Contemporary historians of the South approach their subject matter in a radically different manner from earlier chroniclers of the region. If we had taken a college course on southern history and culture during the 1950s or early 60s (before the civil rights movement) we would have been presented with a much rosier picture of Old Dixie than what we read in current studies of the region. Then, we would have heard little about Jim Crow discrimination against blacks, or of the plight of poor white sharecroppers. We may have been taught that the Ku Klux Klan was a noble response by southern patriots against barbaric negroes (note that the word Negro was spelled without a capital N at that time, as if to denigrate the race even further) and that the real villains of Reconstruction were Yankee “fanatics” and carpetbaggers. We would have heard little or nothing about the lynching epidemic in the South, or perhaps we would have learned that extra-legal violence was a regrettable necessity in light of the vexing race problem. We certainly wouldn’t have been told that no white man in Mississippi was indicted for murder of a black person between the years of 1890 and 1910. We would have been taught that the scurrilous charges against Thomas Jefferson of having a slave concubine were entirely false, since a true southern gentleman such as the “Master of Monticello” would never have stooped to sleep with a Negro.

All this has changed over the past thirty to forty years. For at least two generations now, historians of the South have taken a sharply critical turn in their treatment of their region. Cutting edge scholars at the University of Mississippi and at the University of Georgia (men and women born and raised in the South) are now among the harshest judges of their heritage. Slavery, racial bias, violence against minorities, genocidal practices against Native Americans, and class discrimination have now taken center stage in the current historiography of the South. Northern raised historians like Eric Foner and David Blight have joined in the new assessment of life in Dixie. What emerges is not a pretty picture. If this seems unfair, and looks like “piling on” against the South, it should be emphasized that historians’ treatment of America in general (and not just the South) is FAR more censorious than it once was. The Founding Fathers are no longer considered iconic saints, and even Abraham Lincoln has had his knuckles rapped for his retrograde views on race. American foreign policy, which was once characterized in our history books as a noble crusade against alien evil-doers, is now more likely to be described as “military imperialism.” This is not a good time for American heroes.

With this caveat in mind, we should be grateful for the plethora of wonderful reading material on our period. Books such as Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity by James C. Cobb would be very helpful in gaining a deeper understanding of the region. Cobb
also wrote a marvelous history of Mississippi entitled *The Most Southern Place on Earth*, which I found to be extremely insightful. The aforementioned David Blight writes voluminously on the South, and I found his work on Reconstruction entitled *Race and Reunion* to be a valuable resource in preparing this course. Eric Foner’s *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution* is a masterful study of the post-bellum era. Anything by the distinguished Arkansas-born historian C. Vann Woodward is well worth reading, but I found his classic study of racist legislation in the South, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* an indispensable guide to our era. Also, his *Origins of the New South* was my constant companion during my preparation for this class. Edward L. Ayers, President and Professor of History at the University of Richmond, is the author of a number of prize winning studies of the region, including *The Promise of the New South*, which I drew on frequently in designing my talks. Charles Reagan Wilson is the foremost chronicler of The Lost Cause, and his study of postwar southern patriotism *Baptized in Blood* forms the backbone of my fourth lecture in this series. Wilson was the Director of The Center for the Study of Southern Culture at Ol’ Miss for over three decades.

For the lecture on southern politics (week six) I relied heavily on an old standby, V.O. Key’s classic *Southern Politics*. It is perhaps longer and more detailed than what the general reader might want, but it gives fascinating details on the dysfunctional politics of our era. It should be noted that Key is another southerner, born and educated in Texas. (Whenever possible, I relied on southern historians during my preparation for this course.) Leon Litwack’s *Trouble in Mind* is a penetrating study of the relationship between race and politics in the postwar South. In preparing for the lecture on southern religious thought I relied heavily on the website *Journal of Southern Religion*. For this subject I also recommend Edward J. Larson’s *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America’s Continuing Debate Over Science and Religion*.

We may not always like what we see in these newer histories of the South, but I promise you will not be bored!