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Reconstructing the South: How Commercial Myths Compete for Identity Value through the Ideological Shaping of Popular Memories and Counter-memories

CRAIG THOMPSON
KELLY TIAN*

This study explicates the coconstitutive relationships between commercial myth-making and popular memory that arise through myth market competitions for identity value. We develop a genealogical analysis of the representational strategies and ideological rationales that two prominent New South mythmakers use to shape popular memories in relation to their competitive goals and to efface counter-memories that contradict their mythologized representations. We then derive a conceptual model that highlights competitive, historical, and ideological influences on commercial mythmaking and their transformative effects on popular memory, which have not been addressed by prior theorizations of the meaning transfer process.

A similarly egregious example of looking at history less in terms of the content than the package comes from the Mississippi Delta, where without acknowledging the decidedly anti-boosterist message of a recent book about the area, the Washington County Convention and Visitors Bureau has simply appropriated its title in order to make "The Most Southern Place on Earth" its official slogan. None of this should be surprising. . . . Any effort to commodify cultural identity is going to entail some selective emphasis and cosmetic historical adjustment. We hardly need a marketing survey, after all, to know that barn dances and barbecues sell better than lynchings and pellagra. (Cobb 2000, 21)

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The *Most Southern Place on Earth* (1992), which, incidentally, was authored by James Cobb, is a stark analysis of the Delta region's contentious racial politics and the poverty endemic to its sharecropper economy, not exactly the kind of storytelling commerce bureaus use to prime the tourist trade. Yet the book's title resonated with commercial portrayals of the Southern United States that had been established in popular memory long before Cobb's marketable turn of phrase. From the 1920s onward, business interests and state governments across the South have devoted significant resources to the goal of attracting tourists, particularly Northern vacationers seeking respite from harsh winters. As Brundage (2000, 10) observes: "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." Seen in this light, the commercial appropriation of Cobb's book title is not so much a case of placing a cosmetic gloss on Southern history as it is a leveraging of culturally rooted and depoliticized commercial myths and their ideological framing of popular memory.

placing particular emphasis on the interrelationships between the politics of identity and influential commercial representations of the South.

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This article investigates the coconstitutive relationships between commercial mythmaking and popular memory. Commercial mythmaking refers to the efforts of advertisers, brand strategists, tourist promoters, and other marketing agents to situate their goods and services in culturally resonant stories that consumers can use to resolve salient contradictions in their lives (Holt 2004) and to construct their personal and communal identities in desired ways (Thompson 2004). Commercial myths most commonly provide identity value by leveraging and updating existing cultural myths, but they can also convey new mythic ideals through the syncretic blending of narrative and imagistic elements that hail from multiple cultural myths. In concert with generating identity value (Holt 2004), commercial mythmaking can also function as an ideological process that merges entertainment, education, and indoctrination in a particular interpretive rendering of the past and its sociocultural meaning (Brown, Hirschman, and Maclaran 2000; Peñaloza 2000).

In regard to this latter function, prior research has tended to focus on identifying the omissions and occlusions posed by these selective representations of history and the sociopolitical and economic interests they serve by naturalizing relations of dominance and subordination among different social groups (Barthes 1972; Roberts 2000; Sperb 2005). A closely related research stream has demonstrated that consumers are not passive receivers of commercially staged histories but, instead, act as cocreators of meaning who themselves selectively use and variously interpret commercialized representations of the past (Grayson and Martinec 2004; Maclaran and Brown 2005). As Peñaloza (2001, 393–94) also details, consumers' playful and/or oppositional interpretations are still shaped and, to some extent, constrained by the ideological framing of commodified histories; thus, even active forms of consumer resistance involve a partial acquiescence to the interests of commercial mythmakers.

This framing effect suggests that the representational choices and strategies of commercial mythmakers should be an important concern for consumer culture researchers. However, in the consumer culture theory (CCT) tradition, the historical, competitive, and ideological factors that structure the practices of commercial mythmaking remain a largely unexplored and undertheorized terrain, though Holt (2004) and Peñaloza (2000) investigate a number of issues quite germane to this topic. Our contribution to this still-nascent sphere of CCT inquiry emanates from our conceptual reformulation of the relationships between commercial mythmaking and leading theories of popular memory and counter-memory (Foucault 1977; Lipsitz 1990). Before proceeding to the textual details of our analysis, we need first to explain the conceptual network and distinguishing theoretical rationales that orient our research approach.

The construct of popular memory is a mass-mediated, dynamic, and heterogeneous reformulation of Maurice Halbwachs's influential theorization of collective memory (Fowler 2005). Drawing from Durkheim, Halbwachs (1992) argued that social groups (e.g., tightly knit communities, religious

sects, and social classes) create and maintain a sense of solidarity through the active construction of a shared past. These collective memories are produced and reproduced by oral and written storytelling traditions; the designation of sacred landmarks, ancestors, and historical protagonists; and other public affirmations of the group's self-defining historical experiences.

Subsequent theorists have broadened Halbwachs's original thesis to conceptualize the ideological relationships between collective memories that sustain a specific group identity and popular memories that bind different social groups together in a national identity (Fowler 2005). These theorists of popular memory argue that socioeconomically dominant groups have a more powerful voice in this cultural cacophony of collective memories and, thereby, are able to frame national identity, and related socioeconomic and political conversations, in meanings that favor their interests (Lipsitz 1988). Accordingly, the hegemonic construction of popular memory will also selectively omit conflicting perspectives and historical details that would otherwise threaten the dominant group's self-affirming vision of the past (Anderson 2000).

