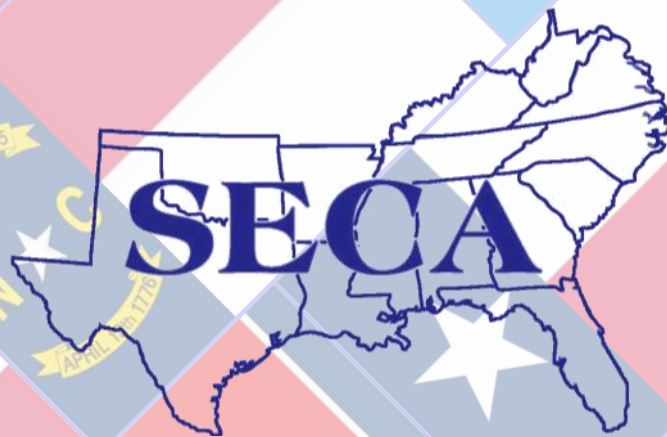


# Southern Issues: Has Anything Changed?

A publication of the  
Southern Early Childhood Association



## About SECA



### Who We Are

Since 1948 the Southern Early Childhood Association has brought together preschool, kindergarten, and primary teachers and administrators, caregivers, program directors, and individuals working with and for families, to promote quality care and education for young children. Over 19,000 individuals working in every aspect of child care and early childhood belong to SECA. They share ideas in local, state, and regional meetings; in professional development institutes; and through the association's publications and resources.

### Our Mission

The Southern Early Childhood Association (SECA) is committed to improving the quality of care and education for young children and their families through advocacy and professional development.

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# SOUTHERN ISSUES: HAS ANYTHING CHANGED?

## Introduction

As an organization dedicated to “Southern Issues,” the Board of Directors of the Southern Early Childhood Association asked that we explore these questions.

- What are Southern issues and have those changed over the years?
- Does the South look so different from the rest of the country or are there similarities and parallels in the issues that face all of the states?
- What makes us uniquely “Southern”?

Since 1949, the Southern Early Childhood Association (previously named the Southern Association on Children Under Six) has existed to promote the field of early childhood education, develop professionalism among its practitioners, and support the families and children of the Southern region. As stated in the charter of the organization:

***The business of the corporation shall be exclusively limited to increase awareness of the needs and to work for knowledge and understanding of children under six in the South, both at school and at home, and to provide opportunities for cooperation between parents, teachers, administrators, research workers, doctors, religious workers, social workers, and others in this field.***

The group (SACUS, now SECA, and initially called the Nashville Council for the Education of Children Under Six), agreed on the following goals:

- To promote an understanding of sound standards for nursery and kindergarten education by acquainting the public with the values of good education for children under six.
- To coordinate all individuals and organizations engaged in the various services for young children in the community.
- To promote and support nursery school and kindergarten legislation as well as all other measures dealing with the welfare of young children.
- To extend and widen information on the educational needs of children under six, through meetings to include discussions, educational films, demonstrations, talks, reports, and so forth.

*SECA NOTE: Invitations for membership were sent to all persons in the community who were interested in these goals. The Nashville Council was open to all persons, “regardless of race or religious belief.” This represented one of the first organizations in the South to work for positive change in racial relations.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Keith Osborn, “Yesterday: Where Have We Been?” Keynote address given at the SACUS Conference, Richmond, Apr 13—16, 1989, <[http://www.southernearlychildhood.org/leadership\\_pdf.php#histories](http://www.southernearlychildhood.org/leadership_pdf.php#histories)>.

From that beginning in Nashville, Tennessee in 1949, the organization has consistently promoted itself as an “advocate for Southern issues” or a “voice for Southern children.”

