Regional Landscapes of the United States and Canada

The South:
Diverse Landscapes of Southeastern North America

Prof. Anthony Grande

©AFG 2015

The South

Interior South

Southern Coastlands

Includes areas called the Old South or Deep South but excludes the Southern Appalachians, Ozarks, Florida Peninsula, South Texas and usually southern Louisiana. WHY?

Includes the Atlantic and Gulf coastal plains. Area has an orientation to the sea which is both an asset and a detriment. HOW SO?

The South’s Sub-regions

Major sub-regions:
• Atlantic Coastal Plain
• Piedmont
• Florida Peninsula
• Gulf Coastal Plain
• Lower Mississippi River Flood Plain

The South’s Sub-regions

When you think about this region, what images come into your mind?

• Disney World
• Heat and humidity
• Growing cities
• Citrus fruits
• Civil War
• Plantations
• Southern food
• Beaches
• Florida Keys
• Hurricanes
• Bible Belt

Overlapping Vernacular Regions of the South

- **Bible Belt**: Coined in 1925 by a journalist during the Tennessee vs. Scopes teaching-evolution trial. Implies a region whose people espouse religious fundamentalism - particularly, literal interpretation of the Bible.
- **Dixie**: Its origin is uncertain.
  - Could be from French Louisiana currency (dix = 10) or the Mason-Dixon Line (area south of the line).
  - During the U.S. Civil War, the song *Dixie* became the unofficial anthem of the Confederate States of America.

- **Old South**: area of the 5 southern plantation colonies (VA to GA)
- **Deep South**: area of SE US from SC to TX excluding peninsula Florida
- **Southern Coastlands**: area of the Atlantic and Gulf coastal plains including peninsula Florida

OVERVIEW of the South

- A subtropical climate: heat and humidity.
- A strong sense of regional identity: similar beliefs, customs, attitudes throughout the region.
- A long standing relationship between people and the land: rural and agricultural.
- Regionalism is reinforced from the outside: often perceived/portrayed superficially and in caricature by outsiders.
- There’s diversity within the regionalism: many sub-regions with their own version of “southern culture”.
- Coastal South is faced with increased danger from natural hazards: severe storms; sea level rise.
OVERVIEW: Population

- NE and NW portions have people with a northern European heritage: English, Scot, Irish, German.
- S and SE portions have people with Hispanic and Caribbean heritage: Spanish, Haitian, West Indian, Cuban; with French heritage in Louisiana.
- SW portion has people with an Hispanic heritage: Spanish, Mexican
- Region has the largest concentration of African-Americans in the U.S. (exc. in South Florida and South Texas)
- An area with testy race relations based on a history of slavery and policies of discrimination and segregation (both political and cultural). More recently an area of conflict between American and Caribbean Blacks.

OVERVIEW – Economy

Five Economic Sub-regions

- Atlantic Coast: tourism, vacation homes, import-export trades
- Piedmont: manufacturing, R&D, finance
- Gulf Coast East: recreation, agriculture, retirement communities, sport fishing
- Gulf Coast West: resource extraction, industrial production, commercial fishing, trade (break-of-bulk and transshipment)
- Mississippi Flood Plain: agriculture, esp. cotton and rice, transportation services, food processing

OVERVIEW: A Changing Area

- Growing urbanization.
- Growing “non-Southern” population.
- New manufacturing enterprises.
- New agricultural orientations.
- Improved race relations.
- “Southern way” of doing things has been altered (by Federal law and in-migration).
- Feeling less regional and more national.

Landforms

Continental Shelf: the undersea extension of the continent; wide and relatively shallow ocean areas.

1. Coastal plain: generally flat to rolling terrain inland with a low-lying, marshy, indented shoreline.
2. The lower Mississippi River Valley: ancient delta of Mississippi River; now sedimentary rock overlain with fertile alluvial deposits.
   Exhibits a unique surface pattern of meanders, scars and oxbow lakes.
3. The Piedmont: Part of the Appalachian Mt. system. The sharp boundary between the Piedmont and coastal plain is called the Fall Line, an area of waterfalls that powered water mills.

