FAULKNER'S YOKNAPATAWPHA COUNTY: A PLACE IN THE AMERICAN SOUTH
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Attempts to interpret William Faulkner's fictional Yoknapatawpha County as an entity with symbolic geographical meaning are varied. They range from that of the student in a freshman English class, who upon encountering Faulkner for the first time must struggle to find any, to that of Gabriel Vahanian, who has termed Faulkner's world "a historical map of the Christian tradition" and "a spiritual geography of Christendom." One interpretation of geographical symbolism of Faulkner's county is paramount—that Yoknapatawpha is really a microcosm of the American South. But much evidence refutes the idea that Faulkner looked upon and presented Yoknapatawpha as the South in miniature and, rather, supports the contention that he regarded his county as a place within the South.

Outstanding among the evidences that Yoknapatawpha is not the South in miniature are the geographical parallels between the real Lafayette County and Oxford, Mississippi, and the fictional Yoknapatawpha County and Jefferson. In "The Reivers" and in "Big Woods," Faulkner tells us that the locations of Sutpen's one-hundred-square-mile plantation and the wilderness where young Ike McCaslin, Boon Hogganbeck, and Lion hunted the bear, Old Ben, have disappeared beneath the waters of a lake, "thirty feet below the surface of a government-built flood-control reservoir whose bottom is rising gradually and inexorably each year on another layer of beer cans and bottle tops and lost bass plugs." There is somewhat of a sense of awe to look across Sardis Reservoir on the Tallahatchie River in northern Lafayette County and contemplate that in Faulkner's mind here once existed fictional places, that Sutpen's Hundred occupied much of the expanse, that the hulks of dead cypress jutting above the water are all that remain of the wilderness, and that Old Ben was slain at a spot somewhere near the center of the north bank.

The large-scale geography of Yoknapatawpha County is essentially the large-scale geography of Lafayette County. Here, however, I do not wish to attempt to refute the notion that Yoknapatawpha is the South in miniature by scrutinizing the geographical parallels between Yoknapatawpha and Lafayette counties. Rather, I wish to demonstrate that Yoknapatawpha is a place within the South by examining

2 In Malcolm Cowley, The Portable Faulkner (New York: The Viking Press, 1946), p. 9, Cowley maintained that the pattern of the Yoknapatawpha saga "can be extended to the Deep South as a whole." In Elizabeth M. Kerr, Yoknapatawpha: Faulkner's 'Little Postage Stamp of Native Soil' (New York: Fordham University Press, 1969), pp. 229-230, Yoknapatawpha County was not interpreted in the geographical context of the South. Kerr stated that Faulkner's creation was a microcosm of the South. Phillip C. Muehrcke and Juliana O. Muehrcke, Maps in Literature, Geographical Review, Vol. 64, 1974, p. 318, wrote that "Faulkner created his county to contain the essence of Mississippi and of the South.

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YOKNAPATAWPHA AND THE TWO SOUTHS, UPLAND AND LOWLAND

Persons who have studied the South have long recognized two cultural Souths. The fictional county's relationship to these two subregions is important in understanding Yoknapatawpha as a place in the South (Fig. 1). At the highest level of generalization, the South may be divided into the Deep and the Border South or the Lowland and the Upland South. The Lowland South encompasses most of the South Atlantic and Gulf coastal plain and the southern piedmont, historically the region with a plantation tradition. Rice, sugarcane, and tobacco have local importance, but the heart of the region is the old cotton belt. Slavery spread across the Lowland South with settlement, producing a large rural black population. The Upland South is physically a diverse region, ranging from the Blue Ridge Mountains and the dissected Cumberland Plateau to the fertile limestone soils of the Blue Grass and Nashville basins. Although plantations have existed in the basins, the agriculture of the Upland South is characterized by a yeoman–farmer tradition that emphasizes

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FIG. 1—The Upland South and the Lowland South. Fictional Yoknapatawpha County occupies the location of Lafayette County, Mississippi.

the small-scale setting of the fictional county in relation to the Upland and Lowland Souths and to the rural and urban Souths.

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grains, livestock, and, to a lesser extent, tobacco. The black population of the Upland South has never been as large as that of the Lowland South.

In the Blue Ridge Mountains and in the dissected parts of the Cumberland Plateau in Tennessee, Kentucky, Virginia, and West Virginia the traits of the Upland South have existed in their extremes. A distinctive “mountaineer” culture emerged in the mountain areas where subsistence agriculture yielded a primitive form of life. Stereotyped, the inhabitants resided in small log cabins and eked out a living by hunting and by growing patches of corn, part of which was converted into moonshine whiskey. Largely isolated, they maintained archaic customs and Elizabethan traits of speech. The highlanders, a xenophobic folk, are primarily the descendants of Anglo-Saxons and Ulster-Scots. There are few blacks.6

