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How Commercial Myths Compete for Identity Value through the Ideological Shaping of
Collective Memories and Counter-memories

ABSTRACT

Through a comparative case study of two influential New South myth makers, we analyze the ways in which the identity value of commercial myths is negotiated at the market system level. We identify several key historical tensions and marketplace pressures that impel these national magazine editors to employ ideological strategies, each tailored to their distinctive competitive agendas, for effacing racial counter-memories that contradict their mythic representations of Southern identity. Based on this analysis, we develop a conceptual model which highlights ideological, competitive, and historical influences on commercial mythmaking that have not been addressed by prior accounts of the meaning transfer process.

In his classic study *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes (1956/1972) defined popular myths as rhetorical systems that enshroud contemporary socio-cultural conditions in an aura of historical incontrovertibility and inevitability. According to Barthes (1956), popular myths work by glossing the consequences of historical contingencies, political conquests, and social conflicts as an essentialized and naturalized cultural order. This rhetorical reification allows unsettling questions about social stratifications and institutionalized inequities to simply “go without saying” (Barthes 1956, p. 143). Placing a Nietzschean spin on Barthes’ critical structuralism, Foucault (1977) conceptualized counter-memories as the linguistic, material, socio-cultural, and institutional traces of contradictory historical narratives, power struggles, fractious voices of protest and dissent, socio-political oppressions, and tactics of resistances. These counter-memories can be obfuscated, but never fully erased, through the invocation of grand mythic narratives such as the triumph of good over evil, the taming of a wild and dangerous nature by the rationalizing forces of civilization, and the inexorable march of progress. A genealogical analysis aims to discern the nexus of counter-memories that are subordinated to a mythic gloss and to explicate the ways in which these historical effacements have shaped specific (and often institutionally dominant) representations of collective memory (also see Foucault 1979; Giroux 1997; Haraway 1994).

The dynamic tensions that arise between counter-memories and the commercial uses of myths are the focus of our genealogical analysis. In the age of postmodernity, commercial culture (i.e., advertisements, products, branding strategies, entertainment and infotainment media, tourist sites, servicescape stagings, and public relations) has become a very significant societal medium for the material representation of collective memories and their corresponding arrays of social identifications, symbolic distinctions, moral valuations, and implied status

hierarchies (Chidester 2005; Lipsitz 1990; Marcoux and Legoux 2005; Peñaloza 2000; Wallace 1996). Consumer culture theorists have developed highly nuanced accounts of how consumers actively and creatively use mythologized brands, products, and servicescapes as resources for identity construction (Arnould, Price, and Tierney 1998; Belk and Costa 1998; Hirschman 2000; Holt and Thompson 2004; Levy 1981; McCracken 1986; Peñaloza 2001; Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Stern 1995; Thompson 2004; Üstuner and Holt 2006). However, this research stream has given relatively little consideration to the ways in which commercial mythmakers seek to ideologically enhance the identity value of their respective representations and conversely, to insulate this symbolic equity from cultural devaluation in the marketplace.

We propose that important negotiations over identity value occur at the market systems level whenever different cultural producers, pursuing their own competitive and ideological agendas, differentially leverage a common mythic legacy. Even though these cultural producers may not be directly competing in the same product or service markets, in the media mélange of postmodernity, they are invariably competing in a broader “myth market” (Holt 2004, p. 56-61) for identity value. As a case in point, the cultural mythology of the American West has been widely appropriated in various quarters of commercial culture in ways that are ideologically diversified and which have cumulatively affected the identity value offered by this canonical mythos of American nationhood (see Slotkin 1992; Mitchell 1996).

In her ethnography of Western stock shows, Peñaloza (2001, p.385) addresses one aspect of this interrelationship by noting that these myth-infused trade shows celebrate “the winners of the West, white rangers, and their rural way of life” and, in so doing, privilege meanings emanating from “white rural culture” (p. 395) while marginalizing the cultural positions of non-Whites. She further observes that consumers, as they move through the various promotional

exhibits, often formulate resistant readings that run against the ideological grain of the representations. Nonetheless, consumers' oppositional interpretations "demonstrate a disjointed structure and are constrained by the interests of beef marketers and producers" (Peñaloza 2001, p. 393).

Three broader implications can be derived from Peñaloza's ethnographic insights that are germane to our analysis. First, the commercial appropriation (and staging) of cultural myths can predispose consumers toward certain perceptual and experiential orientations, including their oppositional readings (see also Thompson 2004). This shaping effect affirms the importance of attending more closely to the production side of consumer culture and explicating the historical, competitive, and ideological factors that influence these myth making activities. Second, commercial myths construct collective memories in specific ideological terms and these historical invocations are major pillars of identity value. Third, a given commercial myth exists in relation to other commercial representations that incorporate the source mythology into different ideological constructions of collective memory; these competing commercial myths can then function as contradictory counter-memories. In the case of the Old West mythology, a gamut of prominent cultural texts—ranging from revisionist Westerns such as John Ford's *The Searchers* and Kevin Costner's *Dances With Wolves* to the numerous commemorative festivals, historical sites, material goods, and artistic forms that now celebrate the Native American traditions—now call forth discordant cultural memories that reframe the ideological meanings of the American West. These jarring and destabilizing cultural juxtapositions can diminish the identity value offered by commercial appropriations of this cultural myth that uncritically reproduce its traditional Anglo-centric ideology.

Our genealogical analysis explores the ways in which these confluences of myth market competition, prevailing commercial and ideological objectives, and historically contentious counter-memories structure the representational choices of cultural producers—including those which seem more intuitive than calculated—as they seek to manage the ideological contradictions and historical fissures that could undermine the identity value offered by their commercial appropriations of myth. Our context of investigation concerns the contested cultural memories of the antebellum and Confederate South which have been adapted to a variety of commercial and ideological purposes. Much like the mythology of the American West (Slotkin 1992), the South's (mythologized) heritage, and the enduring socio-economic patterns set by the aftermath of Reconstruction, has generated prominent ideological templates through which race relations in the United States have been mapped and contested (Blight 2001; Foner 1988; Lipsitz 2006; Roediger 1999) and which have fundamentally shaped the identity value offered by commercial appropriations of Southern traditions and Southern icons (i.e., the good ole boy, the redneck, the hillbilly, the Southern belle, the Southern gentleman to name a few).