Physical Geography

- Low-lying coastal area focused on the sea; spacious natural harbors that become ports.
- The continental shelf off the coast is wide; prime areas for fishing (commercial and sport) and mineral exploration (Gulf of Mexico).
- Sandy barrier islands and lagoons parallel the coast; allowed for the creation of the Intracoastal Waterway System (Texas to New Jersey).
- Coastal plain has relatively flat terrain with slow flowing rivers, swamps and marshes (bayous); focused attention away from the coast.
- The coastal plain extends inland to the Piedmont section of the Appalachians; Fall Line marks the boundary between the two.

Bayou

Defined as either:
- a. Body of water or wetland found in flat, low-lying areas
- b. An extremely slow moving stream with a poorly defined shoreline.

Probably comes from the Choctaw word bayuk, meaning a small stream, and applied by French Acadian immigrants to any waterway.
Barrier Island Coastline

Barrier island: a long, narrow island, lying parallel to the mainland and separated from it by a lagoon.

Shaped by a long shore current, waves and wind.

Barrier islands are temporary geologic features.

Intracoastal Waterway

COASTS in CRISIS

Louisiana Barrier Islands

Barrier islands form, change shape and disappear as a result of five interrelated factors.

The Outer Banks

North Carolina

The Outer Banks is a 200 mile long string of barrier islands.

Cape Hatteras is the site of a lighthouse which had to be moved 1500 ft. inland in 1999 to prevent it from collapsing into the sea.

Lower Mississippi Valley Landscape

A portion of the Mississippi River boundary between the state of Mississippi (right) and Arkansas and Louisiana.
Formation of an Oxbow Lake

Meander Scars

Physical Geography

- Piedmont (foothills of the Appalachian Mts.) rises to the Blue Ridge; forested area; varied resources.
- Vertical zonation of climate is evident from the coast to the Blue Ridge. This allowed colonists to get relief from the heat and humidity of the coastal plain.
- Inland region subject to occasional severe weather: frost, freezing rain, ice storms and snow in winter; thunderstorms, flooding rains and tornadoes in spring, summer and autumn. Southern edge of the zone of interaction between tropical and polar air masses.

Coast to Mountains: the Carolinas

1. Geologic cross-section of North Carolina

Mineral Resources

1. Oil and gas fields located in LA and TX and under the Gulf of Mexico continental shelf Gulf of Mexico area contains extensive oil and gas deposits.
2. Salt – underground salt domes mined for rock salt.
3. Sulfur – from cap rock over salt deposits (LA, TX).
4. Phosphorus – from deposits in Florida.

- Proximity to coal fields of Alabama, Kentucky, Tennessee gives the region access to cheap coal for power plants.
- Political issues and environmental problems related to the extraction and use of resources.

Location of Oil Platforms in the Gulf of Mexico
**Climates**

- **Cfa - Humid Subtropical** - throughout the region; hot humid summers, mild winters; year-round precipitation.
- South Florida is **Aw: tropical savanna** (winter dry).
- South Texas is **BSH: Sub-tropical steppe** (semi-arid with hot summers).
- Very long growing season (over 270 days)
- Altitude cools the Piedmont differentiating it from the rest of The South.

- Warm, humid climate with ample precipitation
- Annual hurricane threat
- Global warming with rising sea levels is a concern.

**Hurricane Hazard Zones**

- Hurricane strikes by county. Red is most, blue is least.
- Source: NOAA

**Hurricane Damage**

Galveston, TX  
Outer Banks, NC

- Ike, 2008
- Irene, 2011

**Path of Hurricane Katrina**

The eye passed E of New Orleans, pushing a storm surge into the lower Mississippi River and into Lake Pontchartrain. Levees failed to contain the rising water.

**Satellite View of New Orleans**

New Orleans: most important port of the region and focus of trade to continental interior via Mississippi River. Portions are below sea level due to subsidence.

**Soils**

- Soils tend to be fertile.
  - Benefit from subtropical climate and ample precipitation.
  - Thick top horizons rich in organic material.
  - Percent of clay determines use and crops.
  - **Coastal Plain soils** are best for forests and pasture. They tend to be sandy.
  - **Piedmont soils** are very old yet remain fertile. They are subject to gully erosion.
  - **Mississippi Flood Plain soils** are extremely fertile. They support the highest density of agriculture in the region.
  - High clay content = rice paddies.
Sink Holes
Florida

The Everglades
Unique ecological region.
- It’s a “river of grass” 60 mi wide, flowing south from Orlando to the tip of Florida.
- It is in danger because of fresh water diversion to Miami and farm land and because of east-west road construction.
- The mangrove forest exists in briny water. May be adversely affected by sea level rise.

