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Y'all Think We're Stupid: Deconstructing Media Stereotypes of The American South

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Y'ALL THINK WE'RE STUPID: DECONSTRUCTING MEDIA STEREOTYPES
OF THE AMERICAN SOUTH

by

KAREN C. HAMILTON

(Under the Direction of John Weaver)

ABSTRACT

This study examines the various stereotypes that persist about the American South, giving consideration to the common stereotypes, their persistence, and the response of Southerners and non-Southerners to them. Further, it aims to examine in-depth the methods by which these stereotypes are perpetuated, such as literature, movies, television, and music. Within this dissertation, pieces of literature by traditional Southern authors, like William Faulkner and Tennessee Williams, are examined for the images they employ. Further, films such as *Deliverance* and *Sweet Home Alabama*, as well as television shows like *The Dukes of Hazzard* and *The Beverly Hillbillies* are analyzed for how they convey stereotypes about the South. Lastly, music of all genres, though primarily country, is considered for the images it conveys. The major aim of this study is not only to reveal these stereotypes but also to deconstruct them.

INDEX WORDS: Culture, South, Media, Television, Music

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Chapter 1: Introduction

About five years ago, I had my first memorable experience with discrimination based on my Southern heritage. This encounter took place at a family function with my husband's family in Illinois. My younger brother-in-law brought his new girlfriend, LeAnn, home for the holidays, and this was my first opportunity to meet her. LeAnn, a North Dakota native who had never traveled south of the Mason-Dixon line and who had only come into contact with the South in media portrayals, spoke to me in a derogatory, condescending manner.

The confrontation occurred as we were playing board games as a family. Every time I answered a question (correctly, too!), she mocked what I said, using an exaggerated drawl and slow cadence. She assumed that because I was from the South, then I must be less intelligent than she. While my in-laws affectionately call me their "little Georgia peach," I understand that they mean that in a loving way. LeAnn, on the other hand, was not being affectionate; she was being cruel based on my background. I actually thought to myself, "Y'all (people from regions other than the South) think we're stupid, don't you?" The thought that people would judge me based on where I lived and how I spoke truly infuriated me. I

came home from the trip with a desire to not only see how common this stereotype was, but more importantly, to devise a way to deconstruct this stereotype. This desire came primarily from the notion that "Wherever our river runs, these landscapes are always with us. We cannot identify ourselves without locating ourselves in our landscapes" (He, 2003, p. 20). Since I will always be a product of the American South, it is a personal quest for me to make sure that this region is not unfairly stereotyped. Since other, more troubling, stereotypes have pervaded our culture for decades, even centuries, stereotypes of the South are often unmentioned. Certainly, stereotypes surrounding race, gender, and sexual preference are far more prevalent and considerably more harmful and overtly hateful than are Southern stereotypes. This study negates the victims of those stereotypes in no way. In fact, these stereotypes are, in many ways, also linked to stereotypes about the South. As slavery was far more common in the South, stereotypes regarding race are rampant in cultural portrayals of the South. Since Southern ladies have expectations to be very, even overly, lady-like, gender stereotypes persist here, as well. Thus, this study claims not to dismiss other targets of stereotyping; rather, it

incorporates a variety of targets under the umbrella of Southern stereotypes.

Thus, my research/inquiry topic is the debunking of stereotypes of the American South, particularly stereotypes that depict Southerners as uneducated, uncultured, and illiterate. These stereotypes are perpetuated through a variety of cultural forms, including literature, television/movies, and music. Thus, cultural studies is an area that influences this study significantly. Cultural studies focuses on an array of elements in society, including how and why people act/think like they do, and how their thought processes are influenced through elements of culture such as media, clothing, speech, etc. Thus, this area of academic focus contributes greatly to my research.

The South and Curriculum Studies

The concept of place is central to an autobiographical curriculum. Thus, analysis of the South falls into this realm of curriculum studies. "The Southern sense of place is sharp" (Pinar et.al. 1995, p. 534), making this constant awareness of place part of the everyday existence, identity, and learning of its inhabitants; it is indeed a part of their currere.

