INTRODUCTION

Historians have written many, many books about southern politics, and so of course have political scientists. Despite this plethora, or perhaps because of it, no wide-ranging overview tracing the course of southern political history has previously appeared. Yet, like the South's history generally, its political history has possessed distinctive characteristics and patterns that give it coherence and direction. Even though it was just a region within a nation-state, the South has acted, for most of its history, as a self-conscious interest group marshaling its political resources in an ongoing struggle with the rest of the nation.

Over the past generation or so the South has changed a good deal, however, and so has its relationship with the non-South. With the region's economy and society becoming less and less distinctive and its politics also following a parallel course, it is appropriate to look back now to recount and explain the past two hundred years of southern political history and discover why the South took so long to become integrated into the national political system—if indeed that is what the region has just done.

Like most introductions, this one needs to take care of some necessary business before the story begins. The first two items are matters of definition. What is included in the category "the South"? And what does the term "politics" mean and refer to? The other topics are explanatory rather than definitional, and there are two of them as well. One explains the book's overarching theme, as indicated in its title, *Pursuit of Unity*, while the other describes how the book is organized and structured.

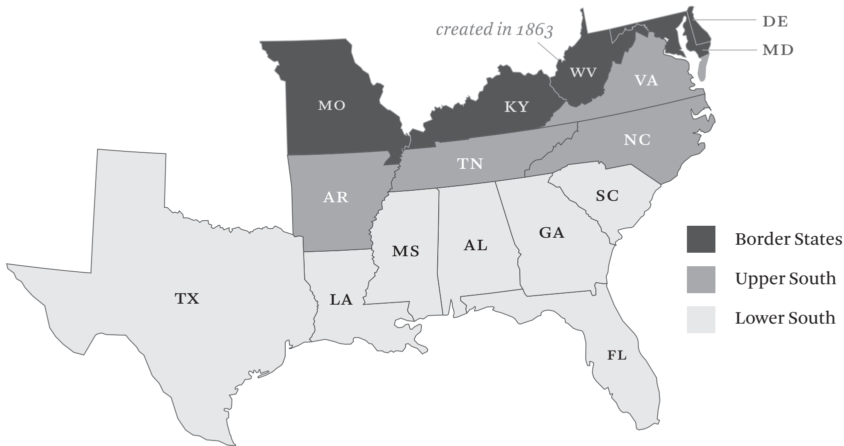
BY MANY OBSERVERS and commentators, "the South" has been conceived as an image or idea, an identity, a stereotype that exists in the minds of Americans. It is the antithesis of "the North," and both concepts are laced with distaste and disdain arising from a long history of rivalry and conflict not confined to the four years when they fought each other on the battlefield. But in political history, the definition of "the South" is a good deal more practical and material, namely, the South as a place, a geographic location where a particular form of politics was practiced.

Since states are the primary political entities that define the South, the question is, therefore, What states constitute "the South"?

Unfortunately, there is no official, or even accepted, definition. But all of the existing definitions agree upon one thing at least. Always included in any categorization of the South are the states that made up the Confederacy. These eleven states consist of two groupings. They are the Lower, or Deep, South states of South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas and the Upper South states of Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas. These are the states covered by two authoritative studies of the region's politics by political scientists—V. O. Key's classic *Southern Politics* (1949) and Earl and Merle Black's recent study, *The Rise of Southern Republicans* (2002). Further endorsement for this definition of the South as the former Confederate states is that these were the states that disfranchised their black voters by constitutional revision and thereby brought into being the "Solid South" at the turn of the twentieth century. Additionally, these same eleven states composed the membership of the Southern Caucus that was formed in the U.S. Senate after World War II.

Four other definitions have also circulated, but none has acquired the currency of these eleven. Before the Civil War, the South was often defined as the slave states, in contrast to the free states. Usually included as slave states were all those where slavery existed and was legally recognized. This meant that Kentucky, Missouri, Delaware, and Maryland were often included, along with the eleven states of the Confederacy. But this definition was no longer applicable or useful once slavery was abolished after the Civil War. Since that time, three eminent historians of the South—C. Vann Woodward, George B. Tindall, and Numan V. Bartley—have added two others to the eleven Confederate states. They first added Kentucky and then later Oklahoma, in their highly regarded region-wide studies in the authoritative History of the South series. Nevertheless, the U.S. Census has an even broader definition, adding to the eleven Confederate states Delaware, Maryland, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia. But the broadest of all is the U.S. Department of Education's twentieth-century category, which includes all the states with legally segregated school systems, thus adding Kentucky and Missouri and Oklahoma to the list in the Census, for a total of eighteen.