Power begets resistance, and hegemonic representations of popular memory are almost invariably confronted by counter-memories that recall historical events as understood from the perspective of subordinated groups (Foucault 1977; Fowler 2005; Lipsitz 1990). From this theoretical standpoint, representations of popular memories are de facto sites of struggle as different social groups seek to propagate their preferred collective constructions of history and cultural identity (Frisch 1990; Roberts 2000). As Lipsitz (1990) discusses, the performing and representational arts and entertainment media have long functioned as cultural forums for the expression of oppositional counter-memories, albeit in an often subversive or sublimated form. As the saturated mediascape has become a province of niche content and market segmentation, commercial representations of popular memory have become increasingly diversified and now speak directly to social groups (e.g., ethnic minorities, gays, and lesbians) that have been historically marginalized in the broader cultural currents of mainstream society. Thus, commercially produced culture can reproduce hegemonic viewpoints in certain quarters while, in others, expressing counter-memories "that rebuke the injustices and inequities of the present" (Lipsitz 1990, 20).

However, this postmodern paradox also blurs the theoretical line between popular memory and counter-memory. For example, a white, middle-class channel surfer might come across a documentary on the Underground Railroad or a rebroadcast of the Academy Award-winning film *Glory* (1989), which dramatizes the trials and tribulations of black soldiers who fought in the Union army. Each of these cultural representations relay historical perspectives that would be conventionally classed as African American counter-memories, but they are culturally available to any media consumer, regardless of collective affiliation. Furthermore, postmodernity levels many of the sociocultural and insti-

tutional hierarchies that once distinguished high culture from low culture and authoritative knowledge from folk knowledge (Jameson 1992). Thus, an engrossing docudrama, like *Glory*, could well have more impact on a consumer's outlook than the official, and presumably dominant-group controlled, histories he/she may have learned in school.

Owing to these postmodern considerations, we have adopted a relational and market-mediated definition of counter-memory that is not strictly anchored to the perspectives and experiences of marginalized or oppressed social groups. In our framework, a mythologized representation of popular memory that serves the competitive and ideological agenda of one commercial producer can function as a contradictory, and identity devaluing, counter-memory for another. Even though different commercial mythmakers may not be directly competing in the same product or service markets, in the media mélange of contemporary consumer culture, they are invariably competing in the "mass-mediated myth market" (Holt 2004, 56–61) for identity value. To analyze the ways in which counter-memories structure these myth market competitions, researchers must attend to the array of institutional and sociohistorical factors that have shaped prior commercial articulations of the leveraged cultural heritage, and which constitute the historical reserve of popular memories from which commercial mythmakers draw.

In this genealogical spirit (Foucault 1977, 1979), our study investigates how these confluences of myth market competition, prevailing commercial and ideological objectives, and historically constituted popular memories structure the representational practices of commercial mythmakers. As foreshadowed by our opening vignette, our theorization derives from a comparative analysis of two prominent New South mythmakers who are seeking to reconstruct ideologically the historical legacy of antebellum, Confederate, and segregationist South in ways that serve their commercial agendas. As editors of nationally distributed Southern lifestyle magazines, their figurations of commercial myths do not arise in an *ex nihilo* fashion. Rather, they are culled from a longer history of Southern mythmaking practices and are shaped by ideological sensitivities toward different counter-memories most relevant to their respective market segmentation strategies.

RECONSTRUCTING THE (MYTHIC) SOUTH

If it can be said there are many Souths,
the fact remains that there is also one
South. (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 of the 1960s Civil Rights movement. These historical circumstances reflect that the economies of the Northern and Southern states followed distinctive trajectories and, as a result, situated their citizenries in quite different constellations of sociopolitical interests. These material differences came to be represented and reinforced through a complex of ideological beliefs, moral valuations, social practices, cultural mores, and sociocultural divisions (Foner 1988).

The South's (mythologized) heritage and the enduring socioeconomic patterns set by the aftermath of Reconstruction have generated prominent ideological templates through which race and class relations in the United States have been mapped and contested (Blight 2001; Lipsitz 2006; Roediger 1999). 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 prejudices and character flaws of its poor white rural inhabitants (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 old boy brother Billy subtly impugned his presidential stature, while President Clinton, among his many public relations 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 infusions of Northern capital needed to build a more prosperous New South. 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 and 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 (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 Hazard* (and its recent cinematic remake), where its heroic protagonists embark on exciting adventures in their souped-up Dodge Charger, affectionately called the General Lee and adorned with a Confederate flag. In this media representation, these Confederate signifiers connote rebelliousness, trickster skill, and, of course, a fun-loving good old 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 (1956–2001), 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 National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) forced its begrudging relocation to the Statehouse grounds (next to a monument honoring fallen Confederate soldiers) in a still-debated political compromise. The State of Georgia's tumultuous flag history further exemplifies the politics of identity conflicts waged through this Confederate symbol. In 1956, the Georgia legislature adopted the Confederate battle flag as the official state flag to symbolize their strident opposition to federal desegregation mandates. In 2001, then Governor Ray Barnes commissioned a new state flag, which did not feature Confederate iconography, in response to ongoing protests and an economic boycott threatened by the NAACP. The new flag drew howls of protest among white voters, particularly in the state's rural areas. This backlash has been widely credited with Barnes's subsequent defeat in the 2002 gubernatorial election (Wilentz 2002).

Citizen attitudes toward these state-sanctioned tributes to the Confederacy break along racial lines, with strong support expressed among white constituencies 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, promilitary, my country right or wrong, and God and guns brand of political populism; this circumstance prompted 2004 Democratic presidential candidate Howard Dean to quip during his campaign that "I still want to be the candidate for guys with Confederate flags in their pickup trucks" (see *USA Today* Web site, http://www.usatoday.com/news/politicselections/nation/2003-11-02-dean-flag_x.htm, posted November 2, 2003).