To briefly illustrate the logic of our impending genealogical analysis, let us trace out a mythological thread that begins with folk tales shared among enslaved African-Americans laboring on antebellum Southern plantations and that culminates in the opening of Disney World's *Splash Mountain* ride in 1992.¹ A key link in this genealogical chain is the journalist and folklorist Joel Chandler Harris who, in the mid 1870's, began collecting African-American folktales and publishing them in the *Atlanta Constitution* as children's stories that incidentally documented a fading slave dialect. These stories proved so popular that Chandler aggregated them into a collection of books that came to be known as the *Uncle Remus* series.

¹ The authors thank Russell Belk for calling our attention to this example.

Harris's ideological reworking of these slave tales was merely one inflection point in a long series of commercially-driven transformations. Historical evidence suggests that these stories originally functioned as subversive allegories in which trickster figures, standing for enslaved African-Americans, cunningly outmaneuver their more powerful would-be oppressors (Pahl 2003). The *Uncle Remus* series, however, reconfigured these allegorical tales into nostalgic odes to the plantation system. These books provided the inspiration for Disney's (1946) *Song of the South* and, this film would, some forty years later (and after being the target of considerable social criticism during much of that period) provide the narrative motif for the Splash Mountain ride. In this transmutation from Disney film to Disney theme park ride, the titular character of Uncle Remus was omitted from the scene and the corresponding racial counter-memories further displaced by Disney's dominant ideological motifs of nostalgia, escapist fantasy, and technological progress (see Mauro 1997; Sperb 2005).

From the theoretical standpoints that have become conventional within the CCT literature, one might propose that critically minded consumers could potentially read Splash Mountain in relation to this repressed historical legacy and reconstitute its now suppressed racial context. Alternatively, one might argue that consumers (perhaps many) could be completely oblivious to this genealogical/racial history and experience Splash Mountain as nothing more than a fun ride animated by cute Disney characters. From this viewpoint, Splash Mountain could not convey meanings tied to the legacy of slavery because consumers do not bring to bear the requisite background knowledge. A stronger variation on this latter claim would be that such antiquarian legacies are actually irrelevant to the meanings that a given commercial setting holds for contemporary consumers. Rather, consumers interpret Splash Mountain through the lens of their operant cultural beliefs and identity projects whereas these historical ties to subversive

African-American folk tales are a dead history, functionally equivalent to a dead metaphor: that is, a once invocative trope that has become a verbal cliché, divorced from its cultural origins, and which no longer generates imaginative elaborations (Lakoff 1987).

Each of these analytic stances privileges the contemporary frame-of-references that consumers use to negotiate specific market-mediated cultural meanings. However, such ahistorical, consumer-centric modes of analysis foreclose many viable lines of critical inquiry. Most particularly, they gloss over the question of how the mythic structuring of commercial culture enables certain collective memories to become more salient and readily available to consumers while rendering other historically linked counter-memories less accessible and less likely to be recalled. In other words, commercial myths pull for certain kinds of readings while militating against others that call forth contradictory counter-memories. For example, if the Splash Mountain ride featured a robotic facsimile of the *Song of the South*'s Uncle Remus (played by James Baskett) clad in his plantation work clothes, this commercial cue would likely inspire questions, even among the historically unaware, about this anachronistic character and its tacit portrayal of racial identity and race relations.

Rather than relegating commercial culture's genealogical undercurrents to the realm of dead history, we seek to interrogate how and why a given commercial myth elides particular counter-memories that hail from its genealogical heritage. To address such questions, researchers must also attend to the array of institutional and socio-historical factors that have shaped prior articulations of a given cultural myth in commercial culture. To put the matter differently, the transformative relations between a contemporary appropriation of cultural myth and suppressed counter-memories are not self-evident but instead have to be gleaned through historical considerations.

We provide a genealogical analysis of the transformative intersection of historically contested racial counter-memories and the commercial and ideological agendas that shape the representational choices and strategic aims of two prominent New South mythmakers. As editors of nationally distributed Southern lifestyle magazines, our participants play an important and quite active role in shaping their respective publications' content. As we will show, their mythic representations are structured by different ideological aims, and sensitivities toward different counter-memories, that emanate from distinctive competitive positions. Through their ideological strategies to manage these diversified, but equally, problematic counter-memories, these New South mythmakers are also engaging in a market system negotiation over the identity value of their proffered commercial myths, which is itself embedded in a still broader cultural conversation over the South's place in the socio-cultural landscape of American society.

RECONSTRUCTING THE (MYTHIC) SOUTH

“If it can be said there are many Souths, the fact remains that there is also one South,”
 Wilbur Cash (1941, viii).

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 1960's 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, social practices, cultural mores, and socio-cultural divisions (Blight 2001; 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 so-called trailer trash stereotype: an impulsive, shiftless, and lascivious Southern man incapable of moral 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 cultural stigmas that had 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 embark on exciting adventures in their souped-up Dodge Charger, affectionately called 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, and Tennessee. In a particularly controversial case, this iconography also adorned the unofficial state flag of South Carolina, which flew over the state capital from 1962 to 2000, until an economic boycott organized by the NAACP forced its begrudging relocation to the Statehouse grounds (next to a monument honoring fallen Confederate soldiers) in a still debated political compromise. Citizen attitudes toward these state sanctioned tributes 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 of white males who embrace a libertarian, pro-military, my country right or wrong, God and guns, brand of political populism; a circumstance 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.²

The nexus of conflicted meanings and counter-memories symbolized by the confederate flag, and its diverse commercial and ideological uses, 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 counter-memories. These counter-memories 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 counter-memories 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 counter-memories implicit to this nexus of white identity myths not only trace to contested black-white power relationships but also to intra-racial hierarchies among different classes of whites.