## Defining the South

*Some have suggested that Southerners constitute a bona fide "ethnic group" just as do Polish Americans or Mexican Americans. This would connote a certain internal cohesiveness founded on shared attitudes, beliefs and values that, for the most part, cut across lines of race, sex, age and income. . . .*

*Early in this century the pioneer Southologist, Howard W. Odum, expounded a delineation of the South--he preferred the term "Southeast"--based on objective measures reflecting the economy of the region. Simply put, the South ended where agriculture ceased to be the major source of employment; the rest of the Nation began where non-agricultural pursuits became dominant. . . .*

*Finally (in significance if not vintage), there is the administrative delineation by the Bureau of the Census dating from 1942. The South outlined here is one of four grand regions into which the U.S. has been divided. It stretches from the East Coast to the western border of Texas--and as far North as the Maryland-Pennsylvania boundary. Thus, the South is drawn to include the likes of Oklahoma, West Virginia and Delaware.<sup>2</sup>*

The Southern Early Childhood Association (formerly SACUS) has defined the Southern region as these states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. As of May 2011, there are approximately 19,000 early childhood professionals throughout those states that belong to the Southern Early Childhood Association.

## What Makes Us Southern?

In the *Seven Signs of Southernness*, Dr. Melanie Johnson brought together thoughts and reflections from famous Southerners and created the list of seven signs to denote how to recognize a Southerner.

**Sign #1: Expressing:** The South has a great tradition of storytelling, oral history, and music, including the creation of a uniquely American art form, the Blues.

“Southerners love a good tale. They are born reciters, great memory retainers, diary keepers, letter exchangers, letter savers, history tracers and debaters, and—outstaying all the rest—great talkers.”

—Eudora Welty, born in Jackson, Mississippi and Pulitzer Prize winner in 1973 for her novel, *The Optimist's Daughter*

**Sign #2: Timeweaving:** Historical events are seamlessly connected to form the whole. The past doesn't die in the South: it is simply woven into the fabric of history and culture that makes the region.

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<sup>2</sup> Richard K. Thomas, “How To Tell You're in the South,” *Southern Changes*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1978, pp. 13—15

**Sign #3: Rooting:** Southerners are deeply connected to “place.” According to Willie Morris, an American writer and editor born in Jackson, Mississippi, “*My town is the place which shaped me into the creature I am now.*”

**Sign #4: Accommodating:** Southern hospitality is famous and relationships are valued.

“Having some Southern grace and a little bit of Southern charm helps a lot.”

—Cokie Roberts, journalist and TV personality born in New Orleans, Louisiana as the third child of former ambassador and long-time Democratic Congresswoman Lindsay Boggs and Hale Boggs, also a Democratic Congressman from Louisiana

**Sign #5: Gathering:** Southerners love to socialize and prefer groups to solitude. “While we may take tea alone from time to time, we prefer to have y’all share tea, time, and friendship.”

**Sign #6: Embracing:** Southerners have a history of large, diverse groups sharing the land, and that helps to explain the diversity of cuisine and customs: French in New Orleans, Native-American in Oklahoma, African-American in South Carolina, Asian in Louisiana, among many others.

**Sign #7: Twining:** Life should include pleasure and joy, and these should be “twined” into our days.<sup>3</sup>

“The South is what we started out with in this bizarre, slightly troubling, basically wonderful country—fun, danger, friendliness, energy, enthusiasm and brave, crazy, tough people.”

—P.J. O’Rourke, an American political satirist, journalist, writer, and author.  
O’Rourke is the H. L. Mencken Research Fellow at the Cato Institute.

## Growing Up Dixie

In 2008, Dr. Todd Shields of the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville attended our annual conference in Covington, Kentucky and presented a thought-provoking look at what it means to “grow up Dixie.”

He examined the “special” cultural characteristics of the South that guide the development of children, our approach to pre-K programs, and what makes us “Southern.” He stated that the South was “unique” for several reasons:

- **Historical development:** The Civil War, integration, and the shift from an agricultural economy triggered many sociological and economic changes.
- **Sociological and economic challenges:** The well-being of children continues to lag behind that of children in other parts of the country and our poverty rates continue to be the highest in the nation.
- **Political values:** Values that are developed through religion, conservatism, “family values.”  
*SECA NOTE: This was especially evident in the 2010 election when the South became a*

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<sup>3</sup> Dr. Melanie Johnson, *The Seven Signs of Southernness*, Birmingham Printing & Publishing, Inc., Birmingham, AL, 1999.

predominantly **RED** or Republican region of the country and our statehouses now reflect that trend, a marked change from historical Democratic majorities at the state level.

