South Polls

"In My Heart, I'm an American"

Regional Attitudes and American Identity

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As the essays in this issue of *Southern Cultures* confirm, it is now old news to point to the changing demographic face of the South. We all know that immigration is transforming the region, that newcomers — new southerners, to be sure, but also new *kinds* of southerners — are introducing novel ways of speaking, of eating, of worshiping. These cultural innovations bring new diversity to a place long noted for its starkly black and white biracialism, its ethnically homogenous Anglo-Celtic whites, and its Christ-haunted Protestantism. Of course, as any number of Chinese in Mississippi, French-speaking Cajuns in Louisiana, Jews in South Carolina, German Lutherans in Texas, and Catholics in Maryland will tell us, the South has always housed more cultural diversity than the above generalizations allow, and it is much too simple to say that southerners are entirely unfamiliar with the voluntary and involuntary flow of people into the region from near and distant shores. Yet these generalizations nonetheless hold much truth: even today, the ancestry of most southerners points to Africa or the British Isles. Still, for most of its history, Dixie lagged way behind the rest of the country in terms of attracting immigrants and thus has far less experience with such perennial "American" themes as ethnic and religious nativism, assimilation, and pluralism.[1]

That all of this is now rapidly changing raises huge questions about both public policy and public morality — questions about Americanism and southernism, about inclusion and exclusion, questions, ultimately, about that most elemental of national matters, who "we" are and who "we" permit to become part of "us." Past South Polls have explored these questions of southern exceptionalism using the Southern Focus Poll, an annual survey of the UNC Odum Institute for Research in Social Science conducted between 1992 and 2001. Recent public data, taken largely from the General Social Surveys (GSS) in 1996 and 2004, offer new information on the attitudes and opinions of representative Americans, differentiated by region, about these issues. Because many of the same questions were asked in both years, the GSS is especially useful for gauging change in how Americans answer the question about what it means to be an American and in their opinions of immigration and immigrants. Comparing southerners with nonsoutherners also reveals the degree of regional divergence or convergence in these attitudes.[2]

According to the idealistic political understanding of America, part of the nation's mission—however insufficiently realized in practice, policy, and law—has always been as beacon and magnet to the world's downtrodden and despised. No other country has become home to so many immigrants, and to so many different kinds of immigrants. New arrivals at Ellis Island, New York, 1908, from the Records of the Public Health Service, courtesy of the National Archives.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AMERICAN?

No fixed consensus exists as to what it means to be an American because the definition of America and thus of American identity itself are the subject of heated debate, negotiation, and conflict. On the one hand, liberal, idealistic definitions of America assert that the United States, unique among modern nations, is not premised on a common ethnicity, race, language, religion, or even homeland, and what makes Americans "Americans"—that is, why we have the particular national identity we do—is not rooted in any of these things, either. Rather, these definitions hold that both the nation and American identity rest on an explicit ideological understanding of a people and the state they created. America and Americans, then, are assumed to be defined politically—that is, by a set of political ideals assumed universal in their applicability—rather than culturally, or, in the words of historian Arthur Mann, by "the bond of common paternity."[3]

Vernacular or "folk" definitions of American identity, on the other hand, which in earlier times were often entangled with "official" definitions issued by governments at all levels, generally assert the opposite; that America is in fact grounded not in abstract political ideals but in "culture" and quite concrete cultural markers: in a particular ethnicity or race (European, especially northwestern European), in a particular language (English), and in a particular religion (Christianity, especially

Protestantism). Such folk definitions of American identity have bred solidarity and a sense of unity and purpose among those sharing these ascriptive (race, ethnicity) and "achieved" (English speaking, Protestant) attributes, but frequently at the expense of those—immigrants and Americans alike—with different ethnicities, tongues, and faiths. Adherents to this definition therefore believe American identity to be quite clearly and properly stamped by cultural particularism rather than political universalism. Much of U.S. history is the consequence of the interplay between these two definitions.

All of the above suggest that American identity is an example of what philosophers call an "essentially contested concept"—one whose meaning cannot be fixed by an appeal to evidence or logic and thus is subject to endless dispute. Nonetheless, the line separating the idealistic, political definition of American identity from the folk, cultural definition has not always been as sharp as may first appear.

The idealistic base of the liberal, political view of American identity, according to the Swedish economist Gunnar Myrdal in his magisterial analysis of American race relations, *An American Dilemma*, espouses "the essential dignity of the individual human being, the fundamental equality of all men, and . . . certain inalienable rights of freedom, justice, and a fair opportunity." Advanced in Colonial America as early as the 1760s, this political definition, seen perhaps most eloquently in the Declaration of Independence, is at the heart of what Myrdal famously called "The American Creed" and, again in liberal, idealistic definitions of American identity, both empowers and obligates all Americans with its normative force; this, Myrdal seems to be saying, is what Americans, as a people and as a nation, ideally ought to be, what we should aspire to be.[4]