² The political fallout over the Georgia state flag which occurred in 2001 and 2002 is emblematic of this contentious political meaning. Seeking to avoid an economic boycott by the NAACP, then Governor Roy Barnes commissioned a new state flag which did not feature the confederate iconography of the St. Andrew's cross. This decision inspired howls of protest among white voters and this backlash is widely credited with Barnes' political defeat in the 2002 elections.

The Rise of Southern White Identities

A historical paradox of the Civil War is that widespread regional identifications with Old South values and the Confederate cause arose only after the conflict had ended (Foner 1980). During the ensuing era of Congressional Reconstruction (circa 1865-76), the former Confederate states had to grapple with their status as a conquered region whose socio-economic system, based on slave capital, was being dismantled by outsiders (rhetorically maligned as scalawags and carpetbaggers). Caught in the midst of this massive socio-economic upheaval, white Southerners had a desperate need to fashion myths that could at least symbolically assuage societal turmoil provoked by this tidal wave of socio-economic 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 political power, economic independence and, an indelicate point not to be underemphasized, ideologically reinforce the Old South racial hierarchies threatened by Reconstructionist reforms (Foner 1988; Stamp 1956).

This ideological project was greatly facilitated by the tireless efforts of commemorative organizations to honor Confederate soldiers who had been killed or injured during the Civil War. While the 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; 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, culturally amplified 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 the South's moral and societal virtues.

This ideological confluence between desires to memorialize the sacrifices of fallen soldiers and to ideologically redeem the Confederate cause 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' collective 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. In this Redeemer version of secession, the Confederacy was fighting to protect the constitutional principle of guaranteed states' rights, and to defend the South's Christian virtues (and the honor of Southern womanhood) from the defilements of Yankee infidels (Cobb 2005; Foner 1988). This mythic reconstruction of the Confederacy played a crucial cultural role in overturning Reconstructionist reforms, such as those that had sought to politically enfranchise blacks and poor whites, 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 white 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 identity myth 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. Through this mythic revision, 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 mythic 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 upon 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 commercial culture phenomenon better exemplifies this framing effect than *Gone with the Wind*, the 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 across the nation with its romantic portrayal of the Old South aristocracy and its vilifying representations of Union soldiers and Northern carpetbaggers, generating more ticket sales than any other film in history (Dirks 1996). The opening montage of this 1939 classic presented a mythic prologue 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 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 might lead to the miscegenation of the white race (for an extended discussion of these anti-immigrant views see Gould 1996).

Gone with the Wind effectively melded the masculine strain of the Lost Cause myth (and its espousal of militaristic valor and noble sacrifice) with its more domesticated and feminized Moonlight and Magnolias variation. The Moonlight and Magnolias myth depicts the antebellum South as 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. In concert with the lost cause myth's construction of proper Southern masculinity as a Christian knighthood (and its validating sense of martyrdom), the moonlight and magnolias variation represented Southern womanhood as a vulnerable vessel of virtue. In the hands of writers, such as Margaret Mitchell, (whose outlooks had been influenced by the proto-feminism of the women's suffrage movement), this mythic construction of Southern womanhood was reconfigured around the metaphor of steel magnolias: that is, a virtuous and delicate femininity that betrayed a steely resilience and imperturbable inner strength. The steel magnolias construction—embodied by the indomitable resolve of Scarlett O'Hara—afforded considerable therapeutic value and cultural resonance in a 1930's world mired in pandemic economic strife and geo-political turmoil. Through this confluence of forces, this formerly regional identity myth took on national and international significance.

Not incidentally, the high profile New South mythmaker Ted Turner launched his cable channel *Turner Network Television* (TNT), in 1988, with a broadcast of *Gone with the Wind*. Through his media empire, Turner has been very instrumental in circulating contemporary expressions of the Moonlight and Magnolias myth throughout commercial culture as well as selected facets of the Lost Cause myth that emphasize the Cavalier legend. Indeed, Turner's public persona—dashing yachtsman and ladies' man, generous philanthropist, and influential member of the body politic—can be seen as an effort to embody the Cavalier myth. Interestingly, his active engagement in public life and politics has been routinely derided in the national media which uncharitably labeled Turner as the Mouth of the South in reference to his public outspokenness and penchant for controversy; an epithet which rhetorically portrayed Turner as a boisterous, ill-mannered, and rather buffoonish Southern male. In other words, his self-promoted Cavalier image was reframed as a variation of the redneck stereotype (e.g., the rich hayseed whose pretensions are foiled by his uncouth demeanor). This elicited countermemory contradicts Turner's claims to aristocratic station and moral authority.

Long before *Gone with the Wind* (and the rise of the Turner Broadcasting System) however, the moonlight and magnolia myth had gained cultural currency throughout the Southern region through the work of key cultural producers such as Southern romance writers and historical preservationists. This latter group's diligent efforts to save plantation era mansions and architectural landmarks from demolition and disrepair exerted considerable influence on the ambiance of iconic Old South cities, such as Charleston and Savannah (see Brundage 2005). These historic preservationists (who tended to be high society women) embedded these material artifacts of Old South culture in a network of narratives that unabashedly drew from the Moonlight and Magnolias myth. This mythic rendering was institutionalized through guided

tours of landmarks, the creation of expository literature in pamphlets, newspapers, and books, and the commissioning of paintings and portraits that recreated romanticized visions of life in the grand Old South; these practices of institutionalization were most prominent in larger Southern cities where more affluent and educated Southerners were concentrated (Cox 2003).

