

Southern Nationalism on the Landscape: County Names in Former Confederate States

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Abstract

The Confederate period and celebration of the Lost Cause are significant sources of county names in eleven of the former Confederate states. Since 1861, counties in these eleven states have been named for Confederate soldiers and prominent antebellum and Confederate politicians. Among these states, important differences in the frequency of choosing Southern nationalist names for counties are apparent. These findings partially explain the lack of mainstream American nationalism on the landscape of states in the Deep South.

Introduction

In his recently published examination of nationalism in America, *Nation Into State*, Wilbur Zelinsky found the Deep South distinctive in its lack of mainstream American nationalism. In seeking to explain this regional pattern, he speculated that perhaps "the South generated an alternative nationality, one that was valid enough in its own terms but distinct from that of the Northeastern Core Region" (231). Formation of the Confederacy was strong evidence that an influential ethnic group composed of white Southerners did indeed have a sense of devotion to the idea of a Southern nation, which can be called Southern nationalism (McCardell). The Confederate military defeat, however, did not exterminate Southern nationalist sentiment in the former states of the Confederacy.

Indicators of the persistence of this attitude on the landscape from 1865 into the 1920s included Confederate monuments, war memorials, and cemeteries. Placenames provide another category of evidence of

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nationalism on the landscape. Testing Zelinsky's notion about Southern nationalism is possible through an examination of county names in the former states of the Confederacy. The choice of the county as a unit of measure is justifiable for many reasons, but Conrad Arensburg stated the case clearly when he wrote, "The distinctive community form of the South was and is the county" (quoted in Meinig 155). Additionally, because county names tend to remain stable for long periods of time, choosing a name becomes a serious part of the county formation process.

Definition of Problem and Methodology

The study area is limited to the former states of the Confederacy. Missouri and Kentucky are included since each was recognized as Confederate by the Confederate government following passage of secession ordinances by their respective state conventions (Wood 22). These two states contributed men and matériel to both Union and Confederate armies and were theaters of operation during much of the Civil War. It is therefore reasonable to assert that appreciable pro-Confederate sentiment existed within these two states. This was not true in the case of West Virginia, which seceded in turn from Virginia and gained statehood as part of the Union. Pro-Confederate sentiment was lacking in West Virginia, and Confederate forces did not attempt significant military forays in that area after 1861. Consequently, West Virginia is excluded from the study area.

Since the formation of the Confederate nation-state represents the zenith of Southern nationalism, 1861 is a useful starting point for the study. Most of my observations and conclusions are based on this benchmark date, but references are made to a few examples of placenames which were implanted during the antebellum period. The earliest of these events occurred in 1838.

The final variable in this study is the group of Southern nationalists and nationalistic terms which became county names. For the purposes of this investigation, Southern nationalists are defined as those who actively supported formation of a separate Southern nation-state, those who were active in the Confederate military or political realm, and Southern state officials of the Civil War period. Compiling this list of names and terms presented numerous problems, since many of the people considered had distinguished careers spanning the antebellum era, the war years, and the Reconstruction period. While some members of these groups were perhaps initially reluctant to secede from the Union, many made substantial contributions to the

Southern war effort. Completing the list is the term *Dixie*, a label often used synonymously with *Confederate* and which has strong links with the idea of Southern nationalism.

Collectively, this list comprises fifty-nine names and terms. Assessment of the relative importance of individuals and groups is facilitated by dividing the list into five categories. The first category is reserved for Confederate military personnel. The second category refers to Confederate government functionaries. State government officials form a third category, while those involved in some combination of state government, Confederate government, and Confederate military constitute a fourth category. The fifth category includes antebellum politicians and the term *Dixie*.

Cartographic analysis of these data is based on plotting the data according to the five categories as specified (Figs. 1 and 2). This permits an assessment of the spatial extent of the names selected. Complementing this cartographic material is a graph (Fig. 2) that depicts the dates at which the counties with Southern nationalist names were created. This allowed identification of periods of great activity in assigning the relevant names. Finally, compilation of a list of all county formations and name changes within the study area from 1861 forward was essential in order to gauge the relative significance of this group of Southern nationalist labels.