In Myrdal's thinking, though, the American Creed bears even more weight than this—much more. He says that the creed "is identified with America's peculiar brand of nationalism," thus serving to give Americans their sense of "historical mission," a fact, he suggests, of global significance. According to this idealistic political understanding of America, part of that mission—however superseded it may be by cultural definitions of American identity and thus however insufficiently realized in practice, policy, and law—has always been as beacon and magnet to the world's downtrodden and despised. Remember the Statue of Liberty with its famous poem written in 1883 by Emma Lazarus: "Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp! . . . Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, yearning to breathe free." No other country, historian Mann tells us, has become home to so many immigrants, and to so many different kinds of immigrants, most of whom were drawn by a promise enshrined in the creed.[5]

Going further still, Myrdal argues that because Americans have no commonality rooted in what usually constitutes a "folk" or a distinct people—such as language, religion, a homeland, and so on—then something external, something

independent of culture in this sense of the term, must serve as the indispensable social adhesive. So he considers the creed to be the political glue holding a culturally diverse and pluralistic people—a nation of immigrants—together. Americans, from this definition, thus need no common culture, no common paternity; they need simply to bind themselves to the creed and thereby to each other.

Myrdal also sees the creed as satisfying yet another crucial social function. Though Americans, in his view, "ought" to act in a creedal fashion, we oft-times do not, thereby falling short of our highest ideals. And history does tell us that we have all too frequently fallen short—and this is painfully true for white southerners—precisely in forgetting that no race, no ethnicity, no religion, no language "owns" America or defines American identity. The United States' past is replete with racial, ethnic, and religious persecution and exclusion, both state-sponsored or -sanctioned and otherwise. Among the many examples of this are the Naturalization Act of 1790, which employed explicitly racial criteria limiting citizenship in this nation to "free white persons"; the Indian Removal Act of 1824; the Chinese Exclusion Acts of the 1880s; and the Executive Order 9066, which authorized the mass incarceration of over 110,000 Japanese Americans in so-called "internment" camps during World War II, an order signed by the very man who a year earlier had delivered his famous, profoundly creedal "Four Freedoms" speech, President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Much of this was a direct consequence of white supremacy, overt racism, and various prejudices against a strange or foreign "other." But some of the distance separating creed from deed—as our collective moral "lapses" are sometimes called by those adherents of the idealistic political understanding of American identity—stems from real, if wrenchingly misguided, fears for the very idea of "America." Here is one area where the political and cultural definitions of American identity interweave. Because Americans are a hugely diverse people who share only a political definition of who we are—a common ancestral culture is neither necessary nor obtainable in this country—adherence to the creed is essential for national unity, and so throughout our history we have occasionally obsessed about the loyalties and allegiances of immigrants, and even of American citizens whose ethnicity or language or religion stamped them as somehow "different" from most Americans or most southerners.

In the event of war, we ask ourselves, will "they" align themselves with their ancestral homelands against America? Will their attempts to keep alive their culture and language fracture America? To whom and to what are they loyal—to their particularistic culture, whatever that may be, or to the creedal political abstraction that is America? During the 1960 presidential campaign, for example, prominent Protestant clergy, led by the Reverend Norman Vincent Peale, questioned "the loyalty of any Catholic candidate for president and the wisdom of choosing any man of that faith for the high office," forcing John F. Kennedy both to declare

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before the Greater Houston Ministerial Association that he did not speak for his church and his church did not speak for him, and to proclaim his commitment to the separation of church and state and to religious tolerance and pluralism. The creed, in a particular way, thus lends itself to this sort of hyperpatriotic abuse: although its logic is one of universalism, its geographic impetus, as Myrdal has shown, is highly particularistic, largely limited to northwestern Europe, and so the bigoted and fearful amongst us can use its Protestant, Eurocentric roots to express the exclusionary folk or cultural definition of American identity.[6]

How does America come to understand and ultimately repudiate its own racism, ethnocentrism, and xenophobia—to make right its wrongs? To Myrdal and other advocates of a political definition of America, the answer is simple: the creed—or, at least, social movements of the dispossessed and disfranchised inspired by and armed with the universalism of the creed. So in addition to doing all the other important things already discussed, the creed also serves, again in the words of Myrdal, as the "American Conscience"—the moral standard we use to judge the goodness or badness of our practices, our laws, and our institutions, the

yardstick that tells us how far we must go to realize the high political ideals upon which the nation, and American identity, were founded.

The creed, though, lacks the visceral appeal of ethnic or religious commonality, and so the political definition of American identity is constantly challenged by the cultural definition. Even in recent times, particularism can trump universalism, not only among everyday folk but among public officials as well. At a meeting of Republican governors in 1992, then Mississippi Governor Kirk Fordice proclaimed that the United States "was a Christian nation, which," he added, "does not mean in any way to infer any kind of religious intolerance or any kind of particular dogma that is being forced on anyone. It's just a simple fact of life in the United States of America." Tying what he saw as the defining quality of the nation to its potential downfall, Fordice then added, "And the less we emphasize the Christian religion, the further we fall into the abyss of poor character and chaos." When another southern governor, Carroll A. Campbell of South Carolina, tried to broaden the religious character of the United States by adding "Judeo-" to "Christian," Fordice said, "If I had wanted to do that, I would have done it." Similar sentiments fueled former Alabama Supreme Court Chief Justice Roy Moore's losing efforts to place a Ten Commandments monument in his courthouse. More secular appeals to cultural particularism, emphasizing, again, the threat to the creed and to national unity, come from the learned and influential, notably Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington and CNN's Lou Dobbs, both of whom fear that unacculturated immigrants from Latin America will mortally wound American national identity. Such anxieties are also repeatedly heard on the floor of the U.S. Congress. For example, during a 2006 debate on immigration in which the U.S. Senate voted 63-34 to make English the official language in the United States (the bill was never put into law), Republican Senator Lamar Alexander from Tennessee argued that "English is part of our national identity. It's part of our spirit. It's part of our blood. It's part of who we are." Clearly, the cultural definition of America is alive and well, illustrating, once more, that no societal agreement on American identity exists.[7]