Traversing all these formative myths of the Old South and white Southern identities were equally mythologized representations of master-slave relationships. As discussed by Yuhl (2005), New South mythmakers (through art, literature, and religious sermons) incessantly portrayed African-American slaves as childlike figures who possessed undying affection for their aristocratic masters and who cheerfully performed the duties to which they were naturally suited. The racial subtext of the Lost Cause myth, however, finds blatant expression in strident segregationist narratives that also gained increasingly prominent expression over the course of Congressional Reconstruction: the fall of the confederacy fundamentally disrupted the natural order of things, thereby precipitating a host of societal ills that threatened the integrity of the white race and the nation (see Reed 2003). Though less relevant to our analysis, the Lost Cause myth also inspired a tragic variation which depicts the Southern gentry as guilt-ridden souls, incapable of living up to their lofty Cavalier ideals, owing to egotism, pettiness, hypocrisy, shattered dreams, and, most of all, the moral stains of slavery.³

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 Cavaliers, who had supported the King, and the principle of rule by divine right, during the English Civil war, and

³ The southern gothic literary tradition, exemplified by writers such as William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, and Tennessee Williams brought this self-critical and melancholy reading of the lost cause myth to the cultural fore. For these writers, the Lost Cause myth was a testament to the contradictions and moral ambivalences of a tragically flawed social order.

whose identities and motives had been highly romanticized by antebellum elites. Conversely, 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 their regional/ethnic claims of cultural superiority. The thesis held that the majority of the immigrants who settled in the South were from Celtic 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 ethos of delayed gratification). Northern opinion leaders and elite Southerners both 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 promulgators of the Celtic thesis was the 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, genetically 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 redneck derivation of the Celtic stigma has been a robust villainous icon that has been reproduced across innumerable novels, television shows, and films such as *Deliverance*, *Mississippi Burning*, and *Easy Rider* (Fischer 1997; Graham 2001). These scurrilous portrayals 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 thesis also provided cultural inspiration for more ingratiating and ennobling iconic figures, such as the comical hillbilly, the fun lovin' good ole boy, and the authentic Appalachian primitive (Graham 2001; Martin 2000). 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 lucrative careers through hayseed antics and drawling hicksterisms that affectionately denuded these otherwise stereotypic representations of their derisive qualities. The cultural icon of the fun loving, good ole boy has been routinely

fashioned into a variation of man-of-action heroism (Holt and Thompson 2004), as exemplified by Burt Reynolds's star making turn in the *Smokey and The Bandit* films.

The Celtic thesis has also given rise to a distinctive and quite marketable spin on the Romantic myth of the tragic artist that has long captivated consumer imaginations. In this regionalized commercial myth, the South's working class folk geniuses are inspired by a dangerous but potent artistic muse: the soul wrenching conflicts between their heartfelt aspirations to Christian piety and a fateful (Celtic) susceptibility to the temptations of the flesh. Most particularly, this myth of the divided Southerner has become quite integral to the heritage of Southern music (Malone 2002). 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.

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, 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.” For example, 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 performers from its soundtrack, and a documentary film of the first tour, and thrust bluegrass legend Ralph Stanley (and self-proclaimed West Virginian hillbilly) into the commercial limelight.⁴ 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 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 siècle New South propagandists had hoped that their idealizations of the antebellum life and the Confederate cause would pave the ideological path to

⁴ This film had a hybrid mythic structure which blended stereotypical Southern characters, idioms, settings, and most significantly of all (in terms of generating commercial revenue) rural music with narrative elements drawn from Homer's *Odyssey*.

regional prosperity and renewed political power. However, these original New South propagandists would likely be dismayed that their mythology of the Old South aristocracy has lost cultural ground to a repackaged Celtic myth so closely wedded to the heritage of poor Southern whites.

This paradoxical inversion is not just an antiquarian concern. Rather, it brings forth counter-memories that contradict an ongoing ideological agenda pursued by a diverse group of New South mythmakers who seek to transform the Southern economy (yet again) by attracting businesses in the high tech, research and development, and cultural creative sectors (Eckes 2005). These cultural producers and intermediaries, who are distributed across various sectors of media and the myriad organizations devoted to commerce development, are carrying forward an ideological project that traces back to the influential Redeemer politician Wade Hampton, who believed that the South could only regain its deposed economic stature by aggressively building its industrial base (Blight 2001). This longstanding project of shifting the Southern economy away from its dependence on commodity markets (agriculture and extraction industries such as coal and forestry) has, of course, been substantially adapted to fit the conditions of the post-industrial economy.⁵

To gain an ideological foothold in the current socio-economic milieu, these New South mythmakers strive to convey a modernized and cosmopolitan image across the global mediascape. This ideological aim also renders the cultural heritage associated with poor and uneducated white folk as problematic racial counter-memories that complicate the production and

⁵ Another rather ironic foundation of the Southern economy has been the massive infusion of capital from the federal government via the disproportionate number of military bases which have been located in the South. The circumstance reflects the preponderance of cheap land in the region, aggressive lobbying from Southern politicians seeking to bring economic resources to their districts, and the South's traditional veneration of military valor which made its citizenry very supportive of these installations, even though their overall mix of socio-economic effects on these local communities has been equivocal and, in some cases, even detrimental (See Lutz 2002).

promotion of their commercial myths. As illustrated by our preceding discussion of Ted Turner and his contested iconic standing (i.e. an aristocratic pillar of society versus a self-aggrandizing redneck), New South mythmakers are often confronted by contradictory counter-memories that are invoked by other critical (or lampooning voices) in commercial culture. Under such circumstances, cultural producers must engage in quite explicit strategies of ideological containment and negation to protect the identity value of their commercial myths from cultural devaluation.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

In keeping with our research emphasis, we conducted depth interviews with ten individuals who played a direct role in the commercial production of Southern culture and the diffusion of its identity myths. 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. 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. As the analysis unfolded, 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 counter-memories 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.

In our presentation, we profile our two most influential mythmakers, in terms of their national recognition and audience reach, who are editors of two major lifestyle magazines: Rob who is the editor of *Today's South* and Candace who is the editor *Southern Heritage* (the titles of the publications and all names in the cases are pseudonyms). *Today's South*, which premiered in 1966, is recognized in the media field for its long-term success and its extensive subscription base of over 2.7 million, with a total readership exceeding 16 million. *Southern Heritage* 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, *Today's South* and *Southern Heritage* have become influential nodes in the broader media network that shapes public perceptions of the South and Southerners. Their respective cases provide a study in contrast which highlights how different commercial interests lead to different uses of a common cultural mythology and differing strategies for negotiating racial counter-memories.

