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Reconstructing the South: Cultural Producers' Ideological Tensions and the Commercial Representation of White Identity Myths

ABSTRACT

This study contributes to a stream of research that interrogates the cultural outlooks and tacit theories of persuasion that cultural producers bring to bear when creating identity myths for commercially motivated purposes. We analyze the strategic goals and ideological orientations of New South mythmakers working in the media industry. We show how their representational choices and beliefs about their professional missions are shaped by salient ideological tensions between redemptive white Southern identity myths and racial countermemories that run against the grain of their idealized portrayals of the region. In seeking to manage these ideological tensions, New South mythmakers are engaging in a culturally embedded form of regional branding that interjects consequential societal debates about socio-economic stratifications and divisions into the commercial marketplace.

> There was a major blue-gray, North-South Reunion in 1895 in Chicago sponsored by the Confederate Veterans Association of Chicago. It was to establish a major monument in Oakwood Cemetery to the Confederates who had died in a prison camp: Camp Douglas in Chicago. At that convention, blue and gray together, the keynote speech was made by Wade Hampton, former Confederate General, former Redeemer Governor, and White Supremacist Governor of South Carolina. In that speech one of his refrains was "Please come invade us again, but invade us with your investments." And he got cheers for that from his northern comrades because part of the purpose of that blue-gray reunion was about business investment.
>
> [David Blight (2004)]

Scholars of American history share a clear consensus that the socio-political legacy of the Civil War, and most particularly the cultural rifts exacerbated and solidified during the era of Congressional Reconstruction (circa 1867-77), has exerted a profound influence on American society (Blight 2002; Foner 1988; Stampp 1956, 1967). Although the historical and mythic underpinnings of contemporary consumer culture have garnered considerable theoretical interest in recent years (see Arnould and Thompson 2005 for a review), the nexus of regional identifications, romantic venerations, social stigmas, and, most controversially, the racial significations encoded in Southern consumption symbols, lifestyle idealizations, and archetypic characters have, much like the proverbial elephant in the room, been conspicuously ignored.

In a closely related theoretical vein, the role that commercial representations play in creating feelings of collective identification among white Americans has been largely overlooked by consumer researchers, with the notable exception of Peñaloza (2001), who discusses how Western Stock Shows glorify the cultural role of white settlers in their promotional staging of the American West. This disciplinary oversight exemplifies a broader tendency in the social sciences to treat whiteness as a natural condition, in need of no further explanation, rather than as a socially constructed category exhibiting shifting symbolic boundaries, differing gradations of membership, and internal diversity that engenders ideological instability and transformative conflicts (Perry 2001; Roediger 1991). Consumer researchers have analyzed identity myths in the context of gender (Holt and Thompson 2004; Thompson 1996), (non-white) ethnicity (Crockett and Wallendorf 2004; Mehta and Belk 1991; Peñaloza 1994), and most prominently, consumer-centric identifications, such as being a Biker (Schouten and McAlexander 1995) or a Trekkie (Kozinets 2001), but they have given scant attention to the white identity myths which are conveyed through consumer culture.

The complex and contested mythic construction of the Southern United States offers an ideal context for investigating the diffusion of white identity myths in popular culture and the ways in which these myths are adapted to serve commercial interests. As historian Wilbur Cash (1941, p.viii) noted long ago, “If it can be said there are many Souths, the fact remains that there is also one South.” The sense of collective identity to which Cash refers emanates from a cultural mythology steeped in the social experiences of Southern whites and related historical factors which created strong symbolic distinctions to other regions of the nation, most particularly the North, that are expressed in Southern music, literature, oral histories, symbol systems, cuisine, and folk traditions (Malone 2002; Woodward 1951).

The South has a peculiar place in American history inextricably linked to its agrarian roots and the emergence of an antebellum planter class aristocracy; the institution of slavery; the vociferous claim to states rights it inspired; a crushing military defeat during the Civil War; regional enmities reinforced during the era of Congressional Reconstruction; stigmatizing connotations inscribed into national consciousness by Northern opinion makers; the region’s long Jim Crow era of enforced racial segregation; and the turmoil and strife of the 1960s Civil Rights movement. These historical circumstances reflect that the economies of the Northern and Southern states followed distinctive trajectories and, as a result, situated their respective citizenries in quite different constellations of political and economic interests. These material differences came to be represented and reinforced through a complex of ideological beliefs, moral valuations, cultural mores, and symbolic boundaries (Blight 2001, 2002; Foner 1988).

Over the course of the twentieth century, the South has been recurrently portrayed in the broader national media as a benighted and backward region that mirrored the presumed character flaws of its poor white Southern inhabitants (see Cobb 1999). Even Presidents who hail from the South are not immune. Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton drew upon their Southern heritage to claim the mantle of beltway outsiders who understood the plight of common folk. Yet, both administrations were dogged by disparaging Southern stereotypes. For President Carter, the much lampooned spectacle of his good ole boy brother Billy subtly undercut his credibility while President Clinton, among his many PR problems, was routinely portrayed by his detractors in terms that drew from the white trash stereotype of the Bubba: an impulsive, shiftless, and lascivious Southern man incapable of self-restraint.

However, disparaging, demeaning, and demonizing portraits of Southern whites are only one side of the ideological story. A countervailing system of meanings has been culturally propagated through the ceaseless efforts of Southern intellectuals, politicians, writers, journalists, historical preservationists, and business leaders to place a redeeming light on the region's historical heritage. Through these myth making activities, this broad coalition of Southern mythmakers sought to defend the honor of their Confederate ancestors, rebuke the many cultural stigmas that have been ascribed to white Southern identities and perhaps most of all, attract desperately needed infusions of Northern capital to create a more prosperous New South. Southern historian James Cobb (2005, 104) informatively elaborates on the ideological agenda advanced through this mythic reconstruction of the South: "intent on stressing continuity with the Old South, New South propagandists had danced around the delicate issue of slavery, paying tribute to the grace and gentility of the slaveholding class without addressing the devastating human and economic impact of the institution that supported them."

The ideological complexities and conflicts posed by these politically and commercially inspired efforts to expiate symbols of white Southern culture from their segregationist origins are illustrated by contemporary debates over the confederate flag. For many African-Americans, the confederate flag remains a despised, unreconstructed symbol of racial oppression; for others, most particularly white Southerners, the confederate flag is heralded as a tribute to a revered cultural heritage that transcends the legacy of slavery (see Bonner 2002). Despite its iniquitous history, the confederate flag has attained a fair degree of acceptability within the mainstream of American culture. For example, consider the still popular syndicated television show *The Dukes of Hazzard* (and its recent cinematic remake) where its fun loving, good ole boy protagonists undertake their heroic deeds in a souped-up Dodge Charger christened the General Lee and embellished with a confederate flag. In this media representation, these confederate signifiers connote rebelliousness, trickster skill, and, of course, a fun loving good ole boy demeanor but this symbolic constellation does not pull for consumers to read the Bo and Luke Duke characters as intolerant segregationists or reactionary white supremacists.

The confederate cross serves or has served as the template for the state flags of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia (until 2001), Mississippi, South Carolina (until 2002), and Tennessee. Citizen attitudes toward these state sanctioned homages to the Confederacy break along racial lines with strong support expressed among white constituencies (though certainly not all) and deep opposition expressed among black constituencies (Bonner 2002). Furthermore, the confederate flag has gained cultural legitimacy as the shibboleth for white males who embrace a libertarian, pro-military, my country right or wrong, God and guns, brand of political populism; a situation that prompted 2004 Democratic presidential candidate Howard Dean to controversially quip during his campaign that “I still want to be the candidate for guys with Confederate flags in their pickup trucks” www.usatoday.com/news/politicselections/nation/2003-11-02-dean-flag_x.htm. [1]

The legitimated but still contested meanings of the confederate flag exemplify a broader cultural phenomenon. Southern white identity myths venerate a cultural heritage that remains dogged by problematic traces of polarizing racial divisions that are carried forward as countermemories (Foucault 1977). These countermemories circulate in popular culture through the oral and written legacies of African-American culture, remembrances of the atrocities committed by white supremacist groups, and the tumultuous record of the Civil Rights movement during the 1950s and 1960s and its many indelible media images and stories of conflict. Importantly, these racial countermemories also include the stigmatized constructions of poor white Southerners as backwoods primitives who possess a debased culture, indicative of an inferior intellect and work-ethic. In sum, the racial countermemories implicit to this nexus of white identity myths not only trace to contested black-white power relationships but also to hierarchies among different classes of whiteness.

In this study, we analyze how this tension between redemptive white Southern identity myths and racial countermemories are articulated in contemporary commercial representations of the South. We give particular theoretical attention to the ways in which cultural producers' strategic choices and aims are shaped by a fusion of historically contested meanings and their contemporary ideological agendas. Our analysis takes a theoretical cue from research addressing the cultural orientations, ideological agendas, and tacit theories that cultural producers bring to bear when creating media, advertising, and servicescape content (Hall 1993; Holt 2004; Kover 1995). While these encoded ideological structures do not determine the full gamut of meanings that consumers can derive from these cultural productions, they still exert a systematic influence on the ways in which a given cultural text tends to be interpreted by specific audiences (Peñaloza 2001; Scott 1994). We further suggest that the professional activities of cultural producers are also influenced, though not fully determined, by historical and ideological forces not of their own making or choosing.

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[1] The political fallout over the Georgia state flag which occurred in 2001 and 2002 exemplifies this point. Seeking to avoid an economic boycott by the NAACP (an action which had previously damaged South Carolina's tourist trade), then Governor Roy Barnes commissioned a new state flag which did not feature the confederate cross. This decision inspired howls of protest among white voters and this backlash is widely credited with Barnes' political defeat in the 2002 elections.