There is a distinct mix of political values that make Southerners both support and oppose government programs like pre-K education. As Southerners, we:

- ◇ “Oppose government intervention, but
- ◇ Support equality, but
- ◇ Support ‘individualist’ solutions, and
- ◇ Desire ‘moral order’ and ‘traditional moral values.’”

Those political values frame the discussion regarding how we approach “the needs of the children of the South” and provide the following challenges, according to Dr. Shields:

- The mix of political values makes Southerners both support and oppose government programs like pre-K education. *SECA NOTE: We continue to debate the role of government and its impact on the lives of families. Do pre-K programs infringe on family responsibilities?*
- How programs are described (the words we use) will make a difference in whether politicians and parents embrace or reject the programs. *SECA NOTE: Terms like anti-bias curriculum and developmentally appropriate practice have sometimes gained notoriety in the South and do not always produce the desired result when used to “sell” a concept or program.*
- Southerners historically value aggressive behavior but also expect a certain conduct code to repress that aggressive behavior. Hard sells, pressure techniques, and factual presentations may not work. *SECA NOTE: Those techniques may not be considered “polite” behavior for advocates.*<sup>4</sup>

A “dyed-in-the-delta” Mississippi product, Willie Morris “grew up Dixie” and became an internationally acclaimed journalist and writer. He roamed from the South (New York and Oxford, England) but came back to live in Jackson, Mississippi, and he reflects those cultural and historic roots that Dr. Shields highlighted.

*Small Southern towns, Morris believes, hold their people in a special way that is almost unexplainable. It is just a presence, a thing that is there. There is, in small Southern towns, a feeling that you won't find in other towns — East, West or North — and it may have everything to do with loyalties, tradition and hardship. Small towns are the corners of the South's collective soul. To understand the South, you must understand its monuments, its town squares, its courthouses, its women who never surrendered in the Civil War, its men who relish life with a kind of wandering, wanton exuberance that is manifested in the male camaraderie of deer hunting on winter weekends and football as religion.*<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Dr. Todd Shields, “Studying the South: Growing Up Dixie,” Public Policy Presentation given at the SECA Conference, Covington, KY, March 28, 2008.

<sup>5</sup> Fred Brown and Jeanne McDonald, “Growing Up Southern — Willie Morris,” *The Southerner*, <[http://www.southerner.net/v1n3\\_99/growupso.html](http://www.southerner.net/v1n3_99/growupso.html)>.

## Are We Changing?

*In the center of Memphis, a river port known for its turbulent history of conflict between blacks and whites, there is a place where the old ideas about race and the South don't make sense anymore.*

*Drive east from the Mississippi along Union Avenue, just past the studio where a then-unknown Elvis Presley showed up one day to record a song, and you'll come to an in-between place known as Midtown. Here, there are no ethnic or racial majorities.*

*"In Midtown, you have everyone and anyone living together," Claudio Perez-Leon, a Peruvian-born painter, said as he sipped a drink at a local cafe. "All the categories used to divide people are ignored here."*

*In Memphis, as in other corners of the South, familiar neighborhoods are being remade, an inevitable consequence of the shifts documented in the 2000 Census. As the South grows-attracting migrants to both its large cities and its rural towns-it's starting to look a bit more like the East and West coasts.*

*Census Tract 36 in Memphis offers one of the most dramatic expressions of this new, polyglot South: Its 3,016 residents are split into four roughly equal groups: 28 percent white, 27 percent black, 25 percent Asian and 17 percent Latino.*

*What's happening in central Memphis is only the most advanced expression of a trend seen in Southern cities and towns as far afield as Bentonville, Ark., and Raleigh, N.C. All have seen a sharp increase in either their Latino or Asian populations or both.<sup>6</sup>*

Religion—a mainstay of the South—has begun to change as well.

