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In this book I refer to the "black nation" and argue that the slaves, as an objective social class, laid the foundations for a separate black national culture while enormously enriching American culture as a whole. But that separate black national culture has always been American, however much it has drawn on African origins or reflected the distinct development of black people in America. White and black southerners, however different they may claim to be and in some ways are, have come to form one people in vital respects. As C. Vann Woodward observes, in *American Counterpoint*:

The ironic thing about these two great hyphenate minorities, Southern Americans and Afro-Americans, confronting each other on their native soil for three and a half centuries, is the degree to which they have shaped each other's destiny, determined each other's isolation, shared and molded a common culture. It is, in fact, impossible to imagine the one without the other and quite futile to try.

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