

Teaching Dixie in the Heartland: Racial and Sectional Imaginaries at a Midwestern University

Paul M. Renfro

Southern Methodist University

“WHEN I WENT DOWN [South] for [a] football game,” one white Midwesterner gleefully shared with his classmates and instructor, “I ordered a *pop* at the stadium. The lady behind the counter—a colored lady—responded, ‘*Pop?! We don’t call it pop down here!*’” In this retelling, the student offered his best impression of an African American woman from the South, oblivious to the treacherous historical ground upon which he danced.

This student meant no harm. But his anecdote, and the manner in which he delivered it, provide windows onto the racial, historical, and sectional imaginaries of the white Midwest. This student came from an overwhelmingly white high school, in an overwhelmingly white town, in an overwhelmingly white state. The homogeneity in which he has lived has prevented him from seriously examining whiteness and the subjectivities of those denied its perquisites. Moreover, the *fictive* racial and class homogeneity of the American Midwest renders the region racially “innocent,” ostensibly divorced from the upheavals of black liberation, Native dispossession, Latinx freedom movements, labor organizing, and other “unpleasant” historical particularities. The young man’s remarks grew out of this geographic and historical terrain.¹

Of course, essentializing is inherently problematic, as “the white Midwest” is surely not monolithic. But as Southern historians Brett Gadsden, Allen Tullos, and others have explicated, the frame of “imaginaries”—political, sectional, and otherwise—can map the “affective terrain” of an “imagined community.” Such imaginaries, Tullos writes, “take shape through popular narratives as much as by legislative acts; in the words and deeds of public figures of speech; through rumor, jokes, statistics, journalistic ascriptions, blog entries, art, and music.” Through these modes, political “common sense” is forged, and (in turn) power asymmetries are reinforced.²

In my U.S. South and Southern Cultures in Global Perspective course, the student from the opening vignette was not particularly unique. At the Midwestern institution at which I taught this class, he resembled many of his peers: most are white and hail from the state in which the university sits. In designing and teaching this course, I quite deliberately endeavored to challenge students’ conceptions of the South, the region in which I was born and raised. This is not to say, to be sure, that I championed the Southern U.S. and demonized the non-South. But I did ask students to consider, throughout the semester, how they have understood the South, on what they have based these understandings, and how these understandings have shaped (or obscured) their views on region and American history.

This article recounts my experiences teaching this class. It posits that the myth of Southern exceptionalism (perhaps unsurprisingly) is alive and well. Yet it also suggests that racism, inequality, and trauma are “hidden in plain sight,” to use Jeanne Theoharis’s formulation, within the American Midwest. The region’s “invisible” segregation patterns, its often-forgotten history of ethnic cleansing, and its charming, Lake Wobegon mythos of communitarianism, humility, and kindness—compounded by the potent trope of Southern “backwardness”—render self-reflexivity difficult for many Midwestern students. Therefore, the present essay argues, complicating these students’ reductive views about the South destabilized their ideas about the Midwest’s inherent goodness.

Much of this story deals with race. In the introduction to their 2009 edited anthology, *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, historians Matthew Lassiter and Joseph Crespino contend that “the notion of the exceptional South” permits “suburban students from Michigan and Atlanta and New England and Virginia [to] know much more

about the civil rights movement in Mississippi and Alabama than they do about what happened in their own states and hometowns.”³ This assessment comports with recent movement scholarship that seeks to upend ideas of the non-South’s racial “innocence.”⁴ The article that follows contributes to this project and looks specifically at how race figured in my students’ ideas about the South and the Midwest—that is, how they assigned characteristics to swaths of space or land.⁵ Deployed here, this concept shows how my students, most of whom had little knowledge of the South before taking the course, internalize and replicate popular cultural treatments of the region—sometimes casting eleven (or more) states and over one hundred million people in a reenactment of *Deliverance* or *Talladega Nights*. These insights illustrate the salience of region to students’ impressions of local, national, and transnational histories.

