



# Cracking the Solid South: The Life of John Fletcher Hanson, Father of Georgia Tech

*Lee C. Dunn*

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John Fletcher Hanson was a rare combination of industrialist, journalist, and orator who spent most of his life in Macon, Georgia, rising from the ashes of the Civil War to become the leading voice of the New South. Many have assigned that role to Henry Grady, but while Grady was talking about a New South, Hanson was building one, by creating jobs, promoting Southern industrialization, and advancing educational opportunities.

Hanson, commonly referred to as "the Major" throughout his lifetime, founded Bibb Manufacturing and grew it into a textile empire, which stands beside his most enduring legacy, the Georgia Institute of Technology. Later, as president of the Central of Georgia Railway and the Ocean Steamship Company, he strengthened the backbone of the state's transportation network.

During the 1880s Hanson owned the Macon Telegraph and used it to challenge conventional Southern ideology about economics, race, and the solid Democratic stronghold on the South. While also fighting for a pro-business platform, he became a Republican and worked with some of the most influential men of the Gilded Age.

Georgia's post Civil War history cannot be fully understood without examining the life of J. F. Hanson, its most important New South advocate and industrialist. In bringing this remarkable man and his accomplishments to light for the first time, CRACKING THE SOLID SOUTH paints an absorbing picture of the economic, political, and social struggles that confronted Georgia after the Civil War and of the many ways one man shaped the course of the state's history.

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