Our genealogical analysis situates the narratives of these contemporary New South mythmakers in their genealogical context and highlights the constituting relationships among 1) commercial imperatives to construct the South in 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 counter-memories which problematically haunt these

representations and which are tacitly and sometimes explicitly negated in their professional reflections and strategic choices.

NEGOTIATING AND (EFFACING) RACIAL COUNTERMEMORIES IN THE PRODUCTION OF COMMERCIAL CULTURE

Today's South mythmaking orientation is patently forward-looking, masculine in tone of address, and wedded to the public sphere: the subtext of which seeks to rebuke the Celtic stereotype and its association with the folk culture of poor whites and the enduring cultural image of the redneck segregationist which came to prominence during the 1960's Civil Struggles. This publication treats Southernness as a dynamic lifestyle choice (open to Southerners and non-Southerners alike) and its mythologized representations blatantly appeal to the more aristocratic aspects of Southern heritage as inflected through a cosmopolitan sensibility. In contrast, *Southern Heritage* adopts a nostalgic/preservationist approach to New South mythmaking that is self-consciously feminine in tone of address, and celebratory of the domestic sphere (while targeting professional working women). However, these appeals to a traditional feminine sensibility and warm interpersonal relationships, free from status hierarchies, render the specters of elitism and class division as problematic counter-memories that have to be continuously negotiated in a magazine that paradoxically targets economically affluent women.

Southern Identity as the Effacement of the Celtic Myth and Racial Segregation

As previously discussed, national media coverage of news stories, past and present, along with mass culture films have often projected a baneful image of Southerners as poor, uneducated, pathologically parochial, irresponsibly impulsive, and culturally backward. In response to this tribal stigma (e.g., Goffman 1963), an almost visceral defensiveness has been built into the mythic structure of the New South creed that ironically reproduces the clannish "us versus them" mindset which is stereotypically attributed to Southern whites. This cultural

predilection can become quite pronounced when these malignments are believed to be impediments to the attainment of coveted goals, such as economic development. The editor of *Today's South*, who was born and raised in the Deep South, is by upbringing and institutional position highly cognizant of the ignominious connotations that have historically clung to Southern culture. One of Rob's primary editorial (and ideological) objectives is to replace the backward and racist stigma that clings to the South with cosmopolitan and socially progressive images:

Rob: 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?

In seeking to counterbalance what he deems as a preponderance of biased and outmoded national media representations, Rob's strategic actions continue in the tradition 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 racially segregated South that have been brandished into cultural memory:

Rob: We a long time ago in *Today's South* 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 is its evolution. 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. Rob's narrative disavows critical representations of the South's segregated history on the grounds that they are one-sided and misleading. While Rob is acutely aware of media images and stories that recall the South's segregationist past, he has surprising little regard for the multitude of popular culture representations that cast Southern culture in a favorable and endearing light. The underlying (countermemory) dilemma is that these veneration of Southern heritage are most commonly associated with working class, rural white culture. To portray a cosmopolitan, New South sensibility to his readers in a fashion that does not encourage potentially contradictory countermemories, Rob's editorial judgments ideologically efface the presence of poor and undereducated Southerners in his magazine's mythic constructions of the region. In

their place stands a contemporary embodiment of the New South Cavalier: the egalitarian, highly educated, and dispassionately rational professional who has completely trumped Celtic stigma.

In the national news media, stories about the South are often sparked by anniversaries of significant figures and watershed moments in the 1960's Civil Rights movement. These annual reports and replays of archival images could be seen as legitimate and necessary tributes to those who perilously fought against institutionalized racism. From Rob's ideological standpoint, these media remembrances over represent images of the bygone Jim Crow South and erroneously anchor national perceptions of the region to a historical moment that has long since passed. Rob's editorial decisions are guided by his ideological belief that the South's troubled racial history is an anachronism and that the media spotlight needs to be cast on the region's evolution and its contemporary socio-economic accomplishments and promising future trajectories.

As a promoter of tourism and business investment in the South, Rob closely monitors the business press with a critical eye toward any signs that outmoded segregationist 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] in 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 publication?]. 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 reported 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 unionized wage standards, benefit packages, and work restrictions helped to fuel 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 Old South socio-economic hierarchies and their institutionalization in social patterns, social mores, educational practices, 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 that could function as a proto-form of labor organizing (Foner 1980). During the

era of Congressional Reconstruction, the Redeemers also placed into cultural circulation a set of ideological beliefs and eventually state laws that would subsequently impede labor union advancement in the region. Under the ideological guise of keeping the South free from the manipulative clutches of Northern reprobates, the Redeemers vociferously and effectively 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 counter-memory 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 during the antebellum period (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, low rates of literacy, and low expectations among those born into poverty) (Flynt 2004) that is conspicuously absent in *Today's South* mythic portrayals, even though these retrograde socio-economic conditions are also a facet of the New South.

In sum, the sunnily optimistic and forward-looking posturing of *Today's South* 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 and deracinated conventions of Southern hospitality and regional cuisines. This ideological simulation further connotes that the South's segregationist legacy lacks

contemporary relevance and should no longer mar perceptions of the region. In this ideological construction, the South is reduced to a mythical place that melds cosmopolitan outlooks and contemporary cultural amenities with *timeless traditions*, which in this commercial context, becomes the operative euphemism for the repression of problematic cultural counter-memories. 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). It asserts that enlightened cosmopolitan values have now trumped the parochial attitudes which once dominated the South, creating a lucrative regional market for a broad gamut of upscale goods and services.

