

The Southern Problem and The Southern Renaissance



In 1920, the American South:



In 1920, the American South:

- • overwhelmingly rural and poor
- • had more than 70 lynchings
- had no universities ranked in the first tier by the American Council of Education
- average farm income of \$1,500 per year as compared to \$3,000 in Midwest
- had 40% of U.S. farms
- had 61% of all land damaged by erosion
- | less than 10% of farms had modern tools and conveniences
- per capita income of less than \$365 compared to \$881 in Northeast and \$715 in Midwest

Southern Hospitality





The largest city was Atlanta with 50,000 persons



Prophet of the New South



- Henry Grady invited northern industry
- Cheap, nonunionized labor

New Industries



Cotton textile mills up and down the east coast

An Area Frozen in Time



1920: cotton
sold for 35
cents per
pound

1921: 17 cents

The results of one-crop agriculture





The 1927 flood



- New Orleans 1927 flood

Stepping Into Modernity

- By 1920, the South was at a crossroads, with many of its customs, laws and living conditions still in the 19th century, but with increased industrialization pulling it reluctantly into the 20th century. The tension created, in some cases, violence, from an old standby.

O Brother Where Art Thou?



Provoking the South



- H.L. Mencken: “The Sahara of the Bozart.”

Mencken's Language was Scathing

“Virginia is the best of the south to day, and Georgia is perhaps the worst. The one is simply senile; the other is crass, gross, vulgar and obnoxious. Between lies a vast plain of mediocrity, stupidity, lethargy, almost of dead silence. . . . nowhere in the north is there such complete sterility, so depressing a lack of all civilized gesture and aspiration. . . . Everywhere else the wave rolls high--but along the line of the Potomac it breaks upon a rock-bound shore. There is no little theater beyond. There is no gallery of pictures. No artist ever gives exhibitions. No one talks of such things. No one seems to be interested in such things.”

“Monkey Trial” in Dayton, Tennessee in 1925,



Dayton Monkey Trial

In Fact, Mencken was Wrong About the South

- The Southern Renaissance

A Homegrown Genius



- William Faulkner

“We Have a Lot to Explain”

- Eudora Welty



Suddenly, Writers were Springing up Everywhere



Glasgow



Gordon



Porter

Zora Neale Hurston



Zora Neale Hurston

“The Fugitives”



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DONALD GRADY DAVIDSON
(1893 - 1968)
JOHN CROWE RANSOM
(1888 - 1974)

Giles County natives Donald G. Davidson and John C. Ransom were influential personages in American literature. Professors at Vanderbilt University, they helped found *The Fugitive* (1922-25), a magazine which launched the "Southern literary renaissance." They contributed to the essential Agrarian manifesto *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (1930), essays critical of industry's dehumanizing effects on the South.