Results

The complete list of Southern nationalist names and terms contains fifty-nine items (see Appendix). Of these fifty-nine labels, forty names are those of Confederate military personnel. Members of this category include the famous, such as Lee, Jackson, and Beauregard, as well as lesser known lower ranking officers and enlistees. Within the second category are eleven Confederate government officials. This group is composed of President Davis, Vice President Stephens, cabinet officers, and a few congressmen. State government functionaries, such as North Carolina Governor Zebulon Vance, make up the third category. Henry Allen of Louisiana, Lucius Q. C. Lamar of Mississippi, and Robert Toombs of Georgia form a fourth category due to their service in some combination of Confederate and state posts. The fifth category includes the term *Dixie* and two prominent antebellum congressmen with Southern nationalist leanings from South Carolina: Preston Brooks and John C. Calhoun, who has been called the "father of secession" (Sifakis 101).

This group of labels has been attached to eighty counties in eleven

Southern states.¹ In forty-six of these cases, the name chosen belonged to one of the respective state's residents or native sons. Robert E. Lee, the icon of the Confederate military effort, lent his name to counties in eight states. Curiously, only one county was named after Thomas J. Jackson, the legendary "Stonewall." Second on the list of frequently used names is John C. Calhoun, which appears in seven states. Confederate President Jefferson Davis was chosen as namesake of counties in four states. Lucius Q. C. Lamar, who served in a variety of posts during the war, including that of special commissioner to England, France, and Russia, has three counties named after him. The names of Confederate Vice President Alexander Stephens, former Governor of Virginia and General Henry A. Wise, and General Patrick A. Cleburne are each commemorated in two counties.

The eighty counties which have Southern nationalist names are found in eleven states of the former Confederacy (Fig. 1). The only two ex-Confederate states which have no examples from this group of labels are Tennessee and Missouri. Reference to the time frame within which the process of affixing Southern nationalist names to counties is a useful prelude to analyzing the spatial pattern of these names.

As noted above, many of the people who can be considered Southern nationalists began successful military or political careers well before 1861. Congressmen Calhoun and Brooks even died prior to that date. The problem which these circumstances present is that thirteen of the counties considered here were named during the antebellum period. Six of those thirteen were named for Calhoun. Four more counties were assigned their names during 1861, but the most active periods of affixing Southern nationalist names were the eleven years immediately after the Civil War and the period from 1902 through 1912 (see Fig. 2).

The flurry of activity from 1866 through 1876 can be viewed as a reaction to and attempt to overcome the trauma of Confederate military defeat. The contemporaneous movement to erect monuments and memorials in the South was further evidence of this process (Foster 36-46). The early twentieth century saw an upsurge in construction of Confederate monuments and increased interest and participation in organizations such as the United Confederate Veterans and the United Daughters of the Confederacy (Winberry; Foster 79-191). The higher incidence of implanting Southern nationalist names on counties may thus be understood as part of a larger process of commemoration. Hendry County, Florida, was the last example of a county named for a former Confederate military officer. That name