Southern Identity as a Reclaimed Moonlight and Magnolias Myth (and the Effacement of Intra-racial Class Differences)

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

Rather than distancing itself from the rural culture of poor Southern whites, *Southern Heritage* 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. This collective discourse is targeted 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. The magazine's recurrent recitations on traditional home cooking and domestic craft (e.g., quilting, pottery, basket making, and sewing) made easy ideologically invoke ideals of self-sufficiency, just-folks-populism, and autonomy from the seductive trappings of crass commercialism. 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 quality of life could be enhanced by recovering these archaic forms of regionalized cultural capital.

Eschewing the forward-looking orientation of *Today's South*, *Southern Heritage* is unabashedly nostalgic in its many odes to Southern traditions and the virtues of the Old South. In particular, *Southern Heritage* actively promotes the idea that contemporary women can ritualistically and materially regain their connection to some lost essence of traditional womanhood (i.e., the mindset of a lady) through stylized modes of domestic production via cooking, sewing, flower arranging, home entertaining, decorating in a tasteful Southern style, dressing in fashions that hearken to the antebellum era, and most anachronistically of all, enriching personal relationships through the delicate art of handwritten notes inscribed on fine stationery.

In the following passage, magazine editor and founder Candace elaborates on her goal of cultivating respect and appreciation for Southern traditions and her related belief that the antebellum ideal of Southern womanhood is a needed therapeutic and societal corrective to the de-traditionalizing consequences of the feminist movement:

Candace: 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 bonbons and shop. Being a lady is a mindset, and it’s a way that we approach our lives with 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. 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.

Much like New South mythmakers who erase the complexities of racial inequality from their representations, Candace’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 traditional virtues of Southern femininity, which has created a sense of loss and social taboo among women who aspire to the gracious mindset of a lady. This rhetorical framing enables the feminist movement to serve as a potent ideological foil for media content that Candace characterizes as a “re-spiriting” of Southern femininity but this positioning also necessitates that counter-memories of pre-feminist angst and unrest among middle class women—Betty Friedan’s (1963) “the problem with no name”—must also be elided in these celebratory portrayals.

Ideologically, Candace’s narrative can be linked to broader expressions of cultural ambivalence toward the 2nd wave feminist movement of the 1960’s and 1970’s and the paradoxical metonymic reduction of this socio-political movement, in popular culture, to a defiantly unadorned style of appearance (see Scott 2005). The political and economic agenda of 2nd wave feminism drew heavily from the ethos of liberal feminism, which sought an egalitarian society in which women had equal opportunities to compete for economic resources and status positions in the public sphere (Bristor and Fischer 1993; Warner 2002). As Scott (2005, 276-

279) further elaborates, second wave feminism's quest to liberate women from the shackles of their traditional gender roles, often led to a vilification of female adornment and fashion as tools of patriarchal oppression. This "anti-beauty crusade" (Scott 2005, 278) was premised on a consequential blindspot toward the function of feminine dress as a mode of self-expression and contextually nuanced assertions of liberty. Owing to these draconian sartorial proscriptions, the feminist movement came to be culturally identified with an almost Maoist orthodoxy of plain dress that, in turn fueled disparaging stereotypes of feminists that took hold throughout the 1980's and 1990's.

Against this contested ideological backdrop, *Southern Heritage's* playful representations of Southern feminine traditions strategically invert the feminist construction of domesticity as a form of patriarchal oppression and its puritanically serious dress codes. In this sense, *Southern Heritage* aligns with a sensibility that Scott (2005) characterizes as third-wave feminism, which is gravitating toward a more playful and aesthetically flexible conceptualization of liberated femininity but places a decidedly retro spin on this sensibility. *Southern Heritage* is premised on the ideological axiom that the forces of modernity (as inflected through the detraditionalizing influences of feminism) have denied women the pleasures offered by their natural right to femininity and a volitional return to traditional Southern femininity is promoted as a therapeutic identity project that expresses a kind of post-feminist liberation, though this ideological turn is fully dependent on the greater range of life opportunities that were gained through feminist struggles.

Southern Heritage's mythic construction of the Southern lady is specifically targeted to a particular age cohort: baby boom women who as young adults opted for a different identity path than their mothers and grandmothers and who are now receptive to nostalgic ruminations about

Southern traditions. Candace astutely recognizes that her targeted readers' lifestyles are embedded in the contemporary time pressed worlds of working mothers and dual career couples rather than the idyllically relaxed scenarios portrayed in her magazine. Accordingly, Candace has melded her mission of preserving important vestiges of traditional Southern feminine culture with contemporary preferences for time saving convenience. In this way, *Southern Heritage's* celebrations of womanly craft and gracious living can signal that they are not importuning women to dedicate themselves to an unrealistically meticulous domestic standard:

Candace: 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.

Appealing to this targeted reading audience requires striking a subtle balance between these celebrations of domesticated femininity and inspirational tales that recount how women have been able to leverage their steel magnolia virtues to attain success in the public sphere. This mythmaking objective is rhetorically encoded in the magazine's organizational layout, which has two subsections entitled "to celebrate" and "to inspire." *Southern Heritage* regularly features up-from-nothing biographies of the Southern women entrepreneurs that lend a post-feminist credibility to the magazine's lifestyle admonitions. These high profile women are described as hailing from working class or tenant farming upbringings, and owing to a lack of work experience outside the home, were driven to start businesses that traded on their domestic skills tied to Southern culture. Entrepreneurial celebrities, like Paula Deen, Deborah Ford, and Dixie Carter, are given iconic status through feature articles honoring them as "Southern Lady of the Year," and highlighting their humble beginnings and arduous struggles to attain success.

Through this ideological framing, *Southern Heritage* subtly places a modern spin on the narrative of traditional Southern womanhood whereby inner strength is now manifested as an indomitable entrepreneurial spirit. These stories of hard-earned upward mobility and class standing morally justify the economic privileges of white Southern women who are now quite distanced from the tenant farming/working-class milieu. The identity value generated by this recovered/reconstructed heritage of traditional Southern femininity draws from these cultural ideals of unpretentiousness, authenticity, thrifty industriousness, and working class populism. In similar ideological vein, the end pages of each issue contain resource guides that provide information where its featured products can be purchased. These guides routinely co-mingle 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 rural Southern upbringing, at various times feel uncomfortable with the trappings of affluence and upper class standing (cf., Nenga 2003).

