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The New Southern Politics

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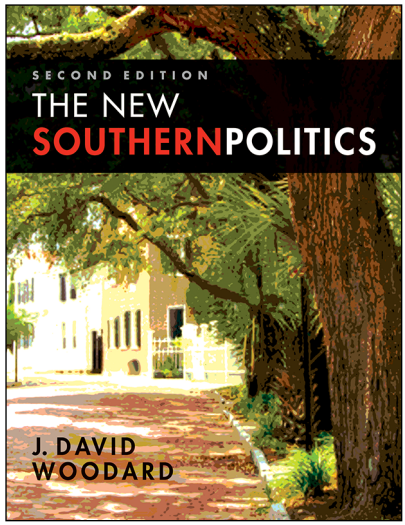

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Southern Politics in the Twenty-First Century

"History, like God and nature, [has] been both generous and unkind to the South," wrote "Fugitive" poet Donald Davidson in his 1938 essay titled "Still Rebels, Still Yankees."[1] Three-quarters of a century later, the region remains a place both blessed and benighted. The South is blessed in the sense that it is now economically prosperous, socially accepted, and culturally defining in its literature, art, politics, music, and social patterns. Yet it is benighted in that a military defeat, racial antipathy, and aesthetic isolation rubbed deep into its wounds a rebelliousness with which the rest of the country is unfamiliar.

Once upon a time—and it was not so long ago—the conventional wisdom was that the South would never overcome its past and join the rest of the country in what was known as the American dream. The estrangement was most apparent in government statistics: the South was poorer, less healthy, undereducated, less urbanized, more agrarian, and resistant to change. It was ruled by one political party whose politicians ran on a platform of racial exclusion and resentment of the rest of the country. "We have never wished to be like everybody else," wrote Ben Robertson in his upcountry South Carolina memoir *Red Hills and Cotton* (1942). "We have tried all our lives to be ourselves, to be different if the spirit so moved us."[2]

The spirit did so move, and the memories, obligations, and resentments of the southern past changed in the twinkling of an eye. Though predominantly rural before World War II, the region welcomed an influx of defense contractors, draftees in training, and workers looking for jobs. Virtually every city in the South could boast about a military installation of some variety during the war years. The disruption transformed a once-unspoiled wilderness into a complex society. The effect was noticeable, and, in the words of Hank Williams who traveled the back roads then and later, the South "traded the wrong for the right, Praise the Lord, I saw the light" (1948).[3] The physical geography of the region did not change, but the population of each state migrated and shifted. In his 2007 documentary, *The War,* filmmaker Ken Burns told the story of how everyday citizens at home experienced the

worldwide conflict. One of the places he picked to examine was Mobile, Alabama, and one of the natives whose story he told was that of Katherine Phillips. Between 1940 and 1943 more than 89,000 people moved to Mobile.[4] Katherine volunteered at the Red Cross canteen at the railway station, served coffee and doughnuts to the men on the troop trains, and after the war was over, married a naval pilot who evacuated men from combat zones to medical facilities.[5] Her story was typical.

The war exposed southern conditions of race, class, and gender to national scrutiny. After it was over, the booming urban centers parlayed their wartime economy into postwar prosperity. A part of the country notorious for slavery, social consciousness, white supremacy, segregation, poverty, and isolation introduced itself as a place for charity, family, manners, humor, and faith. The eleven states of the former Confederacy were 24 percent of the US population in 1950; by 2010 they were 31 percent of the citizenry.

The South grew because it changed, and it changed because it had a social conscience, an infrastructure of religious and cultural agents who "saw the light."[6] When Martin Luther King Jr. spoke of his dream of racial equality, that one day "the rough places will be made plain, the crooked places will be made straight," he named the states of Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi in his speech.[7] Ironically, Southerners embraced their racial past, and in doing so reversed its effects. Scenes of racial conflict in the 1960s were changed into state parks in Alabama. Atlanta, Georgia, a city "too busy to hate," became a world-class venue for the 1996 Summer Olympic Games. The 2010 census found greater African American in-migration to the South than out-migration from it. Majority white congressional districts in Florida and South Carolina elected black Republicans to office in 2010. One of them, Tim Scott (SC), became the first African American senator from the South since Reconstruction when he was appointed to fill an unexpired term two years later.

Agriculture once defined the southern life, first on the plantation and then on the farm. After General Sherman's fabled "March to the Sea" through the heart of Georgia in 1865, his Field Order No. 15 provided for arable land and, in some cases, US Army mules for plowing. Thus was born the "forty acres and a mule" southern agrarian legacy. In 1950 about a quarter of the southern workforce still labored in farming, compared to less than 10 percent nationally. Today, the South has less than 2 percent involved in agriculture as a calling.[8]

The most stubborn legacy was economic. The South trailed other regions in per capita income. In 1950 southern wages were at 74 percent of the national average; by 2010 they were at 91 percent. In 1970 *Fortune* magazine listed the locations of the 200 largest US corporations, and only nine had a southern address; by 2003, forty-three of the top 200 were in the South, including Wal-Mart at the top.[9]

Modern times beckoned with humanistic ideals—more secular, liberal, and postmodern. The rest of the country may have rushed to embrace the new morals, but not so for the South. Some prophets of change are manifest in southern cities

and university towns, but on the whole, the South remains the most conservative region in the nation. It remains faithful to the old ways, more devout, more churchgoing, and more likely to embrace its past with all its contradictions. Southerners know the best and worst of human qualities; their native land is a place where legend is history, and sometimes history is legend.

