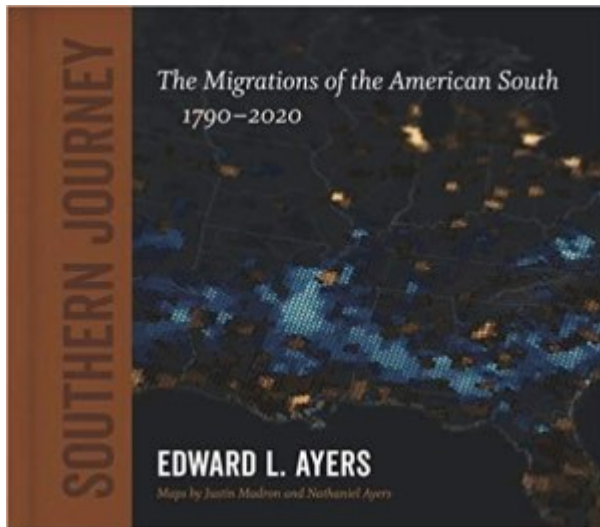




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## Book Review: Southern Journey: The Migrations of the American South 1790-2020

Book Review by Laura Krueger



Southern Journey: The Migrations of the American South 1790 - 2020

Ayers, Edward L. Maps by: Justin Madron and Nathaniel Ayers. Southern Journey: The Migrations of the American South 1790-2020. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2020. 153 p. \$39.95. ISBN: 978-0-8071-7301-5.

Surveys of trends of the southern United States often fail to grasp the region in all its complexities and contradictions; they are often one-dimensional or flat, lacking the clear-eyed, unflinching examination that is required to effectively navigate these dynamics and offer the analysis deserved. Ayers' book, *Southern Journey*, is a notable exception to this trend.

Ayers' book is divided into four sections: "How to read this book," "Creating the south, 1790-1860," "The restless south, 1860-1940," and "Arrival and return, 1940-2020." "How to read this book" outlines exactly that: how to read and understand the maps the reader will find within the book's pages. Ayers makes explicit the perspective of the maps, asserting that they are not neutral, and nor should they be. The maps have two goals, he writes: "to reveal patterns we could not see otherwise among the lives of millions of people, and to produce maps as



consistent and clear as possible.” Each of the subsequent chapters are dominated by maps utilizing this effective methodology, with clear and concise analysis of the maps encouraging readers to see and analyze the data for themselves (with Ayers’ careful guidance throughout). This does make the human element behind the data feel distant. There are a handful of first-person quotations scattered throughout these chapters, but the focus is clearly large, sweeping trends and visualizations. The book isn’t lacking by not including these elements; however, one would hope that subsequent authors would take up that mantle after reading Ayers’ book.

You cannot discuss this book without discussing its maps. Ayers, Madron, and Ayers successfully navigate the challenging task of conveying movement and change on paper—a medium that is inherently stagnant—in a way that is impressive and memorable. Bright colors stand out from the dark backgrounds, encouraging the viewer to look at the representations of people, rather than borders. While modern borders are present on the maps to give viewers a sense of orientation, they are often subtle. This methodology is especially important when dealing with historical data, as those borders have shifted significantly over the time periods covered throughout the scope of the book. The stark visuals are also effective at balancing the complex histories and movements outlined in the text with simple, memorable maps.

In short, this title would make an excellent addition to an academic library or map collection, as comparing its contents to historical maps and materials would bring about rich analysis. The visuals and text are digestible yet advanced enough for undergraduate through graduate readers, and even those familiar with the South’s history will learn something about the ways in which migration affected or dictated these trends.

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