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## **The Songs that Reinvented the South**

*Tin Pan Alley and the Creation of the Moonlight & Magnolias Myth*

**Baton Rouge**—Tin Pan Alley, once New York City’s songwriting and recording mecca, issued more than a thousand songs about the American South in the first half of the twentieth century. In *Reinventing Dixie*, John Bush Jones explores the broad impact of these songs in creating and disseminating the imaginary view of the South as a land of southern belles, gallant gentlemen, and racial harmony.

In profiles of Tin Pan Alley’s lyricists and composers, Jones explains how a group of undereducated writers—the vast majority of whom were urban northerners or European immigrants who had never visited the region they wrote about—constructed the specific and detailed images of the South used in their song lyrics. In the process of evaluating the origins of Tin Pan Alley’s songbook, Jones analyzes these songwriters’ attitudes about North-South reconciliation, ideals of honor and hospitality, and the recurring theme of the yearning for home. Though a few of the songs employed parody or satire to undercut the vision of a peaceful, romantic South, the majority ignored the realities of racism and poverty in the region.

By the end of Tin Pan Alley’s era of cultural prominence in the mid-twentieth century, Jones contends that the work of its writers had cemented the “moonlight and magnolias” myth in the minds of millions of Americans. *Reinventing Dixie* sheds light on the role of songwriters in forming an idyllic vision of the South that continues to influence the American imagination.

**John Bush Jones** is the author of *Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theater*, and *The Songs That Fought the War: Popular Music and the Home Front, 1939–1945*.

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