



## JCR MANUSCRIPT REVIEW HISTORY 002-1 (REVIEWS)

### Editor's Decision Letter

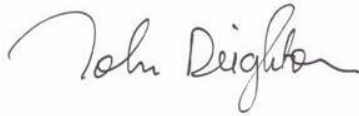
Thank you for submitting "Reconstructing the South" to the Journal of Consumer Research. The manuscript has been read by three reviewers, an associate editor, and myself. The reviewers made arguments on the merits of the paper and the associate editor integrated the arguments, added new thoughts, and developed a recommendation. Their reports are attached to this letter. This letter gives you my decision and reasoning.

As the associate editor's report makes clear, this was a radically divided review process, with two readers strongly for the paper and two feeling that, despite being a very readable paper, it did not have that most essential of JCR elements, a theoretical contribution. Unfortunately I agree that the paper is an application of a particular theoretical stance, not an extension or revision of that stance. It is a tribute to the quality of the writing that the paper remains fascinating and informative despite that, and I suppose an argument could be made that the skill with which the theoretical perspective is wielded constitutes itself a contribution. Certainly in the arts such an argument seems often to prevail. But the test we apply here favors the generalizability of an insight over the substance of the application to one particular context. The decision therefore is to invite a revision that uses this fieldwork to make a theoretical extension.

I think the associate editor is probably right in saying that this theoretical extension can be made without collecting new data. I am encouraged by the AE's optimism that it can be done without supplementing the producer focus with consumer data. If the authors think that there is some extension of the theory of the production of mythic meaning in this work then it may be as simple as articulating that extension more clearly. Or it may require, as the AE and Reviewer B both say, that you isolate a new theme. I don't know if the revision needs to be major or minor. As it stands, the paper is very long and very heavy on institutional detail relative to the pay-off, but what the right length will be depends on the new pay-off.

If any points in this letter or the reports are ambiguous, please let us know.

Sincerely,



John Deighton

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AE comments to the author(s)

There is unanimous agreement among the reviewers and me that this is a very well written paper on an interesting topic. Two of the three reviewers (A and C) couch their suggestions as being minor in nature, while the other reviewer finds the paper sorely lacking in theoretical contribution as well as consumer focus. I am not as bothered by the exclusive focus on the producers rather than the consumers of mythic meanings (there are precedents for this in *JCR*). But I do share Reviewer B's concern with the lack of an original theoretical contribution. Clearly the focus on a new context, the South, is not enough. Furthermore, by focusing on the production of mythic meanings you almost inevitably end with marketing managerial implications. Given that we have other *JCR* papers on the production of mythic meanings as well as other literatures on regional and national identities, other consumer behavior work on images of the South (e.g., Hirschman on debutante balls), and other work speaking to white identity, what is the theoretical take-away here that might be applied more broadly? Reviewer B's suggestion for making a more original theoretical contribution would require additional (consumer) data. This would also allow more of an audience response approach rather than the present purely autorial approach. This is certainly one direction in which you might proceed, but there may be others that focus more on how various strategies of mythic production seek to defeat, ignore, confront, embellish, rehabilitate, or change counter-narratives that, in the present case, involve race, class, gender, and region. All three reviewers suggest some possible ways to further contribute to the branding literature that has emerged in consumer research. It is also possible to revisit the basis of prejudice, although it seems doubtful that the present data would allow it. It might also be possible to put a religious template on the current data and to treat this as a case of sin, atonement, redemption, and resurrection. And it might be possible to compare the tactics used by these two magazines to those of marketers generally (e.g., misdirection through a focus on emotional but non-controversial topics like food and fashion). In whichever direction you might seek to make a more original theoretical contribution, there are also other related literatures to bring in to facilitate the effort. One thing that you do very well in the analysis section of the paper is to integrate insights based on a single informant (either Rob or Candice) with a broader relevant set of literature. At the same time, this provides evidence of the lack of originality in the interpretations offered here.