Course Background

Approximately sixty undergraduates enrolled in my class, which I taught in two sections. The course satisfied a “general education” credit and thus attracted students representing a wide range of majors and intellectual traditions. The syllabus articulated eight course goals:

1. You will comprehend change and continuity in history.
2. You will understand one or more periods of the past on its/their own terms.
3. You will improve your ability to evaluate evidence using the tools of historical investigation.
4. You will gain experience and improve your skills in explaining and interpreting historical change.
5. You will hone your critical thinking and analytical abilities and become a more astute consumer, observer, and producer of knowledge.
6. You will develop a working understanding of “culture” and its importance in the U.S., the U.S. South, and the globe.
7. You will learn to identify the social construction of region and place.
8. You will also explore the commonalities and differences between areas of the country and the world, as well as those who populate these places.

These goals targeted students from history and other humanist disciplines, but also those from STEM fields. Organized thematically, the course explored (in turn) history, culture, and region; identity and place; nationalism and memory; Southern business in national perspective; Southern business in global perspective; country music; Southern hip-hop music; film and television; literature; food and foodways; suburbanization in the Sunbelt South; sport; religion; and immigration, emigration, and travel. Though such a thematic approach precluded the deep historical engagement that a chronologically arranged class might have provided, it nonetheless enabled students to familiarize themselves with a broad array of topics related to the American South. This framework also allowed students to engage a diverse set of texts, from recent scholarship by Bethany Moreton, Darren Grem, and Bartow Elmore, to popular media like *Gone with the Wind* or OutKast's *Southernplayalisticadillacmuzik*. Finally, these thematic units each presented “clash[es] of race and memory,” to appropriate W. Fitzhugh Brundage's phrase, that challenged students to think about the “burden of Southern history” as a *national* and *global* burden.⁶ It is to these clashes that we now turn.

“Clashes of Race and Memory”

Clash One: The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism

From early on in the semester, students read and wrestled with differing viewpoints on Southern distinctiveness. I encouraged them to ponder: Is “the South”—as constructed in the popular imagination and as it exists in a material sense—different from the rest of the country? In the second week of class, we read C. Vann Woodward's canonical “The Search for Southern Identity” from *The Burden of Southern History* (2008 [1960]), James C. Cobb's introduction from *Away Down South* (2005), and Lassiter and Crespino's aforementioned introduction to *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*.⁷ For his part, Woodward maintained that the South's familiarity with poverty, defeat, and evil have rendered it distinct from the rest of the nation, for which abundance, success, and innocence are the defining historical experiences. Cobb takes a more muted position, writing in the twenty-first century but drawing from the deep well of Southern history. He identifies “the apparent

waning of southern distinctiveness over the last generation,” wrought by transformations both within and beyond the South.⁸ Yet Cobb confesses that his book cannot and will not deliver “a definitive pronouncement as to whether ‘the South’ still exists as a distinctive region.” He holds that “even the most informed and responsible ‘Yes’ or ‘No’ reply” to the question of Southern exceptionalism “must still be so conditional and subjective as to be practically meaningless.”⁹ Situating themselves alongside Howard Zinn and others who have recognized the limits of Southern exceptionalism as an explanatory framework, Lassiter and Crespino call Southern distinctiveness a “myth.” They insist that the symbolic South has served to explain away national problems as regional ones:

[T]he basic features of southern exceptionalism still structure the popular mythology of American exceptionalism—a story of white racial innocence (occasionally compromised by the ‘southernization’ of northern race relations), of a benevolent superpower (that temporarily tasted the ‘southern experience’ of defeat after Vietnam), of an essentially liberal national project (if only the red states would stop preventing the blue states from resurrecting the Great Society).¹⁰

Although these readings offered just a tiny glimpse into a robust, ongoing scholarly debate, they nonetheless pushed students to trouble the idea of Southern exceptionalism—and, more specifically, that of a wicked, monolithic, and intransigent South. Students were torn. “I don’t know; the South just doesn’t seem all that different,” one African American woman shared with me after class. “It’s just another part of the country. But then again, black culture in the South is so unique. Even northern African Americans today,” generations removed from the Great Migration(s), “hold on to traditions that originated in the South. I don’t know! It’s interesting.” Like other non-white undergraduates in the course, this student appeared less constrained by the myth of Southern exceptionalism, presumably because of the structural racism to which she and other students of color are more attuned.¹¹ Others appeared less ambivalent on the question of Southern exceptionalism, especially after I—while playing devil’s advocate—presented to them statistics illustrating the Deep South’s poor performance in various metrics of wellbeing. Yet I also reminded students that such statistics were not totalizing. Indeed, they might work to shoehorn national social problems into a Southern exceptionalist framework and thereby whitewash other,

perhaps less obvious, patterns related to region, class, race, and history. A few students cited Southerners' voting proclivities, while others used stereotypes and platitudes about the potency of Southern racism, the region's emphasis on family and religion, and the South's overarching rurality and detachment from American civic life.