For my purposes, the South is the southeastern United States, part of which is often noted as the Deep South. States in my definition of the South include: Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, South Carolina, North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Arkansas.

A stereotype of the South was recently reinforced by noted comedienne and television personality, Whoopi Goldberg. In her new role on *The View*, Goldberg publicly defended the 2007 criminal actions of Atlanta Falcons quarterback, Michael Vick, saying, "He's from the South, from the Deep South ... This is part of his cultural upbringing" (www.reuters.com). With this comment, Goldberg likely reinforced notions many people have about the South being a region of lower-class people who torture animals for entertainment. Further, Goldberg continued, "For a lot of people, dogs are sport. Instead of just saying (Vick) is a beast and he's a monster, this is a kid who comes from a culture where this is not questioned" (www.reuters.com). In this segment of her comments, Goldberg blatantly lumps the entire region together in condoning dogfighting. It is media reinforcement such as this example that perpetuates inaccurate stereotypes about the South. While dogfighting is a sport(though this label is questionable) that is found in the South, measures are being taken to eradicate such

cruelty, as is evidenced by the recent actions of Willie Nelson and legislators. In November 2007, Nelson offered his support of an anti-dogfighting bill currently in the Georgia Legislature. This bill would make any action directly related to dogfighting, including transportation, trade, or sales, a felony(www.cnn.com). Thus, while dogfighting has existed in the South's past, the New South is taking steps to overcome this horrid activity.

In the stereotype of the "illiterate, inferior Southerner" are several motifs/trends. First of all, because Southerners speak with a distinctive accent, they are perceived as lazy and/or illiterate. Simple distinctions such as the dropping of "g" at the end of words ending in "ing" (i.e. "goin'" instead of "going") make many people feel that Southerners are "lazy" in their speech. Further, because of their "lazy" speech patterns, Southerners are frequently considered to have lazy behavior, as well. This stereotype is similar to the one applied to Mexicans and Native Americans, who are also labeled "lazy" in American culture. In all cases, these stereotypes are not based on behavior, but on assumptions gathered from speech patterns and physical appearance.

In Southern speech, the use of "y'all" is generally perceived as "cute" by people who do not have this speech

pattern, which further devalues the speech of Southerners. The issue of discrimination based on speech patterns and other factors is an ever-widening problem in contemporary American culture. Speakers of Standard American English perpetuate the notion that this is the only appropriate form of communication, which totally negates the worth of non-standard dialects. Ironically, Standard American English has become something of a myth. In fact, most regions have distinctive speech patterns. Media personas often take speech classes to modify their speech patterns and eliminate any accent they may have. Thus, the media portray unrealistic people with no accent whatsoever.

To more completely understand this phenomenon of stereotypes based on speech, it is necessary to examine two aspects of the discrimination by using a critical lens: 1) the reasons the dominant class has for negating speakers of non-standard languages, and 2) the marginalization experienced by Southern English, or other non-standard English, speakers. Further, methods of dispelling this notion of inferior speech and lifestyle should be explored, especially with regard to teaching linguistic diversity and general tolerance in schools.

Secondly, Southerners are portrayed to be of lower socioeconomic status than their counterparts from other

areas of the country. "Over the years, the rest of the nation has. . .[viewed] the South as a hellhole of poverty, torment, and depravity" (Applebome, 1996, p. 10). For much of the country, and even the world, the "South" evokes images of only trailer parks and blue collar jobs. The important segment of middle and upper-middle class in the South is largely a foreign concept to non-Southerners who have never personally visited the South. In reality, "there are rickety trailers and ramshackle frame houses. . .But there are also homes with new plastic swimming pools and fancy new siding,. . .houses with big old Harleys and gleaming new Toyotas" (Applebome, 1996, p. 206). However, these latter images are rarely shown. Granted, the South has historically led the nation as being an area rife with poverty. However, data indicates that this trend is changing. According to the University of Georgia's Interactive Poverty Statistics, "while the national poverty rate is 12.38 percent. . .the [South] has a poverty rate of 14.06 percent" (www.poverty.uga.edu/stats/faq.php). However, poverty rates are improving: in 1980, the South had a poverty rate of 16%; in 1990, the South's poverty stayed steady at that rate; now, however, it has dropped by 2 percentage points (www.prb.org). Indeed, the South is changing its image, albeit slowly.