John Crowe Ransom



Bells for John Whiteside's Daughter

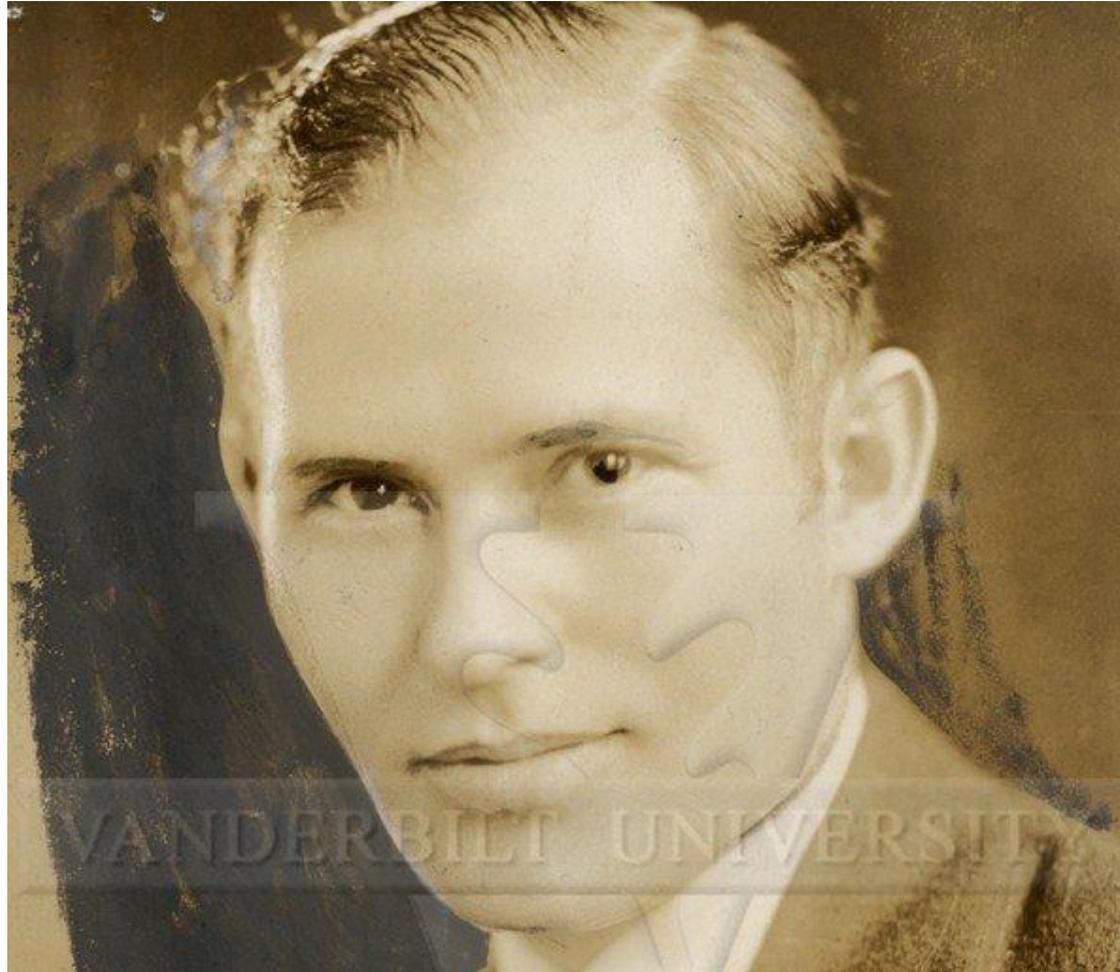
There was such speed in her little body,
And such lightness in her footfall,
It is no wonder her brown study Astonishes us all
Her wars were bruited in our high window.
We looked among orchard trees and beyond
Where she took arms against her shadow,
Or harried unto the pond
The lazy geese, like a snow cloud
Dripping their snow on the green grass,
Tricking and stopping, sleepy and proud,
Who cried in goose, Alas,
For the tireless heart within the little
Lady with rod that made them rise
From their noon apple-dreams and scuttle
Goose-fashion under the skies!
But now go the bells, and we are ready,
In one house we are sternly stopped
To say we are vexed at her brown study,
Lying so primly propped.

Allen Tate



[http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/
poem/ode-confederate-dead](http://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/ode-confederate-dead)

Donald Davidson



Lee in the Mountains

Walking into the shadows, walking alone Where the
sun falls through the ruined boughs of locust Up to
the president's office. . . . Hearing the voices Whisper,
Hush, it is General Lee! And strangely Hearing my
own voice say, Good morning, boys. (Don't get up.
You are early. It is long Before the bell. You will have
long to wait On these cold steps. . . .) The young have
time to wait But soldiers' faces under their tossing
flags Lift no more by any road or field, And I am spent
with old wars and new sorrow. Walking the rocky
path, where steps decay And the paint cracks and
grass eats on the stone. It is not General Lee, young
men. . . . It is Robert Lee in a dark civilian suit who
walks, An outlaw fumbling for the latch, a voice
Commanding in a dream where no flag flies.

