



An Old Creed for the New South: Proslavery Ideology and Historiography, 1865-1918

John David Smith

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An Old Creed for the New South: Proslavery Ideology and Historiography, 1865–1918 details the slavery debate from the Civil War through World War I. Award-winning historian John David Smith argues that African American slavery remained a salient metaphor for how Americans interpreted contemporary race relations decades after the Civil War.

Smith draws extensively on postwar articles, books, diaries, manuscripts, newspapers, and speeches to counter the belief that debates over slavery ended with emancipation. After the Civil War, Americans in both the North and the South continued to debate slavery's merits as a labor, legal, and educational system and as a mode of racial control. The study details how white Southerners continued to tout slavery as beneficial for both races long after Confederate defeat. During Reconstruction and after Redemption, Southerners continued to refine proslavery ideas while subjecting blacks to new legal, extralegal, and social controls.

An Old Creed for the New South links pre- and post-Civil War racial thought, showing historical continuity, and treats the Black Codes and the Jim Crow laws in new ways, connecting these important racial and legal themes to intellectual and social history. Although many blacks and some whites denounced slavery as the source of the contemporary "Negro problem," most whites, including late nineteenth-century historians, championed a "new" proslavery argument. The study also traces how historian Ulrich B. Phillips and Progressive Era scholars looked at slavery as a golden age of American race relations and shows how a broad range of African Americans, including Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois, responded to the proslavery argument. Such ideas, Smith posits, provided a powerful racial creed for the New South.

This examination of black slavery in the American public mind—which includes the arguments of former slaves, slaveholders, Freedmen's Bureau agents, novelists, and essayists—demonstrates that proslavery ideology dominated racial thought among white southerners, and most white northerners, in the five decades following the Civil War.

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