Cultural pluralism and the subject that fuels much of the debate about it, immigration, thus again seem to be hot-button issues, and we have little good evidence for what Americans currently think about "Americanism"—that is, about what it means to be an American. Now that the United States contains, as sociologist Alan Wolfe puts it, more "nonwhite people whose first language is not English" than at any point in its history, Americans are being challenged to define our national identity and to articulate just how inclusive we are to be. Perhaps the firmest conclusion to be reached regarding what Americans believe about immigration is that we, collectively and individually, are likely confused, most certainly conflicted. Many Americans appear distressed by the way immigration is handled in the United States today, even as they value the contributions of immigrants to

the nation. A slight plurality (43 percent) of Americans, polled in April 2007 by USA Today/Gallup, for instance, believed that the United States has "lost ground" in dealing with illegal immigration in the past year; only 12 percent felt that the country has made progress. But while a majority of Americans (54 percent), also surveyed in April 2007 by the *Los Angeles Times*/Bloomberg Poll, believed that illegal immigrants harm the nation's economy, 55 percent preferred a guest-worker program in conjunction with tougher border enforcement to a strategy emphasizing only enforcement (40 percent). Likewise, most Americans (78 percent), asked in April 2007 by USA Today/Gallup about a number of ways to handle the problem of illegal immigrants in the United States, chose policies permitting a path toward citizenship rather than those that called for deportation, either with (only 6 percent supported) or without (14 percent supported) a chance to return.[8]

Illegal immigration is but the tip of the iceberg: 55 percent of Americans, when polled by Gallup in early 2007, said that the overall level of immigration should be decreased, up from 45 percent in January 2001; the percent of those who believed it should be increased was in the single digits. The Gallup Poll also found, in June 2006, that almost half of all Americans polled thought immigration from Latin America should be curtailed. Is this evidence of a new nativism, of renewed (if possibly passing) intolerance and exclusion? How pervasive is the creedal understanding of American identity, a national identity premised on political ideals rather than culture? Conversely, do many Americans embrace a cultural underpinning of "us," one that places ancestry, language, and ethnicity above those ideals?

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES AND THE CREED

American opinions gathered by the General Social Survey can shed new light on these questions and on any regional differences that may exist. In both 1996 and 2004, the GSS asked respondents the following question: "Some people say the following things are important for being truly American. Others say they are not important. How important do you think each of the following is?" In 1996 seven characteristics were queried; in 2004, eight. For each trait, respondents were asked if it was "very important," "fairly important," "not very important," or "not at all important." A residual category, "can't choose," was volunteered by a small percent of respondents (0.5 to 3 percent). The traits and the percent of Americans believing each "very important" is seen in Table 1. We report the results separately for three regional groups of respondents: a) those who are lifelong residents of the South; b) those who either grew up in the South but now live elsewhere ("exiles") or grew up elsewhere but now live in the South ("transplants"); and c) lifelong nonsoutherners. (We combine exiles and transplants because, separately, there are too few of either in the sample to permit reliable interpretation.)[9]

Table 1: Americans' Opinions About the Traits Necessary for Being "Truly American" (1996 and 2004 General Social Surveys)

	% Responding "Very Important"			
	Lifelong Southerners	Exiles/ Transplants	Lifelong Nonsoutherners	Total Sample
To have American citizenship				
1996	84	75	71	75
2004	87	77	81	82
To respect America's political institutions/laws				
1996	70	64	61	63
2004	72	72	71	72
To feel American				
1996	70	61	57	61
2004	72	64	65	67
To have American ancestry				
2004	44	25	28	32
To have lived in America for most of one's life				
1996	57	46	38	44
2004	69	47	56	58
To have been born in America				
1996	57	38	34	40
2004	68	45	53	56
To be able to speak English				
1996	78	71	68	71
2004	88	85	81	83
To be a Christian				
1996	57	40	29	38
2004	63	47	42	48
Number of respondents, 1996*	346–350	164–165	834–838	1,344–1,351
Number of respondents, 2004*	329–330	142	742–743	1,213–1,215

*The number of respondents generally varied by question.