Accordingly, we sought out cultural producers who were directly involved in the construction and diffusion of commercial representations pertaining to Southern culture. In making sense of these cultural producers' narratives and corresponding media representations, we came to realize that their professional outlooks (and the vision of the South they hope to cultivate in popular culture) were framed by white Southern identity myths, each carrying distinctive racial countermemories that had to be implicitly or explicitly negated owing to the exigencies of their respective marketplace contexts. These contemporary commercial constructions of the New South exhibited strong genealogical linkages to national debates over the South that have raged since the antebellum period and that have historically been reworked and continuously revamped in accord with a broad variety of commercial interests.

For purposes of communicative clarity and efficiency, we present our results in a linear format rather than one that mirrors the iterative process through which our interpretation developed. We begin by tracing out two major Southern white identity myths which have predominated in popular culture and highlighting some key ways in which these representations have been shaped and transformed by commercial considerations. We then show how this cultural background of Southern white identity myths and racial countermemories structures contemporary commercial representations of the South and generates ideological imperatives for dialectical processes of cultural remembering and selective forgetting (or negation) on the part of these cultural producers.

The Commercial Shaping of Southern White Identity Myths

A historical paradox of the Civil War is that strong grassroots identifications with Old South values and the Confederate cause arose only after the conflict ended and the antebellum plantation economy had been obliterated (Foner 1980). Prior to Lee's surrender at Appomattox, Southern nationalism had not taken hold at the grassroots level. Confederate soldiers' primarily fought to protect their home communities rather than the Confederate nation (Cobb 2005; Stampp 1950). Throughout the South, support for secession had been quite fragmented and unevenly distributed, with several subregions exhibiting strong Union sympathies throughout the war (Inscoe 2005). [2]

During the ensuing era of Congressional Reconstruction, the former Confederate states had to confront their much despised status of being a conquered and broken society whose socio-economic system, based on slave capital, was being dismantled by outsiders (the much maligned carpetbaggers). In the face of this massive social upheaval, white Southerners had a desperate need to fashion myths that could at least symbolically assuage the angst, anger, and antipathy provoked by this tidal wave of change. These mythic narratives and ideals sought to glorify the Confederate cause; reinforce and sustain identity distinctions between white Southerners and occupying Northerners (while also attenuating the class-based socio-economic chasms among poor and affluent white Southerners); imbue a sense of honor, nobility and valor in the Confederacy's military defeat; promise a revival of the South's virtues, tradition, and Cavalier spirit and, an indelicate point not to be underemphasized, ideologically reinforce the Old South racial hierarchies threatened by Reconstructionist reforms (Foner 1988; Stampp 1956).

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[2] This intra-Confederate opposition toward secession did not equate to opposition to slavery. Opponents of secession cited reasons such as fear of economic isolation and populist anxieties that the Confederacy would become an anti-democratic oligarchy, controlled by the wealthy planter class (Inscoe 2005).

An important cultural impetus to this mythic reconstruction of the South came from the organized efforts by commemorative organizations to honor Southerners who had been killed or injured during the Civil War. While this commemorative movement began during the era of Congressional Reconstruction, it blossomed throughout the 1890s and early 1900s. During this period, statues, monuments, memorial gatherings and festivities, innumerable stories of the Confederacy's great military leaders and great battles proliferated throughout the Southern states (Blight 2001, 2002; Brundage 2005). Roughly three decades after Lee's surrender, the viscerally recalled horror and emotional traumas of the Civil War had faded throughout the region and white Southerners gravitated seemingly in mass to a highly nostalgic and revisionist view of what colloquially came to be known as the war of northern aggression. Commemorative organizations drew support from these revisionist predilections, and, in a dialectic fashion, helped to amplify them by uncritically embracing mythic motifs that had been advanced by a coterie of Southern clergy, journalists, writers, educators, business leaders, and politicians who proclaimed themselves to be the redeemers of Southern virtues threatened by Northern influences.

This ideological confluence between desires to memorialize the sacrifices of fallen soldiers and to redeem the Confederate cause for purposes of economic revitalization proved to be a powerful alliance. The Redeemers gained an entrenched political foothold throughout the

South under the auspices of the Democratic Party. Moreover, white Southerners' cultural memory of the Civil War, and its causes and its legacy, were cast in stridently sectarian terms that manifested a pandemic cultural forgetting of slavery's role in sparking the conflict. From this Redeemer viewpoint, the Civil War became a struggle over constitutionally guaranteed states' right (with the confederacy standing as the patriotic defenders of constitutional principles) and, ultimately as a noble struggle to defend the honor and Christian virtues of the South (and Southern womanhood) from the defilements of Yankee infidels (Cobb 2005; Foner 1988). This mythic reconstruction of the Old South would be an important ideological instrument for overturning Reconstructionist reforms and for gradually moderating broader national animosities toward the former Confederate states (Brundage 2005).

The New South mythology that has emerged from this historical ferment manifests a degree of genealogical complexity that exceeds the scope of a journal article. In our abbreviated treatment, we highlight two ideologically related and multi-faceted identity myths that have been quite integral to commercial representations of Southern Culture: 1) the myth of the lost cause and 2) the Celtic stereotype. The first mythic narrative arose predominantly from the regionally indigenous myth making efforts undertaken by the Redeemers and other New South visionaries. In contrast, the Celtic stereotype was interjected into Southern culture through the many disparaging representations of white Southerners that circulated in the North. While many of these stigmatized associations have retained some degree of cultural currency to the present day, other elements of the Celtic stereotype have become imbued with endearing qualities that paradoxically have become beloved aspects of Southern folk culture and widely disseminated through many commercial representations of the South.

The Myth of the Lost Cause

This myth of the lost cause sought to absolve the Confederate leadership from blame (and white Southerners from guilt) for their role in the Civil War conflagration (Stampp 1967). As this identity myth became culturally diffused and elaborated, it reshaped postbellum Southerners' understanding of the war and their heritage. General Lee is the historical figure who first came to embody this mythic revision. Through the idolatry and idealization of General Lee, New South mythmakers were able to propagate a view of the confederacy as a legion of gallant Christian Knights who were serving a divine cause. This fusion of militaristic and Christian rhetoric also lies at the heart of the now clichéd proclamation that the "South will rise again!," which originally posited a direct parallel between the South's immanent destiny and the resurrection of Christ (Cobb 2005).

This messianic reconstruction of the confederacy hinged upon a virtuous framing of the Old South as an idyllic society devoted to a moral code of Christian honor and virtue that opposed the greed, avarice, and lowly mercantile interests attributed to Northern industrialists. Through this mythic formulation, the contentious aspects of the Old South's agrarian society, most particularly the brutal conditions endured by the slave class, largely disappeared from the cultural memory of white Southerners. In its place, a beatific image of Old South as a divinely sanctioned society of aristocratic planters and contented slaves increasingly came to the cultural fore (although this Uncle Remus confabulation was vociferously challenged throughout all quarters of African-American culture) (see for example Du Bois 1903). The Lost Cause myth was also endorsed and elaborated by notable New South historians, imbuing its revision history with a high degree of institutional credibility. Though later historians, most notably C. Vann Woodward (1951), would assail the historical accuracy of these portrayals, the Lost Cause myth and its complementary Cavalier legend exerted a significant sway on the regional memories of Southerners and later national memory.

Perhaps no other popular culture phenomenon exemplifies this framing effect better than *Gone with the Wind*, a record selling novel penned by Atlanta-born journalist Margaret Mitchell and later brought to the silver screen by West coast cinema magnate David O. Selznick. This landmark film swept the nation with its romantic portrayal of the Old South aristocracy and its vilifying representations of Union soldiers and Northern carpetbaggers, generating more tickets sales than any other film in history (Dirks 1996). The opening montage of this 1939 classic presented a mythic foreword that not only set the stage for the riveting tale of Scarlett O'Hara's trials and tribulations, but it also emblazoned the core themes of the Lost Cause mythology in the national consciousness:

> There was a land of Cavaliers and Cotton Fields called the Old South. Here in this pretty world, Gallantry took its last bow. Here was the last ever to be seen of Knights and their Ladies Fair, of Master and of Slave. Look for it only in books, for it is no more than a dream remembered, a Civilization gone with the wind.

In the midst of the Great Depression (which had been rife with racial and class-based conflicts) (see Cohen 2003) and with ominous developments in Europe looming on the cultural horizon, American society was primed to embrace Romanticizing narratives that offered comforting visions of abundance, splendor, decorum, and social tranquility where everyone happily accepted their God-given place. These magnanimous portrayals of the antebellum South also struck a national chord by providing a mythic vision of a pure and noble state of whiteness that assuaged dominant cultural anxieties that the rising tide of Slavic and Asian immigration could lead to the miscegenation of the white race (for an extended discussion of these anti-immigrant views see Gould 1996).

A more domesticated and feminized variation of the Lost Cause myth is the moonlight and magnolias narrative, whose key purveyors include Southern romance writers and high society historical preservationists. This latter group, who exerted considerable influence on the public face of Old South cities such as Charleston and Savannah (see Brundage 2005; Yuhl 2005), diligently worked to save Old South mansions and architectural landmarks from demolition and disrepair. In pursuit of this goal, these preservationists (who tended to be women) embedded these material artifacts of Southern culture in a network of narratives and images that suggested a by-gone world of refined manners and polite decorum, where courtship and gentrified leisure pursuits (e.g., ballroom dancing, hunting, horseback riding) occupied the days and nights of dashing aristocratic gentlemen and prim and proper belles. Through guided tours of landmarks, the creation of expository literature in pamphlets, newspapers, and books, and the display of paintings that recreated romanticized visions of life in the grand Old South, these historical preservationists helped to promote and to some extent institutionalize the moonlight and magnolias myth throughout larger Southern cities where more affluent and educated Southerners were concentrated (Cox 2003).

