



Creating an Old South: Middle Florida's Plantation Frontier before the Civil War

Edward E. Baptist

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Set on the antebellum southern frontier, this book uses the history of two counties in Florida's panhandle to tell the story of the migrations, disruptions, and settlements that made the plantation South.

Soon after the United States acquired Florida from Spain in 1821, migrants from older southern states began settling the land that became Jackson and Leon Counties. Slaves, torn from family and community, were forced to carve plantations from the woods of Middle Florida, while planters and less wealthy white men battled over the social, political, and economic institutions of their new society.

Conflict between white men became full-scale crisis in the 1840s, but when sectional conflict seemed to threaten slavery, the whites of Middle Florida found common ground. In politics and everyday encounters, they enshrined the ideal of white male equality--and black inequality. To mask their painful memories of crisis, the planter elite told themselves that their society had been transplanted from older states without conflict. But this myth of an "Old," changeless South only papered over the struggles that transformed slave society in the course of its expansion. In fact, that myth continues to shroud from our view the plantation frontier, the very engine of conflict that had led to the myth's creation.

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