From the end of the Civil War in 1865 to 1976, the legacy of the South was a liability in political races outside the region. The record of white supremacy and slavery checked political ambition such that no southern politician could seriously challenge for the national office of president. The memory of slavery and the practice of segregation was a scar. Politicians who won the office, like Andrew Johnson and Lyndon Johnson, used the vice presidency as a stepping stone. "Southerners were the junior partners . . . not until 1912 did a southern politician . . . seriously attempt to win the Democratic presidential nomination."[10]

After Jimmy Carter won the White House in 1976, the sins of a southern past were dissolved by voters and acquitted by the mainstream press. Televised softball games between the administration and the White House Press Corps in Plains, Georgia, made good public relations. They signaled national acceptance and helped to wash out the blemish of inferiority from one hundred years earlier. At the end of the twentieth century the memory of second-class political citizenship receded when politicians from the South were the standard-bearers of both major political parties in the 2000 presidential election. In 2008 an African American won the presidency by carrying three southern states, and something once unthinkable became a political reality. The words of Lyndon Johnson came true: "It is all of us who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice. *And we shall overcome*" (emphasis added).[11]

Political Science and Political Culture

The 2010 census showed the eleven states of the South with nearly one-third of the nation's population, and a part of the country historically out of the mainstream had become a full partner in national life and politics. The best way to understand this change of status in the South is to liken the region to a subset of the larger political culture.

The influence of culture in terms of ethnic identity, urbanization, and religion has been a guiding principle in political science since the time of the ancient Greeks and Hebrews. Aristotle looked not only to the culture of the state, but also to civilization's potential for being directed to some end.[12] The idea of the "just regime" implied public action that was in agreement with the values and habits of its citizens. Similarly, Moses ruled the Israelites in accordance with divine law and instructed the citizens as to its precepts. The ancients regarded the formation of character and development of civic virtue as the fundamental responsibility of government.

The classical tradition was challenged in the sixteenth century when Niccolo Machiavelli abandoned culture and focused on the passions and behavior of egotistical human beings.[13] The new political science concentrated on changing circumstances to achieve peace and prosperity, as well as individual freedom and equality. Thomas Hobbes suggested that the fear of violent death was basic to all cultures, while John Locke declared the real issue was protection of property.[14] The social contract conceptualization of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau rendered culture and character superfluous, because the contracting humans were not political animals, but natural, precultural beasts. Later, Marxists damned culture and character as by-products of the economic substructure. Their arguments were that political culture was the dead hand of the past that ignored the primary role economics played in political life.

In the 1950s scholars like Gabriel Almond and Bingham Powell responded that "political culture" was a better way of understanding political action than the mechanistic concepts of some Marxian material consciousness. Almond defined political culture as a "particular pattern of orientation to political action." The approach regarded politics as "cognitions, preferences and evaluations or choices through the application of standards or values to the cognitive and effective components."[15] In other words, the orientation people collectively had to politics was based on transmitted patterns of conduct and their attachment to group symbols. This cultural orientation of a people determined their political orientation.

The concept of political culture explains a wide range of systematic differences in political behavior and structure in the southern states. For example, political culture research contends that people do not enter social contracts as separate individuals, but as culture-bearing beings and members of groups seeking to accommodate their interests with others. The persistence of traditional values in the South is an understood part of the cultural legacy. Political party realignment and economic development cannot be explained apart from the culture and ideology of the region. Again, in Aristotle's words, the principles of justice are to be tailored to the character and circumstances of a region's inhabitants.[16]

Political culture is the summation of ethnic settlement patterns, historical episodes, and persistent patterns of political attitudes and values. V. O. Key opened his book on southern politics by saying, "The South remains the region with the most distinctive character and tradition."[17] Elements of life such as heritage, religion, regional ethnicity, the timing and size of migrations to a place, and the settlement patterns once there, are all part of the character, or political culture, of the area. Contemporary US political culture reflects the values of the European people who settled the country hundreds of years ago. Settlers did not come with a blank cultural slate; they brought with them elements of life from their native lands. Gabriel Almond and Bingham Powell describe this development when they "refer to these special propensities located in particular groups as *subcultures*" (emphasis added), with different roles, substructures, and subsystems within a nation. "There

may be traditions and attitudes, current in the different roles, structures and subsystems of the political system," but the area as a whole remains distinct.[18]

The history and values of the South make it a discrete subculture to the US experience. It is distinct in language, as when native president Jimmy Carter referred to Italians as "Eye-talians." It is distinct in race, having historically had the nation's highest percentage of African American population. Southerners relate to each other the way Martin Luther King Jr. did to Lyndon Johnson when he addressed him as "my fellow southerner."[19] It is distinct in religion, and *Time* magazine recognized this when it said, "Southerners are the most church-going people in the nation."[20] It is distinct in history, attitudes, and a host of other ways that make it a subculture of the larger national whole. It is distinct in change, as when a majority of the populations leave rural areas and flock to new cities, leaving their racial stereotypes behind.

The southern political culture is a product of the land itself. The geography of the South is very different from Europe and the rest of the United States. The verdant undergrowth flourished in relentless summer heat and there was enough rainfall to sustain any crop. The challenges of confronting the Appalachian wildness, the forests of the alluvial plain, and the starkness of the frontier made different demands on the political system than had been the case in civilized Europe. Settlers did not have the luxury of a social support system or a history of prior success, and had to face challenges alone. A dominant characteristic of southern political culture was "rugged individualism," which emphasized self-reliance as applied to economic and social relations.

Today, waves of change have washed over the South, smoothing off its hard edges while keeping the traditions of certain manners, emotions, and interests intact. A lost war, decades of poverty, a history of individualism, and the systematic segregation of a major part of its population created a distinct subset of the national political culture. Certain values, cherished in the South, persisted over time, and their legacy and change in an urban environment are the subject of this book. The belief systems formed the meanings of cultural values and life patterns, and were transmitted, learned, and shared over time.[21]

Political culture also refers to the attitudes and evaluations people have toward government. Here, too, the South remains unique. One-party politics, legislative governance, a distinct Christian rhetoric about values, colorful executives with flamboyant leadership styles, a preference for an elitist social system, and a popular resistance to centralized authority made, and continue to make, southern politics original. These attitudes and patterns of life are transmitted from generation to generation through political socialization and participation.