The ideological negation of class difference is also manifest in Candace'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 to economic limitations, the latter of which Candace regards as a great class leveler:

Candace: [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.

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 preserving the hallowed cultural heritage of poor rural Southern women, pulls for nostalgic readings that gloss over the class/race privileging instantiated in these representations.

Southern Heritage assiduously 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 of women holding upper level professional positions rather than the vast majority of working women (Warner 2002, p. 260-261). Instead, *Southern Heritage* 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 communicating through hand written letters rather than e-mail. In this way, *Southern*

Heritage positions its vision of Southern tradition as a means for women to combat the dehumanizing and depersonalized aspects of the hypercompetitive business world.

In seeking to build a national and even global readership, however, a significant portion of each *Southern Heritage* issue promulgates an updated and consumerist vision 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. Importantly, these portrayals place enactments of traditional Southern womanhood in the public sphere where the anti-egalitarian counter-memories of domestic drudgery and patriarchal entrapment are not likely to be invoked and that also tacitly presuppose that the women being represented have careers and economic independence:

Candace: It's really funny, This came about [the concept of *Southern Heritage*], 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 the Celtic myth/white trash dispersions, Candace's statement seems almost incongruous. For example, why would someone need to be raised in the South to appreciate the region's premier dining and shopping venues?

Underlying this seemingly banal endorsement of the South's cultural sophistication is a quite interesting ideological move. *Southern Heritage* trades on white Southerners' counter-memory of Mencken's damning Celtic thesis, which renders their cultural heritage as debased and aesthetically inferior. Candace's 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.'" What is noteworthy about this reflection (and its parallel expressions in the *Southern Heritage's* representational content) is the easy rhetorical shift between the aristocratic moonlight and magnolias myth and cultural meanings and practices invocative of the rural culture of poor whites.

Candace's editorial choices rely on a regionalized 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 empathetically understand that the heritage of more affluent Southern women may only be one or two generations removed from the cultural world of poor whites. Accordingly, this magazine has tailored its myth making activities to mesh with these hybrid-class affinities and the cultural circumstances of upwardly mobile Southern professional womanhood.

Southern Heritage blends a Romantic construction of rural white culture and the steel magnolias myth to forge a commercial myth of Southern accented feminine entrepreneurship. This ideological quest is 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 trans-generational sisterhood that transcends class hierarchies and divisions. Through its ennobling appropriation of the folk cultures and entrepreneurial survival skills of poor Southern women, this mythic figuration elides the contentious realities of class-based economic inequities and the cultural capital rifts that separate the worlds of the professional and working classes (Holt 1998). 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 baby boomers’ aspirations for upward mobility, their ambivalence about diverging from regional notions of traditional family life, and their habituated defensiveness toward the trailer trash variation of the Celtic stigma.

This ideological construction promotes a sense of sisterly solidarity with all white Southern women and promises compatibility between their regional and professional identities. This magazine 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 odds and representing different ideological factions (e.g., traditionalists versus feminists) (see Warner 2002). In contradistinction to *Today’s South*, *Southern Heritage* privileges an ideal of historical continuity among the lives of Southern women that trumps space both in terms of transcending geographic provincialism—as Candace puts the matter, being a Southern lady is a “state of mind” not a location—and the hierarchal stratifications that have divided women of different socio-economic classes.

SIMULATION AND ITS DISCONTENTS

In the course of analyzing the commercial myths that have shaped collective memories of the American South, we were drawn to Baudrillard's (1983) concepts of simulations and hyperrealities, which have inspired a generation of postmodern social theorists (see Firat and Venkatesh 1995; Kellner 2005). Baudrillard's signature argument is that the modernist distinction between the original and the copy has fundamentally imploded. Postmodern societies are a realm of simulation in which copies of copies of copies (*ad infinitum*) perpetually circulate throughout the rhizomatic network of mass media and digital technologies with no definitive connection to a discernible and incontrovertible origin. In this media-saturated postmodern order, consumers' are seduced by desire, rather than dominated by rationalized modes of exchange, and these desires are stoked by intensified experiences of the hyperreal and the schizophrenic ecstasy of promiscuously, proliferating cultural signs whose virtual existence appears to have no material limits (see Best and Kellner 2001).

If we bracket the nihilistic undertones of Baudrillard's theorization, the strategic actions of our two New South mythmakers, each operating from unique positions in a heterogeneous market system, can be seen as simulations. While both make repeated emic references to the realities of New South or Southern traditions, their representations draw from prior mythic constructions of the South, which themselves derive from prior mythic constructions of the South, etcetera, etcetera. However, these cases of New South mythmaking diverge from Baudrillard's theoretical assumption that a given simulation is a free-floating sign whose meanings emerge in relation to other free-floating signs in a broader semiotic code. Instead, these commercial simulations of the South are complex narrative reconstructions of collective memories grounded in the material conditions of racial and class stratifications and they harbor

an ever present potential to invoke contradictory counter-memories that could dispel their seductive allure. The differing strategies that Rob and Candace use to manage these counter-memories are a function of their positions in a heterogeneous market system, which imposes a gamut of constraints, competitive goals, ideological imperatives, and heightened sensitivities toward the racial counter-memories that most problematically contradict their ideological portrayals.

Rob is highly sensitive to counter-memories emanating from the 1960's Civil Rights movement and this legacy is a constant point of concern and an explicit object of ideological effacement. For Candace, memories of the segregated South are not a particularly pressing ideological concern whereas counter-memories linked to class difference are far more salient. These contrasting ideological outlooks are a direct function of the gender subtext that distinguishes the myths conveyed through *Today's South* and *Southern Heritage*. Though the ranks of Southern segregationists included both men and women, its most high profile enforcers and ideologues, particularly during the 1960's Civil Rights struggles, were male (i.e., Bull Connor, George Wallace, and the Imperial Wizard of the KKK). This media-reinforced cultural association helps to insulate *Southern Heritage*, with its feminine motif, from the specter of segregationist counter-memories. For *Today's South*, however, the counter-memory of retrograde white Southern masculinity (and its cultural associations with segregation, intolerance, parochialism, and philistinism) looms much larger because so many of its cosmopolitan portrayals, and general mode of address, are framed in terms that culturally connote a masculine frame-of-reference.