Representations of master-slave relationships also loom large in the moonlight and magnolias narrative, owing to its emphasis on tranquil domesticity. As discussed by Yuhl (2005), African-American slaves were consistently portrayed as noble, if childlike, peasants, who had undying affection for their aristocratic masters and who cheerfully performed the duties to which they were naturally suited. The subtext of the mythic figuration, however, finds blatant expression in strident segregationist narratives: the fall of the confederacy fundamentally disrupted the natural order of things, thereby precipitating a host of societal ills, and threatening the integrity of the nation and the white race (see Reed 2003).

The Celtic Thesis/Redneck Stereotype

The antebellum South was marked by a sharp class division among its white constituents. The affluent planter class strongly identified with England's aristocratic cavalier class, who were supposedly of Norman descent. Members of the planter class derisively labeled poor whites as rednecks or crackers in reference to their presumed genealogical links to the warring cultures of the Scottish highlands (Malone 2002). During the post-Reconstruction period, this so-called Celtic thesis became applied more generally to white Southerners by Northern elites to justify claims of cultural superiority. The thesis held that the majority of the immigrants who settled in the South were from borderlands of Britain, Ireland, and the Scottish highlands; regions whose histories had been shaped by several centuries of fighting, leading to strong cultural predispositions toward violent projections of masculinity and immediate gratification (the latter trait understood in contradistinction to the Puritan roundhead ethos of delayed gratification which fostered higher rates of saving and investment). Northerners as well as elite Southerners endorsed the view that poor Southern whites' lowly life station reflected the inherent and irrevocable character traits of the Celtic blood line including: 1) an aversion to work; 2) disregard for education and self-improvement; 3) sexual promiscuity: 4) drunkenness; 6) penchants for uncivilized music and dance; 7) reckless searches for excitement,; and 8) an unrestrained and demagogic style of religious oratory marked by strident rhetoric, unbridled emotions and flamboyant imagery (McWhiney 1989).

One of the primary proponents and promulgators of the Celtic thesis was the famed journalist, pundit, and vitriolic critic of the New South H.L. Mencken (1920) who argued, in keeping with the eugenicist thinking of the day, that the Celtic bloodline of poor whites had proliferated in the aftermath of the Civil War, fundamentally corrupting and debasing the once aristocratic planter class of the Old South. More recently, the influential conservative writer Thomas Sowell (2005) has resurrected Mencken's assertions by arguing that the major social problems facing black urban communities trace back to the deleterious influences that poor Southern whites have exerted upon the cultural heritage of African-Americans.

In popular culture representations, the racist and violent male redneck has proven to be a robust villainous icon that has been reproduced across innumerable novels, television shows, and films such as *Mississippi Burning* and *Easy Rider* (Fischer 1997; Graham 2001). These scurrilous media depictions proliferated during the 1950s and 1960s. As the nation became increasingly sensitized toward institutionalized racism and prejudicial attitudes, the unreconstructed Southern redneck provided a potent scapegoat upon which to project blame for this societal problem (Graham 2001).

During the course of the 20th century, however, the Celtic/cracker/redneck defamation also morphed into alternative forms that carried more ingratiating and ennobling connotations, such as the comical hillbilly, the fun lovin' good ole boy, and the authentic Appalachian primitive (Graham 2001; Martin 2000). For example, Southern artists, performers, and celebrities subversively incorporated disparaging portrayals of white Southerners in ironic celebrations of the South's cultural distinctiveness. These endearing inversions of the Celtic stigma are a significant means through which affirming mythic conceptions of white Southern culture have gained a foothold in the popular imagination. Popular comedians such as Jeff Foxworthy, Dan Whitney (aka Larry the Cable Guy), Elwood Smooch (the former resident clown of the Dollywood theme park and now host of his own attraction), the late Junior Sample (of *Hee Haw* fame), and Grand Ole Opry comic legends, such as Minnie Pearl and Jerry Clowers, all built their lucrative careers through hayseed antics and drawling hicksterisms that affectionately denuded these otherwise stereotypic representations of their derisive qualities. Also consider the now commonplace media portrayals of fun loving Southern good ole boys that incorporate characteristics linked to the Celtic stereotype into endearing representations of unpretentious, authentic masculinity or the man-of-action hero icon (Holt and Thompson 2004), such as Burt Reynolds's star making turn in the *Smokey and The Bandit* films.

The Celtic thesis has also been reconfigured in very marketable terms by placing a distinctively regional spin on the broader Romantic myth of the tragic artist that has long captivated consumer imaginations. In this regionalized version, working class folk geniuses are inspired by a dangerous but potent artistic muse sparked by the tension between their heartfelt aspirations to Christian piety and a damning susceptibility to temptations of the flesh expressive of the impulsive and wanton character of poor white Southerners. Most particularly, this regional myth of the divided Southerner (c.f., Cash 1941) has become quite integral to the heritage of Southern music (Malone 2004). Its two most iconic figures—Hank Williams Sr. and Elvis Presley—not only captured this struggle between redemption and back slidin' in their songs but their drug addled lives and premature deaths seemed to embody it. Echoing this Romanticized, Celtic myth, the Hank and Elvis hagiography (as well that which surrounds other God fearin/hard livin' Southern musical legends such as Jimmy Rodgers, Ira Louvin, Jerry Lee Lewis, Jimmy Martin, George Jones, and Johnny Cash) invariably states that these musical geniuses possessed an almost primal emotional vitality and hedonic compulsiveness that drove them to great heights of creative expression and to tragic depths of self-destructive indulgence.

As suggested by these examples, commercial enterprise—most notably the entertainment and tourist industries—has played a significant role in promoting these likeable, though no less stereotypical, transformations of the Celtic thesis (Kirby 1986). As Brundage (2000, p. 10) discusses, “the advent of automobile tourism has led to a commercially oriented celebration of Southern architecture, landscape, and history, and in turn, historical memory in the South has come to reflect the ubiquitous influence of tourism.” As a case in point, the atavistic hillbilly myth became central to the touristic reconstructions of Appalachian life orchestrated by the National Park Service and reproduced in resort/handicraft towns, like Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge, Tennessee, and a gamut of Appalachian-themed amusement parks scattered throughout the region (Martin 2000). The hillbilly icon also gained favorable commercial expression through television shows such as *Hee Haw*, *The Beverly Hillbillies* and more recently the Cohen Brother’s Old Tyme screwball comedy, *O Brother Where Art Thou*? (2000), whose box-office success spawned a multi-million selling soundtrack CD, two very successful concert tours featuring soundtrack performers, and a documentary film of the first tour, and pushed bluegrass legend Ralph Stanley (and West Virginian hillbilly) into the commercial limelight. Through this mythologized cultural memory, suburban/metropolitan Americans have been able to project desires for a simpler, purer, and more authentic life onto the Appalachian region and its purportedly archaic culture (Malone 2002).

These comical and/or romanticizing subversions of the Celtic stereotype have not only triumphed in media representations of the South, the tourist trade, and the canon of country music but they have also functioned as the lingua franca for regional brands. Mountain Dew, long before its X-treme posturing, began as a Hillbilly soft drink, replete with a gun totin’ moonshiner proclaiming on the bottle logo, “Yahoo Mountain Dew! It’ll Tickle Your Innards!” (see Holt 2004 for a more extensive account of how the brand’s hillbilly genealogy has shaped its current market positioning). Martha White Flour became a staple item in Southern kitchens through its regionally resonant advertising emphasis on biscuit quality and its sponsorship of the

Grand Ole Opry radio broadcasts and famed country musicians such as Flatt and Scruggs and Tennessee Ernie Ford. Moon Pie® began its branded life as a convenient, high energy snack for Kentucky coal miners and eventually, in combination with Royal Crown Cola, became the lunch time favorite of working class whites across the South.

Summary

This constellation of identity myths, and the staggering totality of their commercial incarnations, has profoundly shaped cultural perceptions of the South and white Southerners both inside and outside of the region. *Fin de siecle* New South propagandists had hoped that their idealizations of the antebellum life and the Confederate cause would be the ideological ticket to regional prosperity and renewed political power. However, these original New South propagandists would likely be dismayed that their redeeming mythology of the Old South aristocracy has lost cultural ground to a repackaged hillbilly myth so closely connected to the life experiences of poor Southern whites. For contemporary New South mythmakers seeking to present a modern and cosmopolitan image of the region, however, associations with the identities and outlooks of po' white folk (and the panoply of meanings emanating from the Celtic thesis) are, like the South's segregationist past, problematic racial countermemories that have to be rhetorically managed.

METHOD

The Informants and Interviews

In keeping with our research emphasis, we sought out participants who played a direct role in the commercial production of Southern culture and the diffusion of its identity myths (see Table 1). While our key and initial informants were producers of Southern lifestyle magazines with knowledge of the broader national media industry, we also solicited informants from the non-media industries that are typically featured in lifestyle magazines (e.g., exterior housing design, home interiors, and food production).

Insert Table 1 Here

The interviews ranged in length from a half hour to several hours. We presented our topic broadly as an interest in Southern culture and its relevance to their business endeavors. Whereas interviews with the two regional media producers were pre-arranged by appointment, remaining interviews resulted from approaching individuals during extended stays in the region. Though the specifics of their interview narratives varied on a case by case basis, all of our participants located "Southernness" in an upscale, cosmopolitan, symbolic field that deftly blended tasteful traditions with contemporary cultural amenities and whose denizens have achieved economic success in the New South economy. Their narratives also revealed sensitivities toward social contradictions and less charitable cultural meanings and connotations which posed dilemmas for advancing their preferred representations of the region.

Our analysis seeks to place the narratives of these contemporary New South mythmakers in their genealogical context and highlight the constituting relationships among 1) commercial imperatives to construct the South in a ways that appeal to targeted readers; 2) historically robust meanings, ideals, and white identity myths through which the South has been ideologically constructed (and which provide the cultural resources leveraged by these New South mythmakers); and 3) the racial countermemories which problematically haunt these representations and which are tacitly and sometimes explicitly negated in their professional reflections and strategic choices. Providing this degree of historical texture is a discursively involved affair which better lends itself to case study comparisons than aggregated thematic analyses (for examples see Fournier 1998; Holt and Thompson 2004).