In 1993, two hip-hop music promoters based in Charleston, South Carolina, Sherman Evans and Angel Quintero, put a decidedly postmodern spin on this cultural contestation by launching the NuSouth apparel line. At its marketing

peak, NuSouth attained nationwide distribution in over 200 boutiques and garnered endorsements from celebrity enthusiasts (Boyz II Men) and a significant level of national press coverage. This marketing buzz was largely precipitated by the brand's trademark logo: the Confederate flag refurbished in the red, black, and green scheme symbolic of African liberation (Edwards 1998).

Through this hybridizing marketing strategy, the founders of NuSouth sought to appropriate a divisive symbol of Southern history in ways that could unite black and white Southerners and expedite the emergence of an inclusive, multicultural New South. In the words of Angel Quintero, "We're not trying to change history; we're making it" (Wilkie 1999). They also had visions of creating an iconic fashion brand that would have significant identity value for fashion-forward young adults: "We intend to take on Tommy Hilfiger and all those guys, so they can't say we're just whistling Dixie" (Evans, quoted in Wilkie 1999, A1). Historian Robert Bonner (2000) extolled the brand's daring iconography, proclaiming that "the NuSouth entrepreneurs have attempted to resolve the false choice of whether the Confederate flag is a symbol for heritage and sacrifice, as its white supporters claim, or a symbol for slavery and oppression, as its detractors argue." As it turned out, however, the polemical meanings of the Confederate flag and their contradictory relationship to themes of African American empowerment proved to be an untenable brand positioning, and NuSouth ceased operation in 2004, a casualty of declining sales and undercapitalization.

The nexus of conflicted meanings and countermemories symbolized by the Confederate flag and its diverse commercial and ideological uses (some more successful than others) exemplifies a broader cultural phenomenon. Southern white identity myths venerate a cultural heritage that remains dogged by traces of polarizing racial divisions that are carried forward as countermemories. Importantly, these racially tinged countermemories also include the stigmatized constructions of poor white Southerners as backwoods hicks who possess a debased culture, indicative of an inferior intellect and work ethic. In sum, the racial countermemories implicit to this nexus of Southern white identity myths reflect not only contested black-white power relationships but also intraracial hierarchies among different classes of whites.

The Rise of Southern White Identity Myths

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 (ca. 1865–76), the former Confederate states had to grapple with their status as a conquered region whose socioeconomic system, based on slave capital, was being dismantled by outsiders (rhetorically maligned as scalawags and carpetbaggers). Caught in the midst of this massive socioeconomic upheaval, white Southerners had a desperate need to fashion myths that could at least symbolically mollify the collective anxieties provoked by this tidal wave of

socioeconomic 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 socioeconomic 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 and 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; Stowell 1998).

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, and innumerable stories of the Confederacy's great military leaders and great battles proliferated throughout the Southern states (Blight 2001; Brundage 2005). Roughly 3 decades after General Robert E. 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 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 redeem the Confederate cause ideologically 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, 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 enfranchise blacks and poor whites politically, and 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 three ideologically related and multifaceted white identity myths that have been quite integral to commercial representations of Southern culture: (1) the myth of the Lost Cause, (2) its complementary Moonlight and Magnolias myth, and (3) the Celtic myth. The first complement of identity myths emerged from the regionally indigenous mythmaking efforts undertaken by the Redeemers and other New South visionaries. In contrast, the Celtic myth 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 myth 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 and Its Moonlight and Magnolias Complement

The 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 (Stamp 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).¹

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 collective memories of white Southerners were significantly reshaped, and the morally objectionable aspects of the Old South's agrarian society, most particularly the brutal conditions endured by the slave class, were largely cast aside. In their place, a beatific image of Old South as a divinely sanctioned society of aristocratic planters and contented slaves increasingly came to the fore

¹The formative place of religion in the sociopolitical reconstruction of the postbellum South is a complicated story that is beyond the scope of the present article. Its historical contours were shaped by highly discordant relationships and political struggles among reform-minded Northern evangelicals, conservative Southern religious leaders seeking to restore the antebellum status quo, and newly freed African Americans embarking on the goal of establishing religious communities free from the control and influence of their former plantation class overlords. We direct interested readers to Stowell's (1998) comprehensive historical analysis of the cultural and ideological reconstitution of Southern religious life in the aftermath of the Civil War.

(although this mythic confabulation was vehemently challenged throughout all quarters of African American society; Du Bois 1903). The Lost Cause myth was also embraced and elaborated on 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 accuracy and scholarly legitimacy of these portrayals, the Lost Cause myth and its subsidiary Cavalier legend exerted a significant sway upon the regional memories of Southerners and eventually white Americans at large. The legendary film auteur, and son of a Confederate officer, D. W. Griffith, greatly facilitated this shift from a regional identity myth to a popular memory through his 1915 motion picture, *The Birth of a Nation*. Despite protests from the NAACP and other civil rights groups, this film received endorsement from President Woodrow Wilson, who held a private screening at the White House; it played to record audiences nationwide; and its heroic representations of the Ku Klux Klan helped to spark a revival of this white supremacist organization, which at time of the film's release had been defunct for approximately 2 decades (Rogin 1985).

Perhaps no other commercial culture phenomenon more powerfully framed cultural perceptions of the antebellum South and the aftermath of the Civil War than *Gone with the Wind* (Mitchell 1936), 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 also emblazoned the central motifs of the Lost Cause myth 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; Cohen 2003) and with ominous developments in Europe looming on the cultural horizon, American society was primed to embrace Romanticizing narratives that offered comforting visions of abundance, splendor, decorum, and social tranquility where everyone happily accepted their God-given place. These magnanimous portrayals of the antebellum South also struck a national chord by providing a mythic vision of a pure and noble state of whiteness that assuaged dominant cultural anxieties that the rising tide of Slavic and Asian immigration might lead to the miscegenation of the white race (Gould 1996).