Consider, first, those attributes of "true Americanism" that are creedal in nature, or at least do not represent an open break with a culturally inclusive, political definition of American identity. The vast majority of Americans believed both in 1996 and in 2004 that having American citizenship (71 to 87 percent) and respecting the nation's political institutions and laws (61 to 72 percent) were "very important" to be "truly American." Lifelong southerners, more than others, were a bit stricter here, but by 2004 these differences were small or nonexistent. Regional differences are also small in 2004 for the trait "feel like an American" as well, with a majority of all three groups believing this subjective state of genuine import. These "requirements"—or so they are viewed by large percentages of Americans—do not seem unduly constraining or exclusionary, though one could argue that some laws and political institutions deserve more respect than others. Nevertheless, none of these attributes courts overtly cultural requirements of "true Americanism." The same, however, cannot be said for the next five components queried: American ancestry, longtime residence in the United States, American birth, English-speaking, and Christian. All of these, in one way or another, would impose quite stringent ethnic, linguistic, or religious criteria on the ability of many in this nation—most of whom are its citizens—to claim or assert a "real" or "true" American identity.

Significantly larger percentages of all regional groups in 2004 than in 1996 state that four of the five explicitly particularistic or ascriptive—exclusionary, in any case—components of true Americanism are "very important." The sole exception to this generalization is that exiles/transplants did not believe having lived in America for most of one's life more important from one survey to the other. (The fifth trait, American ancestry, was not queried in 1996.) Though we have no systematic data on why we see these attitudinal changes from 1996 to 2004, it is possible that 9/11, the "war on terror," and the current Iraq war—all of which were on prominent public display during the 2004 presidential campaign—play an important role in what is an increasingly narrow popular understanding of Americanism. Such an inference is certainly consistent with the heightened number of attacks against Arab Americans and Muslim Americans after 9/11.[10]

The majority of Americans in 2004—sweeping majorities, in one case—believe most of these attributes "very important" (see the "Total Sample" column in Table 1). Only for American ancestry does a clear minority of those polled believe this, and even here, 54 percent of all Americans (irrespective of region) believe it either "very important" or "fairly important." (Percentages for the "fairly important" category do not appear in Table 1). Fifty-six percent believed it very important to have been born in America to be "truly American," and another 20 percent asserted it was "fairly important." Similarly, 80 percent thought having lived in America for most of one's life either very or fairly important (58 percent

Despite all the theorizing about what it means to be an American by intellectuals and politicians, vernacular or folk expressions of American identity are not underpinned by universal, inclusive political ideals but, instead, by particularistic and exclusionary, ancestral, linguistic, and religious criteria, the sort of standard most immigrants would of necessity fail. Department of Labor training service class in English and citizenship for Italian immigrants, Newark, New Jersey, ca. 1925, courtesy of the Collections of the Library of Congress.

said it was very important). Eighty-three percent thought speaking English very important; add to that the additional 14 percent who replied that it was fairly important, and we have, in 2004, 97 percent of a representative sample of Americans willing to say in a public poll that an inability to speak English effectively rendered "true Americanism" unlikely, perhaps even impossible. Even more exclusionary in their logic are the statistics pertaining to the import of being a Christian: a near-majority of Americans, 48 percent, believed identifying with this particularistic faith very important, and another 16 percent answered fairly important. Almost two-thirds of these respondents, then, think being a Christian at least of some significance for "true Americanism."

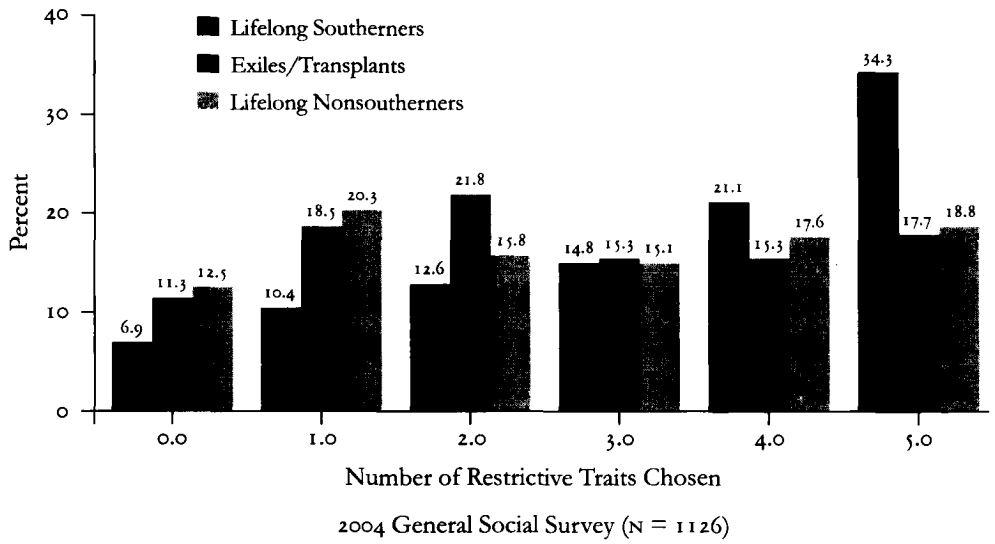
One statistic (not included in Table 1) does offer evidence of a contrary sentiment. Both the 1996 GSS and 2004 GSS included a question asking if respondents agreed with the statement, "It is impossible for people who do not share American customs and traditions to become fully American." They could answer either "strongly agree," "agree," "neither agree nor disagree," "disagree," or "disagree strongly." The modal response in both years was "disagree," with 33 percent of Americans choosing it in 1996 and 36 percent in 2004. Only about a third either "strongly agreed" or "agreed" in either 1996 or 2004. But it is not entirely clear how to interpret these results, especially given the tightly systematic pattern seen with the "truly American" characteristics in Table 1. The question is phrased in

