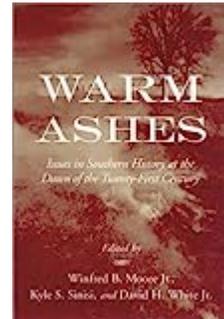




Winfred B. Jr., Moore, Kyle S. Sinisi, David H. White Jr., eds. *Warm Ashes: Issues in Southern History at the Dawn of the Twenty-First Century.* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003. xiii + 413 pp. \$49.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-57003-510-4.



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A Region Beating Ceaselessly Against the Tide

Secretly, many Southern historians suffer periodic existential crises. This is understandable, what with John Egerton having declared the alleged Southernization of the United States and the Americanization of the South some three decades ago.[1] And with well over seven decades of Southern History as a discrete phenomenon, most historians of the region still cannot definitively say what the South even is. Sure, there are the eleven states of the Old Confederacy, but even among those, is Texas really Southern? Is it western? Is it borderlands? What of Florida? And what about Missouri or Oklahoma or Kentucky or Maryland or, hell, Delaware? And what about sub-regions? Is Southern Appalachia more southern or Appalachian? And if the South as a whole is becoming more Americanized (or, oh dear, is it the other way around?) are these distinctions without a difference? It is almost enough to make your average (tenured) professor throw up her hands and write books about cooking.[2]

Alas, for those of us either without tenure or without the lick of common sense to feel the despair, this curious and vexing thing we know as the South, (even if we

think about the region much what Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart famously thought about pornography—it is difficult to define but we know it when we see it) continues to allure and tantalize and tease even as it remains elusive. Indeed, it is its very elusiveness that makes it so attractive. Just when we are almost ready to join our more despairing colleagues, the historiography of the South rises again. Or else the Southern returns to New Orleans. Either way, just when we think we are out, they pull us back in. [3]

Interestingly, Southerners away from the academy have no such concerns or problems with self-identity. As the inestimable Southern historian Sheldon Hackney illustrates in his brief but magnificent closing essay to *Warm Ashes*, away from the cloistered offices of the academy, Southerners know who they are, thank you very much. Citing the 1993 Southern Culture poll from the University of North Carolina's Howard Odum Center, Hackney shows that of the ex-Confederate states, only Texas and Virginia self-identified as living in the South at a rate of less than 90 percent. And even residents of the Lone Star State (84 percent—Don't Mess with

Texas) and the Old Dominion (82 percent) did not exactly have a whole lot of doubts. Texas's borderland and the nefarious impact of Northern Virginia's proximity to Washington D.C. surely explain their creeping from the flock, if only tentatively. Kentucky (79 percent) and Oklahoma (69 percent) "remained as pretenders to Southernness," in Hackney's words, while West Virginia (45 percent), Maryland (40 percent), Missouri (23 percent), Delaware (14 percent) and Washington, D.C. (7 percent) self-identified at decreasing rates. Hackney concludes, rightly, "The idea of the South is alive and well in the minds of ordinary people." (390).

Of course history professors are ordinary people too, in their way, and despite their jeremiads and identity crises, they too see the South as alive and well but know that periodically declaring the patient to be gravely ill makes the doctor look like more of a miracle worker. Some work with snake oil, others with psychological nonsense, but as evidenced in *Warm Ashes*, the best practicing historians of the South are still able to act with a surgeon's precision and a family practitioner's warmth.

One of the most welcome additions to the world of southern history in recent years has been the Citadel Conference on the South, a small, semi-annual gathering that brings together some of the most engaged scholars in the field to carouse Charleston, haunt its restaurants, drink all of its beer, and in between all of that, to present some of the most lively ongoing scholarship on the region. Many outsiders become agitated to know that one of the finest small conferences on Southern history, the theme of which in 2003 was the Civil Rights Movement in South Carolina, is held at what most do not see as a bastion of tolerance. And yet the conference is simply one of the finest of its sort, as the quality of work in *Warm Ashes* reveals.

Coming from the 2000 Conference, against the backdrop of South Carolina's Confederate flag controversy, the papers here show that Southern history is alive and well as it leads scholars in new directions. The flag controversy in many ways epitomized some of the prevailing themes at which historians are taking new or fresh looks—from race to symbolism to war to identity, the flag controversy in some ways brings out the worst in Southerners, but in so doing, it causes an equal reaction that brings out the region's best.