A political subculture is not necessarily contained by geographic boundaries or state borders. The South has a unique culture, but within that whole are differentiated parts that have separate and more specific experiences. Almond and Powell say these "regional groups, or ethnic groups, or social classes which make up the

population of a political system may have special propensities or tendencies."[22] There are differences within the South, between upstate and downstate, east and west, mountain and plain, and these dissimilar elements determine political competition.

When V. O. Key compared two southern states by saying that "the political distance from Virginia to Alabama must be measured in light years," he was talking about subcultural values without using the word.[23] Another example of this subculture analysis was illustrated by Key's detection of a pattern of party cleavage in western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee, demonstrated by Republican strength in the mountain areas of these otherwise Democratic states. After World War II, the conflict between urban and rural became pronounced. The influence of culture, particularly ethnic identity, migration, and heritage from the time of the Civil War, explains these political differences. Today subcultural values are primarily divided between cities and suburbs. What new patterns are in evidence with the migration to city living, with new minority groups, and with an interstate highway system that allows one to commute from fifty miles away?

In a continuation of Key's analysis, patterns of rural land settlement influenced rates of urbanization and economic growth. The strength and activity of local governments, the extent and quality of education, and the amount of voter participation all make for a patchwork political culture across the South. Although all southern states share a geo-historical past, they adapted to the twentieth century, and then the twenty-first, in different ways. A variety of subcultures meant that the rates of economic, social, and political change varied from state to state, and within states as well. The "Byrd machine" in Virginia produced a different political leader than the "Barnwell Ring" of South Carolina, or the network of county judges in Alabama. The growth of metropolitan Atlanta defined the politics for the whole state of Georgia, while Hurricane Katrina changed elections in Louisiana.

The concept of political culture has come under criticism for including too much and excluding too little.[24] While it does have some shortcomings, the term is useful for explaining a wide range of differences in political behavior and the political structure of southern states. Political culture is a concept broad enough to encompass a dispute over the Confederate symbol on the Georgia state flag and at the same time allow for specific measurement of the change in partisanship of a single Georgia county. The political culture exerts its greatest influence by establishing a framework wherein individuals and groups may orient themselves for political action.

The term "political culture" has several components, three of which are (1) the appropriate role of government in society, (2) the role of the individual in relation to the state, and (3) the evaluation of existing institutions and officeholders.[25] The pattern in the South was that tradition, habit, and elite leadership gave stability to society. As a result individual liberty was seen as more important than centralized government authority. While recent urbanization and a more uniform US culture have weakened many of these distinctions, they remain in force when it comes to

politics. There was some overlap of these values with other regions of the country, but the minimalist views on the role of government and rampant individualism remain relevant attitudes in the South, making it once again distinct from northern and western states.

Daniel Elazar offers a comprehensive theory of political culture that addresses the how and why of US development, and describes the boundaries of major subcultural cleavages within the nation. His analysis is useful for confirming southern political distinctiveness and showing subcultural differences within the South. Elazar argues that three political subcultures—individualistic, moralistic, and traditionalistic—have been the primary influences in the historical development of the United States. By researching the social and historical immigration patterns within each state, the roots of a particular social and geographic culture are defined.[26]

The traditionalistic subculture is appropriate for studying most of the South. It is rooted in the elitist agricultural social order that once characterized the region. Government's principal function in the traditionalistic subculture is to preserve the social order relative to the position of various social and economic classes. Politics is dominated by representatives of the social and economic elite, who benefit from their position at the top of the social order. Elazar contends that the traditionalistic culture developed most fully in South Carolina and Virginia, but dominated every southern state, as well as a few in the Midwest and southwestern areas. Texas and Florida were a mixture of traditionalistic and individualistic subcultures, but even there the older social order dominated politics. The individualistic political subculture emphasizes politics as a marketplace where government is a business proposition that depends on professional politicians for stability.[27]

Elazar's conception of US culture is one of a dynamic system, one that assumes the patterns of belief and behavior will evolve over time. As a result, cultural values are subject to modification and mixing of subcultural components. In the traditionalistic political culture, mass participation is not encouraged since individuals see themselves as subservient to the ruling elites. Political participation is discouraged, voter turnout is low, and leadership is entrusted to a governing elite, a body like a state senate or a group of legislative leaders. Urbanization or a population shift can change these belief patterns, but they remain strong in defiance of replacement.

The central idea of the cultural basis of politics is that any explanation of political change in the South involves the interaction of numerous factors. To focus on a single aspect of cultural development, like geography or even ethnicity, is inadequate when it comes to explaining the political behavior of diverse southern states. The states in this book are defined as the ones of rebellion in the Civil War: Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. They are the same ones V. O. Key used in his midcentury analysis, despite compelling evidence that the political culture is similar in states like Oklahoma, Kentucky, and West Virginia.[28] Fifty years

ago they had much in common; today, because of urbanization, in-migration, and economic growth, the differences among them are significant.

While a host of factors separates the South from the rest of the nation, six are identified for the current analysis as components of the political culture. These six aspects of southern politics help explain the historical differences between the region and the rest of the nation, and are useful in analyzing the present distinctions within and among the states. These cultural legacies are (1) the geographic legacy, (2) the rural agricultural economy and the inheritance of economic underachievement, (3) the racial tradition, (4) religious sentiment, (5) one-party political competition, and (6) political leadership in legislatures and executive offices.

These six persistent and significant aspects of the southern political culture, acting in different combinations, have a commanding influence on the political behavior in each of the eleven states. While history is a significant part of culture, so are ethnic makeup and settlement patterns. Present-day politics emerged from the past. The past is a prologue for understanding behavior in the twenty-first century.

The Traditional Southern Political Subculture

The political culture exerts its greatest influence when it establishes the means by which people relate to one another and to those who make decisions on their behalf. In the South, the **physical geography** and climate promoted a society of rulers who had land. Land has been a resource over which disputes have historically centered because the natural topography of an area often dictates political divisions. Natural resources in the South supported the agricultural economy, but later the land and waterways became havens for tourism and recreation.