Some other points brought up by the reviewers are also important to attend to. These include the flag treatment (Reviewers A and C), manuscript length (Reviewer A), contextualization for non-US readers (Reviewer A), selection of context (Reviewer B),

unresolved racial issues (Reviewer C), and the role of other media (Reviewer C). In addition, a few other comments and suggestions follow.

1. Bubba also simply means brother and is a nickname affectionately given to male children.
2. Not all Southern intellectuals seek to redeem (note your religious word choice) the South for its past—e.g., Tennessee Williams, William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, James Baldwin, Ralph Ellison, Toni Morrison, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Alice Walker, etc.. Furthermore there are other counter-mythmakers ranging from African American critics to the KKK.
3. Is “Yankee infidels” an emic term? If so, note again the religious vocabulary.
4. You note the strong African-American objection to the Uncle Remus stories. Why was this not the case with black face minstrelsy by whites?
5. In discussing the several characteristics of the Celtic myth, note the striking parallel to stereotypes of blacks of the era, hinting at a scapegoating almost exactly paralleling that directed at “redneck whites” (note too the occupational basis of the term redneck). Also in labeling this the Celtic myth, is this still a current myth? Most of the current generation does not read Mencken and would find the notion of a Celtic myth of the South unfathomable. In noting movies reinforcing the redneck stereotype you might also add *Deliverance*.
6. In discussing the film *O Brother Where Art Thou?* you might recognize that the film was also a contemporary enactment of Homer’s *Odyssey*, complete with sirens, a Cyclops, and so forth.
7. Country music’s history isn’t as simple as you present it and was also cross-fertilized by another regional and Hollywood input: the singing cowboy. Furthermore there is a strong counter-mythology in the blues, especially the less culturally coded prison farm variant.
8. You might also better distinguish emic and etic inferences. For instance, when you say “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,” is this an explicit ideology at the magazine or is this an inference on your part? And when you say parenthetically that “of course those Yankees would not believe that us hicks would have nice restaurants,” which hicks? Are you speaking as Candice here or as authors?
9. Given that you mention Wal-Mart, is this another contributor to myths of the South? What of NASCAR which is currently enjoying great popularity and is strongly associated with the South?
10. Work on national branding should be cited—E.g., Emma Combes, Sally Hibbert, Gillian Hogg, Richard Varey (2001), “Consuming Identity: The Case of Scotland,” in *Advances in Consumer Research*, Volume 28, eds. Mary C. Gilly and Joan Meyers-Levy, Valdosta, GA : Association for Consumer Research, Pages: 328-333.

11. Contrary to assertions in the paper, the Colonel as an icon of the Old South figures prominently in the image and advertising for KFC in Japan, China, Hong Kong, and Korea.
12. The assertion that Subway lacks a cultural heritage is wrong. Their shops feature historic maps and images of the NYC subway system—poor example.

Some of these comments suggest clarifications or relevant literatures, while others suggest ways in which the paper might be deepened. But all are minor compared to concerns in the first paragraph above.

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Reviewer A

Comments to the author(s)

This is a very well written manuscript, dealing with an interesting and important topic and with many qualities going for it as it is. There is, as I see it, a very promising contribution to JCR here.

I have only a smaller number of general comments that I would like to propose in order to make this an even better manuscript.

1. The manuscript appears too long, especially in its first half. Although the thorough treatment of the various dimensions of Southern US cultural history is not only nice but also a necessity for a non-US reader, a number of details are not adding to the clarity of the presentation and probably requires more cultural insider knowledge to be accessible. On the way, this reviewer, at least, got lost rather than enlightened, and interest waned rather than woke.
2. Methodologically speaking, mentioning and tabulating the modest but still larger number of informants (or “participants”) seem like a pure legitimacy-creating exercise. Be frank – you may mention that you did more interviews but omit the table – such “emperor’s new clothes” take away from rather than add to the serious quality of the analysis. In fact, at times I wondered whether the informants/participants were needed at all – a thorough content analysis and cultural reading of the magazines might have yielded very similar results and possibly based on less “idiosyncratic” ground than to editors’/publishers’ opinions.
3. Concerning the discussion and conclusion (or “Y’all come” and “Social implications”), the former chapter seems a bit redundant, not adding much (although maybe clarifying and carving out more clearly the impressions from the former pages). Some editing here would again make the main message of the manuscript stronger and more obvious. The final part, on the other hand, seems awfully short, and although place imagery has been discussed in JCR formerly, a broader set of sources of information here would be welcome. I think that the dichotomy and

