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## INTRODUCTION

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Gender is a central category of analysis in understanding the American South. The “Women’s Life” section of the original *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* focused attention on previously neglected issues of women’s culture and identity, but in considering this volume of *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* the editors believed that we needed to reconceptualize many of the issues raised in that section. Work on the “masculine” and the “feminine” grew exponentially after publication of the original encyclopedia, and that scholarship complicates our understanding of men’s and women’s lives in the South. As Ted Ownby and Nancy Bercau note in their overview essay, gender analysis destabilizes discourse about the South, upsetting conventional wisdom. Southern culture looks different than it did in earlier eras because scholars are giving more serious consideration to the conflicts and tensions that are inherent in the cultural constructions that men and women have made over centuries.

The power of gendered terminology is apparent in the importance of the term “patriarchy” as a way to bridge class and regional gaps within the South in order to emphasize shared values around male dominance of the household. “Family,” with its culturally sanctioned antebellum roles for men, women, children, and slaves, proved a related imaginative construct that ideologues used to justify the slave society, and, later, “family values” would prove a resonant contemporary idea for conservative southern Christians.

This volume charts ways that men and women have had differing experiences of manhood and womanhood. The expectations, opportunities, and limitations of white plantation owners, slave field hands, and small yeoman farmers established enduring parameters and boundaries for men’s understanding of their roles as fathers or husbands. The domestic worker and the woman she worked for might share the kitchen, but they did so in complex relationships of intimacy and power. Native American men and women and Latino men and women surely have had differing gender experiences from other people in the South, based on their positioning in southern society. The public and private contexts made a difference in how men and women played gender roles, and the regional context resulted in many southern women having differing ideas about feminism than women in other parts of the nation had.

This volume is particularly important in illuminating a major goal of *The New Encyclopedia*, namely to show—within the systematic categorization of a

reference work—that topics and themes have overlapped in southern culture. Despite neat classifications needed for clarity, topics range across not only disciplinary boundaries but thematic ones as well. In particular, gender entries have close relationships with those on race and social class, and gender themes pervade encyclopedia entries in every volume. Articles in this volume delineate gendered meanings in such major historical events as the Civil War and the civil rights movement. Public policy issues such as abortion and citizenship have clear gendered meanings that are brought out in separate entries on those topics. Gender studies has built on earlier works on regional mythology to examine such central iconic representations as belles and ladies, mummies, and maiden aunts, all covered herein. Gender influences cultural expressions, as seen in thematic entries on autobiography, blues, country music, and photography. A judicious selection of topical entries illustrates the breadth of gender's meanings. Readers will meet politicians, writers, musicians, social reformers, educators, religious leaders, television celebrities, and memoirists, each of which reveals differing conceptions of gender's impact. Gender studies finds meaning in a historical incident (the capture of Jefferson Davis), a slogan (*I AM A MAN*), and a television show (*Designing Women*).

The overview essay stresses that gender studies is often about process, and this volume is timely in presenting the latest scholarship of a field that has grown to be of crucial significance in understanding evolving southern culture.