Gone with the Wind effectively wedded the masculine

strain of the Lost Cause myth (and its espousal of militaristic valor and noble sacrifice) with its domesticated and feminized complement, the Moonlight and Magnolias myth, which depicts the antebellum South as a bygone world of refined manners and polite decorum, where courtship and gentrified leisure pursuits (e.g., ballroom dancing, fox hunting, and horseback riding) occupied the days and nights of dashing gentlemen and prim and proper belles (Cobb 1999). 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 Margaret Mitchell (whose outlook had been influenced by the protofeminism 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 1930s world mired in pandemic economic strife and geopolitical turmoil.

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 ideal. 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; this epithet rhetorically portrayed Turner as a boisterous, ill-mannered, and rather buffoonish Southern male. In other words, his self-promoted Cavalier image was re-framed as a variation of the redneck stereotype (e.g., the rich hayseed whose pretensions are foiled by his uncouth demeanor), an elicited counter-memory that 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 Magnolias 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 ambience of iconic Old South cities, such as Charleston and Savannah (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 its most 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 God-given order of things, thereby precipitating a host of societal ills that threatened the integrity of the white race and the nation (Reed 2003).

The Lost Cause myth also inspired a tragic and far more critical variation that depicts the Southern gentry as guilt-ridden souls, incapable of living up to their lofty Cavalier values, owing to egotism, pettiness, hypocrisy, shattered dreams, and, most of all, the moral stains of slavery. The southern gothic literary tradition, exemplified by writers such as William Faulkner, Eudora Welty, Flannery O'Connor, and Tennessee Williams, gave prominent cultural expression to this self-critical and melancholy interpretation of the Lost Cause myth. For these writers, the Lost Cause myth was a testament to the moral contradictions of a tragically flawed social order.

The Celtic Myth and Its Duality in Popular Memory

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 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 myth became applied more generally to white Southerners by Northern elites to justify their regional/ethnic claims of cultural superiority. This stereotyping popular memory 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 ethic 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).

A prominent promulgator of the disparaging Celtic myth 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 Scotch-Irish bloodline of poor rural 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 has been a robust villainous icon that has been reproduced across innumerable novels, television shows, and films such as *Deliverance* (1972), *Mississippi Burning* (1988), and *Easy Rider* (1969; Fischer 1997; Graham 2001). These scurrilous portrayals proliferated during the 1960s and 1970s. As the nation became increasingly sensitized to the injustices of institutionalized racism and prejudicial attitudes, the racist Southern redneck provided a potent scapegoat on which to project blame for this societal problem (Graham 2001).

During the course of the twentieth century, however, the Celtic myth also provided cultural inspiration for more ingratiating and ennobling iconic figures, such as the comical hillbilly, the fun-loving good old 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 myth are a significant means through which congenial representations 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 af-

fectionately denuded these otherwise stereotypical representations of their derisive qualities. An affably rebellious version of the Celtic myth has been routinely fashioned into an icon 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 myth has also given rise to a distinctive and quite marketable spin on the Romantic ideal 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—captured this struggle between redemption and backsliding in their songs, and 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 prepossessing, though no less stereotypical, transformations of the Celtic myth (Kirby 1986). For example, the atavistic hillbilly icon 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 Joel and Ethan Coen's "Old Tyme" screwball comedy, *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000), whose box-office success spawned a multimillion-selling sound track CD, two very successful concert tours featuring performers from its sound track, and a documentary film of the first tour and also thrust bluegrass legend Ralph Stanley (and self-proclaimed West Virginian hillbilly) into the commercial limelight. Through this mythologized cultural memory, suburban-metropolitan Americans have been able to project desires for a simpler, purer, and more authentic life onto the Appalachian region and its purportedly archaic culture (Malone 2002).

These comical and/or romanticizing subversions of the Celtic myth have not only triumphed in media representations of the South, the tourist trade, and the canon of country music but 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-toting moonshiner proclaiming on the bottle logo, "Yahoo Mountain Dew! It'll Tickle Your Innards!" and who appeared to be a close cultural cousin of the popular syndicated cartoon character Snuffy Smith. 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 Lester Flatt, Earl 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 a lunchtime favorite of working-class whites across the South.

Summarizin'

This constellation of identity myths and the staggering totality of their commercial incarnations have 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 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 countermemories that contradict an ongoing ideological agenda pursued by a diverse group of contemporary New South mythmakers who are seeking to transform the Southern economy (yet again) by attracting businesses in the high-tech, research and development, and cultural creative sectors (Eckes 2005). To gain an ideological foothold in the current socioeconomic milieu, these New South mythmakers strive to convey a modernized, inclusive, and cosmopolitan image across the global mediascape. For these commercial mythmakers, the cultural heritage associated with poor and uneducated white folk is a repository of problematic countermemories that variously contradict their ideological vision of the New South and whose threats to the identity value of their mythic representations need to be implicitly or explicitly redressed.

THE DIALECTIC OF COMMERCIAL MYTHMAKING AND COUNTERMEMORIES

Data Collection and Analysis

In keeping with our research emphasis, we conducted depth interviews with 10 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 1 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 befitting the New South economy's urbane professional class. Their narratives also revealed sensitivities toward social contradictions and less charitable cultural meanings and connotations that posed dilemmas for advancing their preferred repre-

sentations 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 the history of white Southern identity myths and counter-memories.