This problem of Southerners being negatively stereotyped is perhaps most evident within my own family structure. My mother is truly a present-day "Southern belle," as the stereotype would have it. She is very soft spoken, quite polite, and incredibly domestic. In addition, though, she is also educated and intelligent. However, she has lived within a 30-mile radius her entire life, and has traveled only a bit. Thus, she is very self-conscious of her Southern accent. Her grammar is impeccable, and she speaks intelligently, but my mother always feels as if people are ridiculing her because of her ever-so-slight Southern twang. In an interview, she attempts to explain her insecurity,

I feel that I have been stereotyped many times. There are two examples that seem to stand out. When I was a teenager, my brother was serving on an aircraft carrier in the Navy. He called home one night and asked to speak with me. When I got on the line, he told me that there were several sailors who wanted to talk with me because they wanted to hear my southern accent. I felt as if they were making fun of me. Another time when I felt inferior because of my southern accent and heritage was when I was

attending my stepson's wedding in Denver, Colorado. Every time I opened my mouth to speak, someone would say, 'Boy, I'll bet I can guess where you're from! What's it like living down there in the South?' I finally just became very quiet and did not do a lot of talking because I felt embarrassed (Kathryn Tillson, personal communication, September 24, 2007).

Her insecurity has also been evidenced in our household, with non-Southern visitors, including my in-laws. My mother becomes abnormally reticent around them, almost afraid to speak. Four years ago, one of her worst fears was realized when she was interviewed on national television. My younger brother, David, a former University of Georgia Bulldog, hit a grand slam in the College World Series, and the ESPN reporter found my parents in the crowd. My mother responded very succinctly to the question of how it felt to see her son achieve such a feat, quickly turning the spotlight onto my stepfather with his career-military non-accent. She explains her actions, saying, because of past stereotyping, I felt embarrassed. . . . When the news crew approached me for a live interview, I told them to let my

husband (who is not southern) do the interview because I didn't want my southern accent broadcast all over the nation! I guess you could say that I was ashamed of my southern accent and heritage at that particular moment because of how I thought people from other areas would perceive me (Tillson, personal communication, September 28, 2007).

On the opposite end of the spectrum is a former co-worker from New Hampshire. She has lived in New Hampshire for the vast majority of her life, but she moved to Georgia to teach for one year. When she first moved to the South, she expected her stereotypical notions to be fulfilled . . . a land of illiterates and trailer parks. In some ways, the South met her expectations. For instance, her name is Tara, pronounced Tar-a. However, she was quickly told that she pronounces it wrong; it should be pronounced Tear-a, in *Gone with the Wind* fashion. After that initiation into the South, she began to think that we are indeed a land of closed-minded illiterates.

Why do these negative stereotypes persist about the South? In large part, the images shown by the media and offered through literature first introduce and then

reinforce these images. In her interview, Kathryn Tillson agrees, saying,

Fake southern accents, shallow thinkers, and hillbilly behavior have run rampant in various television shows and movies. Some examples of television shows that depicted Southerners in a sometimes negative light were *The Dukes of Hazzard*, *The Beverly Hillbillies*, *Hee Haw*, *The Andy Griffith Show* (specifically Barney and Gomer), and *Green Acres* (personal communication, September 28, 2007).

In each of the television shows she mentions, Southerners are portrayed as having egregious grammar mistakes, impossibly drawn-out drawls, and quite meager living conditions. Tillson continues, saying, " It always bothered me to watch some of these shows and see people of my culture depicted as being stupid and gullible." Indeed, the media---especially the broadcast media--- frequently depict Southerners in the manner Tillson describes, which is a significant contributing factor to such persistent stereotypes.

While considerable work has been done in showing the influence the various modes of media exert in contemporary

society, and considerable research exists on the American South, I plan to add to the rather small existing body of research that combines the two. Through reading information from both of the copious existing fields, I hope to combine the two areas of study to show how the media portray the South.

