

Teaching and Learning from the U.S. South in Global Contexts: A Case Study of *Southern Spaces* and Southcomb

Sarah Toton <stoton_at_learnlink_dot_emory_dot_edu>, Emory University
Stacey Martin <smart3_at_emory_dot_edu>, Emory University

Abstract

This paper examines the internet journal *Southern Spaces*, launched in February 2004 and the online learning community SouthComb, started in 2006. We examine the development of these online tools, exploring pedagogical implications as well as the tools and avenues they bring to the field of Southern Studies, American Studies and scholarly communication online. We also explore the potential uses for these resources as well as their efforts to elucidate a broader understanding of the U.S. South in regional, national and global contexts.

The great ruptures, the great oppositions, are always negotiable, but not the little crack, the imperceptible ruptures which come from the south. We say “south” without attaching any importance to this... but everyone has his south — it doesn’t matter where it is — that is, his line of slope or flight. (Gilles Deleuze, *Dialogues*, 99.)

On the surface, it is not immediately apparent that that there is a correlation between digital learning communities, U.S. Southern Studies, and major league soccer. However, the 2006 World Cup highlighted the emergent relationship and subsequent online discussion regarding traditional iconography of the U.S. South and its contemporary global applications. In June 2006, thousands of soccer fans gathered in Germany to watch national teams compete for the FIFA World Cup. Dressed in team colors and waving national, regional and team flags, these lively spectators made for almost as much discussion on blogs and message boards as the teams they supported. The Confederate Navy Jack (also known as the “rebel” flag) was apparently observed by some television viewers, waving from the Spanish stands at the Spain v. Tunisia match. American and European fans exchanged theories suggesting perhaps they had mistaken the Basque Flag for the Confederate flag, or that those waving the Confederate colors were supporters of the *Atlético de Madrid* team, whose fans reportedly routinely bring the rebel flag to soccer events. It was cited during the course of some of these online discussions that, in the context of European soccer however, the seemingly out-of-place Confederate flag has been used for years to represent self identified “rebel” and “southern” teams such as *Atlético de Madrid*, Naples and even Ireland’s Cork GAA. This popular and seeming culturally remote identification and adoption of the Rebel flag suggests a complex and intriguing cross-cultural identification with the U.S. South, both historic and imagined, that transcends regional, national and even continental boundaries.



Figure 1. Confederate Flag at Naples Restaurant (from the *Around Naples Encyclopedia* by Jeff Matthews; used by permission).

While icons of the U.S. South appear at soccer matches across Europe, new technologies enter classrooms and living rooms across the world. Learners of varying interests and levels can now search online for information on everything from World Cup soccer to the Confederate flag, and at message boards like those run by the American-based History Channel (a channel marketed towards life-long learners that uses the slogan “where history lives”) participants can discuss both topics with other interested parties throughout the world.

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Although this ready access to individuals and content thousands of miles away presents a unique opportunity for today’s students, it also offers a host of new online issues that teachers and researchers must take into consideration. For example, in many cases the content itself can become confusing as users attempt to sort through sites determining what is reputable and what is electronic druck. At institutions of higher education, this has posed a major problem to instructors as the present generation of university students (dubbed “the millenials”) routinely begin scholarly research online by googling research topics before consulting the proverbial card catalogue at their local library. As Wikipedians become the new popular authorities on topics marginal and mainstream instructors in higher education attempt to discern internet technology’s place in the classroom. While some professors simply ban students from using any electronic resources with a URL, others parties such as the LearnHigher Project — a partnership of sixteen universities forming a HEFCE-funded Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) — seek to make online tools for students, training them in how to use the internet as an effective research tool (see *Internet Detective: Wise up to the Web*). Information technologist Peter Morville, in addition, tackles this question of information overload in his book *Ambient Findability*, noting that information literacy, information architecture, and usability remain just as critical and interrelated components to web tool design as author and home institution.