The collection is bookended by two essays by men who loom large in the profession. Sheldon Hackney's whimsical but penetrating look at "The Ambivalent South" ends the book on a high note. Eminent historian

Emory M. Thomas opens the book where all Southern history seems to begin and end, if not in chronological fact then in symbolic and historiographical reality, the Civil War. In "Clio at Climax: Apocalypse and the American Civil War," Thomas asks if we ever need another book on that conflict, and at the same time wonders if we will ever see the last. His answers are provocative. After pleading with future writers to avoid two sorts of books (knowing that they will be done anyway): "ideological polemics purporting that the war had nothing to do with slavery and race" and those "already on library shelves," Thomas goes to show the many things that still remain to be done (p. 7). This article puts one in mind of David Herbert Donald's essays in *Lincoln Reconsidered*, which mock the amount of literature on our most-written-about president and his era while managing to show how much remains to be done.[4]

In between Hackney and Thomas lies a wealth of quality work. The book is divided into seven parts. The essays of Hackney and Thomas take up one part each. The other five parts break down along specific themes, including slavery, war and southern identity, religion, race (which more than any other theme naturally pervades the entire book), and the roles of memory and memorials. Bringing together junior scholars and some of the most respected writers in the field, the book manages to show some of the areas in which scholars are doing some of the most interesting historical work while at the same time providing something of a road map for the near future of Southern historiography.

The editors, Winfred B. Moore, Jr. (a stalwart organizer of the Citadel conferences), Kyle S. Sinisi, and David H. White Jr. have done an admirable job not only in selecting and organizing the essays, but also in providing brief synthetic introductions of each section in which they place the essays in context and lay out the crucial issues that they explore individually, but also collectively. They do this with a deft hand, and add a solid but brief preface that allows the essays to shine.

It follows logically that Thomas' essay on the Civil War is succeeded by a section on slavery, for if the Civil War is the fulcrum upon which southern history tipped, slavery was what gave the lever the biggest nudge. There are three essays in Part II, "Enslaved." James McMillen explores anew the issue of the volume of the slave trade to the United States in the post-revolutionary era, 1783-1810. McMillen engages in one of the most important trends in the historiography of the slave trade by utilizing the work of Africanists, Americanists, and others to

cobble together a fuller, if still imperfect, picture of this most troublesome phenomenon in U.S. history. Kirsten E. Wood and Patrick Breen similarly engage in scholarship that is at the forefront of the literature on slavery. But while McMillen looks globally, Wood and Breen look more locally and focus on the issue of gender in their examinations of the lives of widowed planters and women's responses to slave insurrections respectively.

Part III returns to the theme of "War and Identity," but does so with three essays that take unique views of both the war, its aftermath, and the ways in which historians, at least, might begin to "remember" it. Christopher Phillips takes a look at what the title of his essay calls "The Southernization of Missouri," which came about largely as the result of the betrayal Missourians faced from the West and North during the sectional crisis. Brian Dirck investigates the linkages between Abraham Lincoln, who has been studied more than anyone in American history, and his Confederate antagonist Jefferson Davis, who has not, in his exploration of the "meaning of war." Christopher Waldrep fast forwards to the Reconstruction era in his essay on the Ku Klux Klan and the politics of language.

If slavery and war were the crucible that forged the first three decades of Southern history, religion is still the balm that is supposed to soothe old wounds and provide succor for both the weak and the strong. The four essays in Part IV, "In the House of the Lord," are perhaps the most closely linked in the book, as all in one way or another explore issues of religion, race, and reconciliation. Religion surely was not always soothing—it oftentimes was used and misused to bolster some of the South's most noxious institutions. But these essays reveal attempts, some of which failed, some of which succeeded, to have religion serve as a way to move forward. Paul Harvey explores "biracialism in the twentieth century southern religious experience." James O. Farmer focuses on South Carolina's Emma Anderson Dunovant and her advocacy of woman suffrage and reveals how some women challenged conventions while maintaining respect within their communities and churches. This essay thus explores a rich array of topics, including gender and women's roles, religion, and politics. Joan Marie Johnson too explores the roles women played in religious and political life in the South in her essay on women Episcopalians in the interracial movement in South Carolina in the 1920s. The final essay in this section is William R. Glass's piece on the attempts to forge a reunion between factions that divided both the Methodist and Presbyterian churches from their northern brethren in the years

from 1920 to 1955. All four essays reveal the linkages and disjunctions between the pulpit and the political in the decades after the Civil War, an area that almost surely will continue to provide a wealth of research opportunities in the future.

In one of the richest sections in the book, Part V, "Along the Color Line," explores the ever-rich terrain of civil rights in the twentieth century. While there seems to be a never-ending stream of works on the Civil Rights Movement, it seems that only in the last decade or so have Southern historians begun collectively to branch away from the Montgomery to Memphis model that, while it served earlier generations well, was beginning to grow static. Indeed, when Professor Thomas railed against graduate students writing books already sitting on library shelves, he could just as easily have been warning the next generation of professors from starting yet another synthetic history of "The Movement" when there is so much in the particulars left to be done, as these four articles indicate.