conflict between cultural dynamism and (rural retro-) authenticity as assets in a regional context deserves more attention as a specific case of the increasingly obvious truth that place branding, far from being an exception from the standard rule of brand management: that the brand can be controlled, may be the prototype, in that brand imagery (products as well as place) can never be fully controlled, but is always subject to appropriation. The lack of a social dimension in brand theory is referred to – here, a reference to (parts of) the recent edited volume *Brand Culture\** (Schroder & Salzer-Moerling, eds., Routledge: 2006) would be appropriate.

4. One detail: The South Carolina flag was not altered in 2002 – since 1861 it has featured a crescent and a palmetto, and has had no connections whatsoever to the confederate cross in terms of design. That the symbolism of the flag is as much a secession reference and a confederate battle flag as the confederate cross is a different story, although it may be less recognized as such by the outside world.  
(see <http://www.fotw.net/flags/us-sc.html> and [http://home.freeuk.com/gazkhan/blank\\_state.htm](http://home.freeuk.com/gazkhan/blank_state.htm))

To conclude, a part from the relatively minor critical remarks above, I really enjoyed large parts of this work, and it fills the frame it has set for itself very nicely. I look forward to see an even clearer and more thoroughly discussed version, which will be likely to make an important contribution to the literature. Congratulations on a fine effort.

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Reviewer B

Comments to the author(s)

There is much that I like about this paper. It is very articulately written, and I felt like I learned a great deal about the historical and contemporary Southern U.S. by reading it.

I do, however, have a significant reservation about the paper. The author(s) have not made a convincing case that there is a theoretical gap in the consumer behavior literature that they are filling with this work. As limitations of current consumer research, they identify the facts that

1. “the nexus of regional identifications, romantic venerations, social stigmas ad... the racial signification encoded in Southern consumption symbols, lifestyle idealizations, and archetypic characters have... been conspicuously ignored,” and
2. “the role that commercial representations play in creating feelings of collection identification among white Americans has been largely overlooked.”

I would agree with the authors that neither of these have been studied. However, these are not theoretical gaps in the literature. They are contexts in which extant concepts have not been applied. And just as they have not been applied in these contexts, they have not been applied in many others: for example, we don't know about the regional identifications ... and racial significations encoded in aboriginal/First Nations

consumption symbols and archetype characters; nor do we know the role that commercial representations play in creating feelings of collective identifications among aboriginal/First Nations peoples. Moreover, it is unclear that it would constitute a significant advance in the consumer research literature if each unexamined context were to be explored.

Rather than positioning this as a paper that explores an unexamined context, the authors need to identify hitherto unexamined theoretical issues or conceptual matters that have not yet been analyzed, and use the particular features of their context in order to develop an understanding of those issues or concepts. This notion of using contexts to develop conceptual insights is well described in a forthcoming paper which I encourage the authors to obtain: it is Price, Linda, Arnould, Eric and Mosio, Risto (forthcoming). "Making contexts matter: selecting research contexts for theoretical insight." *Handbook of Qualitative Research in Marketing*

I'd like to offer a suggested direction for conceptual development that does seem to me to arise from this context, and that would be appropriate for *JCR*. The authors in their analysis end by cogently highlighting the selectively cultivated, suppressed and reconstructed facets of Southern identity that marketers produce in aid of their goals. It might be possible to make a contribution by developing theoretical insight into how those whose cultural legacy is thus variously represented respond to, cope with, and/or take advantage of the contested social and political meanings in times of foment. The current paper is silent on how consumers who, by birth or otherwise, identify themselves as Southerners experience and enact these contested identities. However, both informants who are quoted are also consumers in some senses, and it is intriguing to note their entrepreneurial responses to, and interventions in, these circumstances which are largely not of their own making.