The differences between the two culture areas, especially between the mountains of the Upland South and the plantation areas of the Lowland, were recognized before the Civil War and were reinforced by the conflict. Traveling across the South in 1839, the Englishman James Silk Buckingham learned that people in the mountains of northern Georgia “held the ‘low-country people,’ as they called them, in great contempt, thought them an indolent, luxurious, and useless race, and regarded themselves as the most important class of the productive community.” Buckingham also was told that the farmers of the mountains were too poor to purchase slaves and that the mountains were too cold for slaves during the winter.7 Frederick Law Olmsted crossed the mountains of eastern Tennessee and western North Carolina in the 1850’s. A North Carolina farmer told him that slavery was a “great cuss” and that “there ain’t no account of slaves up here in the west, but down in the east part of this State about Fayetteville there’s as many as there is in South Carolina.” The three-fifths clause gave the Lowland whites the political power in North Carolina, and he believed that to be the basis for the strife in the state, “people out here hates the eastern people.”8 Little wonder that the highlanders of the states of southern Appalachia opposed secession, and many allied themselves with the Union rather than the Confederacy when the Civil War began.

Although the concept of the Upland and Lowland Souths has long been recognized, a precise boundary between the two culture areas is difficult to refine, especially when attitudes of people are involved. But to anyone encountering the boundary and acquainted with persons from both sides of it, the concept of the two Souths is very real. It is revealed when older blacks on the Georgia Piedmont declare that they have never gone and are afraid to go into the counties that lie a few miles to the north in the mountains of the state.9 The boundary is reflected in subtleties such as in

a classroom scene when a coed from eastern Tennessee mentioned that she helped in
the harvest of tobacco on the family farm during the past weekend and another coed
from a plantation in the western part of the state, with pretended disbelief, stated
that she had never been in a cotton field and certainly had never worked in one.

A superficial examination of the physical and cultural geography of Yoknapa-
tawpha County initially leads to the conclusion that it is the South in microcosm,
complete to its Upland and Lowland sections (Fig. 2). Faulkner's world has sub-
regions distinguished by topographical, economic, and cultural traits. The northern
and northwestern parts, including the rich Tallahatchie River bottom, are planta-
tion country, the "fat black rich plantation earth still synonymous of the proud fading
white plantation names." Here in the part of the county characteristic of the
Lowland South are McCaslin, Sartoris, Sutpen, and Compson holdings, and here re-
 sides most of the county's black population.

Across the central part of Yoknapatawpha are the Pine Hills, the eastern part of
which is in the minor civil division known as Beat Four. The area is the "roadless,
almost pathless perpendicular hill-country" inhabited by McCallums, Gowries, Fra-
ziers, and Muirs, who speak "only the old Gaelic and not much of that." Principal
occupations include lumbering, farming, and whiskey making. No blacks reside in
Beat Four, and strangers are not welcome.

If Beat Four is interpreted to represent the Appalachian portion of the Upland
South, then Frenchman's Bend in the southeastern part of Yoknapatawpha County
may be accepted to signify the remainder of the region. The area, "hill-cradled and
remote," is located at the edge of the Pine Hills and in the Yoknapatawpha River
bottom, twenty miles southeast of Jefferson. Like the Upland South, Frenchman's
Bend, "definite yet without boundaries," is overt as a region, but it is one that is diffi-
cult to define precisely. Also, like the Upland South the region is a border country,
"straddling into two counties and owing allegiance to neither."

Although the core of Frenchman's Bend is the ruin of the large plantation that
was established by Grenier before the Civil War, the region is not plantation country
but an area of small white farmers. The farmers came in "battered wagons and on
muleback and even on foot, with flintlock rifles and dogs and home-made whiskey
stills and Protestant psalmbooks." They were not slaveholders. Not only did they not
bring blacks with them, but also they did not have the other material trappings such
as "Phyfe and Chippendale highboys" associated with affluent families.

The white occupants of Frenchman's Bend range from sharecroppers like Mink
Snopes, through small landowners like Henry Armstid, to Will Varner, who "owned
most of the good land in the country and held mortgages on most of the rest." Unlike
the Pine Hills, a few blacks reside in Frenchman's Bend. Most are probably the de-
scendants of the Grenier slaves, and none of them own land.

Beyond this superficial description of Yoknapatawpha is an abundance of evi-
dence to support the conclusion that the fictional county is not a geographical micro-
cosm of the Upland and Lowland Souths. Fundamental to assessment of Yoknapa-

11 Faulkner, footnote 10 above.
14 Faulkner, footnote 13 above.
PRINCIPAL REGIONS AND PLANTATIONS
OF YOKNAPATAWPHA COUNTY, MISSISSIPPI

Fig. 2—Principal regions and plantations of Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi. Developed from Faulkner's maps of Yoknapatawpha in Absalom, Absalom!, Faulkner, text footnote 17, and in The Portable Faulkner, Cowley, text footnote 2. Beat Four is not shown on the maps, but a description of the location is given in Intruder in the Dust, Faulkner, text footnote 12, pp. 35–36 and 144–151.

tawpha as a geographical entity is the realization that Faulkner thought of his fictional place as a specific location in the South.

