



The Dirty South

Exploring a Fantasized Region, 1970–2020

JAMES A. CRANK

The Dirty South examines the shifting significances of the South as a constructed, fantasized region in the American psyche, particularly its frequent association with tropes of dirt that emphasize soil, garbage, trash, grit, litter, mud, swamp water, slime, and pollution. Beginning with iconic works from the 1970s such as *Deliverance* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, James A. Crank traces the image of a “dirty” South into the twenty-first century to explore the social, political, and psychological effects of the region’s hold on the imaginations of southerners and nonsoutherners alike.

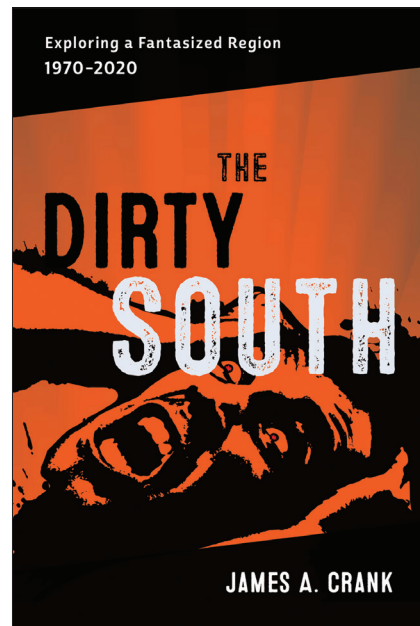
With a focus on media forms through which southern identity gets articulated and questioned—including horror movies, Swamp Thing comics, and popular music by artists such as Waylon Jennings and OutKast—*The Dirty South* probes the sustained fascination with southern dirtiness while reflecting on its causes and consequences since the end of the civil rights era. Highlighting the period from 1970 to 2020, during which the South began to represent several new possible identities for the nation as a whole and for the area itself, Crank considers the ways that southerners have used depictions of dirt to create and police boundaries *and* to contest those boundaries. Each chapter pairs prominent literary or cultural texts from the 1970s with more contemporary works, such as Jordan Peele’s film *Get Out*, which recycle similar investments or, critically, challenge the inherent whiteness of the earlier images.

By historicizing fantasies of the region and connecting them to the first decades of the twenty-first century, *The Dirty South* reveals that notions about southern dirtiness proliferate not because they lend authenticity or relevancy to the U.S. South, but because they aid so conspicuously in the zombified work of tethering investors (real and imagined) to a graveyard of ideas.

JAMES A. CRANK, associate professor of American literature at the University of Alabama, has received fellowships from the Bogliasco Foundation and the National Humanities Center. He is the author of several books, including *Understanding Randall Kenan*.

PRAISE FOR *THE DIRTY SOUTH*

“A unique and multilayered analysis of what and who makes the South legible in its modern iterations, *The Dirty South* offers some new language and approaches to push back against the lazy assertions of the region being a singularly white, conservative, and monolithic experience. . . . It’s a helluva read.”—Regina N. Bradley, author of *Chronicling Stankonia: The Rise of the Hip-Hop South*



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