Students also marshaled evidence from the civil rights struggle's "classical phase" to support their claims of Southern distinctiveness. Their accounts hewed to what historian Emilye Crosby calls the "normative," "textbook," or "master" narrative of the black freedom movement.¹² Though Crosby foregrounds the South as the principal battleground upon which activists fought for civil rights, she also recognizes how the dominant story of the movement—especially as expressed through problematic texts like the 1988 film *Mississippi Burning*—prevents students from assessing its temporal and spatial breadth. In distilled form, the normative narrative goes something like this, according to one of Crosby's former undergraduate students:

One day a nice old lady, Rosa Parks, sat down on a bus and got arrested. The next day Martin Luther King Jr. stood up and the Montgomery Bus Boycott followed. And sometime later King delivered his famous "I Have a Dream" speech and segregation was over. This is how the story was taught to me.¹³

While rigorous movement scholarship has never advanced a civil rights narrative this simplistic, the popular appeal of the teleological, regionally, and temporally circumscribed movement is undeniable. As such, my own students pointed to 1957 Little Rock; 1960 Greensboro; 1961 Albany; 1963 Birmingham; 1964 Philadelphia, Mississippi; and 1965 Selma as proof of Southern exceptionalism. But I also asked them if the myth of Southern exceptionalism itself had turned the nation's attention to these sites instead of non-Southern ones—1957 Levittown; 1960 Detroit and its "Freedom Swimmers"; 1961 Brooklyn and its Clinton Hill protesters; 1963 Milwaukee; 1964 Harlem; 1965 Watts; 1967 Newark; and 1968 Chicago—or, more recently, 1992 Los Angeles; 2014 Ferguson; and 2016 Milwaukee.¹⁴

On that score, we also spoke frankly and extensively about the persistence of racial segregation in the North and South. Many students were shocked to learn how housing and education policy had intersected to racially segregate American metropolises. Though not unique to the American North, the processes by which city planners, engineers, elected officials, and others have deliberately embedded

racial inequality into built environments remain especially visible today in Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Louis, Detroit, Newark, and other non-Southern cities.¹⁵ Visualizing “urban decline” through the intricate, interactive mapping undertaken by historian Colin Gordon, students saw how recent unrest in Ferguson, Milwaukee, and Baltimore stemmed from systemic and often “invisible” discrimination—not simply from personal expressions of racism.¹⁶

Equipped with these insights, my students and I reevaluated cultural representations of Southern racism. The book and film *The Help* proved instructive, as we considered the archetypal roles of characters Hilly Holbrook and “Skeeter” Phelan. Holbrook, the vindictive, virulently prejudiced white Mississippi homemaker, and Phelan, the free spirited, open-minded college graduate who bucks the racial and gendered expectations of white Mississippi high society, occupy distinct poles in a tale of white redemption. The nasty Holbrook receives her comeuppance for her personal views, while Phelan “saves” black domestics by publishing an account of their strife. *The Help* reassures white audiences by aligning them with Phelan, turning them against the cartoonish bigot Holbrook, and localizing American racism entirely within the 1960s Deep South.¹⁷ Through our discussions, my students and worked “not to absolve the South, but to implicate the nation,” and to think critically about the character—and frequent mischaracterization—of racial inequality in the United States.¹⁸

Clash Two: The Performance of Southern Identity

My students, in the main, struggled to humanize Southerners. Generally, popular depictions of certain Southern subcultures dictated how the students saw *all* of those residing within the American South. They conceived of the region as populated by reactionary white aristocrats and similarly reactionary white “rednecks.” The South’s diversity—and especially its high concentration of African Americans—received short shrift in students’ initial analyses of Southern identity. Indeed, as Cobb has lamented, “southern” far too often means “white Southern” in the popular consciousness.¹⁹