*Evangelical Protestant groups have dominated religious life in the South since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Even as the conservative Protestant typically associated with the South has risen in social and political prominence throughout the United States in recent decades, religious culture in the South itself has grown increasingly diverse.*

*The region has seen a surge of immigration from other parts of the United States as well as from Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East, bringing increased visibility to Catholicism, Islam and Asian religions in the once solidly Protestant Christian South.<sup>7</sup>*

To further reinforce the changes that are occurring in the South, in June 2011, the Southern Baptist Convention (the largest and one of the most conservative Protestant denominations in the nation) elected Pastor Fred Luter of the Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans as the first black to serve as a member of the Convention's leadership. (He was elected to the post of Vice-President of

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<sup>6</sup> Hector Tobar, "The Newest South: A Lotta Cultures Goin' On," *Southern Changes*, Vol 23, No. 3-4, 2001, pp 22–23.

<sup>7</sup> Eds. Samuel S. Hill and Charles Reagan Wilson, *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, NC, 2006, Vol. 1.

the Convention.) Southern Baptists, who split from Northern Baptists in 1845 over slavery, voted to “repent of any past bigotry” in 1989 and “stand publicly and privately for racial justice and equality” and to seek “greater racial and ethnic representation at every level of Southern Baptist institutional life.”<sup>8</sup>

“The business about moonlight, magnolias and Anglo-Saxon bloodlines has to go out the window. The Delta is a melting pot.”

—Shelby Foote, an American historian and novelist from Mississippi who wrote *The Civil War: A Narrative* and is best known for his contribution to the PBS documentary, *The Civil War*.

## Defining “Southern” Issues

*The problems that face us are not ours alone, but larger in scale and scope than in the rest of the country.*

In the 2011 edition of *Kids Count Data Book: State Profiles of Child Well-Being* produced by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the SECA states fared poorly in comparison with other states in the nation. The report provides a longitudinal look at the progress (or lack of progress) that states have made in improving the well-being of children. In the national overall ranking of states, using the ten key indicators of child well-being, the Southern states’ rankings fell in a broad spectrum, with most states in the SECA region ranking in the 40–50<sup>th</sup> percentile of all states nationally.

A summary of the statistics for the Southern states can be found in *Kids Count 2011: A Summary of the SECA States* at <http://www.southernearlychildhood.org/policy.php>

### *National Overall Ranking of SECA States on Key Indicators*<sup>9</sup>

State	National Rank 2009	National Rank 2010	National Rank 2011
Alabama	48	47	48
Arkansas	47	48	47
Florida	36	35	36
Georgia	42	42	42
Kentucky	41	40	41
Louisiana	49	49	49
Mississippi	50	50	50
North Carolina	37	37	38
Oklahoma	44	44	43
South Carolina	45	45	45
Tennessee	46	41	39
Texas	34	34	35
Virginia	16	16	14
West Virginia	38	43	44

<sup>8</sup> Frank Lockwood, “Southern Baptists Elect 1<sup>st</sup> Black,” *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, June 15, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> “2011 Kids Count Data Book: State Profiles of Child Well-Being,” Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore, 2011, <<http://datacenter.kidscount.org/DataBook/2011>>.

## The Three Major Issues

In the summer of 2010, the SECA Board of Directors identified the three issues that it felt were the most compelling for the South today. With the rest of the country, we struggle to improve the lives of children and families in those areas: **education, poverty/economic status, and health.**

### Education

In 2011, we're making educational progress but still have a long way to go. Although our region leads the nation in supporting and creating pre-school opportunities, we still have low graduation rates in high school and college.

- In 2009—2010, Oklahoma ranked #1 in the country for access for 4-year-olds to pre-K programs. Florida was #2, West Virginia #3, Georgia, #4, Texas #7, and Arkansas #9. 6 of the 14 SECA states ranked in the top 10 in the country for access to pre-K.<sup>10</sup>
- In 2009—2010, Alabama and North Carolina met all of the 10 quality standards for pre-K programs outlined by the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER). 6 other SECA states (Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana LA4, Oklahoma and Tennessee) met 9 of the 10 standards. 8 of the 14 SECA states met at least 9 of the standards.<sup>11</sup>
- In 2009, the percent of teens (ages 16—19) who were high school dropouts ranged from 4% in Virginia to 9% in West Virginia. Most SECA states had 7—8% of their teens dropping out of high school.<sup>12</sup>

### Economic Opportunity/Poverty

As the nation moved from an agrarian society to a more urban, manufacturing society, the South, which was predominantly rural, began to lose population and economic vitality. In 2011, that trend has reversed and we're seeing a population shift to the South, although those population shifts have not translated into growth in the small rural communities of the region.

