



# Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie (Religion & American Culture)

*Wayne Flynt*

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Alabama Baptists are a complex people. Although regarded as conservative in both politics and theology, many Baptists became leaders of the 1890s agrarian revolt, devoted partisans of the social gospel early in the 20th century, and ardent advocates of the New Deal. Complexity has also characterized the denomination's race relations. For nearly five decades half its members were slaves, while many other members owned slaves. Thus, interaction of black and white Baptists created a unique religious setting in which people who were members of the same churches interpreted the gospel of liberation in dramatically different ways. After the Civil War, Baptist churches in the South divided into white and black congregations. Only white congregations remained part of the Southern Baptist Convention, whose members are known as Southern Baptists. Black congregations became part of the National Baptist Convention, and their history is a separate story deserving future study.

Despite social and cultural conflict Alabama Baptists helped tame a chaotic frontier, sustained a sense of community, created opportunities not available in secular society, shaped Alabama politics, and obtained religious dominance seldom matched in U.S. history.

Wayne Flynt's balanced, exhaustively researched book is the first about Alabama Baptists to be written by a professional historian. Publication in 1998 marks the 175th anniversary of the Alabama State Baptist Convention.

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