Societies are shaped by the land from which they emerge. Soil and climate play a role in any political history, but the weather and terrain in the South created a distinctive rustic culture that flourished with short winters and hot, humid, windless days. "Summers are powdery hot; the white ball sun . . . rolling around and around in the sky," describes five months of the southern calendar, and the hot seasons slow the pace of life and allow residents to indulge themselves in outdoor recreational living.[29]

The South comprises many geographical regions: a coastal plain along the Atlantic Ocean and the Gulf of Mexico, the red-soiled Piedmont, the high mountains of North Carolina and Tennessee, and a variety of bluffs, flood plains, and delta river basins. If there is a pattern here, it is that flat plains fall away to a coast or river that accommodated an "Old South" plantation culture in Black Belt counties of agriculture and slavery, while elevated interior regions were home to poorer farming practices, manufacturing ventures, "Cracker" whites, urban centers, and the "New South." Birmingham, Atlanta, and Charlotte are "New South" urban areas along interstate highways with green grass suburbs, while Montgomery, Charleston, and New Orleans are rich in the rural, plantation life of the "Old South" tradition.

The geography created a **rural agrarian economy**, which was labor intensive. Productive agricultural lands, tropical summer temperatures, and the right amount of rainfall during the growing season defined the boundaries of southern life. In his "Notes on Virginia," Thomas Jefferson wrote that agricultural workers were "the chosen people of God." "Among the farm laborers," he said, "God was able to keep alive that sacred fire which otherwise might escape the face of the earth."[30] For white Southerners the farm was the native habitat of the family that allowed independence from corporations and government. The suspicion in the South among whites was that northern capitalists would undermine farmers and small traders, effectively ending the "Southern Way of Life." "The conclusion of the whole matter," wrote Clarence Poe in *Farm Life,* "is that the final goal of agricultural progress is simply the development of a richer and finer rural and moral culture."[31]

The primacy of land ownership became part of the southern mind-set that kept residents from living under the economic rainbow enjoyed by the rest of the nation. Relatively few Southerners lived in cities, and the South had no way of developing a complex economy. Ben Robertson's record of life on a cotton farm in upstate South Carolina is typical. He describes his grandfather's belief "that eventually the United States would come back to the South for the key to its culture . . . [and] that was why he always pleaded with us never to mortgage the land. . . . We could hold on as long as we owned our land."[32] An agricultural miracle never came, and the economy of the region had to change to other endeavors.

African Americans were locked in racial segregation in counties ruled by white elites, but they had a similar affinity for the land. Ralph David Abernathy, who would become a lion in the civil rights movement, grew up as the son of a landowning farmer during the Depression in Alabama. "My father," he wrote in his biography *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down,* "was, after all, a respected farmer in a part of the country where farming was the most respected of all vocations . . . we never wanted for life's necessities."[33] A social structure once dominated by white landowners and planters supervising a subservient black race later became, in the words of Janice Holt Giles, "Forty Acres and No Mule."[34]

Defiance of national trends and support for the farming life were evident in the 1930 manifesto, *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*.[35] In the book, twelve southern sectionalists questioned the benefits of industrialism imposed on the region, and expressed the virtue in a return to the traditional agrarian practices that made the South distinctive. Their creed was that an agricultural environment produced good men and women as well as crops, and the resulting rural civilization was the essence of the South. The agrarian manifesto critiqued centralized industry because it reduced man to a functional cog in a manufacturing and production assembly line. At the same time, the whites defended the region's traditional culture with its virtues of religious humanism and simplicity. For the southern agrarians the true South was rural, conservative, stable, and devout.

Unfortunately, the agrarian life was better in theory than in practice. Slow job growth and a suspicion of centralized government kept the South at the bottom of

the economic ladder. The political culture stressed democratic participation by elites with an emphasis on self-reliance. After the Civil War the region's economy collapsed. C. Vann Woodward's *The Burden of Southern History* recalls that the South was the only part of the nation to experience the pain of a military defeat, occupation by a victorious external foe, and subsequent domination by its former servants.[36] A memory burdened by anguish, despair, and cruelty was in the blood of southern whites, but it also pulsed with a reminiscence of rare courage, honor, and sacrifice. Black Southerners endured decades of economic despair and racial separation, with no memories of heroism.

Minimal expectations and doing without were a part of life in the South. White Southerners felt cheated by the past in the same way as African Americans. The South experienced disappointments in politics, economics, industry, and agriculture, while at the same time it nursed a permanent suspicion about the national races in the early decades of the twentieth century. A magazine editor interviewed in 1947 said that the South was behind the rest of the country, and likely to stay there, but "Franklin Roosevelt did much to destroy the importance of [the personal followings of disreputable politicians] by awakening the lower economic classes . . . the poor farmers, to real issues and the possibilities of their economic improvement."[37] Still, life below the Potomac lagged behind the standards and expectations of the rest of the nation. Rick Bragg, a Pulitzer Prize–winning journalist from Alabama, captured his native, regional inferiority when he described his time with the Nieman fellows at Harvard in 1992 as "perfume on a hog."[38]

The physical geography and agrarian economy were based on an abiding **racial legacy** that began with an inherited white slave owner and planter class. From the colonial period to the 1850s, the South was home to a diverse population, but after the Civil War the lack of economic opportunity forced homogenization. The white population of the nation came when European immigrants flowed into other areas of the country, yet they avoided the South. The resultant "Caucasian culture" was set in the middle of a huge number of enslaved Africans. Slavery was common in the early days of the nation, but only in the South was the institution the foundation of the economy. The feudal life of the plantation mirrored the structure of the southern social world, with slaves forming the working element in the society. As Gavin Wright has noted, "slavery generated a weaker and looser connection between property holders and the land they occupied."[39] The logic of slavery meant that southern slave owners had their investment in labor, not land, and had little to gain from improvements in roads and marketing facilities in a particular area.

Much of the life history of slaves and slavery is lost because virtually none of the African Americans could read and write. A black activist lawyer in a 1970 Nashville newspaper interview concluded, "Whites make their own history, and they write the Negro out of American history."[40] Those who had the ability and foresight to put their thoughts on paper were few, and the historical record of life in the slave quarters, written by a black hand, is largely nonexistent.