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Taking into account issues of access, multimedia literacy and the emerging role of web-based technology in classrooms in the U.S. and beyond, the MetaScholar Initiative at Emory University’s Robert W. Woodruff Library has launched two electronic projects designed to challenge students’ understanding of the U.S. South and provide instructors with new pedagogical tools as well as online spaces for scholarly development. After briefly identifying some of the many concerns with integrating technology and the process of scholarship and pedagogy, this paper will highlight two projects

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dedicated to elucidating a broader understanding of the U.S. South as well as providing tools, resources and spaces for online-based learning communities.

Both supported by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the internet journal *Southern Spaces* and the new online learning environment SouthComb work to broaden the traditional print-based journal and physical research archive by combining scholarly standards like the blind peer-review process with emergent technology and software development techniques.

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The Metascholar Initiative: A Brief History

Established in 2000, The MetaScholar Initiative of the Robert W. Woodruff Library at Emory University encompasses more than a dozen digital library projects undertaken in the past six years. The Initiative has received funding from various U.S.-based sources, including the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), the National Science Foundation (NSF), and the Library of Congress. Since 2002, the MetaScholar Initiative has been engaged with bringing U.S. Southern Studies to a broader audience. An initial attempt, the now defunct AmericanSouth.org (a free scholarly discovery service for primary research materials related to American South) provided the conceptual foundation for *Southern Spaces* and SouthComb.^[1]

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Writing the South: An Overview of Southern Spaces

American examples of born-digital publications and presses like the Berkeley Electronic Press, the internet journal *Vectors* and the online-only revival of Rice University Press point to a recent growth within the digital realm of the humanities. However, while many publishing initiatives seek to embrace the study of new media through their format and subject matter, the internet journal *Southern Spaces* reaches toward a different objective. Rather than engaging with issues of new media chiefly through its topical focus, *Southern Spaces* works to bridge the digital divide among print-based scholarship, teaching and new media by publishing on subjects conducive to an American history or literature course, but employing many of the multimedia formats (text, audio, video, images, etc.) available through the World Wide Web. In addition, the journal (hosted by Emory University's Robert W. Woodruff Library) remains committed to digital preservation standards as well as serving multiple browsers, platforms and connection speeds.

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Founded in the spring of 2004, *Southern Spaces* is a born-digital, peer reviewed scholarly journal that explores notions of space and place in the U.S. South. Its topical focus is on the analyses of multiple south's and specific southern regions; the critical scrutiny of depictions of an imagined monolithic "South"; and the mapping of expressive cultural forms associated with place. Multimedia pieces published in this journal range from broad topical overviews parsed by southern region to detailed analyses of specific places over time. Through multimedia essays and streaming excerpts from conferences, interviews, presentations, performances and events, *Southern Spaces* presents work concerned with representation of spaces and places in the South, as well as work that addresses the interrelationships of southern regions with other places and spaces beyond U.S. borders.

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Figure 2. Southern Spaces main page on Firefox, (March 8, 2006)

Unlike many peer-reviewed scholarly journals in the humanities and social sciences, *Southern Spaces* has no subscription fee. As an “open access” journal, it is freely available to individuals as well as institutions. *Southern Spaces* thus reaches a broader audience than most journals, from researchers and secondary school teachers to students, independent scholars, library patrons and the general public. The journal includes a variety of publication types, all of which share one important feature: each relies integrally on the multimedia publication environment provided by this journal. Within *Southern Spaces*, users find such content modes as “essays” (structured much like traditional articles with deep investigation of a focused topic) and “gateways” (annotated guides to particular areas of study compiled by scholars), as well as scholarly talks, poetry performances, and interviews.