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, the editor of *Today's South*, and Rebecca, the editor *Southern Heritage* (the titles of the publications and all names in the cases are pseudonyms). *Today's South* is recognized in the media field for its long-term success, its extensive subscription base, and readership reaching into the multimillions. *Southern Heritage* is noted for its rapid growth since its premier issue less than a decade ago. It is the flagship publication of a media company whose annual revenues have quadrupled since 2002 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. They also offer a theoretically informative study in contrast because their mythic reconstructions of the South have been tailored to the distinctive interests and cultural outlooks of their respective target audiences. As a result, these two publications exhibit significant differences in the ideological terms of their myth market competition and the counter-memories that pose the most concern for their editors. Through their comparison, we can better illuminate the coconstituting relationships between commercial mythmaking activities and the ideological shaping of popular memories and counter-memories that occurs in the competition for identity value.

Southern Identity as the Effacement of the Segregated and Racist South

Today's South's mythmaking is patently forward-looking, masculine in tone of address, and wedded to the public sphere. In its pages, the South is portrayed as a progressive and cosmopolitan region, welcoming to Southerners and non-Southerners alike, regardless of creed or color. This commercial myth is geared to the interests and orientations of the global business class, and, conversely, its identity value is most threatened by counter-memories hailing from the Celtic myth's redneck stereotype and the South's segregationist past.

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 combat the backward and racist stigma that clings to the South with a cosmopolitan and socially progressive image that he believes is a more accurate reflection of the New South:

Rob: If you say "California" to most people, you think glam-

our 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 the real glamorous side. 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. . . . 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. . . . There's a 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. 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 rectify 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 since the time of Congressional Reconstruction. 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, intolerant, and culturally backward. In response to this tribal stigma (Goffman 1963), a habituated defensiveness has been built into the mythic structure of the New South mythmaking that ironically reproduces the clannish "us versus them" mind-set that is stereotypically attributed to Southern whites.

The contemporary terms of this rhetorical battle to redeem the South have been inexorably framed by the 1960s Civil Rights movement and the graphic media images of the racially segregated South that have been indelibly brandished into popular memory. This turbulent period is often characterized as the second great reconstruction of the South (Cobb 1999), and this historical parallel is quite central to Rob's editorial outlook:

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 1960s 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 its high-tech medicine. Just recently, I think the [University of Alabama] heart hospital was ranked number 3 or 4 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 having one of the five leading institutions in the world for AIDS research.

When Rob's 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 his editorial worldview. 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 surprisingly little regard for the multitude of commercial myths that cast Southern culture in a favorable and endearing light. However, these more propitious representations of Southern identity draw from a cultural heritage associated with working-class, rural whites. To portray a cosmopolitan, New South sensibility to his readers in a manner that does not encourage potentially contradictory countermemories, Rob's editorial judgments ideologically erase the presence of poor and undereducated Southerners and cultural vestiges of the Old South and the Celtic myth.

In the national news media, stories about the South are often sparked by anniversaries of significant figures and watershed moments in the 1960s 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 point of view, these media remembrances overrepresent 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 contemporary socioeconomic advancements and its 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 2 or 3 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 shows 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 premier 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.

Rob regards Mercedes's and Honda's decisions to locate major manufacturing facilities in Alabama as incontrovertible evidence that the South has entered a new and munificent socioeconomic age. For Rob, this national publication's reference to slave labor is a particularly stinging rhetorical jab because it invokes the most egregious connotations of the Old South. While the reported characterization of Alabama's nonunionized labor force as “akin to 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 that have impeded constructive dialogues between New South mythmakers and their critics.

Historically, nonunionized 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 academic 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 socioeconomic 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 protoform 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 effectively blocked 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 socioeconomic 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 is the state's agricultural center and the geographic locale that had some of 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 (tied to factors such as low investments in education, low rates of literacy, and low expectations among those born into poverty; Cobb 1992; Flynt 2004) that is conspicuously absent in *Today's South* mythic portrayals, even though these retrograde socioeconomic conditions are also a facet of the New South.

In sum, the sunnily optimistic and forward-looking posturing of *Today's South* occludes counter-memories of the Celtic myth and, instead, spotlights a mythic image of a cosmopolitan region populated by a sophisticated, rational, responsible, egalitarian, and enterprising citizenry. In this chamber-of-commerce-friendly portrayal, the New South is a bustling center of economic opportunity and diverse cultural amenities enticingly flavored by the (depoliticized and deracinated) conventions of Southern hospitality and regional cuisines. This commercial myth further connotes that the South's segregationist legacy should no longer mar public perceptions of the region. The ideological framing conveys that enlightened New South values have now trumped the parochial attitudes that once dominated the region, creating a lucrative regional market for business investment and national advertisers (particularly for high-end luxury goods).

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

Southern Heritage presents an alternative to the metropolitanized, masculinized, and secularized South that graces the pages of *Today's South* and other media forums that similarly tout the New South as a prospering, business-friendly region. It adopts a nostalgic-preservationist approach to New South mythmaking that is self-consciously feminine in tone of address, celebratory of domesticity, and lightly accented with Southern Christian salvation motifs. 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 an audience of largely women readers, *Southern Heritage* is a feminine lifestyle magazine spun as a civic crusade to revive craft traditions and moral virtues of Southern femininity. *Southern Heritage's* mythic construction of the Southern lady is specifically targeted to a particular age cohort: baby boom and Gen X 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. However, these appeals to traditional Southern family values and the redemptive value of rural craft render counter-memories of entrenched class hierarchies and the constrained life opportunities and hardships endured by poor, rural Southern women as the paramount threats to the identity value of this myth.

Southern Heritage strikes a delicate balance between celebrations of domesticated femininity and inspirational tales that recount how professional 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 postfeminist credibility to the magazine's lifestyle admonitions. These high-profile women are frequently described as hailing from working-class or tenant farming upbringings and, owing to a mix of trying circumstances and a lack of work experience outside the home, as starting businesses that traded on their domestic skills, steeped in the heritage of 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.