Race was the constant preoccupation of southern white politicians, and almost an obsession in the society structured along superordinate and subordinate lines. Among the upper crust the declaration of racial segregation was an unspoken necessity after the abolition of slavery in 1865. Miscegenation, the dread of "race-mixing" between whites and blacks, defined the culture of the region. In its worst form, the idolatry of southern white women was used to justify the subjugation of black men. White women were "ladies" in the South because they bore the racial purity of the dominant society. W. J. Cash writes in *The Mind of the South* that during the Civil War, "there was hardly a sermon that did not begin and end with tributes in her honor, hardly a brave speech that did not open and close for her glory."[41] Praise for women was an endorsement of the established caste system, and a warning about the danger of new ideas.

The hegemony of white supremacy after the Civil War retarded economic development in the region. While the rest of the nation rushed into the industrial revolution at the turn of the twentieth century by accepting immigration, social diversity, and economic innovation, the South stuck to its communal traditions, reluctant to change. The advocates of a "New South" believed that economic regeneration was possible without a change in the racial social structure. The businessman hero replaced the planter, and across the South self-made men from the middle class became prominent in lumber, tobacco, textiles, furniture, and manufacturing. Ambitious young Southerners allied with northern businessmen, rather than fighting them as their fathers had. In politics, the lawyer-politician replaced the agrarian elites that once dominated courthouse rings and monopolized state legislatures.

The conservative Redeemer governments that came to power in the 1870s were composed of elites who disenfranchised not only blacks but poor whites as well. The South shared fully in the national railroad building boom (1865–1880), the growth of small interior towns, and the expansion of manufacturing. The spread of cotton mills in the 1880s resulted in a public-spirited rhetoric of boosterism across the region.[42] All this growth, while laudatory, could not change the racial scar that was the daily reality in every southern state.

The president of Fisk University declared in 1947 that, "like the white people, the Negro 'votes' in middle and eastern Tennessee, but 'is voted' by the Crump machine in Memphis."[43] Black voters in west Tennessee, and other places across the South, had an inbred fear of ever standing up to the white man. Life for them remained at the back door of the store, the separate facility, and the rear of the bus. Their subsistence reached a nadir between the end of Reconstruction (1877) and the beginning of World War I (1914). Why was resistance to racial integration so fierce in the face of economic development? "It was based upon fear," writes C. Vann Woodward of the politics in Georgia during the time of populist Tom Watson's crusade (1891–1896), "fear of the Negro menace, the scalawag menace, the Federal menace, menaces real and imaginary."[44] The white South justified the caste system as crucial to the economy, but it was also rooted in a belief that blacks were

a diseased and debauched population that could not survive without the paternalism of the tenant farm. In a region settled by whites, be they English, Scotch-Irish, or German, the fate of their economy rested inextricably on the question of race. While there were pockets of diversity, tolerance, and pluralism, the theme of white dominance and black inferiority was pervasive in southern political history.

The agrarian economic system of slavery and elite rule accommodated a growth in fundamental **religious values** that emphasized a reliance on supernatural explanations at the expense of secular and scientific ones. The South has always been sensitive to the fervor of the fundamental Christian faith. The enthusiasm was intense, heartfelt, emotional, and not subject to academic study or interpretation. Southern Baptists, Presbyterians, and Methodists all broke with their northern neighbors before the Civil War. The subsequent defeat at the hands of a freethinking "Yankee" culture was a double tragedy because Southerners saw the sacred virtues of their homeland corrupted by those with no appreciation of morality or the fundamental Christian faith. "The people had believed so absolutely in the support of a just God for a just cause that when this cause went down to defeat, it became plain to all that they had sinned."[45]

The fervor of religious attitudes of Southerners was exposed by the 1925 Scopes Trial on the merits of teaching evolution in the schools in Dayton, Tennessee, and the attendant subjection of Southerners to national ridicule. The "Baltimore Barb," H. L. Mencken, abrasively declared the South of the 1920s to be a "cesspool of Baptists, a miasma of Methodism, snake charmers, and syphilitic evangelists."[46] Seventy-five years later Mencken could still be carping, because the regional attitudes are little changed. Today the Bible Belt of the Southeast comprises the largest block of Protestant Christian evangelicals found anywhere in the world. In the majority of counties, Baptists and Methodists, along with some independent Bible churches, account for nearly all church affiliation.[47]

The Christian religion was a focus of life for both whites and blacks. For African Americans the comfort of the next life was the route from personal salvation to group deliverance. Faith and religious rhetoric were central to the civil rights movement. Martin Luther King Sr., the father of the more famous son, wrote that words for racial reconciliation "were spiritual, not political. . . . I told folks that I never believed in political action that did not come out of a set of ethics, a sense of fair play, a high regard for the humanity and rights of all people."[48] Jimmy Carter, a Southerner converted to racial equality, echoed this sentiment when he discussed a "second conversion" after losing his first race for governor. "I formed a much more intimate relationship with Christ, and, since then, I've had just about a new life."[49] Though whites and blacks worship separately, the same religious sentiment guides their reconciliation behavior.

Regardless of political subculture values, political parties existed to accommodate division, conflict, and opposition within the body politic. In the South this function was mitigated by **one-party politics**. Before the Civil War the South had

two active political parties, the Democrats and the Whigs. War and Reconstruction led to domination by a single political party, the Democrats. Political participation was modest when it was restricted to just one party. A more liberal stance by the national Democratic Party, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and economic development all altered the social fabric of the South and changed the participation and allegiance of voters in every southern state.

When Jimmy Carter took the oath of office as president in 1977, the fabled southern landscape remained one-party Democratic even though it was as lacquered with plastic, styrofoam, and processed fast food as the rest of the country. The expanded social base for politics and elections in the region gradually came to reflect a political struggle between traditional conservatives with their states' rights arguments, fear of the national government, more moderate forces composed of voters who moved to the region, and black voters who embraced an activist role for the federal government. The latter group saw states' rights rhetoric as a mask for discrimination and racism.

