



# South by Southwest: Planter Emigration and Identity in the Slave South

*James D. Miller*

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Between 1815 and 1861 thousands of planters formed a unique emigrant group in American history. A slaveholding, landholding elite, southerners from Georgia and South Carolina uprooted themselves from their communities and headed for their society's borderlands with a frequency and intensity unsurpassed by any comparable class. A phenomenon of such singularity and significance preoccupied many of the South's leading citizens and generated a great deal of interest and discussion among movers and prospective movers, as well as among those who stayed behind. While many wondered what emigration could do for them as individuals or households, others engaged in a public debate as to what emigration said about them as a class and as a society. That multilayered debate surrounding the personal and social, spiritual and ideological meanings of emigration is at the very center of James David Miller's study.

In exploring what planter mobility reveals about planter identity and culture, *South by Southwest* blends analysis of both public and private responses to emigration and in so doing illuminates the ways in which elite southerners themselves understood the connections between emigration as private conduct and as a public phenomenon. In bringing together these two spheres of inquiry, Miller examines the diverse geographical, cultural, and intellectual meanings that elite southerners gave to their private and public journeys and what those meanings reveal about their broader attitudes regarding the people and places of slaveholding society.

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