Methodology

People from Southern cultures comprise approximately one-third of all people in the United States (Applebome, 1996, p. 8). Therefore, the lens through which my research will be conducted is critical, drawing considerably upon cultural studies. Critical theory consists of three general facets. "To be critical first involves establishing a perspective, a view of the world. . . . Secondly, it involves having reasons why that perspective is appropriate, and thirdly, it involves being willing to articulate our views and reasons so that other people hear or read about them" (Dant, 2003, p. 1). Moreover, critical theory combines knowledge with action, "[Critical Theory] refuses to fetishize knowledge as something apart from and superior to action" (Jay, 1973, p, 81). Rather, the two must work together. Knowledge without action accomplishes nothing, and action without knowledge is meaningless. Frequently, Critical Theory is tied to

critiques of culture, as well. In fact, Critical Theory can be noted for "the cultural criticism it fostered" (Jay, 1973, p. 175). Thus, this approach is apropos to my study, as my research focuses largely on the impact of various cultural media on people's perceptions. The major question that drives this study is: How does the media portray the South, and how does that portrayal impact people's perception of this region?

As my own experiences as a Southerner have inspired the topic of this research, much of the methodology is autobiographical. My own experiences are incorporated in the form of anecdotes and interviews. The autobiographical aspect of this study most obviously ties it into the area of curriculum studies. Currere, the curricular journey we all embark on, is evident in this study. This study tells the story of my life, of my place, but more importantly, as I write it, I understand a bit more about myself and my place. To connect it to my professional life, this experience of currere makes me a better person and a better teacher. The better I understand myself, the better I can understand others. Thus, the autobiographical impact of this study is undeniable.

The notion of critical constructivism is essential to this study. This view indicates that our knowledge of the

world is socially constructed. Thus, we must always be aware of how our place affects our views. Further, "critical constructivists are concerned with the exaggerated role power plays in these construction and validation processes. Critical constructivists are particularly interested in the ways these processes help privilege some people and marginalize others" (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 3). As this study aims to identify the sources of stereotypes about the American South and then deconstruct them, critical constructivism is a theory that pertains directly to this task. The notion of power and how it is created based on social constructions is of particular interest, as Southerners are frequently marginalized due to their geographic specificity and associated characteristics of their region. According to the idea of critical constructivism, neutrality is nonexistent (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 8). Everything offers some message, good or bad. For the purposes of this study, the media, in all its forms, gives messages that are often derogatory toward Southerners.

According to Joe L. Kincheloe, "The dominant power bloc uses movie and other media representations to expand its influence. . .Power wielders use film, TV, Internet, CDs, etc. to transmit particular representations" (2005, p.

75). Thus, the bombardment of viewers/ listeners with portrayals of Southerners living in rusted-out trailers, speaking with impossible twangs convince consumers that this portrait is actually correct. Further, "in constructivist theory, different individuals coming from diverse backgrounds will see the world in different ways" (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 9). Therefore, people from various regions see their region as perfect and correct. Moreover, they frequently view other regions as somehow imperfect. This attitude is one that is widespread when it comes to the American South. People from other regions see only difference, particularly in speech patterns, and equate this difference with inferiority.

As the media in all its forms (television, movies, literature, and music) is an integral part of American society, this study will also be grounded in cultural studies. "Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" (Williams, 2005, p. 25). Culture means a variety of things, depending on who processes the word. In fact, the verb form "to culture" means to shape or to form. In many ways, the noun form, culture, does actually shape and form perceptions and opinions of the masses who consume popular culture. On numerous occasions, popular culture outlets, like

television, movies, music, and literature, use their power to manipulate the disempowered groups. "The culture industry misuses its concern for the masses in order to duplicate, reinforce and strengthen their mentality, which it presumes is given and unchangeable" (Adorno, 2005, p. 104). Thus, when people see the stereotypes with which they have been inculcated repeated through the media, it only reinforces those notions. However, these stereotypes are rarely questioned, because it is easier just to accept the stereotypes that are constantly fed to the public. "The phrase, the world wants to be deceived, has become truer than had ever been intended. . .They force their eyes shut and voice approval, in a kind of self-loathing, for what is meted out to them, knowing fully the purpose for which it is manufactured" (Adorno, 2005, p. 106).

