

**THE SOUTH: *Plain as white on rice.***  
by: Christine Beems, 499 words excluding title

-----

I am a Yankee.

A Damn Yankee, to be exact.

The distinction, while predominately geographic, is punctuated by choice.

That is, those (including myself) not born to the variegated landscape that stretches westward from the Virginias and Carolinas across Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas and Louisiana, southern Missouri, southeastern Oklahoma and most of Texas, are not.

Not Southerners, that is.

Our birthplace alone, in the nomenclature of The South, makes us Yankees. Still, a Yankee simply visits The South, often during the wintertime and usually to see Southern kin.

Damn Yankees, on the other hand, move to The South and stay permanently.

Driven perhaps by business and commerce, riding the coattails of academic career or following a sweetheart home, Damn Yankees regularly migrate to The South and are thus immersed in that peculiar state of mind understood as Southern Culture.

An invisible sub-strait, the traditions of Southern Culture bind diverse ideologies together: Black and White. Rich and Poor. Butchers, Bakers, Policy Makers, Musicians, Pioneers, Artists and Indian Chiefs.

Tom Sawyers and Miss Muffets, casting asunder dystopian Lil Abner and Beverly Hillybilly fictions by taking to heart what could (to the uninitiated Damn Yankee) be described as akin to a 'tea ceremony and barndance'.

The South -- amidst a world of unbridled drama -- is a bastion of homespun sanctuary: an unforgettable banjo and fiddle duet that crescendos to orchestral chorus; a barefoot maiden racing dragonflies across wildflower-dappled hills; an eloquent understatement expressed best by men who speak slowly, with a drawling cadence and women who bake deep-dish peach pies spiced with charm.

Delicate, like cascades of romantic lace hand-stitched to heartstrings, the mettle of The South flirts with the senses evading direct observation and yet also can be obstinate as a one-eyed mule.

Corn fritters and gumbo; buttermilk pancakes; homemade white lightening and blueberry jam; blackstrap molasses; hickory smoked bacon; grits, catfish and deep-fried okra; honey & biscuits; sweet tea and a big mess of fresh green beans: emblems of Southern Hospitality.

Hank Williams, Tammy Wynette, Truman Capote and Tallulah Bankhead; Helen Keller, Jimmy Buffett, W.C. Handy, Lionel Richie and Sonny James; Henry L. "Hank" Aaron, Joe Lewis, Willie Mays, Kitty Carlisle and Van Cliburn; Fats Domino and Bryant Gumbel, Al Hirt and Mahalia Jackson, Dorothy Lamour, Jerry Lee Lewis and Huey P. Long: icons of The South's bodacious drive.

Woven like streamers of grosgrain ribbon through mud-flats, climbing craggy peaks like shrewd goats and dancing to the sway of windswept stands of pine, the resonant essence of The South floats across cypress-lined rivers and glides along Interstate byways, carrying the pulse of the Southern heartbeat from the historic traditions of lifetimes past to the annuls of destiny yet to come.

And all they way, like a winding road traveled to second-nature familiarity by a skilled driver in a favorite car, the style, comfort and tradition of The South is best experienced, appreciated and enjoyed by Northerners, Southerners and Damn Yankees alike when driven entirely by heart.

~ ~ ~

~ page 2 of 2 pages ~

Christine Beems, editor/publisher (retired), gozarks.com  
223 Primrose Ln., Shirley, AR 72153, 501-745-4153 (home), 501-253-8006 (cell)