Legal cases still provide fertile and oftentimes unexplored ground for scholars who want to understand the intersection between race, politics, the law, and the people affected by them. In an intriguing essay, Davidson College professor John Wertheimer collaborates with a group of his students on a fascinating Winston Salem, North Carolina case, *State v. Darnell*, involving housing discrimination during the Progressive Era. Wertheimer's essay (co-written with Michael E. Daly, and with the assistance of R. Stanley Baker, John Bell, Wilson Buntin, Scott Herr, Andrew Holbrook, Sarah House, and J. Matthew Strader) is not only a fascinating work of scholarship, but also might prove to be a revelation for those who teach civil rights or legal history. Peter Wallenstein investigates the little-known experience of those who integrated public colleges and universities in North Carolina, revealing that even behind seemingly calm instances of integration there is much that historians can learn. The final two pieces in this chapter explore integration of military schools. Rod Andrew, Jr. writes about black military schools in the age of Jim Crow and shows how they developed in ways both similar to and as important, different from, their white counterparts. Alexander S. Macauley, Jr. explores the desegregation of the Citadel, which must have been an especially interesting paper to hear at South Carolina's Military College in 2000.

The final section before Sheldon Hackney's insightful closing essay is also perhaps the most timely. At the time

of the 2000 Citadel Conference on the South, South Carolina was embroiled in its controversy over the flying of the Confederate battle flag over the state capitol. The flag had waved, proudly to some, menacingly to others, obliviously to most, since 1962, the heart of the Civil Rights Movement and the South's Massive Resistance against it. Ultimately, the Palmetto State reached a compromise in its fight over the flag. Yet if what the flag controversy represented, at least in part, was the role of historical memory and whose memory is allowed to prevail in public representations of the past, that debate still lingers, and presumably will for many generations to come. (Secretly, this is probably welcome news to the despairing historians with whom this essay began.) Part VI, "Of Memory and Memorials," presents essays by two leading historians of the South on the linked but nonetheless discrete issues of black memories of the Civil War during the era of Jim Crow, and the current establishment of museums and memorials to the Civil Rights Movement. In "Whispering Consolation to Generations Unknown," W. Fitzhugh Brundage writes of efforts of black Americans in the decades after the Civil War to memorialize a past quite separate from the one already being concocted by white Southerners in the face of their defeat at the hands of the North in the war and, as important, during Reconstruction. As Brundage writes, "Even as whites used history as a tool with which to erase blacks from annals of civilization, blacks fashioned an alternative past that gave meanings to their sufferings and could sustain their ambitions" (p. 352). Glen Eskew, meanwhile, explores the strange career of building civil rights memorials in Atlanta and Albany, Georgia, and Selma and Birmingham, Alabama. As much about the levers of politics, money, and power as about historical memory, the struggles to get these places to memorialize the past built nonetheless also represent the growing place that the Civil Rights Movement has in the public memory. These two essays, particularly Eskew's, also might represent something of a bridging of the gap between two factions within the glamorous high-stakes world of American history that too often resemble feuding siblings: professional academics and public historians, each of whom eyes the other warily, apparently unaware that there is no reason why the two should not

be working together despite what separates them.

In the closing paragraph of his essay, Sheldon Hackney captures what it means to be Southern. In it he also, perhaps inadvertently, captures what it means to be a Southern historian as well:

"To be Southern is to have one's public identity formed in a biracial world, a world in which the interplay between black and white cultures has left each group profoundly influenced by the other. To be Southern is to be formed by a religious culture of compatible contradictions. To be a Southerner is also to be created in the conversation between the American identity and dissenting critiques of American identity. To be Southern is to be ambivalent" (394).

Warm Ashes provides ample starting points for Southern historians to continue those conversations and to explore that ambivalence. That should be the purpose of any collection of essays, and as such, this one succeeds admirably.

Notes

[1]. John Egerton, *The Americanization of Dixie: The Southernization of America*. (New York: Harper's Magazine Press, 1974).

[2]. Though he is not a professor, tenured or otherwise, this seems to be exactly what respected journalist and commenter on things Southern Egerton has done, as three of his most recent books have been about cooking, albeit from the South. Hedging his bets, one might assume, in case the title of his 1974 book comes home to roost.

[3]. This sly reference to Godfather III should in no way be seen as an endorsement of or homage to that movie that shamed its kin. To put it in terms a Southern historian might understand, Godfather III is to the Godfather films what Roger Clinton or Billy Carter were to their brothers.

[4]. David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln Reconsidered: Essays on the Civil War Era*. 3rd Edition (New York: Vintage Books, 2001).

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