In our presentation, we profile our two most influential mythmakers, at least in terms of their national recognition and audience reach. Furthermore, their cases exhibit diametrically opposed approaches to New South mythmaking. In the first case study, the mythmaking orientation is patently forward-looking, masculine in tone of address, and wedded to the public sphere: the subtext of which seeks to negate aspects of the Celtic stereotype that recall the South’s segregationist past. This publication treats Southern identity as a dynamic lifestyle choice (open to Southerners and non-Southerners alike) which attracts members of the business class through its many compelling benefits. The second case presents New South mythmaking that is nostalgic/preservationist, feminine in tone of address, and celebratory of the domestic sphere (while targeting professional working women). In this latter context, the ideological quest is to leverage the folk culture and domestic heritage of rural Southern women to create a hybrid identity—the professional woman who sustains the hallowed traditions of Southern womanhood in her public and private endeavors and who is supported by a transgenerational sisterhood that transcends class hierarchies and divisions.

HOW NEW SOUTH MYTHMAKERS NEGATE RACIAL COUNTERMEMORIES

Our analysis features the narratives of two editors of major Southern lifestyle magazines, which we reference with the pseudonyms *Southland Today Magazine* and *Southern Heritage Celebration*. Rob, the informant for *Southland Today*, is as an editor employed by an international corporation, that has produced a Southern lifestyle magazine for almost forty years, Candice, the informant for *Southern Heritage Celebration*, is the editor and owner of a mid-sized regional company, whose entrepreneurially entrée into Southern lifestyle publications occurred just prior to the new millennium. Both were born and raised in the Deep South. Their respective magazines target the middle income and upper middle income population segments of the South.

Notably, their companies are engaged in the production of Southern culture through multiple publications (e.g., other magazines, special issues, annual books) and event marketing (e.g., Southern-style cooking classes, speaker-based events celebrating the Southern lifestyle, Southern-themed ball-room dining).

Both magazines have attained national visibility, though through different positioning strategies. *Southland Today* strives to attract advertising revenue from a broad spectrum of national (rather than merely regional) corporate sponsors. In contrast, *Southern Heritage Celebration*'s strategy is oriented toward building a large national subscription base (inclusive of Southern expatriates and those who are drawn to the Southern lifestyle). *Southland Today,* which premiered in 1966, is recognized in the media field for its long-term survival and extensive subscription base of over 2.7 million, with a total readership exceeding 16 million. *Southern Heritage Celebration* is noted for its rapid growth since its premier issue in 1999. It is the flagship publication of a media company whose annual revenues have risen from $2.7 million in 2002 to $14 million in 2005 and whose staff has expanded from 18 to 85 employees. Owing to their national visibility and popularity among business and civic leaders, *Southland Today* and *Southern Heritage Celebration* have become influential nodes in the broader media network that shapes public perceptions of the South and Southerners.

Southern Identity as a Flight from the Lost Cause (and the Negation of Racial Inequity)

Southland Today carries forward an ideological agenda that originated with post-reconstruction New South architects, such as Wade Hampton, who believed that the South could only regain its deposed economic stature by building its industrial base. Throughout the South, this proposed economic shift away from traditional agricultural interests was met with impassioned resistance because it threatened to collapse salient cultural differences to the reviled

North. In this sense, the economic incentives for modernizing the Southern economy ran afoul of the Lost Cause myth (Brundage 2005). Though this idolatry of the Confederacy had helped recalcitrant Southerners overturn federally imposed socio-political reforms, it also sanctified the Old South's plantation economy and imbued all vestiges of the Northern economic system with demonized connotations. While one segment of Southern society railed against Northernization and the encroachment of Yankee Mammonism, many of its political leaders aggressively promoted a modernized New South shaped by "conservative business, financial, and industrial interests" (Cobb 2005, p. 71).

The narratives of *Southland Today* have globalized the historical terms of this New South rhetoric. With the intra-regional battle over economic modernization long settled, the Old South now only exists as a problematic countermemory for those who are seeking to compete in the global economy for new business investments and employment opportunities. The New South mythmakers who control *Southland Today*'s representations are quite sensitive to the ignominious connotations that have historically clung to Southern culture. One of their primary ideological objectives is to replace the backward and racist stigma carried by the Old South with cosmopolitan and progressive associations:

Rob: We [at AOL-Time Warner Inc.] have a magazine called Sunset…if you look at Sunset today it is sort of the real world of the West. And if you say "California" to most people, there's a real glamorous side. You think glamour first and reality is about a thousand miles away. Think about that culture. The culture of California is probably as diverse as any region of the country. Yet the first image of California, is this, it's of the culture that's been articulated. And I want to say that California did a great job, "settled by hardworking people," "the glamour culture of California." When you think of California, you think of beautiful cities, you don't think of the other side. But when you say Alabama, what's your first image of Alabama if you haven't lived here. Now what California's fighting and what Alabama is fighting in the world of culture, of thought, Alabama starts at a totally different base point. And we've recognized that we have to start at a base point and therefore we become defensive of the base point we have.….I think when you start talking about in the world of business how, there's an old line a person said

> to me one time and I really liked it "Alabama is defensive of its culture because it feels like it has to be. Many states don't feel they have to defend their culture." Well if you think about it a minute, that bore probably out of the media. You know, look at the culture. Alabama is a good example, we see around any kind of um, well just take Martin Luther King's birthday, a national holiday, by the way that's totally respected here, maybe even embraced more here than other parts of country. The first thing we're going to expect in the national media is some replay of the Civil Rights movement. Rarely do we get the next play. We get where Birmingham was, but how many times do you see the counterpoint of where Birmingham is today. See where I'm coming from?

Peñaloza (2000, 2001) discusses the important role played by highly romanticized origin myths in commercial representations of the American West. A similar appeal to a glorious antebellum past had at one time been a defining element of the New South creed. However, culturally prominent countermemories of the 1960's Civil Rights struggles have undercut the credibility of these idealizations for *Southland Today*'s anticipated readers. As a result, Rob is particularly keen to actively counterbalance what he deems to be a preponderance of biased and outmoded representations of the South in the national media. In so doing, Rob's strategic actions continue in the long line of New South historians, journalists, and writers who have been defending the South's honor from national besmirchment ever since the time of Congressional Reconstruction. However, the terms of this rhetorical battle have been fundamentally shifted by the Civil Rights movement and the enduring images of the Jim Crow South that have been brandished into cultural memory:

> Rob: We a long time ago in *Southland Today* quit fighting the War, as they say in the South, that's just not our job. The nicest thing about the culture of the South I think, and there is a huge, Birmingham is a great example actually of evolution. The Civil Rights struggles of the 60's in Birmingham, are still in many people's minds that have never visited the city, the cultural image of the city. Don't you agree? Where in fact, if you look at the city in context, it has one of the more affluent African American communities, highly educated, very much a part of the fabric and culture throughout the society, in Birmingham, Alabama, in almost every nuance of the society. I think people are shocked when they realize that the

> driving factor in Birmingham, Alabama today in the economy is not an Old South economy but it's high tech medicine. Just recently, I think the [University of Alabama] heart hospital was ranked number, 3, 4, or 5 in the nation. Well, you don't think of Birmingham, Alabama as being a center of heart research, you don't think of Birmingham, Alabama as being one of the five leading institutions in the world in AIDS research.

When this quote is interpreted in its genealogical context, emic protestations aside, it becomes clear that regional rifts over racial politics are still very much in play in this recitation about the progressive state of the modern South. Rob's narrative disavows critical representations of the South's segregated history on the grounds that they are one-sided and misleading. This ideological framing erases the presence of poor and undereducated Southerners, placing them out of view of the demographic landscape. In their place looms a contemporary embodiment of the New South Cavalier: the egalitarian, highly educated, and dispassionately rational professional who has completely trumped Celtic stigma. By using unflattering mass media representations of Southern culture as an ideological foil, Rob's modernizing reconstruction of Cavalier idealizations can be understood as staking out a balanced (or at least counterbalancing) position.

In the national news media, stories about the Deep South are often sparked by anniversaries of landmark historical events of the Civil Rights movement (e.g., Martin Luther King's birthday, the 16th Street Baptist Church bombings, and the police brutality at the Edmund Pettus Bridge which prompted the March 21st 1965, Selma-to-Montgomery March). These annual reports and replays of archival images could be seen as legitimate and necessary tributes to those who perilously fought against institutionalized racism. However, New South mythmakers intuitively recognize the ways in which these oft repeated media images can impact Americans' perceptions of the region—via judgment heuristics such as vividness and availability (Tversky and Kahnemann 1982). From Rob's ideological standpoint, media remembrances of the Civil Rights movement over represent images of the segregationist Old South and erroneously anchor national perceptions of the region to a historical moment that has long since passed. Time and time again, Rob protests that the South has evolved to such an extent that its troubled racial history is now irrelevant and that the national media should focus on its present socio-economic accomplishments and promising future trajectories.

Rob is attuned to any signs or evidence that can support his ideological claim that the cultural fixation on the Civil Rights movement precludes non-Southerners from understanding the egalitarian reality of the contemporary South. For example, he interprets market research on their readership demographics as evidence that the Old South's color barriers have been broken by the forces of socio-economic progress: "Fourteen percent of the readership of *Southland Today Magazine* is African-American, which mirrors the middle class population base of the African-American community in our seventeen states." Rob further reports that this led *Ebony*, published by a division of *Time* Inc. Magazines, to run a "cover wrap" on *Southland Today* offering a subscription: "the important thing there is, through their research not through ours, *Southland Today* is a very, very well accepted magazine in the African-American middle class community…we've been knowing that for years [from our own research of our readership]. Sort of shocking. Shocking to somebody outside the South."