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The impetus for creating this journal emerged from the work of an Advisory Board of scholars then involved in the Andrew W. Mellon-funded MetaCombine Project (2003-2006) of Emory University’s MetaScholar Initiative. This project sought to provide a modular scholarly communications toolkit for Southern Studies faculty and students that encompassed new search and retrieval methods as well as new forms of digital scholarship. The Advisory Board of this project became the journal’s founding Editorial Board, and they determined that the digital medium offered as yet untapped potential for peer-reviewed scholarly publishing. Through this journal, they sought to pioneer a new model for academic publishing in the humanities. Even such well respected and exclusively web-based journals as *Postmodern Culture* had thus far published only text-based pieces — articles that could have been produced in print. *Southern Spaces* distinguished itself by publishing scholarly works that depended upon a multimedia environment, not by using the internet as a dissemination medium for text-based scholarship.

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Structure, Issues and Inception

As they began planning the journal’s structure, the Editorial Board determined that the success of a new model for digital publication would require two major accomplishments. First, the model would need to resolve several major barriers to adoption of the digital framework for scholarly work, including publishing its contents in a permanently citable location. Second, it would need to promote a fusion of multimedia elements, including interactive maps, images, sound

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and video files, and data sets, into the scholarly productions such that these became integral parts of the publication, not mere auxiliary materials.

At its inaugural meeting in 2004, the Editorial Board established several important policies and procedures for the journal. With regard to barriers to adoption, they carefully approached four key issues: copyright, citation, version control, and cataloging. They created a copyright statement that favored the rights of the author, granting only first publication rights to the forum. By providing authors with explicit rights to republish their materials elsewhere, the Board sought to embody the principles of “open access” and “open content” publications. This is unusual within scholarly publishing, as most publishers claim that the ownership of published material resides with the publisher, not the author. Further, this move anticipated the conundrum of tenure review that has plagued digital publications. As most tenure review boards do not yet consider digital publications — even peer-reviewed journal articles — in the same light as peer-reviewed print scholarship, many scholars are unwilling to risk publishing in this medium. By providing scholars with the right to republish their materials elsewhere, the Editorial Board hoped to allay the fears of this significant community of tenure-seeking academics.

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The Editorial Board likewise addressed the barrier of citation. Scholars and independent researchers have reported their reluctance to cite Internet-based resources due to the ephemeral nature of these resources. Many digitally published websites change their content at-will without alerting readers of the changes, move locations or Uniform Resource Locators (URLs) repeatedly, and a large number of sites disappear altogether without warning. As a result, citing web pages often yields frustration, both for authors and readers of their work. The cited content may change after a scholar has cited it; it may move to a different location; or it may vanish altogether, leaving the author and her/his readers in unverifiable terrain. The Board elicited the support of the Robert. W. Woodruff Library at Emory University, the website’s host, to provide stable URLs for the site’s content. All *Southern Spaces* publications are given a standard URL that encodes key information about the piece, including the author’s name and the publication year. These URLs do not change; nor does the content listed at each page. The Library has made a commitment to maintaining this content in its current locations *ad infinitum*. Information regarding this policy is relayed to the reader through the website on a “Cite This Page” link that appears on every publication page.

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This citation policy relates to a third issue addressed by the Editorial Board in 2004: that of version control. In the print medium, it is not possible to make changes to a publication unless the publisher is willing to print a new edition. As such, authors cannot add to, subtract from, or even correct typos from their work after it appears — not because doing so is undesirable, but because it is too costly. One of the chief benefits of publishing within the digital medium is that the cost of changing a word, a link, an image, or any other component of a site is negligible. If an author comes across new information relevant to a previous web-based publication, s/he can even add this information to the existing piece, and in doing so, enrich its scholarly value.

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The Editorial Board wanted to capitalize on this feature of digital publishing, but wanted to do so in such a way that every change is transparent to the reader, and every version of a piece is accessible through its original citation (or URL). The Board thus established procedures for amendments to published works, and determined that such amendments could not be made to the original piece, but would instead be made within a new *version* of that piece. The original piece remains at its published URL — no changes can be made to that piece in order to ensure that the content matches any citation a reader may include in her/his own work. New versions are given clearly identifiable URLs that connect it to the original publication without replacing it. Likewise, every publication that contains versions also contains a version-management page that links to every published version of the piece, and that provides a “tracked-changes” option to enable readers to quickly identify what changes were made between each version. This maintains both the permanence of content expected by researchers and the flexibility of the medium for published authors.