terms of a double negative ("impossible," "do not share"), which can confuse respondents. Moreover, when we look at the responses to this question of only those polled who believed the ability to speak English "very important," we do see more exclusionary responses (data not shown). Nonetheless, here, at least, we see much lower levels of particularism. However, these responses, when taken together, strongly indicate that despite all the theorizing about what it means to be an American by intellectuals and politicians, as late as 2004 vernacular or folk expressions of American identity were not underpinned by universal, inclusive political ideals but instead by particularistic, ancestral, linguistic, and religious criteria, the sort of standard most immigrants would of necessity fail.

Table 1 also shows fairly large regional differences in American assertions of the importance of the more restrictive identity attributes. Lifelong residents of nonsouthern environs more closely resemble their peers in Dixie in 2004 than in 1996—meaning that "northerners" have moved more rapidly down the path of restriction than have long-term southerners. Though hardly constituting proof, this is consistent with the argument, offered by such perceptive South-watchers as John Egerton and Peter Applebome, that the region is transforming the United States in its own image. But, nonetheless, as of 2004 it is lifelong southerners who consistently remain most particularistic and exclusionary, with exiles and transplants usually closer to the beliefs of respondents who have never lived below the Mason-Dixon Line. Differences in the percentages of lifelong southerners and nonsoutherners who believed these traits are very important range, in 2004, from 7 percent for being able to speak English (88 percent v. 81 percent) to 21 percent for being a Christian (63 percent v. 42 percent). That so many lifelong southerners believe that one must be a Christian to be truly American may be due to the region's long-standing religious homogeneity: for many southerners of all races, a Christian America is the only America they know. Whatever the exact reason, though, these responses do suggest that the Mississippian Kirk Fordice, the Alabamian Roy Moore, and the Tennessean Lamar Alexander represented a great many of their coregionalists' sectarian beliefs.[11]

Averaging across responses to the five most restrictive characteristics in Table 1 (from having American ancestry through being a Christian), we find that a bit more than half of lifelong nonsoutherners (52 percent) in 2004 believe these traits very important to being "truly American"; two-thirds of lifelong southerners do. Additionally, an average of 80 percent of the latter said these five characteristics are either "very" or "fairly" important; sometimes, as in the case of having lived most of one's life in the South and the importance of speaking English, the percentages approach or exceed 90. Except for English-speaking ability, which almost all of each group believe either very or fairly important (these data are not shown), the differences between "lifers" in the other regions and the South range from 6 percent (long-term residency in the United States) to 29 percent

Figure 1. Regional Differences in Culturally Restrictive "True American" Traits



2004 General Social Survey (N = 1126)

(Christian). Another way to see the magnitude of these regional differences is to calculate the percentage of each of the three regional groups who believe that one, two, three, four, or all five of the most particularistic characteristics are very important (see Figure 1). In 2004 only one in six lifelong southerners judge that a small of number of these traits—none or only one—is very important (17 percent); 30 percent or more of exiles and transplants do so, as do one in three lifelong nonsoutherners. Likewise, only a third or so of the latter two groups attribute great importance to a large number—four or all five—of these particularistic characteristics; more than half (55 percent) of Dixie's permanent residents do so. If, in recent times, Americans generally have become more exclusionary in their conceptions of American identity, southerners, at least those who have lived in the region for most of their lives (and they are the most numerous of Dixie's denizens), appear to have led the way.[12]

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES IN THE PERCEPTION OF IMMIGRANTS

While beliefs about what it means to be an American are no doubt intimately tied to attitudes about immigration, it does not necessarily follow that because southerners and other Americans are ungenerous in their estimation of Americanism's requirements they therefore hate or fear immigrants. It is one thing to posit particularistic criteria for "true" Americanism; it is quite another to judge and damn human beings, even those who remain largely unknown to most Americans. So what are the recent American opinions about the latest influx of newcomers, and how have these attitudes changed in the recent past? Are these opinions equally shared by southerners and nonsoutherners?