Through our conversations about authorship and performance, I had some success disrupting their notions of “Southernness.” Historian Karen Cox has written extensively about the construction

of a fictive South by non-Southerners through film, music, advertising, and other cultural vehicles. Cox directed students to the tension between admiring the South as a space of “easy livin’” and admonishing the region as retrograde. Throughout the course of the semester, we began to pick apart precisely who authored or sanctioned such divergent portrayals and for what reasons. Soon, students started to question the accuracy and ideological purposes of cultural representations of the South. We looked at the websites of “Southern lifestyle” clothiers such as Southern Proper, Southern Tide, Southern Marsh, and Volunteer Traditions to consider how these companies envision their clientele. Photographs of beautiful, college-aged men and women clad in vibrant, preppy clothing saturate their online catalogs. Snapped in bourgeois settings like country clubs, private beaches, and tailgates on lush university campuses, these images—as far as my students and I could tell—feature no people of color. They present and sell whiteness, wealth, “frazzledness,” and Southernness, while ostracizing those who do not bear their aesthetic markers: Oxford button-down shirts, short shorts, floppy hair, Costa Del Mar sunglasses with “Croakies,” Sperry boat shoes or New Balance sneakers, and needlepoint belts for men; sundresses, cowboy boots, oversized T-shirts, and Nike Tempo shorts for women.²⁰ But like the non-Southern advertisers, songwriters, and filmmakers who in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries began commodifying the South and promoting imaginary regional traits, the Southern “gentleman” who dons, say, an “Old South grey” ballcap from Volunteer Traditions, or the “belle” who sports an extra-large T-shirt from last weekend’s “swap” party, simply conform to well-worn regional archetypes. The abovementioned “lifestyle” websites, much like the pages of *Southern Living*, are not “authentic” representations of Southern life, but rather are aspirational guides for those (wherever they may reside) who wish to “be” Southern.²¹

Here and throughout the semester, my students and I employed the work of Pierre Bourdieu to address questions of regional “Otherness.” While certainly a challenging read for undergraduates—many of whom were first-year students—Bourdieu’s introduction to *Distinction* supplied a theoretical vocabulary through which to talk about class and regional difference. More specifically, Bourdieu explains how “taste” in the arenas of art, food, fashion, and the like performs “a social function of legitimating social differences.”

Drawing heavily on Bourdieu, musicologist Nadine Hubbs adds region to this equation. She asserts that many Americans profess an aversion to country music in order to divorce themselves from the “white working-class, provincial, and Southern” audiences believed to consume it.²² In a similar vein, a proliferation of “redneck television” in the early twenty-first century has enticed viewers eager to shore up their class and regional superiority. For Cox, programs such as A&E’s *Duck Dynasty*, MTV’s *Buckwild*, or TLC’s *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* “promise new insight into Southern culture, but what they really represent is a typecast South: a mythically rural, white, poorly educated and thickly accented region that has yet to join the 21st century. If you listen closely, you may even hear banjos.”²³

The performance of certain stripes of Southern identity by the *Duck Dynasty* cast or *Buckwild*’s late Shain Gandee reinforces such far-fetched representations. By expressing their opposition to same-sex marriage, fealty to a patriarchal familial structure, and adherence to masculinist conceptions of hunting and gathering, *Duck Dynasty*’s Robertson family embraces the negative stereotypes frequently ascribed to Southerners. Gandee reveled in his status as *Buckwild*’s resident Jed Clampett: mudding, squealing, guffawing, imbibing, dipping, and lusting, all while dressed in a sleeveless T-shirt and weathered camouflage hat. He was so beloved by viewers and so central to the show’s appeal that MTV cancelled the program following his tragic demise. It stands to reason that the Robertsons and Gandee cultivated their television personas, at least in part, as “oppositional identities,” to use John Uzo Ogbu’s theory. Ogbu postulated that subjugated or stigmatized groups assume the characteristics assigned to them (rightly or wrongly) by the dominant culture or society. Cobb has applied Ogbu’s framework to the South, insisting that Southern “identities have not existed in isolation, but always in relation to other perceived oppositional identities against which they are defined.”²⁴ In our discussions about *Duck Dynasty*, *Buckwild*, and masculinity, my students and I eventually agreed that such programming reveals little about Southern life apart from the visibility and power of its most squalid character types. Whether Gandee or the participants in the Blue Collar Comedy Tour actually communicate through different media their “true selves” matters less than the fact that audiences identify them as part of a “redneck” culture rooted firmly within the South.

