



# Counterfeit Gentlemen: Manhood and Humor in the Old South (New Perspectives on the History of the South)

*John Mayfield*

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## **Counterfeit Gentlemen: Manhood and Humor in the Old South (New Perspectives on the History of the South)** John Mayfield

"Counterfeit Gentlemen" is a stunning reappraisal of Southern manhood and identity that uses humor and humorists to carry the reader into the very heart of antebellum culture. What does it mean to be a man in the pre-Civil War South? And how can we answer the question from the perspective of the early twenty-first century? John Mayfield does so by revealing how early nineteenth-century Southern humorists addressed the anxieties felt by men seeking to chart a new path between the old honor culture and the new market culture. Lacking the constraints imposed by journalism or proper literature, these writers created fictional worlds where manhood and identity could be tested and explored. Preoccupied alternately by moonlight and magnolias and racism and rape, we have continually presented ourselves with an Old South so mirthless it couldn't breathe. If all Mayfield did was remind us that Old Southerners laughed he would have accomplished something. But he also offers a sophisticated analysis of the social functions humor performed and the social anxieties it reflected.

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