedom and the power to act are circumscribed when one is tied to a community. Rather than something that a counterculture must construct in the future after all the restraints of organized society have been cast off, community for Southerners is a set of conditions and obligations to be fulfilled through courage and honor. Strangely enough, Southerners, both white and black, do not feel alienated from themselves even though they feel alienated from the national sources of economic and political power.

It may also seem strange to find illegal defiance of national authority coexisting so comfortably in the South with superpatriotism, but that is a consequence of the dual identity of Southerners, and grows out of their double history. As C. Vann Woodward points out in *The Burden of Southern History*, the South's experiences with defeat, poverty and guilt have set it apart from the nation. In contrast to the national belief that problems have solutions, Southerners harbor the countervailing suspicion that there are limits to human power.

There is a salutary humanistic lesson in discovering the vine of fate entangling Southern history. Whether that vine is wisteria or kudzu may vary according to ideological taste, but the message that there are areas of life not susceptible to rational control or bureaucratic manipulation strikes

a resonant note. As a perceptive journalist observed of a group of irate town fathers in Mississippi who had just been struck by another federal court edict, "Of course, they are not really surprised because, being Southerners and therefore fatalistic, they live always half expecting disaster." . . .

Southern history forces us to be aware not only of complexity, but also of defeat and failure. It would be wrong to reject or oppose the improvement in social welfare that will come from the intrusion of the machine into the garden, but we should oppose the Icarian notion that change comes without costs, and that the South will be immune from history. Only through such a constant realization do we have a chance to industrialize and humanize at the same time, to walk the thin line between defeatism and morally obtuse boosterism.

In striving to live with our past without being oppressed by it, the proper stance is one of ambivalent judgment, an ironic distance between oneself and his history that energizes rather than immobilizes. The modern man facing his existential predicament might well be guided by the lesson contained in the following Hasidic legend recorded by Elie Wiesel in his book, *Souls on Fire*:

One of the Just Men came to Sodom, determined to save its inhabitants from sin and punishment. Night and day he walked the streets and markets preaching against greed and theft, falsehood and indifference. In the beginning, people listened and smiled ironically. Then they stopped listening: he no longer even amused them. The killers went on killing, the wise kept silent, as if there were no Just Man in their midst.

One day a child, moved by compassion for the unfortunate preacher, approached him with these words. "Poor stranger. You shout, you expend yourself body and soul; don't you see that it is hopeless?"

"Yes, I see," answered the Just Man.

"Then why do you go on?"

"I'll tell you why. In the beginning I thought I could change man. Today, I know I cannot. If I still shout today, if I still scream, it is to prevent man from ultimately changing me."

#### ✧ FURTHER READING

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