Southern Heritage assiduously avoids the control-oriented vernacular typically used in national media's master narrative on lifestyle management—espousing normative ideals of making conscientious choices, weighing options, and setting priorities—which is most germane to a rarefied strata of women holding upper-level professional positions rather than the vast majority of working women (Warner 2002, 260–61). 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 handwritten 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.

Rather than distancing itself from the rural culture of poor Southern whites, *Southern Heritage* 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) ideologically invoke ideals of self-sufficiency, just-folks populism, and imperiousness to 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 are now represented and mythologized as lifestyle enhancements for affluent women.

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 Southern womanhood (i.e., the mind-set 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.

Magazine editor and founder Rebecca astutely recognizes that her targeted readers' are time-pressed professionals and working mothers whose everyday lives bear scant resemblance to the idyllically relaxed scenarios portrayed in her magazine. Accordingly, Rebecca has blended 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:

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

In the following passage, Rebecca 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 much-needed therapeutic and societal corrective to the detraditionalizing consequences of the feminist movement:

Rebecca: 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 mind-set, 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 stream that flows through the South is that tradition.

Much like New South mythmakers who erase the complexities of racial inequality from their representations, Rebecca's rendition of the feminist movement erases its political struggles for socioeconomic equality. Instead, she pitches feminism as a lamentable 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 mind-set of a lady. This rhetorical framing enables the feminist movement to serve as a potent ideological foil for media content that Rebecca characterizes as a "re-spiriting" of Southern femininity. This positioning also necessitates that countermemories of prefeminist angst and unrest among middle-class women—Betty Friedan's (1963) "the problem with no name"—must also be negated in these celebratory portrayals.

Ideologically, Rebecca's narrative can be linked to broader expressions of cultural ambivalence toward the second-wave feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s and the paradoxical metonymic reduction of this sociopolitical movement, in popular memory, to a defiantly unadorned style of appearance (Scott 2005). The political and economic agenda of second-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, 276–79) 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 blind spot toward the function of feminine dress as a mode of self-expression and contextually nuanced assertions of liberty. Owing to these draconian sartorial prescriptions, the feminist movement came to be culturally identified with a Maoist-like doctrine of plain dress and

personal appearance that, in turn, fueled disparaging stereotypes of feminists that took hold throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

Against this contested ideological backdrop, *Southern Heritage's* representations of Southern feminine traditions strategically invert the feminist construction of domesticity as a form of patriarchal oppression and rebuke 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 this magazine places a decidedly retro spin on this orientation. *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 God-given right to femininity. Hence, a return to traditional Southern womanhood is promoted as a postfeminist and emancipatory revelation, though this ideological turn is fully dependent on the greater range of life opportunities that were gained through second-wave feminist struggles.

Through this ideological framing, *Southern Heritage* casts a contemporary light on the steel magnolias ideal by representing its trademark inner strength and resiliency 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 Southern femininity draws from these cultural ideals of unpretentiousness, authenticity, thrifty industriousness, and working-class populism. In a 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 comingle 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 multistatus 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 (Nenga 2003).

The ideological negation of class difference is also manifest in Rebecca's assertion 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 Rebecca regards as a great class leveler:

Rebecca: [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 Anne'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 socioeconomic inclusiveness and communal connectedness—stemming from revitalizing Southern traditions of family and neighborly togetherness, supporting and celebrating women, and recovering forgotten feminine knowledge of Southern domestic craft—diverts attention from the many vestiges of class or racial status differences that are encoded in the magazine's lifestyle recommendations. Etiquette guides describing the 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.

In seeking to build a national and even global readership, however, a significant portion of each *Southern Heritage* issue promotes an updated and consumerist version of the Moonlight and Magnolias myth in which a refined clientele of Southern ladies and gentlemen enjoy a cornucopia of fine restaurants, museums, and cosmopolitan retail settings. 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. These commercial appeals further signify that the women being represented have careers and economic independence:

Rebecca: 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 mode of representation neatly cleaves away the factious aspects of Southern culture—no Confederate flag-waving rebels here—and their stigmatized meanings and associations. However, it also obscures the historical reason that Southerners have been passionate defenders of their besieged cultural heritage and their

regional identities. Absent the subtext of these Celtic myth/white trash dispersions, Rebecca's statement seems 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 articulation of the Celtic myth, which renders their cultural heritage as debased and aesthetically inferior. Rebecca's editorial choices are shaped by the knowing presumption that the heritage of the South is still frequently subject to a disapproving or demeaning national gaze. She takes credit for reviving regional terms like "lady" and "yes ma'am" while commenting on the national reprobation of such references as antiquated and offensive. Her redemptive construction of Southern traditions precipitates a seemingly habituated defense against stigmatizing counter-memories emanating from the Celtic myth: as she states, "it doesn't mean that mamma beat us and put us in the barn until we said 'yes ma'am.'"

Rebecca's reflections (and their parallel expressions in the *Southern Heritage's* representational content) exemplify a recurrent and facile rhetorical shift between the aristocratic Moonlight and Magnolias myth and cultural meanings and practices invocatory of the rural culture of poor whites. Her editorial choices rely on a regionalized cultural memory to elicit different and emotion-laden interpretation between insiders and outsiders. For *Southern Heritage's* national and global readership, these representations connote that the stigma of Celtic myth 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 lifestyles 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 mythmaking activities to mesh with the conflicted class affinities of upwardly mobile Southern professional womanhood.

Southern Heritage blends a Romantic construction of rural white culture and the steel magnolias icon to forge a commercial myth of Southern feminine entrepreneurship. The ideological quest is to represent and affirm a hybrid identity—the professional woman who sustains the hallowed traditions of Southern womanhood in her public and private endeavors and who is supported by a transgenerational sisterhood that transcends class hierarchies and divisions. Through its ennobling appropriation of the folk cultures and entrepreneurial survival skills of poor Southern women, this mythic figuration elides the entrenched socioeconomic and cultural distinctions that separate the worlds of the professional and working classes. Adopting a voice 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 connotations of the Celtic myth.