According to Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Trichler, cultural studies also aims to debunk such stereotyping, in that "[it] is both an intellectual and a political tradition" (Nelson, Treichler, & Grossberg, 1992, p. 5) Thus, the major divisions of my literature review will be 1) an overview of stereotypes about the American South, 2) the portrayal of Southerners in print, 3) the portrayal of Southerners in broadcast media, and 4) ideas for overcoming these stereotypes.

The subsequent chapters of this study will expound upon each of the major divisions. Chapter 2 will examine the portrayal of Southerners in literature, both classic literature and more contemporary literature. Historically, the South has been portrayed in literature in one of two ways. First, the South is portrayed as a region inhabited by an ignorant, economically-depressed populace. Second, the South is portrayed as an almost-magical realm of mint juleps and hoop skirts. As neither image is accurate, this chapter will involve examining examples from each view, and then deconstructing them point-by-point.

Chapter 3 will examine the stereotypes of Southerners on the screen, which will involve an analysis of television shows and movies. Historically, television shows have portrayed the South in a warped-idyllic manner. The South seems to viewers like a pervasively laid-back region inhabited by characters with endearing drawls. Often, a lack of respect for the law may be evident, while manners are overly-emphasized. In this chapter, scenes and dialogue from a variety of television shows and movies will be analyzed for inaccurate stereotypes.

Chapter 4 will focus on the portrayal of Southerners in music. This chapter will include an analysis of a wide array of musical genres, including country, rock, and folk

music. As with literature, music frequently portrays the South in terms of a lack of education and as an area where life moves a little slower than it does in other parts of the country. Lyrics from songs in a variety of types of music will be examined for the messages they convey, and then analyzed for specific inaccuracies they contain.

Within the context of each of these chapters, information obtained from interviews will be incorporated into the analysis. Participants will share their experience with Southern stereotypes, as well as their views on how the media contributes to those stereotypes.

Chapter 5 offers an alternative view of the South. This chapter will discuss how the South has overcome many of the stereotypes that plague it, including notions about education, economics, and race. As opposed to the South of yesteryear, from which many of these stereotypes emerge, the contemporary South has actually overcome many of its previous problems in these areas.

Chapter 6 discusses influences of the South that have become increasingly apparent in other regions of the United States. This chapter will indicate that "Southern things" are no longer just confined to this area, including music, NASCAR, and conservative views.

Significance

In the area of curriculum studies, my research falls into two primary areas of understanding curriculum. First of all, as this topic stems from my own experiences, it is largely an autobiographical discourse.

"Psychoanalytically, currere as interpretation of experience involves the examination of manifest and latent meaning, conscious and unconscious content of language, as well as the political implications of such reflection and interpretation" (Pinar et.al., 1995, p. 521). This study certainly examines actions and language, and how they impact views of the South. As "voice" is a vital concept to this mode of curriculum discourse, this study seeks to express the oft-unmentioned stereotypes of the South.

Additionally, however, this study can be understood as a political text. "There is a visionary element among political theorists, as they tend to call for an empowered citizenry capable of altering their circumstances in favor of a more just society" (Pinar, et.al., 1995, p. 244). This research aims to do precisely that, create a more just society. The stereotypes that exist about a wide array of cultures, races, etc. are detrimental to society as a whole. Many people maintain closed-minded attitudes toward groups other than their own, detracting from a sense of

community. This is historically true of race relations, gender treatment, and homophobic stereotypes. While this study incorporates some of those stereotypes, too, it focuses on a creating a fairer perception of Southerners and the South.