Faced with this variety, the only reasonable conclusion is to restrict the South to the eleven Confederate states. Besides, inclusion of any other states presents problems. Throughout the two hundred years covered in this study, these eleven states (once they have obtained statehood, of



MAP 1. The South. The South consists of the seven Lower South and four Upper South states, the eleven states that seceded from the Union in 1860–61, although Tennessee was occupied by the Union Army in February 1862. The five border states—Missouri, West Virginia, Kentucky, Maryland, and Delaware—are on the South's northern perimeter.

course) have been included in all the definitions. Clearly, they constitute the undisputed core of the region in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

ALSO NEEDING DEFINITION is the term "politics." In a study covering two centuries of history in an entire region of eleven states, each with a different political system and governmental arena, it is essential to define the term "politics" strictly, even narrowly. Otherwise, the narrative will lose focus and soon become unmanageable. For example, a political history of the South cannot dwell on politics at the county and municipal level, despite the truistic, and almost banal, claim of Tip O'Neill, the Speaker of the House in the 1990s, that "all politics is local." The political life of the region at all levels and in all its variety cannot be the subject matter of a historical overview like this. Nor should it be, since the purpose of a broad synthesis of this kind is to discover the central issues and themes in the South's political history and then to explain why they arose and how they shaped the role and course of the region within the national political arena. To this end, generalization, rather than detail and variation, is the main concern.

Like the South, the Midwest and New England are regions of the United States. But they have not functioned consistently as politically self-

conscious sections, with a history of autonomous, even separatist, organization and action over a long period of time. The South, however, has considered itself a minority at odds with the rest of the country, sometimes even under attack from it. Southern political history has therefore been preoccupied with the region's interaction with the non-South states. And it has been at the national level within the three branches of the federal government that the interests of the South have had to be promoted and protected.

Although Washington has been the focal point of southern politics for most of the past two centuries, it was the interests of the southern states themselves that were being represented and defended there. State politics will therefore feature prominently in the story. But this particular treatment of southern political history is not a compilation of eleven individual state histories. The states will be treated as components of the southern region, not as distinctive entities with their own independent, free-standing political histories.

A HISTORICAL STUDY of this scope and duration has to have an organizing principle or central theme. And it is hard to overlook the fundamental role that political parties have played in the history of the South. Although the parties have changed in form and name and have performed different functions at different times, there is one distinctive characteristic of party politics in the South—the lack of competition between contending parties for almost the entirety of the past two hundred years. As a result, the region has had a history of one-party politics. Either one party has been so dominant that opposition has been completely marginalized or else one party has functioned as the only accepted political organization. The contemporary situation in the South in which there are two viable and competitive parties is therefore not merely unusual—it is an aberration. For most of its history, the two-party system, which is widely seen as a valuable, even essential, feature of American government and politics, has been absent from the South.

The account that follows will trace the region's persistent pursuit of unity. In the process, it will offer explanations for why and when a one-party politics arose, as well as describe its features and how it functioned at both the state and the national levels. But first a few words about what lay behind this preoccupation with unity and what this fear of party competition was all about. Throughout the nineteenth century and most of the twentieth, the white population of the southern states has been deeply concerned about the maintenance of the region's system of race relations.

This system has enabled southern whites to dominate the African American population, both socially and economically.

In the nineteenth century, slavery was the form the system assumed. In the twentieth, it was a system of legal segregation and control over the region's blacks, who were no longer slaves but now U.S. citizens. And for most of these two centuries, the region's system of racial control was questioned and even attacked, usually from outside the South, though not always. In this milieu, the South's political system has functioned as a critical component of the continuous effort to keep organized opposition from becoming a threat, both inside the region and at the national level in Washington. As a result, one-party dominance, or else one-party monopoly, has been the form that politics has assumed in the South. Accompanying this persistent worry about political opposition has been its more affirmative counterpart, the need for unity. Although usually attained, unity has been an objective constantly invoked and pursued in southern politics ever since 1800, when the Republicans and the Virginia Dynasty came to power in the South and the nation.