The political subculture research has suggested that citizens can acquire new social attitudes and values and then mobilize their interests in a new way (political socialization) to form coalitions and make demands on the political system (political aggregation).[50] This happened in the South, and two-party politics began to emerge in the last decades of the twentieth century. The shift from conservative Democrat to conservative Republican began in the Reagan years and was completed in the new millennium. The legacy of one-party politics, however, remains in rural pockets at the county level, in the suburbs, and at the state level of many southern states.

Perhaps because of this legacy of one-party politics, the South has an unusual history of **political leadership**. Allegiance to a single political party meant that elections were decided by factions who knew each other only too well. The southern states engendered a casual familiarity, usually with one state law school and experience with several previous campaigns. In interviews for the book *Southern Politics in State and Nation,* V. O. Key and his associates were struck by the personal and regional divisions in virtually every state. Sometimes the conflicts were more geographic, as in Tennessee (east, middle, and west), South Carolina (upcountry and low country), and Mississippi (delta and hills). At other times the disagreements were more personal, as in Georgia (pro- and anti-Talmadge) and Louisiana (pro- and anti-Long). Sometimes politics was both; in a 1947 interview a Tennessee newspaper editor opined, "Mr. Crump represents the same white supremacy sentiment in Tennessee that Mr. Bilbo represents in Mississippi."[51] The political goal was protection of the "Southern Way of Life," which involved a belief in homespun values, racial rhetoric, the outdoor life, faith in the Ten Commandments, and the superiority of southern womanhood.

The term "demagogue" refers to an unscrupulous politician who gains power by pleasing the baser nature of the electorate; the term was appropriately applied to

politicians as diverse as Benjamin Tillman and Coleman Blease of South Carolina, Eugene Talmadge of Georgia, James K. Vardeman and Theodore Bilbo of Mississippi, and W. Lee "Pappy" O'Daniel and James "Pa" and Marian "Ma" Ferguson of Texas. These politicians were known for their white supremacy rhetoric, criticism of northern capitalism, and suspicion of federal initiatives. A more populist element was seen in politicians like "Big Jim" Folsom of Alabama, Edwin Edwards and "Uncle Earl" Long of Louisiana, as well as Tom Watson of Georgia. They viewed politics as a class movement of the poor against the rich, and even sought black support. Earl Long promised to "sell the state capitol if I had to to pay the poor old folks a fitting pension."[52] Such appeals left them vulnerable to Democratic race baiting, and the charge of allowing "Negro domination." By 1904 Tom Watson changed his stance to endorse the disenfranchisement of African American voters, and by 1908 he ceased to define populism in racially inclusive terms and soon thereafter ran for president as a white supremacist.

The most notorious southern politician of the populist line was undoubtedly Huey P. Long of Louisiana, whose nationwide appeal in the years of the Roosevelt administration almost brought an end to two-party politics in the US democracy. These politicians from the past have modern, though less radical, imitators: men like Herman Talmadge of Georgia, Strom Thurmond of South Carolina, and George Wallace of Alabama. Their political antics and rhetoric mark the South as a region of political distinctiveness. Protest movements, like Huey Long's "Every Man a King" crusade, the Dixiecrat revolt of 1948, and Wallace's American Independent Party, repeatedly reinforced the South's sense of political alienation and impotence. The rhetorical appeals of southern leaders found fertile ground in an environment of poverty, illiteracy, racism, political defeat, agrarian decline, and rural bareness.

Congressmen and senators from the region characteristically compiled a record of influence based on the security of reelection at home and legislative seniority in Washington. The South survived for decades in the twentieth century by reelecting senators and representatives who chaired powerful committees in Congress pledged to an agenda of racial segregation, national defense, state autonomy, and the Second Amendment. These same legislators voted for generous federal resources for the construction of highways, disaster relief, recreation facilities, sewer plants, and an expanding defense industry. When threatened, Southerners used the menace of filibuster and the inability of their opponents to impose cloture as a protection for their values. After one civil rights vote a senator wrote, "With less than 25 percent of the membership of the Senate, the Southerners have won one of the most notable victories in our history."[53] Today, as much as any time in the past, incumbency has a powerful advantage in southern politics.

Walker Percy summed up the influence of southern leadership when he said, "The South has entered the mainstream of American life for the first time in perhaps 150 years, that is, in a sense that has not been the case since the 1870s or

1830s."[54] The region can be captured in many different images, and these six legacies are as fragile as an old photograph. The burden of the past, and the isolation of the region, would be ultimately plowed under by suburban shopping malls, homogenized by television, and made to follow the directives of the federal government. Yet something still endures. "The past is never dead," wrote William Faulkner, "it's not even past."[55] Politically, the transfiguration of the party system reflects new partisan allegiances shaped by the infusion of political newcomers and insurgents into the South's traditional conservative political milieu. The emergence of a new cultural matrix is anchored by a changing economic structure, a more inclusive social topography, conflicting perceptions, and attitudes about the role of government and political leadership.

The six aspects of political culture can only be seen in interaction with each other. For example, the racial legacy influenced one-party politics, and the agrarian heritage produced unique populist political campaigns and leaders. While these traditional legacies may have originally defined the South, the region today is far different from what it once was. During the Great Depression it was the nation's greatest economic problem. Franklin Roosevelt said as much in 1936, yet the South grew faster economically during the last decade of the twentieth century than the rest of the country. By 2000, if the eleven southern states were a separate country, they would combine to have the world's fourth largest economy.[56]

Times change, and Daniel Elazar's theory of political culture helps to explain the transformation of southern life. He believed the key component in any change was the concept of migration.[57] While many of his fifteen migration streams influenced settlement patterns elsewhere and had little effect on the South, some—like the African American influence—left a stamp on southern culture that is still felt today. Undoubtedly, the most important migratory trend in recent southern history is urbanization. The compact settlement in southern cities has restructured society, and changed political strategy and tactics.