Poverty rates in Southern states rank in the top tier for all states, and there is still a significant population, particularly of children, that live in poverty. This environment has many ramifications for all sectors of the society in the South.

- In 2009, the SECA state of Mississippi had the largest percentage of children under the age of 18 living in families below 100% of the federal poverty level. Most SECA states ranged in the 32<sup>nd</sup> to 50<sup>th</sup> percentile.<sup>13</sup>
- In 2009, Mississippi was 50<sup>th</sup> nationally in the percentage of children under the age of 18 living in families where no parent has full-time, year-round employment. Other SECA states ranged from a national rank of 8<sup>th</sup> in Virginia to 49<sup>th</sup> in Kentucky.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> "The State of Preschool 2010," National Institute for Early Education Research, New Brunswick, 2010, <<http://nieer.org/yearbook>>.

<sup>11</sup> "The State of Preschool 2010"

<sup>12</sup> "2011 Kids Count Databook"

<sup>13</sup> "2011 Kids Count Databook"

<sup>14</sup> "2011 Kids Count Databook"

- In 2009, West Virginia ranked 50<sup>th</sup> nationally in the percent of teens (ages 16—19) not attending school and not working. Other SECA states ranged from 8<sup>th</sup> in Virginia to 45<sup>th</sup> in Georgia and Mississippi.<sup>15</sup>

## Health

The health status of the South’s population has deteriorated during the last twenty years, and we’re now facing an epidemic of both adult and child obesity. With obesity comes the corresponding increase in diseases such as hypertension and diabetes, and our health status is becoming a major economic issue for the region.

- In 2008, Mississippi ranked 50<sup>th</sup> nationally in the percent of low-birth-weight babies. Other SECA states ranged from 26<sup>th</sup> in Oklahoma to 49<sup>th</sup> in Louisiana.<sup>16</sup>
- In 2007, Mississippi ranked 50<sup>th</sup> nationally in the infant mortality rate (deaths per 1000 live births). Other SECA states ranged from 13<sup>th</sup> in Texas to 49<sup>th</sup> in Alabama.<sup>17</sup>
- In 2008, 81% of counties in the Appalachian region that includes Kentucky, Tennessee, and West Virginia had high rates of obesity and diabetes.<sup>18</sup>
- In 2008, three-fourths of counties in the southern region that includes Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi and South Carolina also had high rates of obesity and diabetes.<sup>19</sup>

## A Vision for the Future

Many organizations exist within the South to promote the well-being of the region and its citizens. Groups such as the **Southern Early Childhood Association** ([www.SouthernEarlyChildhood.org](http://www.SouthernEarlyChildhood.org)) and the **Southern Regional Education Board** ([www.sreb.org](http://www.sreb.org)) are dedicated to promoting the quality of education and the well-being of children in the South.

Other groups such as the:

- **Southern Growth Policies Board** — founded in 1971 by the region’s governors to develop visionary economic development policies and to provide a forum for partnership between the private and public sectors. ([www.southerngrowth.com](http://www.southerngrowth.com))
- **Southern Economic Development Council** — founded in 1946 and the oldest economic development association in North America. ([www.sedc.org](http://www.sedc.org))
- **Southern Governor’s Association** — founded in 1934, the oldest and largest of the regional governor’s associations, providing a regional bipartisan forum to help shape and implement national policy and solve regional problems. ([www.southerngovernors.org](http://www.southerngovernors.org))

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<sup>15</sup> “2011 Kids Count Databook”

<sup>16</sup> “2011 Kids Count Databook”

<sup>17</sup> “2011 Kids Count Databook”

<sup>18</sup> “Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Press Release, Nov. 19, 2009

<sup>19</sup> Centers for Disease Control

- **Southern Legislative Conference** — founded in 1947 to foster and encourage intergovernmental cooperation among its 15-member states. ([www.slcatlanta.org](http://www.slcatlanta.org))

form a backbone of organizations that actively work to promote the development and enhancement of the region, through economic development and policy initiatives.