These ongoing efforts to manage the political system in the interest of southern unity did not, however, go unchallenged. During the first half of the nineteenth century, first the Federalists, though briefly and feebly, and then the Whigs more forcefully, had presented an alternative to the Jeffersonian Republicans and then to the Jacksonian Democrats. But, in the 1850s and during the four years of the Confederacy, opposition faded into insignificance. For a brief time during Reconstruction, a new party, the Republican Party, made two-party politics a real possibility again. But the former Confederates and their allies in the Democratic Party attacked and marginalized their Republican opponents. From the mid-1870s until the end of the century, opposition did exist, most notably the Populists in the 1890s, but it was countered with heavy doses of force and fraud and effectively subdued. The Democrats proceeded to rewrite the region's state constitutions so as to disfranchise the black voters and a large number of whites who formed the base of support for most of the anti-Democratic parties since the Civil War.

With the elimination of all but a few of the black, and most of the poor white, voters, the political system was closed off to organized opposition in the form of independent black politics or any kind of insurgency by disaffected voters, black as well as white. Indeed, the single-party monopoly, the "Solid South," as it became known, was created for the sole purpose of prohibiting opposition. When a serious challenge did arise, in the form of the States' Rights Democrats, or Dixiecrats, in 1948, it came

from the right and it endorsed the South's system of racial domination even more vigorously than did the region's all-powerful Democrats. In such a hostile environment, effective electoral opposition and dissent was a virtual impossibility.

THIS ACCOUNT OF the South's pursuit of unity will be organized into five parts. Despite the South's proclivity for one-party politics, its political history was hardly static. Circumstances changed over time and in different ways and thus altered the form and shape of the one-party South. Part 1 covers the period that began with the election of Thomas Jefferson of Virginia to the presidency in 1800 and ended with the South's secession in 1861. During these sixty years, the South experienced an era of one-party dominance. Jefferson's Republican Party dominated the South until the mid-1820s, after which two parties competed within the South for a brief period, as the newly formed Democratic Party of Andrew Jackson faced opposition from the Whigs, also a new party. But soon the Whigs collapsed, leaving the South a one-party region again under the Democrats.

Part 2 covers the South's brief experience as an independent nation under the Confederacy from 1861 to 1865. During these few years, the South did not have to maneuver within a hostile political arena inside the same nation. Freed from this burden, the Confederates experimented with a political system without parties at all, an indication that perhaps southern politicians did not particularly like party competition of any kind.

Part 3 traverses the quarter century or so from the end of the Civil War until disfranchisement around 1900. After their military defeat, the former Confederates resorted again to party, calling themselves Conservatives and then, later, Democrats. But a competitive two-party system did not develop during Reconstruction because the Democrats refused to recognize the legitimacy of their Republican opponents and proceeded instead to drive them from power by whatever means necessary, illegal as well as violent. And this period of one-party hegemony continued until the end of the century.

Part 4 begins at the turn of the twentieth century. The political crisis of the 1890s led to the revival of the Republican opposition and the creation of a new party, the Populists. But this enlarged and emboldened opposition was soon defeated, although not without difficulty. Once their challengers were dispersed, the Democrats confirmed their restored ascendancy by changing the electoral rules drastically and formalizing their

dominance with the sanction of law. In effect, a one-party system was declared official and legal. The region referred to itself as the "Solid South," and it remained that way for the next seventy years.

The South's solidity was not, however, unchanging or unchallenged. It reached its zenith over the first thirty years of the twentieth century. But, after the mid-1930s, it began to run into difficulties when opposition from the northern wing of the Democratic Party emerged and gained momentum. For the next three decades, southern Democrats fought a desperate rear-guard action in their region and in the nation, only to meet their Waterloo in the 1960s, a defeat that proved to be decisive and irreversible during the 1970s.

In Part 5, the recent phase of southern political history is examined. It began to emerge in the 1970s, although its form and direction was not evident until a decade or so later. At present, the South is experiencing something quite unfamiliar and unusual. For the first time, there are two parties and they are identifiably different from as well as competitive with each other. Already, the new southern Republican Party and its rival, a redefined and reconstituted Democratic Party, have been in existence for longer than the Whig-Democratic rivalry from 1836 to 1852. It does seem as if the South's political system has changed decisively and that its one-party politics has become, as they say, a thing of the past. Nevertheless, it is still possible that the South might revert to its former self and become a one-party region once again, with the conservative, overwhelmingly white, Republicans replacing the conservative, totally white, Democrats of the Solid South era. Since the southern states have already been designated by many political commentators as "red states," the party's momentum could continue until Republican dominance is the long-term outcome, along with a return to a one-party South.

WE CAN NOW begin to explore politics as it has been practiced and experienced in the South over the past two centuries. And, as we will discover, politics in the South has been strange and unusual—in effect, another "peculiar institution."