The authors themselves end the paper by identifying a conceptual direction that might be more suited to a paper targeted at *Journal of Marketing* positioning, but that is more theoretical than the current positioning of the paper. They discuss how their paper builds (or could build) on Klein et al's *JM* paper consumer animosity. As the authors discuss, their paper raises the possibility that a unique branding challenge might be associated with brands that are marked by "problematic cultural counter-memories." I believe, however, that to explore either this question, or the other theoretical positioning I have suggested, the authors will need to do more analysis of interviews with consumers to complement those they have done with "cultural producers."

They will also have to work toward going beyond describing what they find, which is largely what they do in this version of their manuscript. Once a theoretical "niche" is identified, it will be necessary to analyze data so as to make a theoretical contribution that fills that niche.

I'd encourage the authors to pursue this work. Their immersion in the context is a significant investment that they should – and I believe can – reap rewards from. And I'd like to see the theoretical stories they can tell, given their obvious rhetorical skills.

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Reviewer C

Comments to the author(s)

*Overall.*

This manuscript was a pleasure to review. It is insightful and timely. It interrogates whiteness in a way that has been absent in our literature despite its centrality in consumer culture. It will make a fine addition.

Consequently, I focus the remainder of my comments on a few critical items that the authors should address to strengthen and clarify aspects of the research.

*Specific Comments.*

I have one major concern and a couple of relatively minor ones. My major concern is with the discussion of Candice's retro-branding strategy. Candice promotes a nostalgic version of the Old South that appears to assume away its racist legacy rather than confront and conquer it, quite unlike Rob. Why? I need more clarity on this.

The authors highlight the strategic rhetorical devices she employs to connect middle- and upper-middle-class white women readers to an idealized notion of Southern womanhood/femininity (e.g., comments about bra-burning and combat boots vs. lipstick) in a way that levels class barriers (e.g., the emphasis on "bootstraps" capitalism via female-owned regional business development and domestic creativity). Candice's devices however seem exclusively focused on navigating intra-racial gender identity and social class tensions while racial tensions are all but ignored. Candice's remark on p. 37 that "I'm not talking about the Old South that was slave racist," is the only reference to racism at all in her narrative. A counter-mythologizing strategy that seeks to create a "magnolias and moonlight" nostalgic version of the Old South for a national (rather than just regional) readership without addressing its legacy of racism seems odd. Is her silence a strategy? If so, how?

I have two additional minor points. First, on p. 6 (2<sup>nd</sup> par.) you mention the efforts of Southern intellectuals, politicians, writers, journalists, etc. It may be worth it to mention media mogul Ted Turner as one of the most influential current producers and disseminators of New South mythology. His WTBS and TNT networks are commonly part of any standard (non-subscriber) cable package, and perhaps more than any New South medium reaches a national audience. His Turner South regional cable network makes use of both the strategies you highlight in this manuscript. Second, on p. 8 you mention states that have used the Confederate flag as part of, or a template, for their state flag. Technically, South Carolina has never incorporated the St. Andrew's cross/saltire symbol directly into its official state flag. In 1860 SC added the state tree—the Palmetto—to the crescent moon on navy background, which had been the state flag since the Revolutionary War period, to mark its secession. Rather, SC began flying the flag of the Confederacy on the dome of the State capital building along with the US and SC state

flags beginning in 1962. In 2002 the Confederate flag was removed from the State House dome and placed at street level as part of a political compromise, where it currently flies solo, in a visually more prominent place at the entrance to the State capital grounds. I mention this because rather than remove the reference to SC you might reference the particular controversy in the state, as it enhances the point you make about tension between mythic white identity and racial countermemory on p. 8.