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Finally, the Board broached the issue of cataloging published essays, gateways, and other *Southern Spaces* formats. Libraries have long cataloged scholarly journals; however, they have done so by issue, not by individual publication. The convention of issue-based publication was constructed in order to allow newspapers, magazines, journals and other periodicals to publish batches of works at particular temporal moments — a cost-saving mechanism in the print medium. Such a convention does not naturally apply to the digital medium, where publication can occur on a rolling basis without

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incurring additional cost. Given that another strength of the digital medium is the relatively quick turn-around time from submission to publication, releasing pieces on a rolling basis is a highly desirable quality for a Web-based journal. Southern Spaces adopted a policy of publishing content on a rolling basis, but needed a way to catalog contents to make them more visible through library catalogs and other indices of published works. The Editorial Board charged the Managing Editor and Editorial Associates with resolving this issue.

Working in tandem with the Woodruff Library's Technology and Metadata Librarian, the Managing Editor and Editorial Staff created a cataloging format based on a current library standard, MODS (Metadata Object Description Schema), to catalog the journal's contents at the publication level. Each essay, gateway, interview, performance, and presentation published in *Southern Spaces* is provided with a full catalog record. This record is stored in the code of the lead html-encoded page of the published piece and is submitted to relevant indices, including Emory University's library catalog.

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With these important policies and procedures established, the Editorial Board next concentrated on the critical feature that distinguished *Southern Spaces* from other digital journals — its focus on publishing works that cannot be published in print. The Board wrote a call for submissions and submission guidelines that explicitly sought scholarship that fully integrated text and multimedia elements. The Board and staff have worked collaboratively with authors since the release of that call in order to fulfill this mission.

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Digital Literacy and Southern Spaces authorship

Despite accounting for publication rights, preservation, cataloguing and version control, a prospective author's multimedia literacy and technological comfort level still significantly impacts his or her decision to publish in a born-digital journal. *Vectors: Journal of Culture and Technology in a Dynamic Vernacular*, housed at University of Southern California's Institute for Multimedia Literacy, resolved this issue by both soliciting completed multimedia works and commissioning projects produced through a collaboration between scholars, tech-savvy designers and the *Vectors* creative team. While Southern Spaces staff (which includes a videographer, web designer and copy editors) work with authors during publication process, accepted submissions generally come in a digital format, complete with some multimedia components and references. This is not to say, however, that all authors published on *Southern Spaces* possess a high comfort level with emergent technology. In fact, most authors publishing in the journal have not previously published a multi-media piece...

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Current Pedagogical Applications

In recent months, *Southern Spaces* has been used in a variety of classrooms from an undergraduate U.S. Southern History course at University of Nebraska to an introductory telecommunication policy class at Michigan State University to an Emerging Media course in the Moving Image Studies Program at Georgia State University. In most instances, the content of the *Southern Spaces* article rather than the format the article was delivered in remained the chief reason for assigning *Southern Spaces* texts as reading material. However, poet and professor Natasha Trethewey recently screened *Tuscaloosa: Riversong*, a video poem published in 2005 on *Southern Spaces*, for her undergraduate creative writing class at Duke University. Using the poem itself as well as the online format for poetic delivery, Prof. Trethewey offered students the option of videotaping their own work for a final project. Many of her students took this opportunity learning not only the potentially performative aspect of in creative writing, but also gaining some technical knowledge often not associated with a traditional creative writing course.