Yoknapatawpha County, like Faulkner’s own Lafayette County, is Lowland South (Fig. 1). The fictional place is in the loess region of northern Mississippi, east of the Yazoo Basin and approximately eighty miles south of Memphis. Numerous
evidences from Faulkner’s writings can be marshalled to show that this is the location of Yoknapatawpha, but the most conclusive evidence is a sketch map that he drew in 1945 to explain why both Chickasaw and Choctaw Indians appear in his stories (Fig. 3). The importance of this hastily drawn, simple map should not be underestimated, for it shows connections of the fictional Mississippi, northern Alabama, and western Tennessee. The Mississippi, Tennessee, and Tallahatchie rivers, Memphis, the site of Chief Colbert’s ferry, and the boundary between the Chickasaw and Choctaw nations are displayed in their approximate relationships to one another. When the real features are plotted accurately, Jefferson occupies the location of Oxford, Mississippi (Fig. 4).

Reflecting the portion of northern Mississippi from which it was sublimated, Yoknapatawpha possesses such distinguishing Lowland South attributes as a plantation agricultural system, a cotton economy, and a large black population. The economic context of the Yoknapatawpha sagas is an agricultural system that Faulkner describes as one in which cotton is “a king” and is “omnipotent and omnipresent.” Cotton is the basis for the economy not only of the plantation areas of the county but also of Frenchman’s Bend and even the hill lands of Beat Four. Blacks had been introduced when northern Mississippi was the domain of the Chickasaws. The black population surged with the arrival of pioneer slaveholders and eventually surpassed the white population. By 1936, Yoknapatawpha had 9,313 blacks and 6,298 whites.

The physical, economic, and cultural diversity of Yoknapatawpha County is not a radical departure from reality. Anyone who has dealt with local geography knows that counties can be diverse places, and Lafayette County upon which Yoknapatawpha is based is no exception. The northern and western parts of Lafayette County, as in Yoknapatawpha, are the areas with the largest landholdings and the largest black populations.

Although Beat Four and Frenchman’s Bend appear to be in the yeoman–farmer tradition of Upland South, close scrutiny of Faulkner’s descriptions reveals that the inhabitants of these areas came from other parts of the South. The regions of origin are not what might be expected, for the clannish people of Beat Four are not mountaineers. Nor are they intended by Faulkner to represent mountaineers. They migrated, not from the mountains of Appalachia, but from Scotland to “Carolina,” then from “Carolina” to Yoknapatawpha County. The inhabitants of Frenchman’s Bend, however, came “from the northeast, through the Tennessee mountains by stages marked by bearing and raising a generation of children.” During the Civil War the people of Beat Four and Frenchman’s Bend were not Union sympathizers, but had allied themselves with the planters and the Confederacy.

Cultural distinctions between the Lowland South and the Appalachian Mountains of the Upland South are vividly presented in Faulkner’s works. Although the distinctions involve economic and landscape differences, the attitudes of the inhabitants, especially as they pertain to blacks, also are significant. In the novel, “A Fable,” and in the short story, “Mountain Victory,” Faulkner related his perceptions of the attitudes of the poor folk of the Appalachian Mountains and the planters and

18 Faulkner, footnote 10 above, pp. 316–317; and Faulkner, footnote 13 above, p. 4.
blacks of the Lowland South. The country "where the corners of Georgia and Tennessee and Carolina meet" was an area "where there not only were none, but there

never had been any Negroes." When the Civil War began, men and boys thirteen years and older had

quitted their misty unmapped eyries . . . to engage in a war in which they had no stake and, if they had only stayed at home, no contact, in order to defend their land from Negroes; not content merely to oppose and repudiate their own geopolitical kind and their common economic derivation, they must confederate with its embattled enemies, stealing, creeping . . . by night through the Confederate lines to find and join a Federal army, to fight not against slavery but against Negroes, to abolish the Negro by freeing him from them who might bring Negroes among them.19

In "Mountain Victory" Faulkner brings characters of the two culture regions into intimate contact and comes as close as he ever does to using the stereotypes of southern fiction—arrogant, wealthy planter; uneducated, loyal slave; and xenophobic, moonshine-making, poverty-stricken mountaineer.20 At the close of the Civil War Saucier Weddel, a Confederate major and a planter of Choctaw and French descent, and his black servant, Jubal, travel through the mountains of eastern Tennessee on their way home to Mississippi. They seek a night's lodging at the bleak and barren

cabin of a family of highlanders who allied themselves with the Union. Jubal, upon
discovering that the family is unfriendly, has difficulty comprehending that he is in
Tennessee because the portion of the state that he knows is west Tennessee of the
Lowland South, not east Tennessee of the Upland South. Jubal says to Weddel:

In Tennessee? You tole me we was in Tennessee, where Memphis is, even if you never
tole me it was all disyer up-and-down land in de Memphis country. I know I never seed
none of um when I went to Memphis wid yo paw dat time. But you says so. And now
you telling me dem Memphis folks is Yankees?21

To the highlanders Weddel appears haughty and arrogant, even in his tattered,
faded gray cloak. He will not drink with them but gives the moonshine that he is of-
fered to his servant. Toward the “ign’unt mountain trash,” whom he considers be-
neath him, Jubal is intolerant and boastful. The twenty-year-old daughter of the
family is awestruck by Weddel who is “like a creature from another world with other
air to breathe and another kind of blood to warm the veins.” From Weddel and Ju-
bal she learns of that other world where the family plantation, Contalmaison, is “big-
ger den a county to ride over,” where the coffee is the finest Martinique, and where

21 Faulkner, footnote 20 above, p. 753. Weddel tells Jubal that the members of the family are not Yankees
but does not explain to him the difference between a Yankee and a Union-sympathizing Southerner.
girls are ladies who wear shoes. The antipathy of the highlanders for Jubal and for Weddel, whom they suspect may be part-Negro because of his dark complexion, finally leads two members of the family to ambush the pair as they leave the mountains.

The most powerful description of the distinctions between the Lowland South and the mountain core of the Upland South in Faulkner's works concerns Thomas Sutpen, who as a boy saw the landscape differences and experienced the clash between the two cultures. Even though he was the largest landowner in Yoknapatawpha County, Sutpen was not from the planter group. As Rosa Coldfield discerns him, "he was no younger son sent out from some old quiet country like Virginia or Carolina with surplus Negroes to take up new land." Actually, Sutpen was from Virginia—mountainous western Virginia of the Upland South.

Sutpen was born in the mountains, a place Faulkner describes as where the people "lived in log cabins boiling with children," where "the only colored people were Indians," and where "the land belonged to anybody and everybody." As a boy Sutpen neither heard of nor imagined "a place, a land divided neatly up and actually owned by men who did nothing but ride over it on fine horses or sit in fine clothes on the galleries of big houses while other people worked for them." But the Sutpen family literally fell into such a place, "tumbled head over heels back to the Tidewater by sheer altitude, elevation and gravity." Once he is in the Virginia Tidewater, young Sutpen is shocked by the differences between the mountains and his new home. Although the family lives in a cabin that is almost a replica of the one in the mountains, it is beside a broad flat river. The crops are ones that Sutpen has never before seen, and members of the family are susceptible to strange diseases, unknown in the mountains, that are associated with the warmth and the dampness of the climate. His brothers and sisters seem "to take sick after supper and die before the next meal." Most important, he discovers that there is a social structure. The Sutpens are not like the more prosperous whites, certainly not the ones who live in the big houses, sit on horses and direct workers in the fields. The Sutpens are considered white trash, beneath even the slaves who have a higher standard of living. Finally, loss of innocence and realization of his situation come to him when he is sent to the big house with a message from his father. The black butler opens the front door, looks at the barefooted child in his tattered clothes, and tells him "never to come up to that front door again but to go around to the back."

Although Yoknapatawpha County is Lowland South, it is no more this subregion in miniature than it is the whole South in miniature. It is a distinctive geographical entity that has relationships with and contrasts with other areas of the Lowland South. The areas are as diverse as the reasons for the relationships. The furniture for the Compson house at the edge of Jefferson came from French Louisiana. Colonel Sartoris's regiment marched off to fight Yankees in the piedmont of Virginia. When Sartoris's railroad was completed in 1876, it connected with the one that ran unbroken from Charleston to Memphis.

The differences between the cultural landscape of Yoknapatawpha County and the landscapes of older portions of the Lowland South are among the most inter-

22 Faulkner, footnote 17 above, p. 17.
23 Faulkner, footnote 17 above, pp. 220–223.
24 Faulkner, footnote 17 above, pp. 224–232.
esting of the contrasts that Faulkner presents. At the time of the Civil War, portions of the South Atlantic seaboard had histories that were two hundred years older than that of northern Mississippi, and even within the state the settlement gap was more than a century. In 1790 settlement was well advanced in areas scattered from the tidewater of Virginia southward to Florida. Along the Gulf Coast, Biloxi had been established in 1699 and New Orleans in 1718. Effective settlement of northern Mississippi, however, occurred only after the Chickasaws ceded their lands in 1832.

The settlement gap resulted in profound differences between Faulkner’s country and older portions of the Lowland South. This gap was perhaps best reflected in the antebellum cultural landscape, which in 1860 was more maturely developed in the older portions of the South than in northern Mississippi. In the older settled areas enough wealth had been accumulated so that it could be spent on elaborate houses and certain other cultural trappings. In northern Mississippi, which had been opened to extensive settlement only twenty-five years before the war, most of the prosperous families were still thinking in terms of buying more slaves and of clearing more land instead of devoting capital to erect fine dwellings. Some of the largest landowners in Lafayette County in 1860 still lived in log houses or in log houses that had been veneered with clapboard. Those big houses that had been erected, including the Shogog house that seventy years later Faulkner purchased, restored, and renamed Rowan Oak, were simple boxes that were built without the aid of an architect and were made pretentious only by their size and their porticoes (Fig. 5).