The GSS asked respondents the degree to which they agreed or not with a series of positive and negative assertions about immigrants and their impact on America. Each of the statements was prefaced by the assertion, "There are different opinions about immigrants from other countries living in America." (See Table 2 for statements.) Each statement permitted respondents five alternatives: "strongly agree," "agree," "neither agree nor disagree," "disagree," and "strongly disagree." In Table 2 we present the percentage of respondents who both strongly agreed or agreed and those who disagreed or strongly disagreed by regional group. The remaining percentage of respondents, not shown in the table, neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

American assessments of the consequences of immigration, at least as we can gauge them from the three statements asked in both surveys, are both more positive and less negative in 2004 than in 1996, regardless of region. More respondents both a) agree or strongly agree that immigrants are good for America in the more recent survey, and b) disagree or strongly disagree that they cause higher crime rates or take jobs away from Americans. For example, between one-third and one-half of Americans surveyed in 2004 said that immigrants are good for America (depending on region), and greater numbers judged that they improve American society (as high as 71 percent for exiles/transplants). While many believe that immigrants harm the United States by causing higher crime rates (25 to 31 percent) or by taking American jobs (40 to 52 percent), these percentages are down from 1996. So even as most Americans appear to embrace increasingly exclusionary interpretations of American identity, they also claim to have more positive views of immigrants in 2004 than eight years previously. This seems paradoxical, and to the extent that both sets of findings broadly map the true beliefs of the GSS respondents, they intimate that Americans, again both as a collectivity and as individuals, are confused or conflicted about what they think of the country's newcomers and the changes they have brought. Public opinion about immigration no doubt is to a degree fluid, a function of political initiatives and local, situational factors. Alternatively, these seemingly contradictory patterns may indicate that "we" have loosened the tether between Americanism, on the one hand, and immigration, on the other. Yes, we seem to say, immigration is better for the nation than "we" once thought, but some immigrants—those, for example, who do not speak English or are not Christian—still may not be qualified to be "true" Americans. Note, too, that the notion of "better" is ambiguous here: respondents may interpret this to mean that immigrants bring with them new ideas or innovative, useful cultural patterns, or they may believe that because immigrants frequently occupy low-wage jobs, the latter thus "better" the United States.

The GSS also shows that there is little consensus among Americans about the recent effects of immigration (see the "total sample" row under each statement). Paradoxically, only for views about whether "the government spends too much

Table 2: Americans' Opinions About Immigrants' Impact on America (1996 and 2004 General Social Surveys)

	Percent Responding			
	1996		2004	
	SA/A*	SD/D*	SA/A*	SD/D*
Immigrants Are Good for America				
Lifelong Southerners	23	45	33	32
Exiles/Transplants	44	29	50	21
Lifelong Nonsoutherners	36	29	50	22
Total Sample	34	33	45	25
Immigrants Improve American Society with New Ideas/Cultures				
Lifelong Southerners	NA		44	26
Exiles/Transplants	NA		71	14
Lifelong Nonsoutherners	NA		60	16
Total Sample	NA		57	18
Immigrants Should Have Same Legal Rights as Americans				
Lifelong Southerners	NA		37	47
Exiles/Transplants	NA		36	49
Lifelong Nonsoutherners	NA		40	45
Total Sample	NA		39	46
Government Spends Too Much Money on Immigrants				
Lifelong Southerners	NA		58	14
Exiles/Transplants	NA		48	27
Lifelong Nonsoutherners	NA		50	24
Total Sample	NA		52	21
Immigrants Cause Higher Crimes Rates				
Lifelong Southerners	45	26	31	35
Exiles/Transplants	31	44	27	51
Lifelong Nonsoutherners	29	41	25	47
Total Sample	33	38	27	44
Immigrants Take Jobs Away				
Lifelong Southerners	63	19	52	25
Exiles/Transplants	41	34	41	36
Lifelong Nonsoutherners	44	31	40	38
Total Sample	48	29	43	34
Number of respondents**	1,250–1,281		1,179–1,200	

*SA/A = "Strongly Agree" or "Agree"; SD/D = "Strongly Disagree" or "Disagree."
The remaining percentage of respondents answered "Neither Agree nor Disagree."
**The number of respondents varied by question.

money" on immigrants and if immigration improves the United States does a true majority opinion exist in 2004: 52 percent say immigrants cost too much and 57 percent believe that they improve American society. For the remaining four statements, public opinion is deeply divided. This, as well as the fact that any consensus that does exist appears paradoxical, simultaneously pulling in opposite directions, only exacerbates extant political difficulties in reaching consensus on how the nation should handle immigration.

Important regional differences in these opinions continue. Lifelong southerners are appreciably more particularistic in their understanding of what it means to be an American than are other folks in the United States (see Table 1); so, too, are they harsher in their judgments of immigrants, even in 2004 when their opinions are closer to the mainstream (see Table 2). They less frequently agree with positive assessments of immigration and more frequently disagree with them (immigrants are good for, and improve, America); moreover, they more often agree with negative evaluations and less often disagree with them (immigrants cause high crime rates, take jobs away). In 2004, for instance, only a third of lifelong southerners said that immigrants are good for America; half of the exiles/transplants and lifelong nonsoutherners asserted this. Likewise, 44 percent of lifelong southerners, compared to 71 percent of exiles/transplants and 60 percent of lifelong nonsoutherners, thought immigrants "improve" America.