Clash Three: Modernity and Memory

A few weeks into the semester, I shared with my students an excerpt from Grace Elizabeth Hale's gorgeous monograph, *Making Whiteness*. Hale writes:

Before white Americans can even begin to uncover the deep links between class exploitation, disempowerment, and racial privilege... they would have to face the reality of "the South" they have all lived in. All of us, white and black, northern and southern, would have to think of "the South," the "race problem," and the "burden of history," not as the weight of some other, of a dark and distant place and time, but as a burden that we still carry and as a history that we have not agreed to face or acknowledge as a source of our subjectivities. We would have to remember that "the South," the romance, the place of not now, the space of safety and mooring for whatever we imagine we have lost, lies not south of anywhere but inside us. We would have to look clear-eyed and straight at "the South" we all live in, that space of "safety" and also always of horror. We would have to pull apart the interwoven ways in which "the South" as metaphor founds much of late twentieth-century "knowing," from nonsouthern white self-righteousness to the "morality" of the American state to even a growing black middle class's nostalgia for segregation. We would have to see "the South" we all live in. We would have to place the region back within instead of against history. We would have to see ourselves.²⁵

I asked students what they thought Hale hoped to convey with this passage. One student, a white woman especially steeped in the myth of Southern exceptionalism, explained in class: "She's basically saying that the South is responsible for most of the problems we [Americans] have to deal with." Another white student disagreed and retorted: "Actually I think she's saying the exact opposite. She's saying that we [Americans] all live in 'the South.' We use 'the South' to avoid talking about race, instead of recognizing how the 'race problem' isn't just a Southern thing." I assured the student who responded first that her interpretation made sense—especially considering the Southern "horror" against which Hale writes.²⁶ But I also concurred with the second student's assessment and urged his peers to think about the conflicting "Souths" to which Hale refers. How, I asked, can "the South" simultaneously function as "a dark and distant place and time" and "the place of not now, the space of safety and mooring...the romance"?

Here, I reminded students of our discussions concerning Orientalism as conceptualized by Edward Said, and that of “internal orientalism,” as developed by David Jansson and harnessed by Jim Cobb. The concept of Orientalism—which Said denounces, it should be noted—offers “a political vision of reality whose structure promote[s] the difference between the familiar (Europe, West, ‘us’) and the strange (the Orient, the East, ‘them’).”²⁷ For Said, the lens of Orientalism enables Westerners to exoticize, essentialize, and ultimately dismiss “the East.” Likewise, Jansson’s frame of internal orientalism, as Cobb explains, “sustain[s] a ‘privileged national identity’ by consigning most of the undesirable traits exhibited by Americans to ‘the imagined space called “the South.””²⁸ These constructs suggest that non-Southern Americans “Other” the U.S. South in much the same way that many “Westerners” portray the “global South.” To that end, William Faulkner conceived of the Southern experience as a colonial one. Recently, literary critics have conducted important comparative work on William Faulkner’s South and what has come to be known as the “global South,” while others have sought “new ways of thinking about Faulkner as a world writer.”²⁹ The contemporary American South, I proffered, functions almost as a “foreign” destination—not unlike “the Orient”—marked by peculiar customs, patriarchy, and exotic landscapes. This line of reasoning serves a political purpose, as well. For some, the South is not quite American, not quite modern, not quite good enough. In 2012, Simon & Schuster published travel writer Chuck Woodard’s screed, *Better Off without 'Em: A Northern Manifesto for Southern Secession*. As the book’s title implies, Woodard calls for the separation of the North from what he terms “Amerikkka” or “the politically repressive religious monarchy of the born-again Confederacy.”³⁰ Other cultural commentators have made similar arguments.³¹ Lassiter and Crespino lean against popular conceptions of the American experience as an “essentially liberal national project (if only the red states would stop preventing the blue states from resurrecting the Great Society).”³² But understanding the U.S. South as a leech, a stain, a scar, relies upon understanding the rest of the country as Shangri-La and, thus, upon the collectivized practice of historical forgetting.³³