In a comment on a portion of “Go Down Moses” in which the action occurred in 1859, Faulkner observed that one purpose of the story was

to show my country as it really was in those days. The elegance of the colonial plantation didn’t exist in my country. My country was still frontier. The plantation, the columned porticoes, that was Charleston and Natchez. . . . People lived from day to day, with a bluff and crude hardness, but with a certain simplicity. Which to me is very interesting because the common picture of the South is all magnolias and crinoline and Grecian portals and things like that, which was true only around the fringes of the South. Not in the interior, the back wood.

The frontier environment comes through sharply in Faulkner’s stories. Even though Grenier, Sutpen, and Compson erected large and elegantly maintained houses, the dwelling that commanded the 2,000-acre McCaslin plantation was more typical of the majority that actually existed. It was no more than a large dogtrot, “two log wings . . . connected by the open hallway.” After the war the house was modified into an imposing, but by no means elegant, dwelling by Cass Edmonds when the open passageway was enclosed and the lower floor was “superposed with a second story of white clapboards and faced with a portico.”

There is much pretense in the frontier environment. Miss Sophonsiba insisted on calling the Beauchamp landholding “Warwick” after the place in England she said her brother, Mr. Hubert, was “probably the true earl of.” Thomas Sutpen, penniless to the point that he must borrow seed cotton from General Compson to plant

26 Faulkner in the University (edited by Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner; Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1959), pp. 130-131.
28 Faulkner, footnote 27 above, pp. 5 and 9.
his first crop, was so intent on making himself part of the landed gentry that he ignored what good economic judgement and the normal settlement process dictated. He spent his first two years in Yoknapatawpha County dragging “house and gardens out of virgin swamp,” rather than clearing and putting a substantial part of his one-hundred-square-mile plantation into cultivation. Because he lacked money to purchase hardware, glass, and other manufactured items, the house that was “the largest edifice in the county, not excepting the courthouse itself,” sat three years, “unpainted and unfinished, without a pane of glass or a doorknob or hinge in it, twelve miles from town and almost that far from any neighbor.”

YOKNAPATAWPHA AND TWO SOUTHS, RURAL AND URBAN

The South may also be characterized as rural and urban. Traditionally the area has been depicted as a rural region; small towns and hamlets were important, but cities were insignificant. Like the South of this simplistic rural image, Yoknapatawpha is an area without a city. The county has one town, Jefferson, and one of its hamlets, Varner’s Crossroads, is discussed in detail by Faulkner. With its courthouse square, its Confederate monument, and its biracial population, Jefferson may seem a model of all southern towns. Varner’s Crossroads with its cotton gin, its general store, and its Baptist church may seem a model of any hamlet in the South.

The South has been considered almost wholly rural, not because it did not have
cities, but because until recently scholars ignored the urban components. Standard history and geography texts treating the South devoted few pages to cities. More important, cities were not considered among the factors that influenced the character of the South, and there still persists the attitude that if the South has cities, they must be nonsouthern places. Furthermore, a general tendency has been to regard towns and small cities as places that do not differ essentially from the rural countryside. Only now is there emerging a general recognition of an urban South that significantly contrasts with the rural South.

Although urban development in the South lagged behind that in the North, in 1930 when Faulkner emerged as a major writer, one-third of the South’s population was urban. Most urbanites were concentrated in towns and small cities; 37 percent resided in cities with populations greater than 100,000. Faulkner thought of Yoknapatawpha as having a definite place with regard to the rural and urban Souths. Significant contrasts are presented in his stories between the rural parts of Yoknapatawpha County, small-town Jefferson, and southern metropolitan areas. In an interview at the University of Virginia, he identified in his works four dialectical social groups as they are related to cities. He termed them the “educated semi-metropolitan white Southerner,” the “hill backward [white] Southerner,” the “Negro,” and the “Negro who has been influenced by the Northern cities.”

In his stories Faulkner presents a type of rural–urban continuum. To the uneducated inhabitants of the remote parts of Yoknapatawpha County, Jefferson is definitely urban, offering goods and services that cannot be obtained at Fraser’s store in Beat Four or in the hamlet of Varner’s Crossroads. Mink Snopes, for example, must travel to Jefferson to purchase buckshot shells for his ancient ten-gauge gun because Varner’s store does not stock them. The folk from rural areas are different from those who reside in the town, and on the streets of Jefferson even a casual observer can distinguish between the two groups. Dewey Dell stops at the edge of the town, puts on her shoes, and even changes to her Sunday dress, but she is immediately recognized as a country girl by the townspeople. Even nine-year-old Vardaman senses the difference between the two groups. “Why ain’t I a town boy, pa?” I said. God made me. I did not said to God to made me in the country.”