Florida Keys
The Florida Keys is a chain of coral islands, NOT SAND, linked by causeways, stretching 130 mi from Key Biscayne to Key West. The Florida Key Formation is the world's 3rd largest barrier reef.
- A cay or key is a low coral island (Sp. cayo = shoal)

Demographics

Distinctive Demography
- In-migration. Most residents were born somewhere else.
- A very “non-southern” population.
- Mix of refugees (Cubans, Haitians) and retirees.
  - “Snowbirds”: People from the northern states and Canada who spend the winter in Florida.
- Pull Factor: favorable climate and tax rates
- Unique local cultural groups: Creoles, Cajuns, Gullahs
Regional Demography
Creoles and Cajuns
- **Creoles**: people of French/Spanish/Afro-Caribbean descent usually from the West Indies. Associated with speaking a pidgin language combining words from other languages with French.
- **Cajuns**: people of French Canadian descent. They were expelled after the French and Indian War. Settled in the U.S. Remain distinctive: French dialect, Catholic religion, food.

Regional Demography
Gullah
- **Gullah**: descendants of Africans brought as slaves to cotton plantations on the Sea Islands. Noteworthy for their distinctive African language and culture, which has been handed down by generations relatively intact.
  - Once isolated, their unique culture is now threatened by development and tourism on the coastal islands.

Regional Demography
Hispanics and Caribbean Islanders
- **Hispanics** (South Texas and South Florida)
  - From Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Dominican Rep
  - Remain distinctive:
    - Spanish-speaking
    - Catholic
    - Cuisine
- **Caribbean Islanders** (South Florida)
  - From Haiti and the West Indies
  - French, English and Asian backgrounds
  - Cultural conflict between Caribbean Blacks and American Blacks

Native Americans
- With the spread of white settlement there was a forcible removal of local Indians to Oklahoma (1830s).
- **Descendants of those native Americans who escaped removal remain in the South**:
  - Eastern Cherokee (North Carolina)
  - Choctaw (Mississippi)
  - Seminole (Florida)

Settlement Sequence
- **St. Augustine, FL** was the site of the **first** permanent European settlement in N. America (Spain, 1565).
- **Jamestown, VA** and Roanoke Island, NC: sites of the earliest **English** settlements (early 1600s).
  - **England** settled the coastal areas from Virginia to Georgia.
  - **Spain** controlled Florida and Gulf Coast.
- Early European settler goals were **commercial** and **exploitative**.
- Geographical advantages:
  - Areas were very suitable for agriculture.
  - Game was plentiful.
  - Navigable rivers allowed movement away from coast and access to interior forests and resources.

Settlement Patterns
- **The South did not experience the influx of the urban Europeans as did the Northeast**.
  - Little immigration from Europe during 1800s; very small proportion foreign-born by 1900.
  - No receiving ports; no industry.
  - Cities developed late.
- **Ports/small market centers developed in 1800s**.
  - Collection/transshipment points for cash crops
  - Little contact with each other; orientation was to the North or to Europe
  - Distinctly local allegiances
  - Most people lived in isolation on farms
- **Areas remained strongly rural until late 1900s**.
Plantation Agriculture

- Highly structured agricultural organization.
- Usually tied to a single cash crop for export.
- Plantations were self-sufficient units requiring many people with many skills.
- Needed much land and a large labor force.
- Small local population led to use of slave labor: first local Indians and indentured Englishmen, then African. (European countries have a history of using forced labor.)
- Only the richer plantations had mansions.

James River Plantations, VIRGINIA

http://www.shirleyplantation.com/index.html

Triangle Trade Route

Sailing ships on the Triangle Trade route (1600s-1800s) used global winds and ocean currents to cross the Atlantic.

Slavery’s Impact

- African slaves were integral to the economy, organization and social environment of the South from the start. (Started in the 1600s; South American and Caribbean models were used in North America.)
- Contributed key elements of Southern life by incorporating African culture into daily lives
  - Examples: speech patterns, religion, diet, music.
  - Blacks and whites lived in close proximity to each other on the plantations.