Within this intellectual space of historical forgetting, the field of Midwestern Studies has recently enjoyed a “revival,” one buoyed by debates over Midwestern exceptionalism. The late historian

Andrew Cayton designated it the “anti-region,” while Richard Sisson, Christian Zacher, and Cayton (again) have noted its place in the American consciousness as “the nation writ small, the great middle, lacking extremes, lacking diversity.”³⁴ As historian Doug Kiel explains, the Midwest “is at once the anti-East, not primarily urban or industrial or powerful; the anti-South, not chiefly typified by black-white racial discord and its legacies; and the anti-West, neither wild nor rugged nor tainted by a history of protracted Indian wars. What is the Midwest then?” Kiel answers, “It is a floating signifier of progress, closure, whiteness, and the absence of violence.”³⁵ Historian Brent M. S. Campney concurs, shrewdly observing how “scholars have failed to see systemic racist violence in the Midwest.”³⁶ The regional portrait to which these historians refer owes much to the powerful process of historical forgetting and the Midwest’s juxtaposition with the nation’s other, ostensibly more noteworthy sections.

But while *forgetting* shapes the Midwestern historical consciousness, the South, it seems, does not have that luxury—and for good reason. On my students’ final take-home exam, I listed two quotations from two television programs we viewed in the latter half of the semester. The first came from an episode of chef Anthony Bourdain’s CNN show *Parts Unknown* in which he visits the Mississippi Delta. Sharing a meal with Bourdain at the (in)famous Lusco’s restaurant in Greenwood, writer and foodways scholar John T. Edge declares:

One of the things I love about [Mississippi] is that you can’t deny the burden of the past [here], like it’s on your shoulders; it’s right there. America chooses to deny its problems in many ways. It declares itself a post-racial society. That shit just doesn’t fly in Mississippi.³⁷

In the ESPN *30 for 30* documentary *The Ghosts of Ole Miss*, narrator Wright Thompson adopts the words of Myrlie Evers-Williams, civil rights activist and the widow of slain NAACP field secretary Medgar Evers: “Yes, Mississippi was,” Evers-Williams affirmed, “but Mississippi is.”³⁸

Edge discusses the South’s historical consciousness—set against the national tendencies of historical forgetting or denial—while Evers-Williams takes Mississippi as a fluid space, one defined by its past, but also by its constant conversation and reckoning with that past. Conversely, visions of the Midwest as the “anti-region” or as “America writ small” hinge on its imagined embodiment of the

country's beauty marks, not its blemishes. Its perceived averageness, middleness, and quaintness inoculate it from the viruses that ostensibly ravage the U.S. South. That my Midwestern students struggled to rescind the imbricated mythologies of Midwestern innocence and Southern malevolence bespeaks, first, the allure of both; and, second, the ways in which sectional imaginaries create (and distort) historical knowledge. It is against this understood division—between a noble, quintessentially *American* Midwest and an atavistic, fundamentally *un-* or *anti-*American South—that my course cut.

Conclusion

Of course, teaching victories are often tiny victories. Nevertheless, it seems that most students reconsidered in fundamental ways the myths governing their understanding of regional difference. For one, the male student from the opening vignette of this essay experienced a revelation that was, at first blush, petty. Upon further examination, though, his discovery was rather profound, given the formidable walls, barriers, mirrors, and smokescreens that envelop the American South. “The South is complicated!” he exclaimed about midway through the semester, as we discussed William Faulkner’s “A Rose for Emily.” The student explained, “This class has helped me realize that the South is a complex place. Sure, there are racists and rednecks down there, but there’s also Faulkner and his literary legacy.” In their course evaluations, students expressed their appreciation for the class’s ability to unsettle their conceptions of the South. If they can go forward with and share at least some of the knowledge produced and exchanged therein, we can extend the class project of problematizing hegemonic, and usually deceptive, sectional imaginaries. In doing so, we might all “see ourselves.”

Notes

1. See also Robin Bernstein, *Racial Innocence: Performing American Childhood from Slavery to Civil Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Paul Mokrzycki, “Lost in the Heartland: Childhood, Region, and Iowa’s Missing Paperboys,” *The Annals of Iowa* 74, no. 1 (Winter 2015): 29-70.