Characters in Faulkner’s stories have fictional relationships with several of the South’s large cities. Popeye’s demise finally comes when he is arrested in Birmingham; Carothers Edmonds is unable to intercede when Lucas Beauchamp is charged with murder because he is in New Orleans for a gallstone operation. But Memphis,

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30 Only one of the eighteen chapters in A. E. Parkins, The South: Its Economic-Geographical Development (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1938) treated cities, and fewer than ten of 511 pages of Rupert B. Vance, Human Geography of the South (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2nd. ed., 1935) were devoted to cities. Cities are virtually ignored in most standard histories of the South.
31 For example, Richard C. Wade, An Agenda for Urban History, in The State of American History (edited by Herbert J. Bass; Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970), pp. 43-69. Wade observed that few places in the world have matched the South’s pace in urbanization and that its rate has seemed slow only in comparison with that of the North.
33 Faulkner in the University, footnote 26 above, p. 125.
eighty miles northwest of Jefferson, and beyond the boundaries of Yoknapatawpha County, is the primary city in Faulkner's stories. With a population that ranged from a hundred thousand to half a million during his lifetime, the Memphis that Faulkner depicted in fiction was a city, but not one of the scale of New York or Chicago. In the first half of the twentieth century when rural–urban differences were at a peak, Memphis with its congestion, its paved streets, its Italian immigrants, and its second- and third-generation, urban-born population was a sharp contrast to rural Lafayette County and Oxford. Even those who had never been to Memphis knew that the city was there from the glow of its lights on the northern horizon.

In "The Reivers" eleven-year-old Lucius Priest traveled from Yoknapatawpha County to Memphis in May, 1905 (Fig. 6). As the city was approached, "civilization" became "constant." The "air was indeed urban, the very dust itself . . . had a metropolitan taste to tongue and nostrils." In the short story "Two Soldiers," the eight-year-old, younger brother of Pete Grier journeyed thirty-seven years later from a remote part of Yoknapatawpha County to Memphis to enlist in the army. On experiencing a city for the first time and having only Jefferson for a comparison, it seemed that Memphis "went on for miles." Then seeing the downtown area, the child thought that Memphis was "standing up into the air . . . like about a dozen whole towns bigger than Jefferson was set up on one edge in a field" (Fig. 7).

The contrasts between rural Yoknapatawpha and Memphis are best revealed in the comic and tragic inabilities of certain county inhabitants to function effectively in an urban place. Although members of Yoknapatawpha County's social groups travel to Memphis, only semimetropolitan whites such as the Priests, the Sartorises, and the Stevenses make frequent trips and can comfortably conduct themselves in the city. Poor, uneducated whites like Boon Hogganbeck, Fonzo Winbush, and Virgil and Mink Snopes are overwhelmed by the city. They look and feel out of place and know only a few parts of the city, primarily the red-light district which they frequent as "young bloods" on a few "country-boy Memphis trips." Among the more comical episodes in Faulkner's stories is Virgil Snopes and Fonzo Winbush's journey to Memphis about 1930 to attend barber college. With their new straw hats, clean-shaven necks, and new, imitation-leather suitcases the duo emerges from the train as hicks, fresh from the country. Even though they cannot fully comprehend or effectively function in the urban environment, they are captivated by it. Fonzo exclaims, "So this is Memphis . . . Where have I been all my life?" Moving from the railroad station down Main Street, they plan to stay at the Gayoso, at the time one of Memphis's best hotels, but change their plans because it looks too expensive. They see another hotel that looks just as expensive as the Gayoso. Virgil says to Fonzo, "Let's look down this-a-way. Git away from all that ere plate glass . . . Suppose somebody broke it while we was there. Suppose they couldn't ketch who done it. Do you reckon they'd let us out withouten we paid our share?"

Virgil and Fonzo then leave Main Street and at the next corner turn into a narrow street of dingy frame houses and junkyards and come to a dingy, three-storey

35 Faulkner, The Reivers, footnote 4 above, pp. 94-95.
38 William Faulkner, Sanctuary (New York: Jonathan Cape and Harrison Smith, 1931), pp. 226-239.
39 Faulkner, footnote 38 above, pp. 228-229.
"Besides the streetcars there were buggies and surreys—phaetons, traps, stanhope, at least one victoria, the horses a little white-eyed at us but still collected; evidently Memphis horses were already use to automobiles... We were getting close to Main Street now—the tall buildings, the stores, the hotels: the Gaston (gone now) and the Peabody (they have moved it since) and the Gayoso," Faulkner, The Reivers, text footnote 4, pp. 95-96. (Photograph reproduced courtesy of Memphis/Shelby County Public Library and Information Center.)

