

A New History of the American South

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The thought-provoking and expert essays of *A New History of the American South* represent expansive views of Southern history—beyond the period-focused notions of the region that often appear in history and literature.

Rather than focusing on the immediate antebellum period, the Reconstruction era, or modern issues, these essays focus on less-covered periods and aspects of Southern history. For example, Robbie Ethridge's opening essay "The American South to 1600" is an overview of the Indigenous people who thrived in different parts of the region prior to European contact. It covers the Ice Age Paleoindians and the extinct megafauna they knew, and moves toward the mound builders of the Archaic Period and the academic debate over the structures they left behind. Ethridge also discusses the nations that existed at the time of Spanish exploration and what their cities were like right before the region changed. These are stories often left out of Southern narratives, and their inclusion alongside the book's more modern stories is valuable.

The book's substantial length gives each essayist room to go into considerable depth. Paul Harvey discusses the role of Southern religion and culture in the twentieth century and the inherent paradox of a region that is home to both violent lynchings and beautiful literature. Michael A. McDonnell's essay on the Revolutionary War era includes context on the role of the Cherokee and Chickasaw nations before and during the conflict, as well as information about the different factions among colonists when it came to independence. The value of this approach is that *A New History* tell many stories—some in an academic and traditional way, some in a more analytical manner.

Drawing parallels between the past and present, the essays of *A New History of the American South* eschew easy narratives to capture the contradictions of Southern life.

JEFF FLEISCHER (May / June 2023)

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