

1-1-2007

A scholar and a gentleman: George Tindall, 1921-2006

Furman University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine>

Recommended Citation

University, Furman (2007) "A scholar and a gentleman: George Tindall, 1921-2006," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 49 : Iss. 4 , Article 30.
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol49/iss4/30>

This Article is made available online by Journals, part of the Furman University Scholar Exchange (FUSE). It has been accepted for inclusion in Furman Magazine by an authorized FUSE administrator. For terms of use, please refer to the [FUSE Institutional Repository Guidelines](#). For more information, please contact scholarexchange@furman.edu.

A SCHOLAR AND A GENTLEMAN: GEORGE TINDALL, 1921-2006

George Brown Tindall '42, one of the nation's most respected historians, died December 2 in Chapel Hill, N.C. He was 85.

Renowned for his detailed scholarly work and stylish prose, Tindall, a Greenville native, wrote several acclaimed books on Southern history. He spent the majority of his academic career at the University of North Carolina, where he earned his graduate degrees and from which he retired in 1990 as Kenan Professor of History.

Tributes to Tindall cited his status as an early advocate of racial equality and as one of the first white historians to look without blinders at the black experience in the South. He was also credited with pioneering the discussion of Southern myths, which he said white Southerners developed after the Civil War to explain how what they considered a just and noble cause could have been lost.

His signature work, which took him more than 11 years to write, was *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945*, winner of the Southern Historical Association's Charles Sydnor Award in 1968 as the year's best book on Southern history. In 1994, historian Charles B. Dew described *Emergence* as one of "the twin peaks of New South historiography," the other being C. Vann Woodward's *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*.

Tindall's first book, adapted from his doctoral dissertation and published in 1952, was *South Carolina Negroes, 1877-1900*. In tracing the fortunes of blacks in the state from the end of Reconstruction to the start of the Jim Crow era, the book was important because, as retired Furman professor A.V. Huff, Jr., has said, it "focused on the black experience before it became such a major topic with the civil rights movement, and it influenced the subsequent interpretations of the period."

In a profile in the Summer 1990 *Furman Magazine*, Tindall said, "I suppose if I've made any contribution to new insights, it's with *South Carolina Negroes*."

Among his other books were *The Disruption of the Solid South* (1972), *The Persistent Tradition in New South Politics* (1975) and *Natives & Newcomers: Ethnic Southerners and Southern Ethnics* (1995).

Tindall was also an editor and contributor to the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, a 1656-page



compilation published in 1989 by UNC Press. The volume's co-editor, William Ferris, a former head of the National Endowment for the Humanities and senior associate director of UNC's Center for the Study of the American South, called Tindall a "great teacher and a great scholar, and his legacy as a Southern historian is outstanding. His scholarship was extraordinary, but his personal warmth and generosity also were beyond measure."

In recent years Tindall received additional acclaim as co-author, with Furman president David Shi, of *America: A Narrative History*. Publisher W.W. Norton & Company recently released the seventh edition of the book, which has been lauded for its lively narrative and balance of political, social and cultural history. According to Norton, *America* is used by more than a million students and is among the most successful history textbooks ever published.

Of his friend and colleague, Shi said, "I had the great good fortune to know George for 20 years. He was not only one of the nation's leading historians and a beloved professor, he was a wise and patient mentor,

a man of great dignity and dimension with a charming wit and lively curiosity. His prose was as lucid and as engaging as his conversation, and he loved to read, to teach, to write, and to laugh."

The Tindall name was indeed synonymous with Southern gentility, and his influence lives on not only in his scholarly work, but in a host of former students now teaching throughout the country. To recognize his contributions to their careers and to American scholarship, many of them wrote essays for *The Adaptable South*, published in Tindall's honor in 1991 by Louisiana State University Press.

George Tindall is survived by his wife, Blossom McGarrity Tindall '42; a son, Bruce Tindall, and a daughter, Blair Tindall; and a grandson. Memorials: The George B. Tindall Endowed Lectureship and Scholarship Fund, Furman University, 3300 Poinsett Highway, Greenville, S.C. 29613.

To read an excerpt from the 1990 *Furman Magazine* article about Tindall, visit www.furman.edu/fumag.