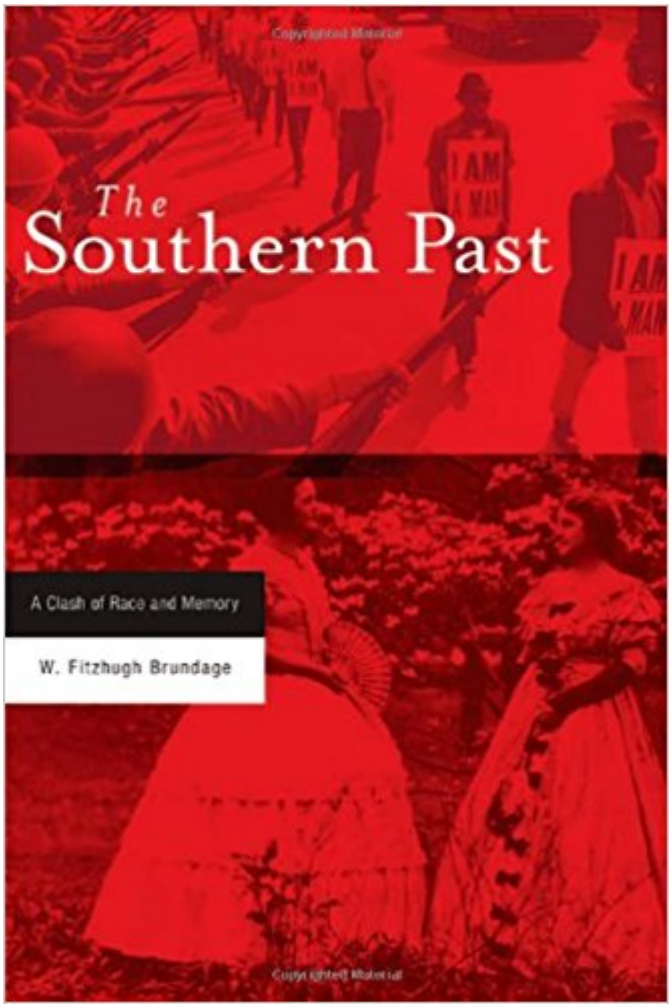
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The Southern Past: A Clash Of Race And Memory



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Synopsis

Since the Civil War whites and blacks have struggled over the meanings and uses of the Southern past. Indeed, today's controversies over flying the Confederate flag, renaming schools and streets, and commemorating the Civil War and the civil rights movement are only the latest examples of this ongoing divisive contest over issues of regional identity and heritage. The Southern Past argues that these battles are ultimately about who has the power to determine what we remember of the past, and whether that remembrance will honor all Southerners or only select groups. For more than a century after the Civil War, elite white Southerners systematically refined a version of the past that sanctioned their racial privilege and power. In the process, they filled public spaces with museums and monuments that made their version of the past sacrosanct. Yet, even as segregation and racial discrimination worsened, blacks contested the white version of Southern history and demanded inclusion. Streets became sites for elaborate commemorations of emancipation and schools became centers for the study of black history. This counter-memory surged forth, and became a potent inspiration for the civil rights movement and the black struggle to share a common Southern past rather than a divided one. W. Fitzhugh Brundage's searing exploration of how those who have the political power to represent the past simultaneously shape the present and determine the future is a valuable lesson as we confront our national past to meet the challenge of current realities.

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Customer Reviews

Focusing on the social meaning of what southerners choose to remember and how, Brundage, a history professor, looks at "how representations of history have been used as instruments of power." He examines historical memory in the South from 1864 to the present, marking the movement from commemorating Confederate icons to civil-rights activism. Brundage explores the presumption that southern heritage is the exclusive property and perspective of whites, a presumption that has been resisted by blacks since slavery. Following developments since emancipation, Brundage compares the competing views on history and heritage of southern blacks and whites as they struggled to tell the story of the South. What developed was a kind of parallel perspective, with whites controlling public space with commemoration of a proud antebellum South and defeat in the Civil War and with blacks maintaining more private recollections of the horror of slavery and the redemption offered by freedom. Since the 1960s, these competing views have been more public and contentious, resulting in a profound change in the perspective on southern history in all its complexities. Vanessa BushCopyright Ã Â© American Library Association. All rights reserved

Brundage compares the competing views on history and heritage of southern blacks and whites as they struggled to tell the story of the South. What developed was a kind of parallel perspective, with whites controlling public space with commemoration of a proud antebellum South and defeat in the Civil War and with blacks maintaining more private recollections of the horror of slavery and the redemption offered by freedom. Since the 1960s, these competing views have been more public and contentious, resulting in a profound change in the perspective on southern history in all its complexities. (Vanessa Bush Booklist 2005-09-01)As The Southern Past painfully affirms, the definition of just who and what a Southerner is remains cloudy even today...Brundage’s research attests to the enormous extent to which Southern whites reshaped antebellum history to suit their own, reshaped memories of the Old South. In the eyes of white hagiographers, blacks were little more than bit players on the larger stage of Southern history. Slavery became an incidental cause of the Civil War. (Terry Shulman Richmond Times-Dispatch 2005-10-23)[Brundage’s] close analysis brilliantly reveals how Southerners defined themselves--and who did the defining...In perhaps his most rewarding section, Brundage shows how Southern whites built the scaffolding upon which their memories rested. Of particular importance was the creation of state-sponsored archives, the establishment of privately funded museums, the professionalization of the study of history, the growth of heritage tourism and the creation of a variety of historic sites from roadside markers to plantation complexes. Again, white Southerners--acting from positions of power--saw the sites of their memories lovingly restored; black Southerners saw theirs demolished. But with the end of

segregation, whites and blacks confronted one another on far more equal ground in battles over the placement of the Confederate battle flag and the singing of 'Dixie.' (Ira Berlin Washington Post Book World 2006-02-12)In this fascinating book, W. Fitzhugh Brundage chronicles the evolution of historical memories in the South between 1864 and the present...The Southern Past enriches our understanding of southern historical memory, shedding new light on how whites used their interpretation of the past to perpetuate political, economic, and social equalities. Using a wide array of primary documents, Brundage has written a thought-provoking study that should prove useful and accessible to public and academic historians. (Bruce E. Stewart North Carolina Historical Review)Brundage has written a compelling and vital work of southern history that both synthesizes and moves the discussion of memory forward. All students of southern history will find it valuable. (W. Scott Poole Civil War Book Review)Even in such a vital and increasingly crowded field, The Southern Past stands out as a rare accomplishment...in his detailed account of the various interrelated responses to the "relevance of history" from the Civil War to the recent past, Brundage offers detailed guidance for new negotiations over and with history. In the process, he has told a story that represents scholarship at its most rigorous and hopeful best. (John Ernest CLIO)Historians of the U.S. South have long debated whyÃ¢â ¬â •and whetherÃ¢â ¬â •the region stands apart from the rest of the country. Differing from scholars who identify poverty or the legacy of Confederate defeat as the source of Southern distinctiveness, W. Fitzhugh Brundage persuasively argues that the SouthÃ¢â ¬â„¢s central theme consists of the Ã¢â ¬Å“enduring presence of white memory in the SouthÃ¢â ¬â„¢s public spaces and black resistance to it.Ã¢â ¬Â• By viewing Southern history through the lens of memory, Brundage demonstrates how Southern distinctiveness still matters...This important and lucidly written book will be required reading for all serious students of the U.S. South. (John W. Quist The Historian)

loved it

I did not like his treatment of women, perhaps because he is a man he would look for no other motive than power.

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