All of these groups have developed policy agendas and areas on which to focus. There is remarkable similarity among the groups in defining the issues that impact our region's well-being. The "goals" developed by the Southern Growth Policies Board are perhaps the most extensive, and the goals have provided the foundation since 2001 for the development of specific legislative initiatives. Those goals include:

- Quality, accessible, equitable educational opportunities for all children and enhancing the perception of the value of education among our population, both urban and rural.
- Creating an environment of entrepreneurship and a skilled talent pool that builds upon our natural resources and brings value to the economic "table."
- Overcoming our historical cultural and racial divisions and creating communities that will attract new economic activity and investment.
- Integrating younger generations into decision-making at the community and state level and changing the face of community power structures.<sup>20</sup>

## In Summary

The South's legacy has been a mixed one: culture and charm on one hand and discrimination and violence on the other. As the decades have passed from the days of segregation, the South has begun a cultural revival that focuses on the best that we have to offer. The large demographic shifts that the region is undergoing are changing the way we perceive ourselves and, hopefully, the perceptions of those outside of the South. The South's population is becoming much more diversified, and it's bringing a new "flavor" to the region.

Outside of the region, we've often been portrayed negatively as a region with little to offer: institutions, particularly educational, that can't compete with the rest of the country; a dearth of educated and skilled leadership; an economy that remains mired in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, Southerners have helped to create some of the most significant programs to increase the well-being of our citizens during the last 100 years of the nation's history. We can credit President Lyndon Johnson of Texas with the creation of Head Start and the implementation of the War on Poverty; Senator William J. Fulbright of Arkansas with enhancing our role on the international scene through creation of the Fulbright programs; and Representative Wilbur D. Mills of Arkansas with helping to guide the political process as Social Security was developed. That's only a short list. There are many more in every field.

There are enormous challenges still facing us, and the South has chosen to look to education to begin the process of providing opportunity for our children. Only with educational opportunities

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<sup>20</sup> "Objectives," *Southern Growth Policies Board*, <<http://www.southerngrowth.com/about/objectives>>.

can our children begin to compete in a global economy and we, in the field of early childhood education, are privileged to be in the forefront of that movement.

The South is unique—unique in its culture, its history, its food, its music and its value system. As an organization that began 63 years ago to chip away at the issues that have plagued our region, we know that our citizens are committed to improving the lives of all our citizens.

“I have a dream that one day on the red hills of the South, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slaveholders will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood . . . This is the faith with which I return to the South.”

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

In many of our communities throughout the South, this dream has become a reality; we do sit down at the table with each other and our politics and leadership are much more reflective of the diversity that is ours. It would have been unthinkable many years ago to have a Governor in Louisiana that is of Indian descent, women as governors in Oklahoma and South Carolina, and African Americans as mayors of some of our largest cities. We’re certainly not where we want to be, but it is now our responsibility to build on that success and move forward into the future.

“The South still has a better chance of working out its problems than the more urbanized rest of the country, simply because more of us remember each other’s names.”

—Will Campbell, a Baptist minister who was born in Mississippi and who has been a notable white supporter of civil rights in the Southern United States.

## THE NEW FACES OF THE SOUTH



A.C. Wharton, Jr.  
Mayor of Memphis, Tennessee



Mary Fallin  
Governor of Oklahoma



Gerald Robinson,  
Commissioner of Education  
State of Florida



Nikki Haley  
Governor of South Carolina



Julián Castro  
Mayor of San Antonio, Texas



Kasim Reed  
Mayor of Atlanta, Georgia



Marco Rubio  
U.S. Senator from Florida



Bobby Jindal  
Governor of Louisiana

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