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Southern Spaces' dynamic use of the medium to present a more innovative lecture offers one significant reason for either bringing web resources into the classroom or bringing the online classroom into the private residence. Through book and poetry readings, conference presentations and musical performances, *Southern Spaces* not only offers online lectures and primary resources, but does so by also integrating text and web-based sources into one online freely-accessible space. Rather than offering something akin to an instructor podcast or taped lecture, *Southern Spaces* pieces go beyond the podium and the video camera by adding supplementary materials such as field footage, maps and outside data. Mary Odem's lecture "Global Lives, Local Struggles: Latin American Immigrants in Atlanta," was built from a conference presentation as she and a *Southern Spaces* videographer crafted a piece featuring documentary

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footage as well as visual data difficult to present on an overhead projector (let alone a video of an overhead projector). Similarly, acclaimed author Darnell Arnoult's "Work" offers a short film of the author reading her poem in the site that inspired her to write the piece. On-site tapings and the inclusion of field footage and other primary materials add to a dynamic content portal that gives learners the opportunity to view lectures from anywhere with an internet connection, and they provide valuable secondary material in a style impossible to replicate live in the classroom environment.

As an internet-based interdisciplinary journal, *Southern Spaces* combines subject matter covering fields of inquiry over a host of media and formats. Although the journal focuses on spatiality and the American South, the Editorial Board and staff endeavor to bring content applicable to courses focusing on American Literature and History, as well as Arts, Music, Media Studies, Economics, Environmental Studies, Social Policy, Education, Religion, Race and Ethnicity Studies, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Government Policy, Leisure Studies and Geography. With nearly sixty pieces published since 2004 and nearly twenty pieces in progress, *Southern Spaces* presents multiple fields of humanistic inquiry through new media applications.

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Looking Beyond: Globalizing *Southern Spaces*

The previous section examined how *Southern Spaces* has been and could be used in humanities classrooms in the United States, however a chief endeavor for the journal in the coming two years remains the relationships between the U.S. South and other parts of the world. Currently, *Southern Spaces* provides a few pieces that deal with immigration policy and the importance of looking at the Global South (see "The U.S. South in Global Contexts", "Global Lives, Local Struggles: Latin American Immigrants in Atlanta" and "Whatwuzit? The 1996 Atlanta Summer Olympics Reconsidered"); however, the concept of multiple souths in multiple regions and their respective identities and uses needs to be further addressed. In *Dialogues*, Gilles Deleuze states that "everyone has his south," regardless of physical location. In turn, these souths, real and imagined, remain loosely related through adopted ideologies, tropes and identities. The soccer fans of Cork and Naples use the U.S. Confederate flag, to identify themselves as "outsiders" and "rebels" within a larger region that they both self-identify with but also set themselves in contrast to, just as some Americans still use Confederate flag to signify a rebelliousness to a perceived national identity and/or a historical, regional (and sometimes racially-biased) solidarity. These global southern spaces, along with those engaging in and with them, and their comparative relations along racial lines and regional boundaries remain important topics of discussion, suitable for an online space that already transcends numerous boundaries based on its format. In identifying issues of social justice, history, cultural, ethnic and regional identity beyond the eleven states that constituted the Confederate States of America, *Southern Spaces* seeks to bring issues in American Southern history and culture into a broader global context through the examination of relationships between American Studies and studies of South Africa, Spain, England, Italy, France and beyond.

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SouthComb: Searching and Aggregating the U.S. South

As *Southern Studies* moves to bring published scholarly materials to a global audience, SouthComb endeavors to provide an interactive learning community for students of Southern Studies who are geographically located inside and outside the U.S. South. As a web-based environment, SouthComb will provide a suite of useful services for a individuals seeking to research, teach, and learn about a specified subject domain. This tool, begun in early 2006, will allow scholars, researchers and students better access and understanding of Southern Studies information. Comprised of five web-based tools, SouthComb seeks to become a major destination for those interested in learning as well as teaching aspects of the U.S. South. The five tools are described as follows

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1. Combined Search

This service provides a search and browsing interface for various "information realms," including digital archive records, web pages, collection descriptions, article abstracts & library catalog entries

All information sources indexed in the system are first vetted by scholars to ensure that they are reliable & creditable

2. Southern Studies Directory

This directory would include descriptive entries for:

- Research institutions housing Southern Studies programs (formal or informal)
- Scholars who study and publish in this field, together with bibliographies of their work
- Publications which publish in various areas relevant to Southern Studies
- Organizations and conferences relevant to the study of Southern cultures and histories.