For Rob, the popularity of *Southland Today* among middle-class African-Americans stands as prima facie evidence that the New South agenda has been enthusiastically embraced by the former targets of region's segregationist policies. This not so subtle subtext of Rob's comment is that African Americans have moved beyond the South's segregationist past so why can't the rest of the nation. The irony of this position, however, is that lifestyle magazines such as *Southland Today* have often been derided for equating the New South with an indistinct, homogenized culture or the so-called “No South” (Cobb 1999).

As discussed by Cobb (2005a), these magazines cater to a sensibility that reflects an increasingly affluent Southern middle class that is located in the suburbs rather than small towns. *Southland Today* presents elaborate images of refined taste and the domestic good life, though garnished with Southern touches, but which would be at home in publications such as *Martha Stewart Living* or any other lifestyle magazine which adheres to upper-middle class standards of propriety and sophistication. These generically cosmopolitan representations lend themselves to a middle class appeal that can cross racial lines. What is erased is the folk culture of poor White Southerners, which have given the region much of recognizable Southern distinctiveness. For example, major Southern lifestyle magazines once would feature working class culinary items like Frito pie. However, these ritual acknowledgements of the South’s white trash cultural heritage have long since disappeared from the pages of *Southland Today*.

Rob laments the paucity of contemporary media images that point to the South’s socio-economic progress and forward looking initiatives. These perceptions reveal an acute sensitivity toward documentary images that recall the South’s segregationist past and, conversely, a surprising disregard for the many popular culture representations that cast Southern culture in a more favorable or endearing light. One likely reason is that these latter representations are predominantly associated with working class (or low brow) white culture, which is quite different from the socio-economic aura that this cultural producer is seeking to imbue to the Southern region. Like our other New South mythmakers, Rob is ideologically predisposed to elide the culture of working class Southern whites in his progressive and cosmopolitan visions of the region. However, he construes the region’s Civil Rights conflicts (and intense resistance to integration during the 1960s) as an almost indelible history that haunts the New South and blinds non-Southerners to the attractive qualities of the region's contemporary business and cultural climate.

As a promoter of investments in the South, Rob closely monitors the business press with a critical eye toward any signs that old South stigmas are being unfairly leveraged by his Northern mythmaking competitors to impugn the economic achievements of the New South:

> Rob: There's a real fine [example] an article about two or three months ago that was a real slam business-wise on how did Alabama attract, well really now four major automotive manufacturing facilities have come into Alabama. The derogatory statement that was made was akin to having slave labor, in terms of Alabama's low cost of employment compared to the northern market which is highly unionized, those plants are strongly unionized- a very derogatory remark made about the state of Alabama. He also used, I think the guy said "it's a culturally behind state." [And this is a national pub?]. Yeah, a national pub. It was one of the development persons in another state who had missed things. Well the fact of the matter is, if you divide Alabama economically, the first two automotive car companies that came into Alabama of significance, Mercedes Benz and Honda, came into the highest socioeconomic venues in the state. I mean the northern half of the state economically has the lower unemployment and the higher per capita income…They didn't go into the Black Belt, you'll have to explain it to your students, it's related to the soils. But I think those kinds of statements, with very little business knowledge behind them, the fact of the matter is it sort of preserves this antiquated cultural thought…And it very much deserves a need to talk about the good things of the South….. We are now a complete generation out of the Civil Rights movement, we're two generations off the land. The economic development of the South, the South is going to be the economic region of the country, number one in retail sales, number one in imported cars, number one in luxury cars. You take all those number one facts and we've got great data sheets on that that show all that.

For Rob, Mercedes' and Honda's decisions to locate major manufacturing facilities in Alabama provide incontrovertible evidence that the South has entered a new and munificent socio-economic age. In this context, the slavery reference he condemns is particularly stinging because it rhetorically links the New South economy with the most egregious connotations of the Old South. While the characterization of Alabama's non-unionized labor force as slave labor is an oversimplifying epithet, Rob's strict separation between the Old and New South economies is no less problematic or ideologically selective in its historical reference. We provide a more extensive analysis of this passage because it encapsulates the ideological rifts which have impeded constructive dialogues between New South mythmakers and their critics.

Historically, non-Unionized labor has been the norm in the South, with several states having passed "right to work" laws that make union organizing quite difficult. Little doubt exists in the business literature that the prospects of circumventing labor union wage standards, benefit packages, and work restrictions had fueled the South's Sun Belt Boom during the 1970s and 1980s (Eckes 2005; Guthrie-Shimizu 2005). This regional divide between the unionized North and the right-to-work South is a cultural artifact whose history traces back to the agrarian basis of the South's socio-economic hierarchies and their institutionalization in social patterns, social mores, and political actions. For example, the antebellum South, in comparison to the North, had a much lower reliance on skilled trade labor and no significant guild tradition to function as a proto-form of labor organizing (Foner 1980). Anti-union sentiments were also fomented in the region during the era of Congressional Reconstruction by the so-called Redeemers (as keepers of the Old South status quo) who, under the ideological guise of keeping the South free from the manipulative clutches of Northern reprobates, vociferously opposed the efforts by populist organizers to forge economic alliances among working class whites (and in some cases between poor whites and newly freed blacks) (Brundage 2005).

Rob's casual reference to Alabama's most impoverished region—the so-called Black Belt—also invokes a countermemory of Old South social hierarchies. The term does indeed conventionally refer to the unusually dark hue of the soil in this region. However, owing to this highly fertile soil, the Black Belt region has long been the State's agricultural center and the area which had the highest concentrations of slave ownership (Foner 1980). Since the end of Reconstruction, the sharecropper system has reigned supreme in this area, creating an institutionalized and quite enduring cycle of poverty (linked to factors such as low investments in education, lower rates of literacy, and low expectations among those born into poverty) (Flynt 2004).

As previously discussed, national media coverage of news stories, past and present, along with mass culture films have often projected a maligning image of Southerners as poor, uneducated, pathologically parochial, irresponsibly impulsive, and culturally backward. In response to this tribal stigma (e.g., Goffman 1963), a strident defensiveness has been built into the mythic structure of the New South creed that paradoxically reproduces the clannish “us versus them” mindset which is stereotypically attributed to Southern whites. The preceding passages show the tacit influence exerted by this historically burnished defensiveness. A magazine designed to promote an ideal of Southern living is not the medium where one would expect to find nuanced discussions about the relationships between the Old and New South economies. In the context of an interview setting, it would be fairly easy for a cultural producer, with extensive knowledge of the relevant economic issues, to reflect upon the socio-economic complexities and problems at work in the New South economy. However, Rob speaks as a New South propagandist who declares the South’s socio-economic history as irrelevant to present day circumstances while proclaiming its corresponding (and bowdlerized) cultural heritage as a differential advantage in the marketplace. By internalizing this ideological logic, New South myth makers are less likely to acknowledge or address the social problems, linked to race and class, which have continued to create significant disparities between the socio-economic realities faced by a broad swath of Southerners and these munificent portrayals of the progressively modernized South.

Southern Identity as a Reclaimed Feminine Tradition (and the Negation of Intra-racial Class Differences)

Southern Heritage Celebration presents an alternative to the metropolitanized, masculinized, and secularized South which graces the pages of *Southland Today* and other like media forums that tout the New South as a prospering, business-friendly region. A biblical passage graces an early page of each issue of *Southern Heritage Celebration*: "Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies. Proverbs 31:10." Drawing predominantly women readers, half of whom work outside the home, *Southern Heritage Celebration* is a feminine lifestyle magazine spun as a civic crusade to revive traditions of Southern femininity in a manner that is compatible with the demands of modern living. Consistent with this mission, *Southern Heritage Celebration* seeks to attract advertisements from small businesses throughout the region which are predominantly owned and operated by women.

In *Southern Heritage Celebration,* Southernness is not lightly accented as in *Southland Today*, but rather elaborately performed as a distinctively feminine mode of practice. Rather than distancing itself from the culture of poor Southern whites, Southern Heritage Celebrations canonizes and reconstructs this legacy in ennobling, feminine, and communal terms designed to inculcate a sense of sisterhood among Southern women that transcends class lines. Yet, this collective discourse is targeted only to the more affluent women of the region and it converts the domestic skills and devout outlooks associated with poor white southerners into symbolic resources for therapeutic identity work.

Consistent with this ideological appeal to a hallowed feminine heritage, this magazine venerates consumption/cultural skills that interject Old South sensibilities into contemporary lifestyles. Most notable among these are displaying a cultivated graciousness with the aid of select consumption objects; proper planning and hosting of parties and home-based socials; semi-formal family meals with intricate place settings; occasion-based creations of home interiors (e.g., themed celebrations); using natural items in home décor; creatively combining old and new products and practices; and Southern-style cooking, all adapted to the time demands of modern life:

> Candice: It's about Southern cooking, it's family cooking, it's the way we were brought up. It's not for those who are looking for another low fat, low carb, low this, It's mama's and grandmama's cooking. Because so many young women want to learn to cook good food, family food. Now do we want to eat like that every day? No. Do we cook everyday? No. But when we want to do something really spectacular…..