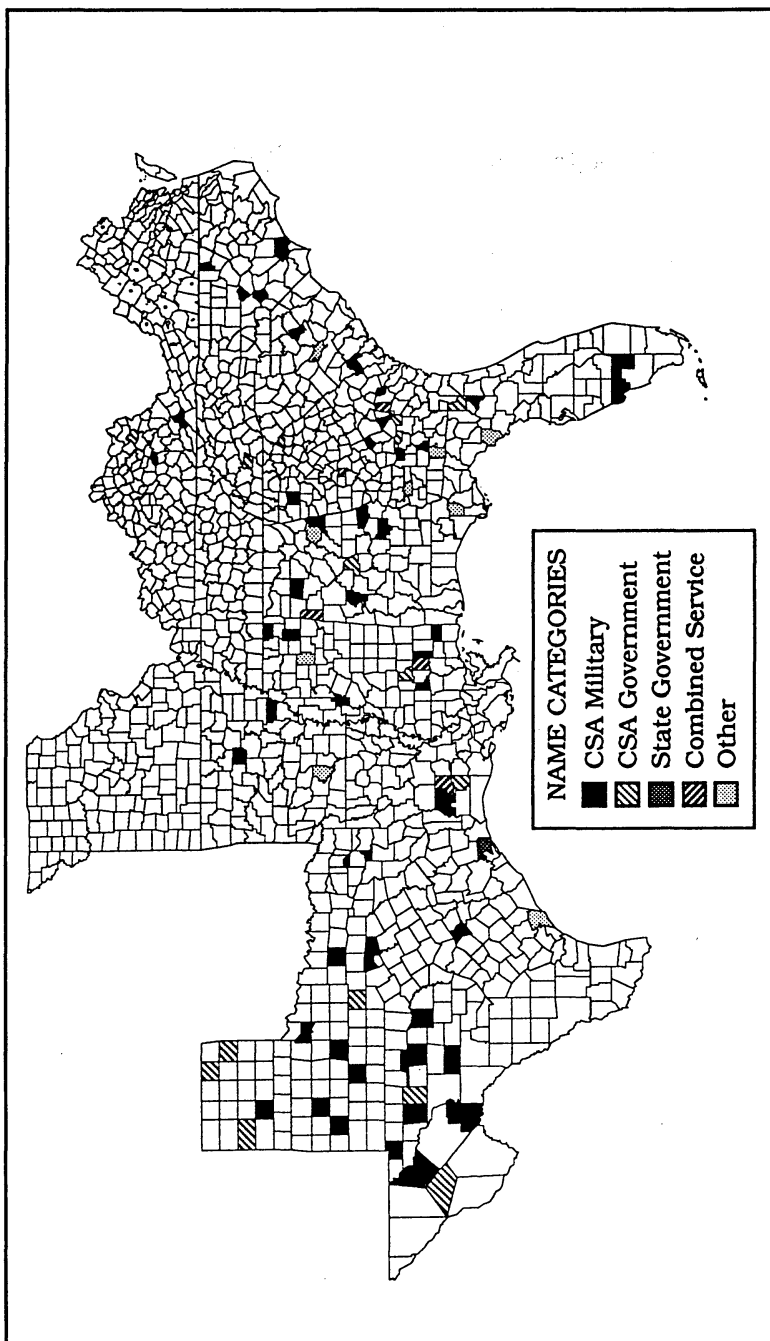


Fig. 1. Counties with Southern nationalist names.

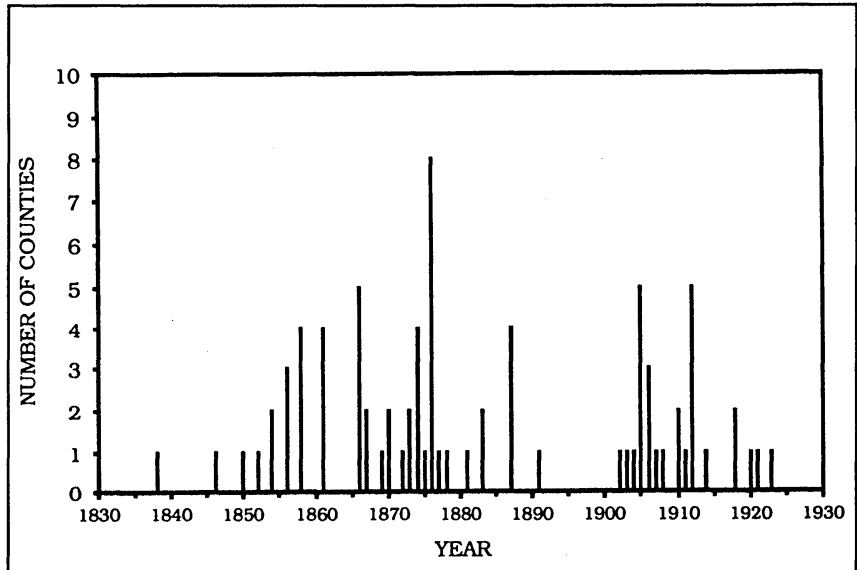


Fig. 2. Southern nationalist naming era.

was affixed in 1923, by which time the commemoration of the Lost Cause was indisputably waning. This was a fitting conclusion to the period, since former captain Francis Hendry had lobbied earlier in support of establishing a Lee County, Florida (Morris 72).

While the period during which these Southern nationalist labels were applied to counties extended from 1838 through 1923, this analysis of the spatial extent of this naming process is restricted primarily to the period since 1861. While this eliminates thirteen of the eighty counties from consideration, this limit also removes any doubt about the motivation behind choosing particular labels. After the Civil War began, individuals were judged on the basis of their participation in the war effort. Additionally, the choice of 1861 as a benchmark year provides a common basis for comparison of data among the various states. Without this common starting point, the importance of Southern nationalist placenames is difficult to judge, since each state chose its initial relevant placename during a different year.

From 1861 through 1923, Texas and Georgia led all former Confederate states in affixing Southern nationalist names to counties, with twenty-two and eleven cases, respectively. This is hardly surprising, since Texas and Georgia have far more counties than other Southern

states. For a variety of reasons, absolute numbers of relevant names are an inadequate measure of the significance of Southern nationalist labels.

