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Readings in the Modern South
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What is the South?

There are many issues that define what the South is. For the most part, it is the region that supported slavery and sparked a Civil War. Regardless of the modernization that has taken place in the South since the end of World War II, the memory of the South's loss in the War Between the States continues to reinforce the existence of a South. The most glaring example of this was back in 2000 when South Carolina fought against the removal of the Confederate battle flag from its statehouse. Also relevant in depicting the South's attributes are its climate and its social outlook. While the South may not be as vilified as it once was, its transfer of allegiance from the Democratic Party to the Republic Party after the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 are proof that the "Old South" still exists. Despite its many historical faults, studying the South is important because it helps Americans to understand their nation better.

With the ratification of the United States Constitution, a distinctive region known as "the South" was born. Before agreeing to join this union, southern states demanded representation in Congress for their African-American slaves, despite their deprived societal status. The North's acquiescence to the South's wish for the sake of establishing a new union gave the South more voting power in Congress than the North. In addition to this larger voting power, the fact that most U.S. presidents up to the Civil War were southern allowed slavery to flourish for as long as it did. The South's steadfast defense

of slavery antagonized northerners who felt that slavery was morally wrong. More than just a moral divide, at the time of the Civil War, the South and the North had two different types of economies and lifestyles. The North was becoming a more industrial society, while the South remained an agricultural society.

Differences between the North and the South also stemmed from their power rivalry pitting the South's fight for states' rights against the North's quest for a stronger national government. Southerners fought for slavery on the basis of state's rights, while northerners wanted a stronger national government that could increase and force unity amongst the states. Opposition from the South to both tariffs and the creation of a national bank also helped to define the South. Just as the states' rights platform was used to justify slavery, it was also used to oppose these other two issues. Southerners wanted to be more autonomous than northerners wanted them to be. This rivalry resulted in the northerners establishing an image of the South as "backwards." The warm climate in the South also helped to define the region. A popular view amongst historians is that the South's warm environment allowed for the creation of a slave society that differentiated it from the North. This environment has also resulted in southerners leading a more relaxed lifestyle than people in the North.

The continued existence of a "South" is both the choice of southerners themselves and northerners who will not allow the South to forget its history. This North/South rivalry is exemplified every time that a New York team, such as the New York Mets, comes to Florida for a baseball game against the Florida Marlins. The large number of northerners and particularly New Yorkers who live in Florida drive Floridians to cheer more forcefully for their team, as if the sports field were a mini-reenactment of the Civil

War. For their part, northerners residing in Florida also cheer louder for their “home” team. On a more jovial level, this example serves to show that the South continues to exist because southerners have pride in their home and because northerners continue to believe that the south is inferior.

Studying the South helps both northerners and southerners, as Americans, to better understand the country they live in. By learning and understanding on how the South became “backwards,” the nation as a whole can work to change this image. Pay levels and educational scores might be lower in the South than in the North, but the South is progressing. Evidence of this change is reflected by a recent Florida referendum where voters banned smoking in restaurants and another referendum that raised Florida’s minimum wage above the national minimum wage. Overall, Southerners have pride in the values of their ancestors, even if some of their views have become outdated. Likewise, northerners continue to view the South as different from them because of their vastly different history in the one United States.