Boone’s Hall Plantation near Charleston, SC

Slave quarters were located off the main entrance road near the manor house.

Economics: North vs. South

Before the Civil War slaves were found in all Southern states except the counties within the Appalachian Highlands.

Greatest concentration of slaves was in the plantation areas of the coastal plain and lower Mississippi Valley – cotton, rice, sugar cane and tobacco producing areas.

North’s economy was based on industry and trade.

South’s economy was based on plantation agriculture.

Demand for cotton increased the need for laborers to work the fields.

See map, p. 41 of Historical Atlas
**Civil War Aftermath**

See Section 5 of Historical Atlas

- Most Civil War battles (1860-1865) were fought on Southern soil = much destruction.
  - Railroads were disrupted or in disrepair.
  - Equipment was confiscated or destroyed.
  - Shipping terminals were in ruins.

- Confederate currency/bonds were worthless.
- Large portion of the labor supply was eliminated
  - Emancipation of slaves and the white labor pool decimated by Civil War fatalities.
- Large land holdings were heavily taxed and/or sub-divided
- Reconstruction began.

**Post-Civil War Transition**

(1865-1880s)

- Southern White reaction to emancipation was institutionalized segregation.
- Few opportunities for blacks until World War I (Great Migration to northern areas).
- Greater national isolation of the South.
- Persistent regional poverty
  - Destruction of economic infrastructure and plantation economy by Civil War battles
  - Lack of economic development incentives
- Few jobs outside of farming
  - Poor farmers (both blacks and whites) made arrangements with land owners.
- Sharecropping System
  - Rent and repayment of loans for a share of the crop.
  - Debt perpetual, sharecropper bound to land until paid.
  - Reinforced by “Black Codes” restricting black movement.

**Today’s Dual Social Landscapes**

- Segregation outlawed:
  - Common workplaces, retail shopping, educational institutions, etc.
- Yet different human landscapes still exist:
  - one black and one white.
  - Little overlap in Mississippi, Louisiana, eastern Texas.

**Development of Manufacturing**

early 1900s

- Attractions of Piedmont South:
  - High levels of underemployment
  - Opportunity to modernize operations
  - Lower taxes
- Cotton textile industry
  - Originally based in New England
  - Shifted south after the Civil War
  - Carolina Piedmont and Northern Georgia
  - Drew other industries (clustering)
  - Economic impact
    - Workers paid low wages
    - Low land tax rates
    - Less regulations
- Other Industrial Developments

- Railroads: construction, other public improvements increased access
- Cigarettes: manufacturing; local tobacco farms: NC, VA
- Timber resources:
  - Furniture manufacturing (NC, VA)
  - Pulp and paper
- Atlanta (GA) - Birmingham (AL) - Chattanooga (TN) Triangle
  - Resources plus low wages encouraged manufacturing

**Other Industrial Developments**

**Changes in Economic Landscape**

The South’s economy has become more national in structure and less regional since the 1970s.

Has greatly diversified automobile, pulp and paper, textiles and apparel, oil refining, petrochemicals, aluminum, food processing.

Plus tourism, banking and finance.
Agricultural Setting

- Humid subtropical climate
  - Long growing season (from 9-12 mo.)
  - Average rainfall greater than 50 in./yr

- Advantages for agriculture
  - Can grow crops that cannot be grown elsewhere, such as citrus and sugarcane, introduced by Spanish in the 1500s.
  - Produced only in Florida, Texas, and California.
  - Double-cropping possible
  - Winter vegetables

Changes in Employment Structure

Percent non-agricultural labor force in manufacturing, 1950 vs. 2000

Harvesting Cotton

1860 vs. 2012

Apparel Manufacturing

Florida Tourism

Fishing

Commercial Fishing Distribution of Commercial Fishing Landings

Sport Fishing Distribution of Florida Sport Fishing Trips
Houston is the 4th largest city of the US. It is a major industrial center and the focus of the oil industry. Its port facilities are located 40 mi from the Gulf, linked to it by the Houston Ship Channel (1873).

Oil Refinery
Louisiana

N E X T

The Great Plains and Prairies