3. **Geographic Information Service**

- Generates and displays data overlay maps of the South based on queries and feature selection, including historical demographics, industries, political boundaries, natural resources, waterways and other topographic information
- Value Added: Scholars want access to geographic views of this information. Also provides a highly desired associated map creation service for scholars interested in particular kinds of geographic displays.

4. **Pedagogical Resources Repository**

Pedagogical resources will include:

- subject guides
- lesson plans
- automated quizzes
- topical portfolios
- other kinds of information packages

All of these resources will be either harvested or generated/updated semi-automatically, with some human oversight and input.

5. **Today's South News Service**

This service provides a (filtered) RSS feed aggregation of various sources which include information on Southern Studies:

- News Services
- Blogs
- Digitization Projects
- Other

The resource is filtered by means of phrases and keywords, as appropriate to each RSS feed. The back file is archived and made searchable.

SouthComb promises to add a great deal of value for online learners as well as Southern Studies, American Studies and humanities scholars. The Combined Search Service will index high-quality information that is not searchable by Google, excluding low-quality information that Google often prominently displays. The Southern Studies Directory will collect and display information about the people and departments working in Southern Studies. A directory of this type has not been gathered elsewhere, and remains of great utility particularly to scholars new to the field. The Geographic Information Service will allow instructors as well as researchers the ability to access geographic views of requested data. In addition, it will provide a highly-desired map creation service that can be used to generate lecture materials as well as illustrative data. The Pedagogical Resources Repository will not only provide materials useful for teaching and study, but will allow users to generate and post their own syllabi and materials lists, in turn creating a repository and a cooperative community for Southern Studies instructors and a space for pedagogical dialogue. *Today's South News Service* will function as a current awareness service, keeping users up-to-date on topics relating to the U.S. South and Southern Studies, regardless of the user's geographic location. Although SouthComb is still in the development phase as of summer 2006, the service will begin taking subscriptions and potentially offer limited open-access use as early as spring 2007.

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In addition to creating a program sustainable for the long-term through the SouthComb service, this project also seeks to examine how subject-based resources can be used and amended as a learning community develops around it. Although the short term focus of SouthComb is to establish an outreach program to improve networked access to

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humanities collections in the regional South, the program will seek to foster best practices in multimedia content dissemination, new models of digital scholarship and new rationales for learning and teaching communities.

Conclusion

In this case study of two new sites for scholarly communication and pedagogy, we have introduced Southern Spaces and SouthComb and offered insight into their construction, uses and future goals. We argue that Southern Spaces provides a forum for innovative scholarship and research by taking advantage of the internet's capabilities to deliver audio, video, interactive imagery, and text in a rapid and timely fashion. Furthermore, the vast majority of the Editorial Board and the Editorial Reviewers are instructors in North American and Europe and seek to not only provide an innovative site for multimedia publication, but also to publish pieces that will bring technology into the classroom, the library, and the home of the independent learner. Similarly, SouthComb, as a new model of a scholarly communication service and online learning community, seeks to push beyond the limits of a peer-reviewed journal by offering dynamic and interactive spaces as well as research tools. In addition to challenging the conventional definitions and boundaries of the U.S. South through our preexisting as well as upcoming content, these pieces also seek to bring Southern Studies to an audience outside the U.S. South in order to engage in historical and contemporary issues of social relations, cultural identity and geographic identification across places, spaces and contexts.

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Notes

[1] American South's OAI collection was used as a seed set for SouthComb. See [AmericanSouth 2002].

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