2. Brett Gadsden, *Between North and South: Delaware, Desegregation, and the Myth of American Sectionalism* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Allen Tullos, *Alabama Getaway: The Political Imaginary and the Heart of Dixie* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised ed. (New York: Verso Books, 2016). For political “commonsense,” see especially Laura Briggs, *Somebody’s Children: The Politics of Transracial and Transnational Adoption* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

3. Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino, “Introduction: The End of Southern History,” in *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, ed. Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 7.

4. Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Thomas J. Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008); Jeanne Theoharis and Komoyi Woodard, eds., *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940-1980* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

5. Tullos, *Alabama Getaway*; Gadsden, *Between North and South*.

6. W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History*, third ed. (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2008).

7. C. Vann Woodward, “The Search for Southern Identity,” in *The Burden of Southern History*; James C. Cobb, “Introduction,” *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Lassiter and Crespino, “The End of Southern History.”

8. Cobb, *Away Down South*, 7.

9. *Ibid.*, 8.

10. Lassiter and Crespino, “The End of Southern History,” 7.

11. Considering the homogeneity of the institution at which I taught this course, I was pleased by the enrollment of approximately a dozen or so students of color. Further, this relative diversity helped the white undergraduates, many of whom came from very white backgrounds, understand historically vexing issues from several vantages through peer-to-peer learning.

12. Emilye Crosby, ed., *Civil Rights History from the Ground Up: Local Struggles, A National Movement* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

13. Emilye Crosby, *A Little Taste of Freedom: The Black Freedom Struggle in Claiborne County, Mississippi* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), xiii.

14. For these and other accounts of civil rights mobilization in the North, see Patrick D. Jones, *Selma of the North: Civil Rights Insurgency in Milwaukee* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Kevin Mumford, *Newark: A History of Race, Rights, and Riots in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2008); Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty*.

15. Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960*, third ed. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press,

1998); Amanda I. Seligman, *Block by Block: Neighborhoods and Public Policy on Chicago's West Side* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2005); David M. P. Freund, *Colored Property: State Policy and White Racial Politics in Suburban America* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2007); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); Colin Gordon, *Mapping Decline: St. Louis and the Fate of the American City* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

16. Colin Gordon, "Mapping Decline: St. Louis and the American City," interactive map exhibit, The University of Iowa libraries, <<http://mappingdecline.lib.uiowa.edu/>>.

17. Kathryn Stockett, *The Help: A Novel* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009); *The Help*, directed by Tate Taylor, 146 mins., 2011; *Southern Cultures* 20, no. 1, Special Issue: *The Help* (Spring 2014). For a fine discussion of "white redemption" in the context of Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained*, see David J. Leonard, "Django Blues," *Crisis* 120, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 24-29.

18. Lassiter and Crespino, "The End of Southern History," 7.

19. Cobb, *Away Down South*, 5.

20. For an excellent study of the white sorority "uniform" on Southern college campuses, see Abigail Abide, "Big T-Shirts and Running Shorts: A Female Uniform and Southern Womanhood on the Ole Miss Campus" (B.A. thesis, University of Mississippi, 2014).

21. Karen L. Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South Was Created in American Popular Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); idem, "Branding Dixie: The Selling of the American South, 1890-1930," in *Dixie Emporium: Tourism, Foodways, and Consumer Culture in the American South*, ed. Anthony J. Stanonis (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 50-68; "Tristar Hats," Volunteer Traditions website, <<https://www.volunteertraditions.com/products/tristar-hats>>. See also David E. Whisnant, *All That is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1983). For *Southern Living* as "a refuge from the unlovely realities of the region it sets out to define and ameliorate," see Diane Roberts, "Living Southern in *Southern Living*," in *Dixie Debates: Perspectives on Southern Cultures*, ed. Richard H. King and Helen Taylor (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 85-98, quoted on 86.

22. Nadine Hubbs, *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014), 24.

23. Karen L. Cox, "The South Ain't Just Whistlin' Dixie," *The New York Times*, 17 September 2011, <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/18/opinion/sunday/the-south-aint-just-whistlin-dixie.html?_r=0>.

24. John Uzu Ogbu, *Minority Education and Caste: The American System in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New York: Academic Press, 1978); Cobb, *Away Down South*, 6.

25. Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage, 1998), 295-296.

