

Religion, Sexuality, and Identity in the New South

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A long line forms at Our Way Café in Decatur, Georgia as customers are anxious to buy a plate heaping with traditional Southern food. If one were to observe the employees and those in line, one might notice that a diverse group patronizes this restaurant. There are men in business suits, men in gas station jump suits, women with huge diamond earrings, and women in sweats. Blacks, whites, young, old, Hispanics, and many gays eat and work at Our Way Café. These gays are open to exhibiting their sexual orientation and preferences, as same-sex couples find the setting to be comfortable. This array of people represents the community of Decatur, an in-town neighborhood east of [Atlanta](#). Something else as important to Decatur residents as good food is religion. Three minutes from Our Way Café is Oakhurst Baptist Church, of which the congregation is a variety of people similar to those, waiting for fried chicken at Our Way Café. Oakhurst Baptist Church maintains a covenant which prohibits withholding church office or congregation participation based on “possessions, race, age, gender, sexual orientation, or mental and physical ability” (White “Baptists Group to Church”).

Although this liberal and accepting attitude of Oakhurst Baptist Church reflects Atlanta’s

progressivism, it causes controversy with those attempting to preserve the traditional and conservative ideology of the South. Atlanta is progressive and conservative simultaneously and this is shown in its religious, racial, and social relations. Globalization has also affected all [facets](#) and social classes of the city. Further class stratification is a result of Atlanta's participation in modernization, as sepa...

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...he attempts to suppress it. Oakhurst is proud of its strength, morality, and diversity that was important during the conflict with the Southern Baptist Convention. The church is a product of its environment and its congregation and the Oakhurst fellowship serves the community in return.

It is true that "religion is expected to have political, economic, and educational functions at all levels of cultural development, and in complex societies to form one of the most important mechanisms for status placement, group [identity](#), and social control," (Rosenberg 11). This is exactly what Oakhurst Baptist Church has done in Decatur. Southern tradition has survived while modern and liberated views have been accepted. It illustrates an ongoing process which is taking place all over the United States at various speeds. Old fashioned Soul Food can be enjoyed by everyone.

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