

Authoritarianism in the American South

*Beliefs That Led to Slavery and
Civil War, 1606–1861*



ROBERT L. DIPBOYE

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The evidence is overwhelming that the protection and expansion of slavery was a primary reason for the secession of the Confederate states and the Civil War that followed. While slavery undoubtedly was important,

a more fundamental cause was a belief system held in common among the ruling elite. The antebellum South was not only a slave society but also an authoritarian society, shaped by a view of the world as dangerous/competitive, an us vs. them mentality, a dominance/obedience orientation, and closed-mindedness. The authoritarianism of the founding elites, in combination with the travails they experienced on the southern frontiers, led to oppression, racism, and corruptions in thinking, emotion, and behavior. It also perpetuated the practice of slavery, sparked the Civil War, and left a difficult legacy.

In a unique application of contemporary social psychological theory and research to the interpretation of history, this book traces the evolution of southern authoritarianism from the founding of Virginia in 1606 to the secession of the Confederate states in 1861. In doing so, it examines how belief systems become embedded in a society, act as both consequences and causes of historical events, and have effects that reverberate far into the future.

Robert L. Dipboye is an organizational psychologist residing in Winter Park, Florida. He has held several academic positions including the Herbert S. Autrey Chair in social sciences at Rice University. Having published more than 100 articles and five books, he holds the position of professor emeritus from University of Central Florida.

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