Eschewing the forward-looking orientation of *Southland Today*, *Southern Heritage Celebration* is unabashedly nostalgic in its many odes to Southern traditions and the virtues of the Old South. In the following passage, magazine editor and founder Candice elaborates on her view that respect and appreciation for Southern traditions are intimately linked to an antebellum ideal of Southern womanhood:

> Candice: The people who were skeptical [of the concept of the magazine] were the people up North because the word "lady" was an affront to them… We came through the bra burning generation, with the Joan Baez and the whole nine yards. The term "Ms." was coined when I was growing up. You were not "Miss" any more, that feminine distinction that you were single. Now that word, Ms. is perfectly acceptable. But yes, the term "lady" stirs your heart to (draws in a deep breath) "Oh wow." To be considered a lady or called a lady, it's one of the highest compliments that anyone can pay you in the South. It's like saying "yes ma'am" to your mother… A lot of people have an affront to that, having your children say "yes ma'am." They think that you're mistreating your children. The reality of it is in the South it's a sign of good manners. It doesn't mean that mama beat us and put us in a barn until we said "ma'am." You esteemed your mother if you said "yes ma'am," or your Dad when you said "yes sir." That's the way we were raised to respect their positions as the heads of the household. So Southern manners and Southern traditions as we know them today, we're celebrating them. It's great to be a woman, it's great to wear lipstick, and high heels, and dress up to go somewhere, and have the girls over for a luncheon and set a beautiful table, or

> because it's your family supper. That's just what we did growing up. And it has been accepted with huge acceptance and huge revival because it's like a re-spiriting of the South, the inner working, the inner stream that flows through the South is that tradition.

As McPherson's (2003) discusses, the enshrinement of Southern womanhood has been quite integral to the New South Mythology: "Southern women [as] embodiment of [the] graces [of the region], are what the South as a whole has cultivated; they *are* Southern culture" (p. 19, citing Baym 1992, p.193). Through this mythic construction, Southern womanhood has become a fetishized and highly marketable ideal which symbolizes the immanent rebirth of a vanquished culture. Like many mythic formulations, this construction of Southern womanhood melds two seemingly contradictory ideals: resiliency (which maps onto underlying hopes for cultural resurrection) and fragility (which historically has provided a symbolic resource for the construction of Southern male chivalry and conversely, the demonization of Northerners and sexualized non-whites). Scarlett O'Hara emerged as the defining icon of Southern womanhood in no small part because this character so fully embodied this peculiar blend of steely resolve and emotional and physical delicacy. A more recent dissemination of this paradoxical construction of Southern womanhood is Robert Harling's off-Broadway play (and subsequent star-studded motion picture) *Steel Magnolias* in which socially besieged women are revealed to possess inner strength and a triumphant spirit.

Southern Heritage Celebration's steel magnolias construction of the Southern lady is specifically targeted to a particular age cohort: babyboom women who as young adults opted for a different identity path than their mothers and grandmothers and who are now nostalgic about Southern traditions that once seemed anathema to prevailing feminist ideals of emancipation and equality (e.g., Brownmiller 1986). Much like New South mythmakers who erase the complexities of racial inequality from their representations, Candice's rendition of the feminist movement erases its political struggles for socio-economic equality. Instead, she pitches feminism as a regrettable call to abandon the virtues of femininity:

> Candice: For so many years in my generation, we tried to erase the gender lines between men and women. Women to compete in a man's world dressed in suits, and almost had to forsake quote "your femininity" to be a success. And after 20 years of that, women are saying "You know what, I can be successful and be a woman, and be a lady." "Lady" is not a slam term for a mindless bimbo who does nothing but eat bon bons and shop. Being a lady is a mindset, and it's a way that we approach our lives from a graciousness. You can be successful and be feminine and wear beautiful heels and a beautiful dress and you don't have to come in here in combat boots and forsake all that makes us a woman.

Southern Heritage Celebration encodes this ladylike mindset through repeated references to the gentility of the Old South. For example, one issue featured a series of stories on the making of *Gone with the Wind*, with photographs of Vivien Leigh (aka Scarlett O'Hara), covering several pages. Against this mythic backdrop, *Southern Heritage Celebration*'s intricate instructions on matters of lifestyle and taste become linked to a commemorative and preservationist agenda that has been the historical province of upper class Southern women (Brundage 2005). These preservationist impulses have often been closely coupled to commercial considerations via efforts to build a tourist trade around Southern culture's handicraft traditions, performative arts, and historical landmarks and events. While such touristic considerations still play a significant role in the commercial shaping of Southern culture, the commercial imperative now encompasses the media trade and its need to build readership and advertising revenue through an idealized visage of the Grand Old South that cast aside unsettling genealogical ties to segregation and class divisions among Southern whites.

In seeking to build a national and even global readership, *Southern Heritage Celebration* promulgates an updated and consumerist version of the moonlight and magnolias myth in which a refined clientele of Southern ladies and gentlemen enjoy a cornucopia of fine restaurants, museums, and cosmopolitan retail settings:

> Candice: It's really funny, This came about [the concept of *Southern Heritage Celebration*], when I was reading, I think it was *Martha Stewart* or *Victoria* or one of them and I said out loud in my office "I love these magazines but the places that are featured, the things that are featured are all found in New York or California. Why doesn't someone feature the beautiful things of the South, the places, the restaurants, the boutiques, the museums." And I answered my own question. You need to. You know what, because if you don't live here you don't understand it. You don't have that passion. If you were raised here you have a passion, Southern roots. So that's how this magazine came about….. So rather than trying to produce magazines that [suggest] we are trying to move away, we produce magazines that celebrate who we are.

This celebratory and mannered representation neatly cleaves away the socio-politically contentious aspects of Southern culture—no confederate flag waving rebels here—and its stigmatized associations with poor whites. However, it also elides the historical reasons that Southerners have been passionate defenders of their besieged cultural heritage and their identities as Southerners. Absent the subtext of these white trash/hillbilly dispersions, Candice's statement seems almost incongruous. For example, why would someone need to be raised in the South to appreciate the region's premier restaurants and shopping venues?

Underlying this seemingly banal endorsement of the South's cultural sophistication is a quite interesting ideological move. Candice's reflection trades on white Southerners' countermemory of Mencken's damning Celtic thesis (i.e., of course those Yankees would not believe that us hicks would have nice restaurants). Her editorial choices are shaped by the knowing presumption that Southern traditions are subject to a disapproving national gaze. She takes credit for reviving regional terms like "lady" and "yes ma'am" while commenting on the national approbation of such references as antiquated and offensive. In doing so, her redemptive construction of Old South mores necessitates a seemingly habituated defense against the Celtic stereotype: as she states, “it doesn’t mean that mamma beat us and put us in the barn until we said ‘yes ma’am.’”

Candice’s editorial choices play to both her regional and non-regional audiences but rely on regional cultural memory to elicit different and emotion-laden interpretation between insiders and outsiders. For her national and global readership, these representations connote that the stigma of Celtic stereotype need not apply to upscale, highly feminized Southern women. To her regional audience however, these representations subtly signal that this publication is produced by genuine Southerners who know and appreciate that the heritage of more affluent Southerners may only be one or two generations removed from the cultural world of poor whites such that they are sensitive to “the hidden injuries of class” (Sennett and Cobb 1972). While the magazine’s readers are largely middle or upper class, Candice states that many of its readers still identify with the cultural mores of the rural South from which they may only be one or two generations removed. Accordingly, this magazine draws upon the emotions tied to these hybrid-class affinities to forge a regional group identity that refashions an ideology of Southern womanhood steeped in the Old South and Lost Cause mythos.

Throughout her interview, Candice makes rhetorical gestures to insulate these heritage celebrations from the more problematic aspects of the Old South legacy. For example, she states that her magazine is geared to the life experiences of baby boomers that “grew up in the Old South. I’m not talking about Old South that was slave racist; I’m talking about the Old South where Sunday dinner was Sunday dinner.” Yet, Sunday dinners are not an exclusive province of Southern culture and conversely, the region’s cultural distinctiveness can not be disentangled from its historical grounding in racial segregation and class based hierarchies which created a pronounced social differentiation between the gentile world of Southern aristocrats and the economically embattled world of poor whites.

The ideological negation of class difference is also manifest in Candice's claim that her magazine's representations of Southern identity and feminine culture are inclusive ones that only require a certain degree of will and creative adaptation, the latter of which Candice regards as a great class leveler:

> Candice: [Being a Southern lady] transcends all economic levels. It doesn't matter. Any person can have a gracious lifestyle regardless of where you see yourself economically. For example, we tend to think, "I'm not rich. I don't live in a big ole house, so therefore I can't set a beautiful table." And we show table settings of all price ranges, and we show picnics with paper plates. And here's a daisy that you pick outside and put in a bottle and it makes a beautiful centerpiece. And, it can be Queen Ann's lace that you pick off the side of the road. It could be a daisy or a beautiful fall leaf that you put in a bottle, something you might consider a discard but used creatively. A clay flower pot is 49 cents, how you can take it and serve bread in it. …It's not about who has the most or who buys the most. It's about taking what you have and using it to the fullest.

The up-from-nothing biographies of the Southern women entrepreneurs featured in *Southern Heritage Magazine* lend a populist aura to the magazine's lifestyle admonitions. These high profile women are described as hailing from working class or tenant farming upbringings, and who in the face of no "traditional" work skills or experience (i.e., work experience outside the home), were driven to start businesses that trade on their domestic skills tied to Southern culture. Southern women like Paula Deen, Deborah Ford, and Dixie Carter are set up as iconic models of Southern cultural production through feature articles honoring them as "Southern Lady of the Year," and highlighting their humble beginnings and many struggles. Through this ideological framing, *Southern Heritage Celebration* subtly places a modern spin on the narrative of traditional Southern womanhood whereby inner strength is now manifested as an indomitable entrepreneurial spirit. This framing of acquired class status morally justifies the economic privileges of white Southern women who are now quite distanced from the tenant farming/working-class milieu that imbues this recovered heritage with an aura of authenticity and populist appeal.

In similar ideological vein, the magazine's issue closing resource guides, which provide locations where its featured products can be purchased, routinely intermingles discount stores (e.g., Kmart, Wal-Mart) and upscale department stores and boutiques. Given that the targeted subscribers are women earning six-figure incomes, this multi-status retailing mix is likely a symbolic gesture to accommodate the emotions of some who, as a function of their upbringing, at times feel working class despite their attained economic affluence (Nenga 2003).