One basic problem in using a simple absolute measure involves ignoring variations in the tendencies of individual states to create new counties. Opportunities for designating new placenames can be attributed to one of three reasons: fragmentation, in which existing counties are carved into smaller areal units; initial development of territory, which involves formation of sets of counties in previously undeveloped or uncontrolled areas; and alteration of names of existing counties. Most of the former Confederate states assigned Southern nationalist names as a result of fragmentation, while many of the counties in west Texas were created initially during the Reconstruction era. Altering existing county names was much more rare than either of these other two practices.

Analysis of the data on the basis of common measures required the calculation of the number of counties formed in each state from 1861 to the present, as well as the number of county name changes which occurred during the same time span (see Fig. 3).

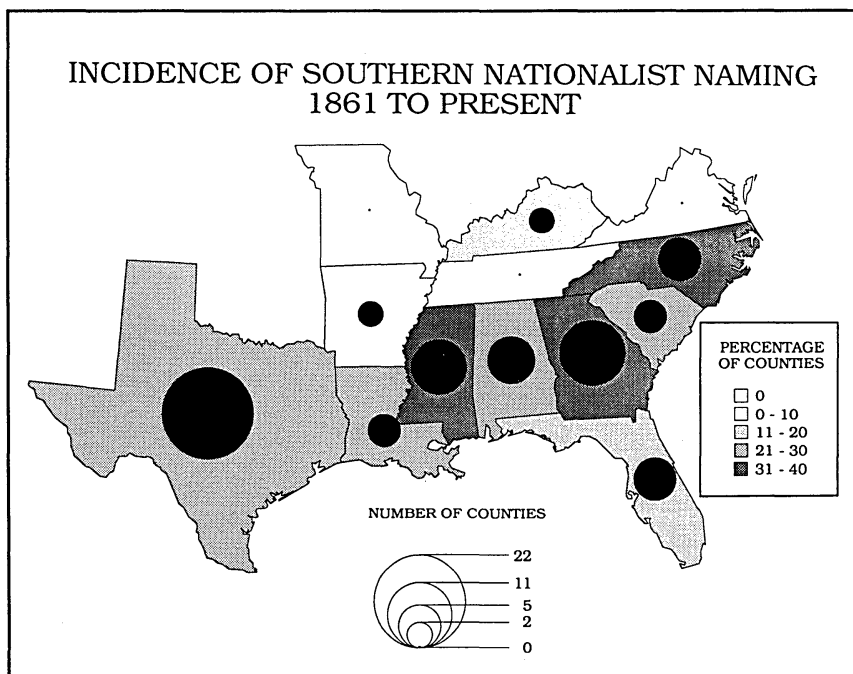


Fig. 3. Incidence of southern nationalist naming 1861 to present.

From this total number of naming opportunities, the frequency of attaching Southern nationalist labels can be determined by calculating the proportion of all naming decisions for which state legislators chose Southern nationalist names.

This relative measure demonstrates that in North Carolina, Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama at least thirty percent of the counties formed since 1861 gained Southern nationalist names. The rate of incidence in South Carolina, Louisiana, Texas, and Kentucky was at least twenty percent. This measure of frequency thus discounts the significance of the twenty-two Texas counties considered here but emphasizes the relative importance of fewer counties involved in states such as North Carolina and Alabama, where county boundaries were more stable and naming opportunities fewer. Throughout the thirteen states surveyed, sixty-seven of the 291 placenames assigned were Southern nationalist in origin, a rate of incidence slightly greater than twenty-three percent.²

Conclusion

This preliminary investigation of the impact of Southern nationalism on the landscape of the former states of the Confederacy has addressed the single issue of county names. This is but one of a number of commemorative activities, as is evidenced by the naming of towns and cities, roads and streets, and businesses and institutions. Other examples of commemoration of Southern nationalism include the large number of memorials and monuments dedicated to individuals and groups found throughout the Southern states. The results of this study confirm Zelinsky's notion that an alternative nationalism was generated within the South which was quite distinct from the mainstream American nationalism usually associated with the Northeastern Core Region. It is important to note that this Southern nationalism was a product of the experiences and political power of the white ethnic group of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These names have remained intact in spite of some protests about other forms of commemoration of the antebellum and Civil War periods in the South. This is evidence of the durability of county names generally and the Lost Cause mentality among some white Southerners specifically.

For nineteenth century Southerners, secession and Civil War were revolutionary experiences. One hundred years later, a second Southern revolution occurred, one which was organized and accomplished primarily by black Southerners. Thus far, commemoration of these

events has been confined largely to affixing the name of Martin Luther King, Jr., to streets, parks, and schools (Stump). Perhaps, in the coming years the Civil Rights movement will be further commemorated within the South, if the political clout of black Southerners allows them to exert a greater influence on future placenaming decisions.