In 2003 Daniel Elazar changed his analysis of political culture to accommodate the high rate of mobility and extensive individualism in contemporary urban life. Communities in the old sense, with the same families occupying the same space under the same political jurisdictions for generations, had disappeared. They were replaced by metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs) located near the city for which they are named. "We can understand the American urban place as a community only when we view it as a 'civil community'—a term . . . to better describe the way an urbanized area . . . frequently extends beyond the formal city limits of most central cities or occupies less than the area of formal jurisdiction [and is] bound together as a meaningful political system."[58]

These civil communities now dominate the southern urban political landscape. "In the 1980 Census, the South had only 10 metropolitan areas of one million people or more . . . now the region has twenty-two."[59] The settling of cities after World War II, and especially in the last two decades of the twentieth century, is as much

a migration as any covered wagon experience mentioned by Elazar in his original work. The urban South ended agrarianism, changed rural religious patterns of worship, and provided a multicultural mix of Hispanic, black, and Asian neighbors in new suburbs. These changes led to a two-party political system and a new style of televised political leadership.

Classification of the Southern States

Political culture has been defined broadly, yet different aspects of it can be seen across the South. Each of the eleven states has unique patterns and structures in its political culture, which dictate that it be viewed independently of its neighbors. How do these states relate to one another and the larger US political culture? Some classification scheme is needed to examine the effect of the six aspects, which have produced varying rates of party competition and economic growth among the states, and their influence on politics and culture.

The southern states share a similar past, but the very structuring of politics and government is different in each. For example, the manner and rate in which states opened their voting rolls to African Americans varied. Citizen access to government through political reforms like the constitutional initiative, political party competition, and voting rates are measures of subcultural differences. As V. O. Key noted more than fifty years ago, Virginia is clearly different from Alabama, Texas is almost the opposite of Mississippi, and Florida is a populous upstart. The South has been divided into the "Rim South" (or "Border South") and the "Deep South." Florida and Texas have been excluded in some studies, and others have included states omitted by Key.[60] Given the abysmal economic past of the southern states, the recent surge to national respectability may be the most important measure of southern state differences.

To examine the states independently, the eleven states are classified into three different groups, based on an analysis of their economic, political, and social rankings, which helps to measure them one against another. The rankings in Table 1.1 are based on a composite of indicators associated with several social, political, and economic indicators in each state. Some of the criteria are drawn from government statistics; others are based on the size and importance of the state in national politics. The entries reflect the development of the eleven southern states on various issues. In Key's midcentury study, Florida was a backwater anachronism in US politics; today it is the nation's fourth most populous state and presidential candidates covet its electoral results. After the 2010 census apportionment, five of the top eleven most populous states were in the South.

The first category consists of what are called **national** states, that is, those states that have a measure of economic and social development approaching that of the rest of the country. These states are average, or above average, when it comes to per capita income. They have a substantial, professional, and urbanized labor

Table 1.1 Composite Ranking[a] of Southern States, 2010

	Population	Per Capita Income	Diversity: Non-Southern-Born Population	Registered Voters	Education: Percent with 4-Year Degree	Gross State Product	Infant Mortality Rate	Unemployment Rate	Composite Average
National States									
Virginia	1	1	3	1	1	5	2	1	1.87
Florida	3	2	1	2	3	1	3	11	3.5
Texas	2	3	2	10	5	2	1	4	3.63
Georgia	4	6	5	5	2	3	4	9	4.75
North Carolina	5	5	6	3	4	4	5	7	4.87
Emergent States									
Louisiana	9	4	10	4	10	7	10	3	7.13
Tennessee	6	7	7	9	7	6	8	6	7
Alabama	7	8	9	6	8	8	9	5	7.5
Traditional States									
South Carolina	8	9	8	8	6	9	6	10	8
Arkansas	11	10	4	11	9	10	7	2	8
Mississippi	10	11	11	7	11	11	11	8	10

Sources: US Census Bureau, "Personal Income per Capita in Current Dollars: 2007"; US Census Bureau, "Native Born Population: 2000"; US Election Project, "State Voter Turnout: 2008"; US Census Bureau, "Persons 25 Years Old and Over with a Bachelor's Degree: 2007"; US Census Bureau, "Gross State Product: 2008"; US Census Bureau, "Infant Mortality Rate: 2006"; US Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Unemployment Rate for States: January 2011."

Note: a. State rankings are among the eleven southern states.

force. They are key states in the calculus of any presidential election, and prominent politicians from these states are listed as potential party nominees. Two or three cities in these states, and in the case of Georgia a single city, can determine the outcome of any statewide political race. In sum, they are larger and more prosperous than their traditional southern cousins and in some ways have more in common with the rest of the country than their neighbors. Five states make up this category: Virginia, Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, and Texas.

These states have gained congressional seats after every census since 1980; they are also bellwether states for registering national trends. Their size makes them targets in any presidential campaign, and the five of them together have nearly 70 percent of the total southern electoral vote. Texas has produced two recent presidents, and Florida decided the 2000 election. Both Texas and Florida have a sizable Hispanic population to complement a relatively low proportion of blacks. Georgia's economy is carried by the city of Atlanta, while Virginia lives on federal dollars and technology-based industries in an urban crescent that stretches from the Washington suburbs, through Richmond, to the military installations in the Hampton Roads/Norfolk/Virginia Beach area. North Carolina has a similar crescent and a military installation on the coast. It was predicted by V. O. Key to be a state with the possibility of breaking out of the southern mold of one-party competition and stagnant economic growth. It achieved both by the millennium. Subregions in these states differ. The noncoast part of the Florida panhandle and south Georgia are far from national, and rural Texas is a throwback to the frontier. Both North Carolina and Virginia have areas that could fit in any traditional southern state. Yet these states are national because they have dominant cities, are similar to each other in national outlook, and collectively are quite different from other states in the South.