This ideological construction promotes a sense of sisterly solidarity among white Southern women and promises compatibility between their regional and professional identities. This magazine symbolically unites two factions of American women (women who are full-time homemakers and women working outside the home), which have been constructed by national media as being culturally and ideologically at odds (e.g., traditionalists vs. feminists; 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 Rebecca 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 socioeconomic classes.

IDEOLOGICAL STRATEGIES FOR EFFACING COUNTERMEMORIES

Myth is depoliticized speech. (Barthes 1972, 142)

The differing strategies that Rob and Rebecca use to manage these counter-memories reflect their institutional positions in a heterogeneous market system characterized by a gamut of constraints, competitive goals and pressures, and tacit ideological imperatives. In negotiating these market system complexities, Rob and Candace have become highly sensitized to specific racial counter-memories that contradict their preferred portrayals of the New South. Rob is most sensitive to counter-memories of the 1960s Civil Rights movement, and this legacy is a constant point of concern and an explicit object of ideological effacement. For Rebecca, memories of the segregated South are not a particularly pressing ideological concern whereas counter-memories linked to class hierarchies and distinctions 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 publicized enforcers and ideologues, particularly during the 1960s Civil Rights struggles, were male (i.e., Bull Connor, George Wallace, and the imperial wizard of the Ku Klux Klan). This mass media-replicated popular memory helps to insulate *Southern Heritage*, with its feminine motif, from this Jim Crow legacy. For *Today's South*, however, the specter of recalcitrant Southern segregationists looms much larger because so many of its cosmopolitan portrayals 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 amplified the intraregional chasm between the cultural outlooks and values of poor rural whites and white urban professionals (Reed 1983). *Today's South* speaks to individuals as cosmopolitan consumers, and it keeps this conversation on a cordial but always professional level. 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 media context, these cosmopolitan and market populist representations are tacit confrontations with the stigmatized aspects of the Celtic myth 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 cultural vestiges of the segregated Old South.

To negate countermemories of intraracial class division among Southern women, *Southern Heritage* is pursuing a strategy of revisionist reclamation that bears marked similarity to retro branding (Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry 2003). Rather than construing the South's past as an embarrassing and checkered legacy now displaced by an enlightened present, *Southern Heritage* renders timeless 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'" (Malone 2002).

Mythic appeals to a timeless cultural existence are also a rhetorical technique for eliding the political struggles and conflicts that have shaped the contingent course of history and for essentializing their sociopolitical consequences (see Barthes 1972). Through nostalgic and heartfelt stories, commemorative layouts, 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 troubling countermemories of class-based inequities. Thus, the past becomes not only a repository of displaced meaning for valued ideals (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, which we characterize as mythological conflation. In its representations of traditional Southern femininity (and implied sisterhood), *Southern Heritage* conflates the socioeconomically 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 in a manner that enables *Southern Heritage* to be read as an empowering, postfeminist script rather than as a regression to the confining gender roles of the past.

Second, this mythological conflation also allows countermemories of exploitative class-based power relations to pass without saying. Simply put, 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 poor white Southern women. In contrast, 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. 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 countermemories of the socioeconomic disparities that have culturally divided and ordered the lives of white Southern women.

FROM MEANING TRANSFER TO MYTH MARKET TRANSFIGURATIONS

By focusing on the historical and ideological influences that structure the professional perspectives of commercial mythmakers, our study diverges from the dominant intellectual thrust of consumer culture theory. Consumer culture theorists have developed highly nuanced accounts of how consumers actively and creatively use narratives and meanings conveyed through brands, products, and servicescapes as resources for identity construction (see Arnould and Thompson [2005] for a more comprehensive review). However, this research stream has given relatively little consideration to the production side of consumer culture and the tacit theories, goals, and competitive and ideological influences that shape the actions of commercial mythmakers.

Peñaloza's (2000, 2001) ethnography of how beef producers strategically leverage cultural memories of the American Old West in the staging of western stock shows is a noteworthy exception that speaks directly to this theoretical gap. Peñaloza (2000) investigates the discourses and practices through which western cultural meanings and values are produced in these marketplace events. She details the roles and activities of multiple agents (e.g., ranchers, visitors, booth exhibitors, and rodeo riders) in "reproducing specific Western Culture values and capitalistic beliefs constituting the cultural world of the stockshow" (Peñaloza 2000, 104).

Our analysis extends Peñaloza's (2000) by casting theoretical light on the dialectical relationship between popular memories and commercial mythmaking. We have explicated the ways in which popular memories have been transformed by culturally resonant commercial myths and their recursive effects in the historically shaped field of contemporary myth

market competition. Our study has further plumbed the ideological strategies that commercial mythmakers use to interpret and efface contradictory counter-memories generated by myth market competition and the cultural rationales through which they justify these systematic erasures.

As a result, our genealogical analysis enriches the standard critical theory explanation that selective representations of popular memory are a means for dominant social groups to assert their hegemonic status (Barthes 1972; Lipsitz 1988, 1990; Peñaloza 2000; Sperb 2005; Wallace 1996). We have shown that commercial mythmaking is structured by a heterogeneous mix of historical influences, ideological and competitive goals, and multiple and contextually shifting counter-memories rather than a hegemonizing intent (Lipsitz 1988). In the context of New South mythmakers, for example, concluding that their elision of the 1960s Civil Rights movement is a straightforward expression and imposition of dominant group interests would be to fundamentally misunderstand the variegated mix of stigmatizing and contradictory counter-memories that are being negotiated through their representational choices.