However, *Southern Heritage Celebration* recognizes that many of facets of targeted readers' lifestyles and professional pursuits are incompatible with traditional Southern feminine responsibilities of home-cooking, home-entertaining, and gardening. Thus, its mission of preserving important vestiges of Southern culture is fused with contemporary imperatives for time saving convenience:

> Candice: But we only do things that are easy. We don't do any thing hard. We're busy. Women are busy. So the things we do in all our magazines have to be easy to prepare, easy to fix. Here it is, here's how to do it. A very simple approach. … Also it's about the food. Here it is. Here's how to do it. Southerners season their food, we love salt and pepper and onions. And so okra, fried green tomatoes, there are certain things found in the South and we've taken them and fried everything. I say we fry everything but salad. The reality is so many people have forgotten and never learned the recipes that were handed down through generations. And this magazine is about that.

In *Southern Heritage Celebration's* portrayals, Southern womanhood is now besieged by a plethora of mundane impositions that accompany the frenetic and multiphrenic nature of modern lifestyles. The magazine's repeated discourse of traditional home cooking and craft made easy ideologically invoke ideals of self-sufficiency, just folks populism, and autonomy from the seductive trappings of crass commercialism. As the heritage of the rural poor, skills at quilting, pottery, basket making, and sewing, emerged from the scarcity of money and the abundance of time that existed in the off seasons following planting and harvesting. Whereas these domestic skills originally functioned as necessity-driven improvisations by women lacking economic capital to buy needed goods (Flynt 1979), these recovered traditions now function as lifestyle improvisations by affluent women who feel that their identities and quality of life would be enhanced by recovering these archaic forms of regionalized cultural capital.

This ideological representation of inclusiveness and communal connectedness—stemming from re-connecting with family traditions, supporting and celebrating women, and finding commonality in traditions of female domestic skill—diverts attention from the many vestiges of class/racial status differences that are encoded in the magazine's lifestyle recommendations. Etiquette guides describing placements and use of various eating utensils whether or not these are discussed as "silverware" or the more class inclusive language of "flatware," have little relevance to the daily lives of the South's poor, and the production or purchase of handcrafts, despite their origins in the culture of the poor, rely upon the high-paying salaries of modern professional jobs (Bobel 2002). Yet, the effusive discourse on feminine communality, class inclusiveness, and saving the heritage upheld until now by poor rural Southern women, pulls for nostalgic readings that ignore the class/race privileging instantiated in these representations.

Southern Heritage Celebration transforms the traditional ideals of Southern womanhood into an ideology of feminine entrepreneurship. This ideological aim, however, also places an inclusive feminine face on the more contentious realities of upper-class privilege and its ennobling appropriation of the folk cultures and entrepreneurial survival skills of poor Southern women. It studiously avoids the control-oriented vernacular typically used in national media's master narrative on lifestyle management—which emphasizes themes of making conscientious choices, weighing options, setting priorities, and seeking balance—which is most germane to a rarified strata women holding upper level professional positions rather than the vast majority of working women (Warner 2002, p. 260-261). Instead, *Southern Heritage Celebration* connotes intimacy and personalization through a variety of rhetorical means, such as publishing extended biographies that introduce business owners; presenting business partnerships as originating in friendships or leading to them; not interspersing advertisements into the editorial content but confining these to the inside covers; and encouraging more personalized interactions, such as the occasional use of hand written letters as opposed to e-mail. In this way, *Southern Heritage Celebration* positions its vision of Southern tradition as a means for women to combat the dehumanizing and depersonalized aspects of the hypercompetitive business world.

Employing a mode of address that is sweet and sentimental, stories that are communal and encouraging, and images that are nostalgic and celebratory, this magazine plays to Southern women babyboomers' aspirations for upward mobility, their ambivalence about diverging from regional notions of traditional family life, and their habituated defensiveness toward the stigmatized aspects of the Celtic Myth. This ideological construction promotes a sense of sisterly solidarity with all white Southern women and promises compatibility between their regional and professional identities. In so doing, this magazine also symbolically unites two factions of American women (women working at home and women working outside the home), which have been constructed by national media as being "at war" (see Warner 2002).

Y'ALL COME

Every colonized people-in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality- finds itself face to face with …the culture of the mother country. The colonized is elevated…in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards. - Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks, p. 18*

Ideological constructions of the South and white Southern identities lie squarely at the center of the United States factious racial history (Kirby 1986). Historian Howard Zinn (1964), writing at a time of great Civil rights unrest, perspicuously noted that the South could have easily served as a national mirror reflecting pandemic discrepancies between the American Dream and the everyday realities of racism, prejudice, and class-based inequities that existed in all quarters of society. By constructing this gamut of societal ills as moral failings unique to the Southern region, however, the national media and much of the nation had a ready rhetorical means to circumvent these unsettling national self-reflections. From this standpoint, a prominent ideological function of the South, in the broader national discourse has been to play the role of the symbolic upon which problematic aspects of the national character could be projected.

While our New South mythmakers attempt to conjure a regional cultural memory that positively resonates with their target audience, they also recognize that this cultural legacy is plagued by countermemories that carry undesirable and stigmatizing meanings. *Southland Today's* sunnily optimistic and forward-looking posturing can be viewed as a strategy of erasing the Celtic Myth stigma, through a discourse about the progressive, egalitarian, and cosmopolitan New South as populated by a sophisticated, rational, responsible, and enterprising citizenry. In this chamber-of-commerce friendly portrayal, the New South is a bustling center of economic opportunity offering many enticing cultural amenities linked to the depoliticized conventions of Southern hospitality and regional cuisines. This ideological representation further connotes that the South's segregationist legacy lacks contemporary relevance and should no longer mar perceptions of the region. By privileging present and future trajectories over fidelity to tradition and respect for heritage, this ideological framing is designed to attract business investment and national advertisers (particularly for high end luxury goods) by asserting that enlightened cosmopolitan values have now trumped the parochial attitudes which once dominated the South, hence creating a skilled workforce and a lucrative regional market for a broad gamut of upscale goods and services.

Southern Heritage Celebration more directly reckons with the broader scope of the region's history by acknowledging the rural genesis of the New South and its upwardly mobile constituency, but it does so through appeals to refined lifestyles, creative adaptation, and entrepreneurial acumen, suggesting that Southern traditions have now transcended their humble but virtuous origins. This magazine's communal, familial, salt-of-earth, just folks rhetoric romanticizes and sentimentalizes rural and working class white poverty as a noble, essential, and invaluable foundation of Southern traditions while rendering invisible the brutal socio-economic realities of rural poverty that continue to place poor and affluent Southern whites on very different life trajectories. To negate these racial countermemories, *Southern Heritage Celebration* uses biographical stories recounting the economic success of individual women as a means to render the culture of poor whites, not as a sphere of fundamentally limited opportunities, but as a character building feature of the Southern heritage that facilitates entrepreneurial success.

The consumer resonance generated by a given marketplace myth is always contingent upon prevailing socio-cultural conditions, and societal changes can strain a mythic narrative to the point that it no longer has relevance to a targeted consumer group (Holt 2004; Thompson 2004). Marketers manage this relevance problem by continually adapting their appropriated cultural myths to the cultural complexities, anxieties, and identity needs currently experienced by their customer and employee base (Holt 2004; Peñaloza 2001; Tian and Belk 2004). Our analysis of New South mythmakers highlights two different strategies through which this revisionist process can be undertaken.

Southland Today's strategy can be characterized as symbolic gentrification. This rhetorical strategy metaphorically parallels the so-called Bulldozer revolution of the 1940s and 1950s which dramatically altered the architectural face of the urban south and which also corresponded to an emerging intra-regional chasm between the cultural outlooks and values of poor rural whites and white urban professionals (see Reed 1983). Eschewing appeals to the Cavalier ideal and the hallowed traditions of the Grand Ole South, *Southland Toda*y situates the South in a discourse of cosmopolitan consumption that has considerable currency throughout the upper echelons of the global economy (Holt 1998; Sassen 1998; Thompson and Tambyah 1999). *Southland Today* treats Southern identity as a dynamic lifestyle choice (open to Southerners and non-Southerners alike) which attracts members of the business class through its many compelling benefits. *Southland Today* speaks to individuals as rational individuals and keeps the conversation on decidedly professional though quite congenial, rather than personal terms.
In this formulation, the south is only The South by virtue of its geographic location and the quintessential inherent friendliness and buoyant hospitality of those who live in the region.

If taken at face value, these representations would seem to be fashioning an entirely new mythos of the Southern region expressive of market populism and its premise that the free market maximizes economic opportunities for all (Frank 2000). However, in this context, these cosmopolitan and market populist representations are tacit confrontations with the Celtic stigma (and most particularly its iconic expression in the stereotyped image of the racist, ignorant, violent, and coarse redneck) and the still quite living history of the traumatic social conflicts posed by the 1960s Civil Rights movement. In this way, the magazine's photo layouts and stories cohere around the tacit ideological message that the rationalizing forces of commercial exchange and economic development have triumphed over the last lingering vestiges of the backward South and its irrational aversion to social progress

Southern Heritage Celebration is pursuing a strategy that bears marked similarity to retro-branding (see Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry 2002). Rather than construing the South's past as an embarrassing and checkered legacy now displaced by an enlightened present, this backward looking world-view renders Southern heritage as an anodyne for the cultural anxieties facing professional women regarding the balance of work and family, and even more particularly to Southern professional women, who are ambivalent about their class privileges and emotionally connected to the old Southern moral axiom of "don't get above your raisin'" (see Malone 2002). Through nostalgic and heart-felt stories, commemorative lay-outs, and even the panegyric tone of its advertisements, *Southern Heritage Celebration* pays homage to the struggles and domestic skills of poor white Southern women, without raising the troubling specter of class-based inequities. Thus, the past becomes not only a repository of displaced meaning for valued ideals (see McCracken 1986) but also an invaluable cultural resource for creating a more desirable future that integrates the family values of rural folk culture into contemporary upscale lifestyles.

