



# **Bishops, Bourbons, and Big Mules: A History of the Episcopal Church in Alabama (Religion & American Culture)**

*J. Barry Vaughn*

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*Bishops, Bourbons, and Big Mules* tells the story of how the Episcopal Church gained influence over Alabama's cultural, political, and economic arenas despite being a denominational minority in the state.

The consensus of southern historians is that, since the Second Great Awakening, evangelicalism has dominated the South. This is certainly true when one considers the extent to which southern culture is dominated by evangelical rhetoric and ideas. However, in Alabama one non-evangelical group has played a significant role in shaping the state's history. J. Barry Vaughn explains that, although the Episcopal Church has always been a small fraction (around 1 percent) of Alabama's population, an inordinately high proportion, close to 10 percent, of Alabama's significant leaders have belonged to this denomination. Many of these leaders came to the Episcopal Church from other denominations because they were attracted to the church's wide degree of doctrinal latitude and laissez-faire attitude toward human frailty.

Vaughn argues that the church was able to attract many of the state's governors, congressmen, and legislators by positioning itself as the church of conservative political elites in the state--the planters before the Civil War, the "Bourbons" after the Civil War, and the "Big Mules" during industrialization. He begins this narrative by explaining how Anglicanism came to Alabama and then highlights how Episcopal bishops and congregation members alike took active roles in key historic movements including the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Civil Rights Movement. *Bishops, Bourbons, and Big Mules* closes with Vaughn's own predictions about the fate of the Episcopal Church in twenty-first-century Alabama.

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