



A Sphinx on the American Land: The Nineteenth-Century South in Comparative Perspective

Peter Kolchin

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One reason that the South attracts so much interest is that its history inevitably involves big questions -- continuity versus change, slavery and freedom, the meaning of "race," the formation of national identity. Because these issues are central to human experience, southern history properly conceived is of more than regional interest. In *A Sphinx on the American Land*, Peter Kolchin explores three comparative frameworks for the study of the nineteenth-century South in an effort to nudge the subject away from provincialism and toward the kind of global concerns that are already transforming it into one of the most innovative fields of historical research.

The volume opens with a comparison between the South and the North, or what Kolchin terms the "un-South." Turning to the cohesion and variations among what he calls the "many Souths," Kolchin reminds us that there has never been one South or archetypal southerner. Finally, he explores parallels between the South and regions outside the United States -- the "other Souths" -- Russia most notably.

Kolchin examines how scholars have approached each of his comparative frameworks and how they might do so in the future, making his book at once a work of history and of historiography. Illustrating the ways in which southern history is also American history and world history, this elegant, profound volume proves Kolchin to be one of the stellar southern historians of his generation.

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