Another way to look at these patterns is to note that only 36 percent of lifelong southerners believe two or all three of the positive sentiments about immigrants (they are good for/improve America, deserve legal rights) compared to 57 percent of exiles/transplants and 53 percent of lifelong nonsoutherners. Similarly, more of Dixie's lifelong residents also agree or strongly agree with more of the negative assessments (immigrants cost too much money, cause higher crime rates, take jobs away): 47 percent of them believe two or three of the negative views compared to 35 percent of the two other groups who do so. Overall, then, we see more disapproval and condemnation of immigration, and less generous appraisals of immigrants themselves, among Americans who have spent their entire lives in the South.[13]

In 1996, 2004, and 2006 the GSS asked respondents if they thought the "number of immigrants to America nowadays should be" increased a lot, increased a little, remain the same as it is now, reduced a little, or reduced a lot. Consistent with the increasingly positive view of immigrants seen in Table 2, American opinions liberalized between 1996 and 2006. (See the "total sample" row in Table 3.) Nonetheless, as of the latter date, a clear majority of Americans, 53 percent, continue to prefer a reduction in the level of immigration; only 13 percent expressed a wish for an increase in immigration. (Roughly equal numbers of respondents answered "decreased a lot" and "decreased a little.") The remainder (35 percent in 2006) preferred that the number of immigrants remain constant. For every American in

Table 3: Americans' Preferences About the Volume of Immigration (1996, 2004, and 2006 General Social Surveys)

	Lifelong Southerners	Exiles/ Transplants	Lifelong Nonsoutherners	Total Sample
Percent Responding That the Number of Immigrants Should Be Increased*				
1996	7	10	9	9
2004	8	17	10	10
2006	10	17	13	13
Percent Responding That the Number of Immigrants Should Be Decreased**				
1996	72	61	62	64
2004	62	51	53	55
2006	62	44	50	53

*Percent preferring either "increased a lot" or "increased a little."

**Percent preferring either "decreased a lot" or "decreased a little."

The remaining percentage of respondents answered "Remain the Same As It Is Now."

N of Respondents, 1996 = 1,141

N of Respondents, 2004 = 1,983

N of Respondents, 2006 = 1,945

the 2006 GSS who wished to increase the flow of in-migration a lot or even a little, four wished to decrease it; for every American who wished to increase immigration "a lot," more than seven wished to decrease it "a lot."

By 2004 the GSS data show few robust regional differences in attitudes about a) government assistance to ethnic minorities (most Americans said no), b) racial and ethnic distinctiveness versus assimilation (most Americans preferred the latter), c) the exclusion of illegal immigrants (70 percent believed they should be excluded), and d) the status of parents with children born in the United States (75 percent believed that such parents should be permitted to become citizens). Regional differences in anti-immigrant sentiment, however, are considerable (see Table 3): in 2006 lifelong southerners, when compared to the other two groups, preferred by a margin of 12 percent (compared to lifelong nonsoutherners) and 18 percent (compared to exiles/transplants) that the volume of immigration be reduced. Ten percent of "lifers" believed immigration should be increased; more than 60 percent believed it should be decreased. No doubt many factors affect how people feel about this issue, but the sort of positive and negative evaluations of immigrants discussed above probably play a role here: those who believe immigrants are good for the country are likely to be more welcoming of newcomers; those who see immigrants as harmful—and lifelong southerners do so more than other Americans (see Table 2)—are likely to wish to staunch the flow of immigrants. This, as can be seen in Table 3, is in fact the pattern we find.[14]

Even as most Americans appear to embrace increasingly exclusionary interpretations of American identity, they also claim to have more positive views of immigrants than eight years previously, a seemingly paradoxical perspective—but one with a longstanding history in the country, evident, for example, both in the Chinese Exclusion Acts of the 1880s and the government's appeals to new immigrants by evoking the Creed in its World War I posters (here). Courtesy of the Collections of the Library of Congress.

Virtually all these data on Americanism and immigration consistently indicate that those who have deeply imbibed southern culture generally hold both more exclusionary views of what makes an individual a true American and less charitable opinions of immigrants than do other Americans. And the more of the culture we have imbibed, seemingly the more narrow and harsh the attitudes. It is not a matter of simply having lived in the South as an adolescent, nor, after migrating here, living in the region as an adult. After all, exiles and transplants—both of which have had exposure to the South and its social arrangements—are frequently more inclusive in their sense of American identity and appreciative of immigrants than are lifelong nonsoutherners. It is, instead, lifelong southerners who advance more restrictive immigration policies than do others because, in part at least, they both evaluate immigrants more negatively and are more apt to understand "Americanism" in more restrictive ways. More than other regional groups, those of us who have lived here all our lives define what it means to be an American with the imagery of ancestry, language, religion, and paternity—exactly opposite, one could argue, what the American Creed calls for, exactly opposite what an open, pluralistic, diverse multicultural region and nation require.