My father's house is taken and his hearth Left to the
candle-drippings where the ashes Whirl at a chimney-
breath on the cold stone. I can hardly remember my
father's look, I cannot Answer his voice as he calls
farewell in the misty Mounting where riders gather at
gates. He was old then--I was a child--his hand Held
out for mine, some daybreak snatched away, And he
rode out, a broken man. Now let His lone grave keep,
surer than cypress roots, The vow I made beside him.
God too late Unseals to certain eyes the drift Of time
and the hopes of men and a sacred cause. The
fortune of the Lees goes with the land Whose sons
will keep it still. My mother Told me much. She sat
among the candles, Fingering the Memoirs, now so
long unread. And as my pen moves on across the
page Her voice comes back, a murmuring distillation
Of old Virginia times now faint and gone, The hurt of
all that was and cannot be.

Why did my father write? I know he saw
History clutched as a wraith out of blowing mist
Where tongues are loud, and a glut of little souls
Laps at the too much blood and the burning house.
He would have his say, but I shall not have mine.
What I do is only a son's devoir
To a lost father. Let him only speak.
The rest must pass to men who never knew
(But on a written page) the strike of armies,
And never heard the long Confederate cry
Charge through the muzzling smoke or saw the
bright
Eyes of the beardless boys go up to death.
It is Robert Lee who writes with his father's hand--
The rest must go unsaid and the lips be locked.

If all were told, as it cannot be told-- If all the dread
opinion of the heart Now could speak, now in the
shame and torment Lashing the bound and trampled
States-- If a word were said, as it cannot be said-- I
see clear waters run in Virginia's Valley And in the
house the weeping of young women Rises no more.
The waves of grain begin. The Shenandoah is
golden with a new grain. The Blue Ridge, crowned
with a haze of light, Thunders no more. The horse is
at plough. The rifle Returns to the chimney crotch
and the hunter's hand. And nothing else than this?
Was it for this That on an April day we stacked our
arms Obedient to a soldier's trust? To lie Ground by
heels of little men,

Forever maimed, defeated, lost, impugned? And was I
then betrayed? Did I betray? If it were said, as it still
might be said-- If it were said, and a word should run
like fire, Like living fire into the roots of grass, The
sunken flag would kindle on wild hills, The brooding
hearts would waken, and the dream Stir like a crippled
phantom under the pines, And this torn earth would
quicken into shouting Beneath the feet of the ragged
bands-- The pen Turns to the waiting page, the sword
Bows to the rust that cankers and the silence. Among
these boys whose eyes lift up to mine Within gray walls
where droning wasps repeat A hollow reveille, I still
must face, Day after day, the courier with his summons
Once more to surrender, now to surrender all. Without
arms or men I stand, but with knowledge only I face
what long I saw, before others knew, When Pickett's
men streamed back, and I heard the tangled Cry of the
Wilderness wounded, bloody with doom.

The mountains, once I said, in the little room At
Richmond, by the huddled fire, but still The President
shook his head. The mountains wait, I said, in the long
beat and rattle of siege At cratered Petersburg. Too
late We sought the mountains and those people came.
And Lee is in the mountains now, beyond Appomattox,
Listening long for voices that will never speak Again;
hearing the hoofbeats that come and go and fade
Without a stop, without a brown hand lifting The tent-
flap, or a bugle call at dawn, Or ever on the long white
road the flag Of Jackson's quick brigades. I am alone,
Trapped, consenting, taken at last in mountains.

It is not the bugle now, or the long roll beating.
The simple stroke of a chapel bell forbids
The hurtling dream, recalls the lonely mind.
Young men, the God of your fathers is a just
And merciful God Who in this blood once shed
On your green altars measures out all days,
And measures out the grace
Whereby alone we live;
And in His might He waits,
Brooding within the certitude of time,
To bring this lost forsaken valor
And the fierce faith undying
And the love quenchless
To flower among the hills to which we cleave,
To fruit upon the mountains whither we flee,
Never forsaking, never denying
His children and His children's children forever
Unto all generations of the faithful heart.

Robert Penn Warren



[http://www.english.illinois.edu/
maps/poets/s_z/warren/online
poems.htm](http://www.english.illinois.edu/maps/poets/s_z/warren/online_poems.htm)

The Decade Ends with a Whimper

- *I'll Take My Stand* came out in 1930, and was the last serious attack on corporate capitalism ever mounted in the United States. They didn't have to say any more, because the stock market crash of 1929 had called the entire capitalist structure into question.

The Fugitives Become Agrarians