The eight-year-old Grier boy discerns Memphis for the first time that same year, "standing up into the air higher than any hill in all Yoknapatawpha County," Faulkner, text footnote 36, p. 92. (Photograph reproduced courtesy of Memphis/Shelby County Public Library and Information Center.)
building with a latticework false entry, Miss Reba's brothel, which they mistake for a boarding house. They enter the house and, thinking that she is a dressmaker who has a large family of daughters, in all innocence convince Miss Reba to rent them a room. During the first night they drift into slumber as they listen to the city, “evocative and strange, imminent and remote; threat and promise both.”

One of the most pathetic of the poor whites who travel to Memphis is Mink Snopes. In 1946, upon his release from a thirty-eight year term in Parchman, the Mississippi penitentiary, Mink hitchhikes to Memphis to purchase a pistol with which to kill his cousin Flem. Mink is disoriented in both time and space. He has been to Memphis on only three other occasions, and the city that he recalls no longer exists. Seeing strange blinking lights, he tells himself as he enters the city, “Remember, Remember. It won't hurt you as long as don't nobody find out you don't know it.” And then Memphis

engulfed him; it stooped soaring down, bearing down upon him like breathing the vast concrete mass and weight until he himself was breathless, having to pant for air. It's un-sleeping, he thought. It aint slept in so long now it's done forgot how to sleep and now there aint no time to stop long enough to try to learn how again.

Suddenly, however, Mink becomes oriented and knows how he will pass the night until the next morning when he can buy the pistol. Confederate Park on the river bluff is almost exactly as he recalls it with its Civil War cannon and its flower beds crisscrossed by walkways. But a cold wind from the Mississippi River sweeps across the park benches, and he thinks of another park, Court Square, where he will be sheltered from the wind by tall buildings. Mink, however, is driven from Court Square by a policeman. He then goes to the railroad station where the trains that he rode from Jefferson once arrived. The station with its “hollowly sonorous rotunda” has not changed. Mink is also ejected from the station by a policeman. He then recalls “another depot just down a cross street” but decides to spend the night wandering the streets. “A man can get through anything if he can jest keep on walking,” he reasons.

The next morning, after a breakfast of two boxes of animal crackers purchased at a small store, Mink approaches a pawnshop to buy the pistol. Faulkner tells us that by “merely turning his head” Mink “could have seen the street, the actual house-front” of the brothel that he visited on his first trip to Memphis forty-seven years earlier, an establishment that is now operated by his younger daughter, although “he didn’t know it of course and probably wouldn’t have recognised her.”

The integrity of southern rural–urban contrasts as presented in Faulkner is supported by his basically accurate, albeit fictional, description of Memphis (Fig. 8). The railroad station where Virgil and Fonzo arrive and the one that Mink remembers is Union Station, accurately described to its rotunda. The other station recalled by Mink is Grand Central, and it is a short distance from Union Station, down a street that crosses Main. Faulkner’s description of Confederate Park is accurate for 1946, except that the Civil War cannon were removed during a World War II scrap

40 Faulkner, footnote 38 above, pp. 228–233.
41 Faulkner, footnote 37 above, pp. 282–293.
44 Faulkner, footnote 37 above, p. 290.
drive. Likewise accurate is his description of nearby Court Square. Virgil and Fonzo would have walked down Main Street from Union Station to find the actual Gayoso Hotel. On the other side of Main Street was the Chisca, the unnamed hotel that they would have encountered.

The descriptions of real buildings, parks, and streets of Memphis and their relationships to one another are amazingly accurate. But what of the urban, economic, and social conditions of which Faulkner gives us glimpses? The inhabitants of Yoknapatawpha County are attracted to Memphis because the city offers opportunities and services that are not available in Jefferson. The Grier boy is drawn to a regional federal office, Virgil and Fonzo to a trade school, and Mink to a specialty shop. They also are drawn by the sense of adventure in what for them is the far country, close in space, yet far removed in its environmental qualities. And like far countries, Memphis presents the opportunity to be anonymous and to engage in forbidden pleasures.

Fig. 8—Downtown Memphis during the 1930's and 1940's. The area did not change significantly during the two decades. After 1960 economic decline and urban renewal dramatically altered downtown Memphis from the way Faulkner knew and described it.
In 1930 Virgil and Fonzo would have had the opportunity to have attended, among others in Memphis, the Moler College of Beauty Culture and Barbering, and in 1942 the Grier boy would have found not only an army enlistment office but also the headquarters of the Second Army. Pawn shops were concentrated on Beale Avenue, and in the mid-1940's six establishments dominated the three blocks between Main and Third streets. \[45\] Into the fifth decade of the twentieth century, with full knowledge of public officials and city leaders, Memphis had a red-light district. In the 1920's and 1930's, it was a small, dispersed area at the southern end of the central business district. Among the infamous streets were Mulberry and Gayoso. According to Faulkner's wife, Estelle, who in 1934 asked him to show her "Miss Reba's," Mulberry was the street on which the model for the fictional establishment was located. \[46\] When Virgil and Fonzo left Main Street and turned again at the next corner, they would have traveled down Linden or Pontotoc for one block and turned into Mulberry. If Mink had turned his head while he walked along Beale to the pawn shop, he would have been looking down Mulberry. However, by 1946 at the time of the story the red-light district had been abolished by an edict from Memphis's political boss, E. H. Crump. \[47\]