Commenting on the hegemonic subtext of western stock shows, Peñaloza (2001, 395) further states that “white rural culture plays important roles within the larger configurations of white culture and U.S. culture, as consumed by members and nonmembers in negotiating elements of the imaginary and the real. . . . Documenting the consumption of white culture is an important contribution to our understanding of how it maintains its very powerful but implicit position at the center of U.S. culture.” Our genealogical analysis extends Peñaloza’s theoretical argument by demonstrating that popular memories of white culture are polysemic and poly-historical, reflecting complex intraracial divisions steeped in

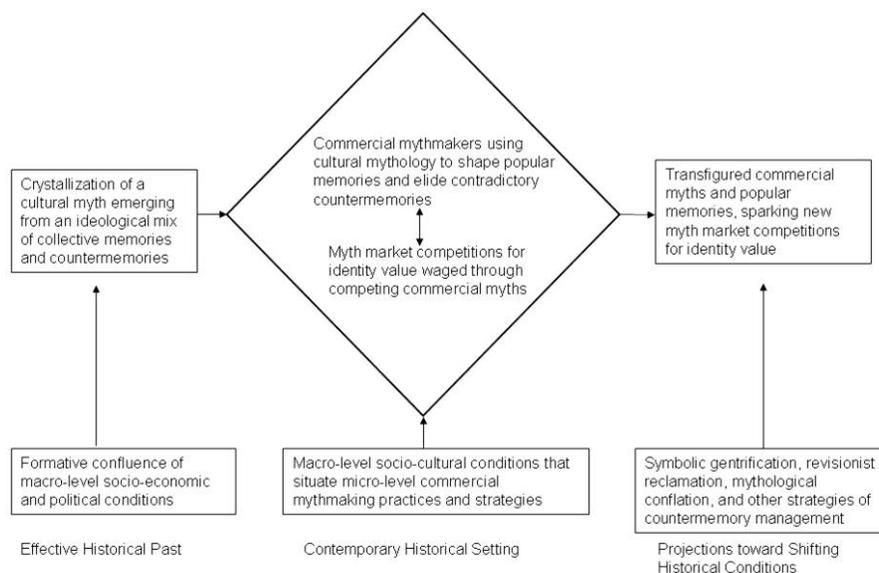
class position, ancestral origins, regional identification, and other loci of socioeconomic distinction. Commercial mythmakers variously juxtapose, rework, and systematically exclude counter-memories that carry forward historical traces of these intraracial cultural divisions and conflicts.

This genealogical recognition also affords a new conceptualization of how commercial myths compete for identity value. Many CCT studies, including Peñaloza’s twin ethnographies (2000, 2001), are conceptually premised on a variation of McCracken’s (1986, 1988) meaning transfer model. McCracken’s model highlights vertical flows of meaning from the culturally constituted world to marketplace intermediaries (such as advertisers, marketers, and other cultural producers) to consumers who ritually incorporate these cultural meanings into their lives. In contrast, our genealogical analysis profiles a nexus of horizontal relationships that structures myth market competition for identity value, as a given commercial mythmaker conjures popular memories that serve his/her marketplace interests while also seeking to ideologically manage contradictory and destabilizing counter-memories hailing from competing commercial representations. Furthermore, these horizontal competitive dynamics call attention to the arbitrariness of the now axiomatic distinction between the culturally constituted world of higher order meanings and the realm of commercial mythmaking. Rather, popular memories (and, by implication, counter-memories) are dialectically intertwined with commercial mythmaking.

Figure 1 provides a visual summary of our proposed interrelationships among cultural myths, counter-memories, and competing commercial interests. The *crystallization of a cultural myth* represented on the far left side of the model indicates that a cultural myth emerges from the creative and

FIGURE 1

TRANSFIGURING COMMERCIAL MYTHS AND POPULAR MEMORIES THROUGH THE PRISM OF MYTH MARKET COMPETITION



conflictual ferment of collective memories and counter-memories, as different social groups ideologically struggle to maintain or change their relative positions in the socio-economic and cultural order. Furthermore, the resulting 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 cultural myth, such as the Lost Cause myth or the Celtic myth. However, pivotal historical moments can be identified in which these diverse genealogical threads coalesce into a form that exerts enduring influences on popular memories. For example, the 40-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 genealogical threads could be traced further back to colonial conflicts with the British Empire and beyond, the mythic narratives formed during the Reconstruction era and its segregationist aftermath constitute the effective history (Ricoeur 1981) that has most directly shaped the identity value of the South's commercial mythology.

When different commercial mythmakers draw from a cultural mythology (such as the heterogeneous New South mythology that has arisen through the long-standing ideological and commercial project of reconstructing the South), they are also vying for identity value through the strategic and ideological framing of popular memories. Commercial mythmakers' strategic transfigurations of popular memory are structured by an awareness of the counter-memories that are invoked by competing representations that circulate in the mass-mediated myth market. Their diversified strategies to manage these competitive quandaries, in turn, generate new commercial myths and new configurations of popular memories and counter-memories that are projected forward toward changing cultural and marketplace conditions.

This transformative cycle also harbors broader societal implications. Popular memory is infused by legacies of sociopolitical and economic conflicts. As a consequence, societies also need forums for recognizing, representing, and negotiating these conflicts and grappling with their underlying socioeconomic and cultural catalysts. As postmodern cultural currents continue to blur distinctions between the public and private sphere, commercial culture has been inexorably thrust into the realm of identity politics (Holt 2002). The commercial marketplace now functions as a virtual plebiscite for negotiating the ideological parameters of popular memory and the sociopolitical significance of racial, class-based, and gendered counter-memories. Our investigation has developed a genealogical framework that we hope will facilitate further research into these consequential intersections of commercial culture, popular memory, counter-memory, and identity politics.

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