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Notes

1. Not included in this group is David W. Baine, a Confederate officer for whom an Alabama county was named in 1866. This is the only case which I discovered of a name with Confederate links being replaced. Baine County was abolished in 1867, and the name was changed to Etowah County in 1868 (Foscue 11, 54).

2. Baine County, Alabama, is not included.

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Appendix

Southern Nationalist Names

NAME	DATE OF DEATH	STATE	DATE OF COUNTY NAMING
<u>CSA Military</u>			
ALCORN, James L.	1894	Mississippi	1870
BARTOW, Francis S.	1861	Georgia	1861
BEAUREGARD, Pierre G.T.	1893	Louisiana	1912
BLECKLEY, Logan E.	1907	Georgia	1912
BRADFORD, Richard	1861	Florida	1861
BULLOCK, Edward C.	1861	Alabama	1866
CAMP, J. L.	1891	Texas	1874
CLEBURNE, Patrick R.	1864	Alabama	1866
		Arkansas	1883
COOK, Philip	1894	Georgia	1918
EVANS, Clement A.	1911	Georgia	1914

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NAME	DATE OF DEATH	STATE	DATE OF COUNTY NAMING
FOARD, Robert L.	1898	Texas	1891
FORREST, Nathan B.	1877	Mississippi	1906
GEORGE, James Z.	1897	Mississippi	1910
GREEN, Thomas	1864	Texas	1874
GREGG, John	1864	Texas	1873
HALE, Stephen F.	1862	Alabama	1867
HAMPTON, Wade	1902	South Carolina	1878
HENDRY, Francis A.	(?)	Florida	1923
HOKE, Robert F.	1912	North Carolina	1911
HOOD, John B.	1879	Texas	1866
HUMPHREYS, Benjamin G.	1882	Mississippi	1918
JACKSON, Thomas J.	1863	Texas	1876
JOHNSON, M. T.	1866	Texas	1854
LEE, Robert E.	1870	Alabama	1866
		Mississippi	1866
		Kentucky	1870
		Arkansas	1873
		Texas	1874
		Florida	1887
		South Carolina	1902
		North Carolina	1907
LUBBOCK, Tom S.	(?)	Texas	1876
McCULLOCH, Ben	1862	Texas	1856
PENDER, William D.	1863	North Carolina	1875
RANDALL, Horace	1864	Texas	1876
REEVES, George R.	1882	Texas	1883
SCURRY, William R.	1864	Texas	1876
SUTTON, John S.	1862	Texas	1887
TERRELL, Alexander W.	1912	Texas	1905
TERRY, B. F.	1861	Texas	1876
TURNER, Henry G.	1904	Georgia	1905
UPTON, John C.	1862	Texas	1867
WALTHALL, Edward C.	1898	Mississippi	1910
WHEELER, Joseph	1906	Georgia	1912
WINKLER, C. M.	1882	Texas	1887
WINSTON, John A.	1871	Alabama	1858
WISE, Henry A.	1876	Virginia	1856
		Texas	1856

CSA Government

BAKER, James M.	1892	Florida	1861
CHILTON, William P.	1871	Alabama	1874
DAVIS, Jefferson	1889	Texas	1887
		Georgia	1905

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NAME	DATE OF DEATH	STATE	DATE OF COUNTY NAMING
		Mississippi	1906
		Louisiana	1912
ELLIOTT, John M.	1879	Kentucky	1869
GRAHAM, William A.	1875	North Carolina	1872
HEMPHILL, John	1862	Texas	1876
HILL, Benjamin H.	1882	Georgia	1906
OCHILTREE, W. B.	1867	Texas	1876
OLDHAM, William S.	1868	Texas	1876
REAGAN, John H.	1905	Texas	1903
STEPHENS, Alexander H.	1883	Texas	1861
		Georgia	1905
<u>State Government</u>			
CHAMBERS, T. J.	1865	Texas	1858
VANCE, Zebulon B.	1894	North Carolina	1881
<u>Combined Service</u>			
ALLEN, Henry W.	1866	Louisiana	1912
LAMAR, Lucius Q. C.	1893	Alabama	1877
		Mississippi	1904
		Georgia	1920
TOOMBS, Robert A.	1885	Georgia	1905
<u>Other</u>			
BROOKS, Preston S.	1857	Georgia	1858
CALHOUN, John C.	1850	Florida	1838
		Texas	1846
		Arkansas	1850
		Mississippi	1852
		Georgia	1854
		Alabama	1858
		South Carolina	1908
DIXIE	—	Florida	1921