Why do we see such consistent regional patterns, some clearly nativist and exclusionary, in these data? One possible explanation is that lifelong southerners have responded with a cultural backlash because the region is now subject to unparalleled, seemingly escalating immigration from Latin America. Such a rapid demographic transition—one, moreover, very much still underway—can be quite disorienting, threatening, no doubt, to those still in the region who came of age in a South etched in black and white, one in which orthodox Protestantism reigned unchallenged, and English, for most, was the only linguistic currency. During the 1990s, for example, among the six states with the highest growth rate of Hispanics, four were southern: Arkansas (#1), North Carolina (#3), Georgia (#4), and Tennessee (#6). Today, Latinos permeate parts of the region: the Atlanta metropolitan area was, in 2005, home to over 400,000 Latinos; Charlotte, to 112,000 Hispanics; New Orleans, 65,000; North Carolina's Triangle area, over 110,000; Houston, almost 1.7 million. The South—even in its divergence from and historical opposition to "America"—has always been thought more American than America, the place where American excesses, whether good or bad, could be safely deposited, used or abused as needed, and then returned. We southerners wear our Americanism, and our patriotism, on our sleeve, proudly, as we will happily show any curious onlooker. Still, the question continues to haunt: are all of the above sufficient reasons to explain why so many of us in this region hang on so tenaciously to such a constricted, anti-creedal expression of American identity?[15]

NOTES

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1. James Cobb and William Steuck, eds., *Globalization and the American South* (University of Georgia Press, 2006); James Peacock, Harry Watson, and Carrie Matthews, eds., *The American South in a Global World* (University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Carl Degler, "The Foundations of Southern Distinctiveness," *The Southern Review* 13 (Spring 1977): 225–39; Milton M. Gordon, *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (Oxford University Press, 1964); Arthur Mann, "From Immigration to Acculturation," in *Making America: The Society and Culture of the United States*, ed. Luther Luedtke (University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 68–80. The quote that serves as the title of this essay is from a statement by an undocumented Latino whose legal claim to American citizenship was delayed by the Immigration and Naturalization Service. It continues: "I'm No Longer One of 'Them.' I'm One of 'Us.'" *The Herald* (Rock Hill, S.C.), 4 July 1999.

2. The General Social Survey is widely used in public opinion studies and is fielded by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago (see http://www.norc.org/projects/General+Social+Survey.htm). The GSS consists of face-to-face interviews with a nationally representative sample of adults eighteen and older.

3. Mann, "From Immigration to Acculturation," 68. See, also, Michael Walzer, "What Does It Mean to Be An 'American'?" *Social Research* 57 (Fall 1990): 591–614.

4. W. B. Gallie, "Essentially Contested Concepts," in W. B. Gallie, *Philosophy and the Historical Understanding* (Schocken, 1964), 157–91; Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy* (Harper and Brothers, 1944), 4.

5. Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*, 5; Mann, "From Immigration to Acculturation," 70.

6. Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President*, 1960 (Atheneum Publishers, 1961), 295. Kennedy's Houston speech is reprinted on pages 437–39.

7. On Fordice, see *The Washington Post*, 18 November 1992. On Moore, see *The New York Times*, 19 November 2002; 7 March 2004. Samuel Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (Simon and Schuster, 2004). See, also, Alan Wolfe's review of Huntington, "Native Son: Samuel Huntington Defends the Homeland," *Foreign Affairs* 83.3 (May–June, 2004), 120. On Lamar Alexander, see Bloomberg at http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=10000103&sid+a_LjjNFU9gBY&refer=us.

8. Wolfe, "Native Son," 121. Immigrants from Mexico alone account for half of the recent immigrants into the United States and compose almost 30 percent of the nation's foreign-born population. See Michael B. Katz, Mark J. Stern, and Jamie J. Fader, "The Mexican Immigration Debate: The View from History," *Social Science History* 31 (Summer 2007): 157–89. See, also, George Sánchez, "Face the Nation: Race, Immigration, and the Rise of Nativism in Late Twentieth Century America," *International Migration Review* 31 (Winter 1997): 1009–1030.

9. We lack information on the continuous residential histories of the GSS respondents. "Lifelong" southerners and "lifelong" nonsoutherners therefore are defined to be those who both lived in the South/Non-South at age sixteen and did so at the time of the survey.

10. See, for example, the report, "The Status of Muslim Civil Rights in the United States, 2002," from the Council on American-Islamic Relations, http://www.cair-net.org/civilrights2002/, accessed 29 May 2007.

11. John Egerton, *The Americanization of Dixie, the Southernization of America* (Harper's Magazine Press, 1974); Peter Applebome, *Dixie Rising: How the South is Shaping American Values, Politics, and Culture* (Times Books, 1996).

12. Both black and white lifelong southerners espouse more restrictive criteria than do their same-race peers in the other two regional groups, though the pattern is more pronounced for African Americans. Also, these black southerners generally are more particularistic than lifelong white southerners.

13. Again, this pattern holds for both black and white southerners.

14. In 2006, much fewer of the South's lifelong African Americans (49 percent) preferred a decrease in the number of immigrants than did whites who had resided in the region their whole life (71 percent). The region's African Americans were also both more supportive of granting ethnoracial minorities assistance from the state and less supportive of exclusionary policies toward the undocumented. Regional differences in most of the patterns in Tables 1 and 2 are only slightly dampened when we limit the analysis to native-born Americans. Foreign-born citizens are much less likely to tie "true Americanism" to attributes grounded in American birth or ancestry and, not surprisingly, are both considerably more positive in their assessment of immigrants and less exclusionary in their opinions about immigration policy.

15. For state-level statistics on Latinos, see U.S. Census Bureau at http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/, accessed 23 July 2007. Data are from the 2005 American Community Survey, conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau at http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en, accessed 15 May 2007.

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