**YOKNAPATAWPHA, A UNIVERSAL PLACE**

The internal evidence of Faulkner's stories and his explanations of certain segments of his stories indicate that Yoknapatawpha is not a microcosm of the South. It is one thing, however, to say that Yoknapatawpha is not a microcosm of the South and another to say that this is not what Faulkner really intended for it to be. A passage in "Absalom, Absalom!" is sometimes cited to demonstrate that one of Faulkner's principal purposes was to write about the South. Upon arrival at Harvard, Quentin Compson is besieged by questions: "Tell about the South. What's it like there. What do they do there. Why do they live there. Why do they live at all." \[48\] To alleviate the curiosity of his Canadian roommate, Quentin relates the saga of the rise and fall of Thomas Sutpen and of the landed dynasty that he attempted to create. In his interviews Faulkner left no doubt how he perceived his creation as it pertained to the South. He stated repeatedly that his principal purpose was to write universally about mankind. When asked the question, "To what extent were you trying to picture the South and Southern civilization as a whole, rather than just Mississippi—or were you?", Faulkner responded, "Not at all. I was trying to talk about people, using the only tool I knew, which was the country that I knew." \[49\] And when asked specifically if the purpose of "Absalom, Absalom!" was to portray the South, Faulkner replied:

The primary job that any writer faces is to tell you a story, a story out of human experience—I mean by that, universal mutual experience, the anguishs and troubles and


\[48\] Faulkner, footnote 17 above, p. 174.

\[49\] Faulkner in the University, footnote 26 above, pp. 9–10.
griefs of the human heart, which is universal, without regard to race or time or condi-
tion . . . . I think that no writer's got time to be drawing a picture of a region.\(^{50}\)

Although Faulkner was not attempting to draw a picture of the South, he took
Yoknapatawpha from a geographical reality, and that reality was a part of a greater
geographical whole. Certain themes therefore are themes that were common to the
South. But geographically Yoknapatawpha is a microcosm within the South rather
than a microcosm of the South. Literarily, however, it is much more. When we ac-
cept Faulkner's principal objective to be the telling of universal, mutual experience
of the human heart, Yoknapatawpha County becomes more than Lafayette County,
Mississippi, or the South. It becomes, as John T. Irwin reminds us, “a place where we
have all lived, and where some of us come from.”\(^{51}\)

What is the significance of recognizing that Yoknapatawpha County is not a geo-
ographical microcosm of the South but a place within the South? Accurate inter-
pretation and full appreciation of Faulkner's stories require that they be considered
within their proper historical and geographical settings. To emphasize universalities
in his writings, Faulkner thought the setting incidental but by no means unimpor-
tant. In a 1955 interview he stated, “I think that local color is part of the environ-
ment and no part of the environment can be more or less important than any univer-
sal truth . . . . to say that local color is merely cute . . . I can't agree with that.”\(^{52}\)
Faulkner's use of local color both increases the complexity of interpreting his works
and decreases his role as a regional authority. Many errors are made by critics simply
because of a lack of understanding of the geography of one small place in Mississippi
during one short span of time. But errors of another type are made by attempting to
employ his works as general sources on the geography of the entire South.

Faulkner did not look inward and think of Yoknapatawpha County as a closed
geographical model. Inhabitants of the fictional place reach toward other areas and
operate within a broader spatial context. From Faulkner’s descriptions it is clear that
he considered the Tallahatchie and Yoknapatawpha rivers as boundaries of his coun-
ty. But significantly no boundaries are given on the two maps of the county that he
drew.\(^{53}\) Symbolically, Yoknapatawpha is a place with a core, but the county has no
isolating walls. The interconnection of Yoknapatawpha County is, perhaps, best ex-
pressed by Faulkner through the perception of a child. The little Grier boy in “Shall
Not Perish” comprehends his niche on earth, “that little place that don't even show
on a map,” as a hub that is tied to all places in a universe—“never a one too big for it
to touch, never a one too little to be remembered:—the places that men and women
have lived in and loved.”\(^{54}\)

\(^{50}\) Faulkner at West Point (edited by Joseph L. Fant and Robert Ashley; New York: Random House,
1964), pp. 50–51.

\(^{51}\) John T. Irwin, Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge, A Speculative Reading of Faulkner (Bal-

\(^{52}\) Faulkner in Manila, in Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner, 1926–1962 (edited by
p. 203.

\(^{53}\) Faulkner, footnote 17 above, map insert; and Cowley, footnote 2 above, inside front cover.