Another consideration is the notion of "ressentiment", which was first introduced by Friedrich Nietzsche in the nineteenth century; however, this term is apropos to the plight of Southerners in modern society. Ressentiment simply refers to the mentality that an oppressed class develops, assigning blame and frustration for its situation. Typically, this blame and anger is focused on the group perceived to be the oppressor. In the case of Southerners, much anger is vented toward "Yankees." Psychologically, though, the Southerners may be angry with themselves for their current situation, yet need a scapegoat on which to place blame. Is the North to blame for all the ills of the South? Certainly not. However, since the end of the Civil War, the North has served as a handy source of frustration for the South. This frustration is compounded by the fact that Southerners, partially because of our own insecurities, feel as if we are stereotyped and ridiculed by Northerners. Because of this long-festering anger, much resentment exists toward

the North in the minds of Southerners. Further, resentment refers to the "dark, personal secret, which most of us would never reveal to others even if we could acknowledge it ourselves" (Morelli, 2007, p. 1). Perhaps Southerners feel insecure because of our level of education and socioeconomics. Perhaps we feel inferior to people from other areas. However, rather than acknowledging these insecurities, we wave our rebel flags high, thus making ourselves targets for more stereotyping.

On the other side of the Southern coin, there is the experience of the African-American population, the large portion of our population that has widely and consistently been othered. African-American Southerners undoubtedly experience a different type of resentment than that of Southern whites. In this case, it is not the Northerners who are to blame; it is fellow Southerners, white Southerners. The memories of slave-holding have not faded, and the feeling of constant oppression remains. This feeling and this resentment explains the ongoing race struggles in the South. Indeed, the African-American experience of living in the South is quite different from the experience of whites. However, I can only examine the Southern experience from my own perspective as a white Southern woman.

A number of studies and projects have focused on the American South, but "place as a concept is largely absent in the curriculum literature" (Pinar, 1991, p. 165). I seek to make "place" less obscure in the curriculum landscape. As a native Southerner who has been the target of negative stereotypes, I can offer a unique perspective on the importance of deconstructing these stereotypes. Indeed, "the power of place as a category of social and personal experience is strong in the South" (Pinar, 1991, p. 167), and the concept of 'place' should be brought to the forefront. "In the South even more than in the North, curriculum becomes an anonymous Other whose linkages to everyday life are fragile and implicit" (Pinar, 1991, p. 174). Since the curriculum in the South often seems far removed from learners, my study aims make Southern culture more relevant. While some people in other geographical regions may fail to notice the power the South holds in our country, the South has, in fact, influenced the entire nation in several realms. Our 41st, 42nd, and 43rd Presidents, to name the most recent ones, were from the South, indicating that the South wields considerable political power. Culturally, too, many national phenomena have roots in the South. Indeed, the South has helped shape our country in countless ways.

Chapter 2: The South in Literature

Cultural studies is a disturbance characterized by intellectual engagement with a world beyond academe. Studies in this area seek to answer pressing societal questions through intellectual inquiry. Further, scholars in cultural studies maintain that culture and power are related to context. Therefore, cultural studies focuses on an ever-changing reality that is defined by cultural practices that represent and deploy power. Within this examination of how cultural practices influence power is considerable focus on identity, especially on how one's identity is shaped (Grossberg, 1997, p. 2). In fact, "cultural studies is the notion of radical social and cultural transformation and how to study it" (Grossberg et.al. 1992, p. 5), indicating that this area of research focuses on how identities of individuals and societies change in reaction to or with our culture.

In many pieces of literature, often those that are consistently taught in our nation's schools, the South is depicted as an impoverished area pervaded by bigotry. While this description may not be wholly inaccurate, it is the only view of the South that is conveyed, in many instances. As previously noted, the poverty rate in the South is decreasing, yet the images portrayed through many

media outlets still focus only on the severe poverty, not on the positive change. Affluent areas with more open-minded attitudes are largely ignored. Conversely, however, the South is often portrayed to be something it is not. "[M]ultinational media capitalism's role in shaping the South for tourism in *Southern Living*. . . revise[s] the traditional perimeters of southern place and literature and invite nonsouthernists to consider the extent to which southern 'regional' dynamics have always figured, or prefigured, the tensions in American national cultures" (Henninger). Certainly, particular geographic regions and cultures consider themselves superior to others. One thing that most cultures within America seem to agree on, however, is certain stereotypical images of the South. Southern writers often portray what they have seen or what they have read about in the history of their region, and "the 'authentic' Southern writer should remain under the sway of his natural environment without protesting or explaining the social order" (Casemore, 2008, p. 3). Thus, these recurring images often appear with little explanation, giving non-Southerners a glimpse into the South, but with none of the background information that explains the characters' behaviors.