In grappling with counter-memories of the segregated South, *Today's South* employs a strategy of 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 fomented an intra-regional chasm between the cultural outlooks and values of poor rural whites and white urban professionals (see Reed 1983). *Today's South* speaks to individuals as cosmopolitan consumers and its keeps the conversation on decidedly professional though quite congenial, rather than personal terms. If taken at face value, this commercial myth would seem to be fashioning an entirely new regional identity 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.

To elide counter-memories of intra-racial class division among Southern women, *Southern Heritage* is pursuing a strategy of revisionist reclamation 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, *Southern Heritage* renders time honored Southern traditions as an anodyne for the cultural anxieties facing professional women who are struggling to balance work and family; this ideological strategy is particularly attuned to the identity conflicts facing Southern professional women who are ambivalent about their attained class privileges and emotionally connected to the rural South's 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* pays homage to the struggles and domestic skills of poor white Southern women, without summoning 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.

A more subtle, supplemental ideological strategy can also be discerned in *Southern Heritage*'s mythic constructions that we characterize as mythological conflation. In its representations of traditional Southern femininity (and implied sisterhood), *Southern Heritage* conflates the socio-economically stratified class positions of aristocratic and poor white Southern in a fashion that serves two important ideological functions. First, it strategically reworks the mythic construction of aristocratic Southern femininity by incorporating ideals of skillful industriousness and resiliency-in-the-face-of-hardship that are culturally associated with poor white Southern homemakers. This fusion of class practices buttresses the steel magnolias motif that enables *Southern Heritage*'s mythic portrayals to be read as an empowering, post-feminist script rather than as a regression to the confining gender roles of the past. Second, this mythological conflation also allows the problematic legacy of segregation to go without saying; a circumstance quite directly reflected by the paucity of references to these counter-memories in Candace's narrative. Poor southern white women have long performed their own domestic labor because they lack the economic wherewithal to own (in the antebellum period) or hire servants. In contrast, aristocratic Southern women enjoyed the class/race privilege of house slaves during the antebellum era and post-Reconstruction, of cheap domestic labor provided by African-Americans and in some cases, poor white Southern women. By aligning its aristocratic

construction of Southern femininity with the (romanticized) positions of poor white Southern women, *Southern Heritage* in one fell mythological swoop erases problematic counter-memories of the racially oppressive hierarchies that culturally and socio-economically divided Southerners.

FROM MEANING TRANSFER TO MARKET SYSTEM TRANSFIGURATIONS

Identity value is a major symbolic currency of the commercial marketplace. Prior consumer research has established that negotiations between commercial mythmakers and consumers play an integral role in the co-creation of identity value. However, parallel and equally consequential negotiations occur at the market system level, as competing commercial mythmakers conjure collective memories that serve their market interests while also seeking to ideologically contain contradictory and destabilizing counter-memories. Figure 1 provides a visual summary of our proposed interrelationships between cultural myths, counter-memories, and competing commercial interests that can be compared to prior formulations of the meaning-transfer process (cf., Belk, Ger, and Askergaard 2003; Coulter, Price, and Feick 2003; McCracken 1986; Murray 2002; Thompson and Haytko 1997).

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

The “crystallization of myth” represented on the far left side of the model indicates that a cultural myth draws from multiple genealogical threads whose roots can always be traced further back into history. In other words, there is no definitive historical origin to a prominent cultural myth. However, for pragmatic purposes, pivotal moments of historical confluence can be identified in which these diverse genealogical threads coalesce in a mytho-ideological form that exerts enduring historical influences on cultural perceptions. For example, the forty year period immediately following the end of the American Civil War proved to be a critical time for the germination of the South’s regional mythology. Even though these threads could be traced back

to the antebellum period, and still further back to racial tensions and colonial conflicts which shaped America's relationship to the British Empire, the mythic narratives formed during the Reconstruction era and its segregationist aftermath, constitute the effective history (cf., Ricoeur 1981) that has most directly shaped the identity value of the South's commercial mythology.

Whereas McCracken's influential conceptualization has directed theoretical attention toward vertical movements from the culturally constituted world to marketing intermediaries to consumers, our model calls attention to the horizontal flows (and conflicts) that arise in a market system. When different cultural producers draw from a heterogeneous ensemble of mythic ideals and meanings, they are also vying to shape public perceptions. For example, *Today's South* is in a tacit cultural competition with mythic representations of the South that run against the grain of its cosmopolitan depictions, whether in the form of the raunchy redneck humor of Larry the Cable Guy, the hard living, rebellious persona of the honky tonk singer Hank III (grandson of Hank Williams Sr.) or the down home, rural culinary traditions promoted through the themed restaurant chain *Cracker Barrel*. Commercial mythmakers are embedded in these relational competitive networks and their strategic transfigurations of a cultural myth are shaped by an (at least partial) awareness of the counter-memories that are invoked by alternative representations that circulate in the relevant myth market. The diversified strategies used to manage these competitive quandaries, in turn, generate new commercial myths, and new configurations of collective memories and counter-memories, that are projected forward toward changing cultural and marketplace conditions.

Commercial culture is infused by legacies of socio-political and economic conflicts (Cohen 2003). Through the symbolic currency of identity value, commercial myths provide an important cultural medium for negotiating the tensions between collective memories and

countermemories that harbor consequential political and economic stakes. Our investigation has developed an analytic perspective that we hope can and will facilitate further research into the role that market systems play in shaping the ideological terms of these cultural dialogues.

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FIGURE 1
Transfiguring Commercial Myths and Collective Memories through the Prism of Market Systems