In their differing ways, these two publications naturalize white identity myths and the institutional conditions of white privilege as the essence of Southern culture. Our analysis highlights that much of their ideological work occurs through the cultural meanings and associations they systematically exclude in propagating their preferred portrayals of Southern culture. In their publications, our New South Mythmakers make little effort to foster sensitivity to lingering racial and class inequities or to recognize the problematic racial countermemories of Southern blacks and poor whites. Yet, they remain equally intent on promoting a regionalized (white) identity that exudes a symbolic distinctiveness to other forms of upper class whiteness.

As Perry (2001) aptly puts it “White Means Never Having to Say You’re Ethnic.” Recent consumer research suggests ways in which consumers have begun to grapple with the seemingly generic quality of naturalized white culture, such as by crossing into the cultures of the opposite gender (Holt and Thompson 2004), engaging in white cultures of pre-modern periods (Belk and Costa 1998), and of course, appropriating other ethnic traditions such as hip hop styles. As our analysis has shown, the ideological reclamation of marginalized and stigmatized white identities can also provide a symbolic resource for cultivating distinctiveness but, paradoxically, the very genealogical sources of this distinctiveness often have to be denied or homogenized.

When W. J. Cash (1941) wrote his treatise *The Mind of the South*, he proposed that (white) Southerners’ sense of collective identity hinged upon feelings of blood ties to the region, racial solidarity and segregationist thinking, which managed to consistently trump (though not without moments of destabilizing crisis) intra-racial class divisions. In the contemporary expressions we have analyzed, the cultural conditions that afford white racial solidarity are now cast as immaterial historical artifacts or nostalgically glossed as heritage. The commercially framed mythology of the New South implores consumers to understand Southernness as an identity position, redolent with redemptive tradition and authenticity, accessible to anyone who can appreciate and/or cultivate a southern state of mind. This historical shift reflects that dissipating class conflicts among white Southerners is no longer a pressing concern among New

South myth makers. Rather, they now appropriate this nexus of (modernized) white Southern identity myths to forge economically remunerative alliances with affluent consumers and institutional decision makers in the professional strata of global economy. Over two hundred years after his historic plea for an economic invasion of the former Confederate states by Northern capitalists, Wade Hampton would be proud.

SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The cultural producers we interviewed are engaged in a process of regional branding. Their efforts to build their media brands have become inexorably intertwined with a broader ideological objective of fostering positive attitudes toward the Southern region and the gamut of cultural icons and goods (i.e., cuisine, music, tourist attractions) that draw from this historical legacy. Seen in this light, our analysis highlights how marketers, and their myth making rationales, practices, and objectives, are embedded in larger constellations of cultural meanings and countermemories that structure and constrain their strategic visions and branding decisions.

In a postmodern consumer culture that increasingly appeals to cultural ideals of authenticity through symbolic connections with pre-modern pasts (Belk and Costa 1998; Grayson and Martinec 2004; Kozinets 2002; Illouz 1997), the Old South is a rich repository of authenticating meanings that is quite tempting to mine. However, this legacy also carries a vast number of stigmatizing connotations and socially divisive countermemories that circulate throughout various quarters of popular culture. While seeking to selectively control this polysemic cultural resource for strategic purposes, New South myth makers are also controlled by countermemories that run against the grain of their ideological aims. Much like the consumers they target, New South myth makers are historical subjects in the Foucauldian sense: that is, agents who are tied to their identities by historically imposed social meanings and identifications that are enforced across institutional and cultural fields (Foucault 1983).

In their individual commercial pursuits, New South mythmakers face an almost Sisyphean task of transforming this pre-given historical matrix into a form where its cultural countermemories seem more distant and less objectionable. Their relative success depends on the replication of their preferred vision across a network of cultural producers who also have a vested interest in promoting this regional brand. Whereas the conventional branding literature emphasizes the importance of communicating consistent brand messages (Keller 2003), regional brands can and will be constructed through a plethora of different meanings that inhere in their complex social histories. For every mythmaker who glorifies the South in a media campaign, another in some other quadrant of consumer culture will invoke a disparaging image (say a redneck villain or an ignorant hayseed) to serve his/her own marketing purposes.

This daunting combination of historical embeddedness and cultural multiplicity (and the tacit pressures it places on cultural producers to undertake specific acts of ideological negation) highlights some important theoretical issues that have not been broached by prior research on consumer-brand relationships. This literature widely presumes that brand meaning is negotiated between brand managers and brand consumers (Fournier 1998; Keller 2003). These dialogical accounts further assume that the success or failure of branding strategies depends on how well marketing managers understand their customers and effectively and compelling communicate the value of a brand’s functional and symbolic benefits (Keller 2003a). In the case of brands that invoke regional histories as a source of authenticity, these strategic actions are inflected through a broader cultural prism that exists beyond managements’ sphere of control.

As a consequence, authenticating branding strategies can be haunted by problematic cultural countermemories that are linked to the regional heritages being leveraged. The salience of these cultural countermemories to a given consumer group will likely effect how they interpret these branding strategies in relation to a past history of cultural representations. As a case in point, KFC (formerly Kentucky Fried Chicken) originally gained its niche in the fast-food market through appeals to Southern home cooking and the iconic Colonel Sanders whose image drew from Old South conceptions of the Cavalier gentleman. Overtime, however, the brand's strong associations with the Old South came to be seen as a limit to global growth potential and its management repositioned KFC as a modernized, de-regionalized, globally understandable, if more generic, brand. In recent years, however, KFC has sought to revitalize its sagging domestic market by reclaiming its regional heritage as a point of differentiation. Toward this goal, a recent advertising campaign featured Lynyrd Skynyrd's Southern pride-swelling anthem, *Sweet Home Alabama*, as its background music. While Alabama may love the governor and not need Neil Young around, it is not Kentucky. This branding strategy employs a more abstract and globally recognizable notion of Southern heritage to make a distinguishing claim to authenticity that could not be emulated by most other fast food chains (for example, what is the cultural heritage of Subway?). Yet, this campaign quickly sparked controversy as bloggers, ad critics, and various consumer groups debated whether Lynyrd Skynyrd's song was a defense of George Wallace's segregationist politics and an affront to African-Americans (Kiley 2005). Once again, racial countermemories negated in one context arise in another and significantly complicate the meanings and societal dialogues sparked by a seemingly banal branding strategy.

Our thesis about racial countermemories and their refusal to be fully negated in commercial representations expands upon Klein, Ettenson, and Morris's (1998) model of consumer animosity. In brief, Klein et al. (1998) posit that consumers may avoid purchasing a brand due to deeply held animosity toward its country-of-origin (e.g., Chinese who refuse to purchase Sony products because of their countermemory of Japanese military aggression and oppression during the 1930s). As our analysis shows, marketers also have to be concerned about motivations for brand avoidance that derive from problematic cultural countermemories tied regional rifts and the cultural factions that form around socio-economic hierarchies. In effect, the dilemmas and complexities posed by cross-cultural marketing can arise even when national or ethnic borders are not crossed. Vestiges of intra-national political and socio-economic struggles constitute the subtext of regional branding appeals and, in pursuing authenticity, marketers can easily conjure a more impassioned and polarizing social reality than they bargained for.

What may be problematic for a given marketing strategist, may be beneficial to society as a whole. If regional branders all pursued a common ideological agenda and if consumers were passive recipients of branding messages, the kind of ideological negations we have analyzed would equate to a significant truncation of cultural memory. However, marketers pursue diverse competitive agendas and different collectivities of consumers are vested in keeping their group-defining countermemories alive, such as African-American consumers recalling the Civil Rights struggle, Southern whites recalling the Christian virtues of their rural roots, or gay consumers recalling companies that have or have not supported their claims for social legitimacy (Kates 2004).

Consumer researchers have extensively documented the ways in which consumption can foster a communal spirit among diverse individuals that supersedes other sources of social differences (Kozinets 2001; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). However, democratic societies also need mechanisms for recognizing, representing, and negotiating more intractable social differences. Postmodern cultural currents which have blurred distinctions between the public and private sphere and generated skepticism toward conventional political channels have increasingly thrust consumer culture into this politicized role (see Holt 2002; Kozinets and Handelman 2004). As consumer culture has become an important societal forum for personal and collective identity construction, the consumer marketplace has likewise begun to function as a virtual plebiscite for debating cultural countermemories that harbor consequential political and economic stakes. Our investigation points to a need for further research on the socio-economic stratifications and regionalized historic tensions that consumers and marketers strive to accentuate or attenuate in commercially-mediated societal dialogues.

TABLE 1

PARTICIPANT PROFILE OF NEW SOUTH MYTHMAKERS*

Pseudonyms	Title	Commercial Context	Constituencies
Barbara	Interior Design Consultant	Southern home builder	City planners and consumers
Candice	Editor in Chief	Southern lifestyle magazine	Regional advertisers, globally distributed readership base
Carla	Operations Director	Southern interior design goods company	Distributors to end consumers
Donna	President	Historical preservationist society	Donors, city officials
Helen	Editor in Chief	City newspaper	City officials and local readers
Kent	Owner	Southern cuisine restaurant chain	Local consumers and tourists
Lori	Interior Design Consultant	Southern home builders	City planners and consumers
Rhea	Owner	Gift boutique	Local consumers and tourists
Rob	Editor in Chief	Southern lifestyle magazine	National advertisers, Southern based consumers

***Note.** All informants are white Southerners, with the exception of Rhea who is Asian-American. Both editors of Southern lifestyle magazines had over 20 year tenures with their respective companies. Tenure for other informants ranged from 3 years for Lori to 20 years for Barbara.

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