The second category has been enlarged from the first edition of this book to accommodate three states that have moved from the economic backwaters, and are well on their way to achieving national status. Two have produced presidential candidates and attract national media attention, but are still below the national average in some familiar national rankings. Each has pockets of poverty that are more reminiscent of the Great Depression poverty than any twenty-first century affluence.

On a host of these criteria these states consistently rank behind the achievements of the national states. They are classified as **emergent** states because they are below their national cousins in terms of economic development and political importance, but are more substantial than their smaller and more destitute Deep South cousins. Alabama has broken from the poetic narrative of the Gudger and Ricketts families James Agee described in his Depression-era memoir, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*.[61] It has a gleaming central city in Birmingham, three national football champions at its state universities, and an inviting business climate. By 2010, five years after Hurricane Katrina, Louisiana had recovered to the point where it too can be classified as emergent. The tourists are back in New Orleans,

and the slimmed-down state economy has survived the recession with a combination of federal dollars and cost-cutting. The state has gone from being "America's banana republic" to one with exemplary standards for ethics, health care, job creation, and education. Tennessee has a border state history of racial moderation and two-party political competition, but it remains emergent for reasons of economics. Each state has several dynamic and growing urban sectors, and a national reputation for innovation and progress. All three of these states are destined for national importance in the decades to come, but for the present they constitute a separate category.

The final group is composed of states that still lag behind the national average when it comes to income and that retain some of the rural poverty so typical of the South fifty years ago. Vestiges of the racial, economic, and demographic divisions of the "Old South" are in these states. Despite five decades of change, and efforts by government and the private sector, the national rankings of these states are not substantially changed. The **traditional** southern states are South Carolina, Mississippi, and Arkansas. They remain "Deep South" in the sense of maintaining, more than their neighbors, a vestige of the southern culture described by V. O. Key in 1950. They rank among the bottom ten states in the United States in terms of per capita income. Each has a historically high proportion of African Americans and a strong agricultural tradition.

The tripartite division of the South, as set forth in Table 1.1, is based on all of the criteria mentioned in this section, and is used as a categorical scheme throughout the book.

A Political Culture Approach

The change in allegiance from the one-party Democratic South to two-party competition is one of the great transformations in US political history, but it is equaled by the astonishing change in the demography and lifestyles of the region. A problem with the study of this alteration in allegiance is that there is no agreed upon approach to the subject. Most studies take social and economic variables to explain subsequent voting behavior. These thematic studies are very helpful, but they do not allow for much state-by-state analysis. These studies additionally cannot explain the persistence of issues such as flying of the Confederate flag or the removal of the Ten Commandments from the lawn of a courthouse square.

The political culture approach of this book broadens the analysis, but expansion comes with a price; it is a concept that excludes very little from consideration. The six cultural factors introduced earlier are a compromise between narrow specificity on the one hand, and overly broad inclusiveness on the other. An understanding of the cultural basis of politics depends on analyzing the mix of these six cultural aspects (geography, agrarian past, race, religion, one-party politics, and political leadership) and explaining how they relate to the changing politics of each

state as well as the region. The analysis in this book will take into account change and continuity using previous studies and current trends. The book will deliberately delve into historical explanations when appropriate. At the same time, a consistent methodology will analyze voting trends and patterns in the various states, with a county-by-county explanation of allegiance. A state-by-state analysis under the classification scheme introduced in Table 1.1 and discussed above will reflect urbanization and partisanship. Historical voting trends will be combined with present-oriented research.

The approach is deliberately eclectic. It is painted with a broad brush to give a full picture of the personalities and events of southern politics. Vignettes of important personalities and events are included to deepen the analysis. Some of the presentation is visual with county maps of the various states. The subsequent investigation raises some straightforward questions: How different are the subcultures of the states when it comes to elections? How do Republicans and Democrats approach a campaign for statewide office? What effect has urbanization had on the strategies of the two parties?

The chapters that follow are arranged in a way to examine each of the six aspects of political culture in order. Chapter 2 presents a background history on the traditional South. Readers unfamiliar with the historical legacy will see that it stimulated the patterns of migration and that racial incidents played a part in making the South unique. Chapter 3 examines the geographic legacy of the South, and the individual urbanization patterns in each state. Chapter 4 explains the racial legacy of white supremacy that dominated the region for much of its history. The racial past is related to the civil rights movement, busing for school integration, and the election of African American officials. It includes a discussion of Latino voters in the South. Chapter 5 explains the religious legacy of the South, showing its effect in both the black and white community, as well as the nation as a whole. Chapter 6 examines the one-party legacy in the South by showing its demise of both federal and state offices, and introduces a measure to summarize this change. Chapter 7 expands on this partisanship explanation to see how the South has changed in the new millennium. Chapter 8 analyzes the uniqueness of southern legislators and governors. Chapter 9 places conflicts in the South in a national context by looking at the cultural legacy of the South in national politics. Finally, Chapter 10 examines the future of the political culture in the South.

Poet and novelist James Dickey wrote that the South was a promised land, and he used the biblical story of Jericho—the first city of conquest in the promised land—as a metaphor to talk about the South. Behind the political science analysis is the poetry of the region, with its localness, sense of history, and fierce independence. Modern culture has changed this, but it has not disappeared. A cultural analysis goes beyond facts and statistical rankings; there is a feeling about the place, a mystery, and the political life is a part of that. As Dickey said, "You never *just* pass through the South. The South not only grows on you; it grows *around* you. Once there, you will come back, or you will stay in it long enough to die there."[62]

Notes

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22. Almond and Powell, *Comparative Politics,* 23.

23. Key, *Southern Politics,* 36.

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26. Daniel J. Elazar, *American Federalism: A View from the States,* 3rd ed. (New York: Harper and Row, 1984).

27. In contrast to the self-interested politics of the individualistic culture, the moralistic one is dominated by the conception of a commonwealth with politics as an activity for the public interest. See ibid.

28. Christopher Cooper and H. Gibbs Knott, "Defining Dixie: Seeking a Better Measure of the Modern Political South," paper presented at the biennial Citadel Symposium on Southern Politics, Charleston, SC, March 4–5, 2004.

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