



# **Southern Farmers and Their Stories: Memory and Meaning in Oral History (New Directions in Southern History)**

*Melissa Walker*

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The industrial expansion of the twentieth century brought with it a profound shift away from traditional agricultural modes and practices in the American South. The forces of economic modernity -- specialization, mechanization, and improved efficiency -- swept through southern farm communities, leaving significant upheaval in their wake. In an attempt to comprehend the complexities of the present and prepare for the uncertainties of the future, many southern farmers searched for order and meaning in their memories of the past. In *Southern Farmers and Their Stories*, Melissa Walker explores the ways in which a diverse array of farmers remember and recount the past. The book tells the story of the modernization of the South in the voices of those most affected by the decline of traditional ways of life and work. Walker analyzes the recurring patterns in their narratives of change and loss, filling in gaps left by more conventional political and economic histories of southern agriculture. *Southern Farmers and Their Stories* also highlights the tensions inherent in the relationship between history and memory. Walker employs the concept of "communities of memory" to describe the shared sense of the past among southern farmers. History and memory converge and shape one another in communities of memory through an ongoing process in which shared meanings emerge through an elaborate alchemy of recollection and interpretation. In her careful analysis of more than five hundred oral history narratives, Walker allows silenced voices to be heard and forgotten versions of the past to be reconsidered. *Southern Farmers and Their Stories* preserves the shared memories and meanings of southern agricultural communities not merely for their own sake but for the potential benefit of a region, a nation, and a world that has much to learn from the lessons of previous generations of agricultural providers.

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