26. See also Crystal N. Feimster, *Southern Horrors: Women and the Politics of Rape and Lynching* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).
27. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978), 43.
28. Cobb, *Away Down South*, 3. See also David R. Jansson, "Internal Orientalism in America: W. J. Cash's *The Mind of the South* and the Spatial Construction of American National Identity," *Political Geography* 22, no. 3 (March 2003): 293-316.
29. John T. Matthews, "Introduction," in William Faulkner in Context, ed. John T. Matthews (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 2. Hosam M. Aboul-Ela, *Other South: Faulkner, Coloniality, and the Mariátegui Tradition* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007), 1.
30. Chuck Thompson, *Better Off without 'Em: A Northern Manifesto for Southern Secession* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012), xviii. "Amerikkka" (or "AmeriKKKa") has long been deployed in hip-hop music produced by Southerners and non-Southerners alike. See Ice Cube, *AmeriKKKa's Most Wanted* (Priority Records, 1990; Killer Mike featuring Bun B, T.I., Trouble, and El-P, "Big Beast," *R.A.P. Music* (Williams Street Records, 2012). In the Killer Mike song, Atlanta rapper T.I. boasts that he is "AmeriKKKa's nightmare."
31. See, for instance, Lee Siegel, "Memo to the South: Go Ahead, Secede Already!" *Daily Beast*, 30 April 2013, <<https://www.thedailybeast.com/memo-to-the-south-go-ahead-secede-already>>.
32. Lassiter and Crespino, "The End of Southern History," 7.
33. For "forgetting," see Judith Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); T. Ruanni F. Tupas, "Bourdieu, Historical Forgetting, and the Problem of English in the Philippines," *Philippine Studies* 56, no. 1 (March 2008): 47-67.
34. Richard Sisson, Christian Zacher, and Andrew Cayton, "Introduction," in *The American Midwest: An Interpretive Encyclopedia*, ed. Richard Sisson, Christian Zacher, and Andrew Cayton (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), xxii.
35. Doug Kiel, "Untaming the Mild Frontier: In Search of New Midwestern Histories," *Middle West Review* 1, no. 1 (Fall 2014): 20.
36. Brent M. S. Campney, "'This Negro Elephant is Getting to Be a Pretty Large Sized Animal': White Hostility against Blacks in Indiana and the Historiography of Racist Violence in the Midwest," *Middle West Review* 1, no. 2 (Spring 2015): 84.
37. *Anthony Bourdain: Parts Unknown*, season 3, episode 6, "Mississippi Delta," CNN Original Series, 43 mins., 2014.
38. Mitchell, Fritz, dir., *The Ghosts of Ole Miss*, ESPN Films' 30 for 30 series, 52 mins., 2012.

Appendix

Recommended Resources*Text*

- Cobb, James C. *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- Cox, Karen L. *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South Was Created in American Popular Culture*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011.
- Hale, Grace Elizabeth. *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*. New York: Vintage, 1998.
- Hubbs, Nadine. *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2014.
- Kiel, Doug. "Untaming the Mild Frontier: In Search of New Midwestern Histories." *Middle West Review* 1, no. 1 (Fall 2014): 9-38.
- Lassiter, Matthew D., and Joseph Crespino, eds. *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Ogbu, John Uzu. *Minority Education and Caste: The American System in Cross-Cultural Perspective*. New York: Academic Press, 1978.
- Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage, 1978.
- Stockett, Kathryn. *The Help: A Novel*. New York: Penguin, 2009.
- Woodward, C. Vann. *The Burden of Southern History*, third ed. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2008.

Audio/Video

- Anthony Bourdain: Parts Unknown*, season 3, episode 6, "Mississippi Delta." CNN Original Series, 43 mins., 2014.
- Mitchell, Fritz, dir. *The Ghosts of Ole Miss*. ESPN Films' *30 for 30* series, 52 mins., 2012.
- OutKast. *Southernplayalisticadillacmuzik*. LaFace Records, 1994.
- Taylor, Tate, dir. *The Help*. 146 mins., 2011.

Online Clothiers

Southern Marsh, <<https://www.southernmarsh.com>>.

Southern Proper, <<https://www.southernproper.com>>.

Southern Tide, <<https://www.southerntide.com>>.

Volunteer Traditions, <<https://www.volunteertraditions.com/>>.