A prime example of literature that offers this depiction of the South is *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. It offers multiple stereotypes of the South: a rural setting, racial discord, and Southern belles. The setting for the novel is rural Maycomb, Alabama, in the 1930s. As the novel is set during the Great Depression, the image of the South is particularly bleak. Many people, like the Ewells, a family important to the plot of the novel, have become unemployed ne'er-do-wells, and even people with meager jobs live in run-down homes. Some children go to school, like Jem and Scout Finch, two of the main characters, while others are forced to stay home and help the family work. These situations would likely have been apparent in any geographic region of the time, but the Southern setting only serves to reinforce these infamous images of the South.

Racial discord is the major premise on which the novel is based. Tom Robinson, a black man, stands accused of raping Mayella Ewell, a white girl from a lower class, "white trash" family. This situation is rife with Southern stereotypes. First of all, the townspeople all firmly believe Mayella over Tom, simply because she is white, thus reinforcing the "good old boy" system of the South. Further, many of the white residents of Maycomb try to

lynch Tom Robinson before he can even go to trial, which is yet another stereotype of Southern behavior. The support of the white community is given to Mayella Ewell only grudgingly, however, as they perceive her family to be "white trash." Her family lives in a run-down shack on the outskirts of town, and the description of her family as unemployed drunkards and of the family homestead undoubtedly meet the stereotypical vision many people have of the South.

Another common occurrence in the South is brought to light in this novel. The tension between poor whites and the black community, particularly during this time period, was often far more volatile than other racial tension in the South. In fact, "black children learned to fear poor whites more than other whites simple because they were known to express their racism by cruel and brutal acts of violence" (hooks, 2000, p. 113). Thus, the image of racism is especially poignant in this book, with the intense hatred and violence the Ewell family expresses toward Tom Robinson.

These racially-charged images strike a particular chord with readers, and with Southerners in general, as the book closely parallels the famous Scottsboro trials of the 1930s. In these trials, nine African-American boys were

accused of raping two white girls. Ultimately, a second trial revealed that no such thing happened. In fact, the white girls had lied to protect their own flagging reputations, regardless of what that meant for the black boys. Like Mayella Ewell in the novel, *Victoria Price*, was a person of low repute, a prostitute. She was neither crying, bleeding, or seriously bruised after the alleged gang rape. She was fearful of being arrested for a Mann Act violation (crossing state lines for immoral purposes) when she met the posse in Paint Rock, so she and Bates made groundless accusations of rape to deflect attention from their own sins. Throughout the four-hour cross, Price remained sarcastic, evasive, and venomous. She used her ignorance and poor memory to her advantage and proved to be a difficult witness to corner (Lindner).

Since this story is factual, the parallels found in *To Kill a Mockingbird* are particularly poignant. The oft-presented racially-charged images are depicted within the context of Southern literature. The 2006 Jena Six controversy has reminded everyone that race relations are still a tense matter. However, despite the deplorable actions of a few

people in rather isolated incidents, race relations in the South have certainly improved from the time in which *To Kill a Mockingbird* was set. In most communities, people of all races live together in integrated neighborhoods, students attend integrated public schools, and all people eat in restaurants together. Further, interracial marriages are on the rise, even in the South, indicating that color barriers are at least crumbling. Undoubtedly, there is still much progress to be made in this realm, because even though the Jena Six controversy may have been based on the actions of a few people, it was likely silently condoned by many more. While the South may not be as filled with outspoken bigots as it once was, silent racism continues, where actions (or lack thereof) may speak louder than words.

The well-known image of the Southern belle is also prevalent in Lee's novel. Maycomb is a town that adheres to strict Southern codes, one of which is that females should be ladies. Scout, the young protagonist of the story, has been raised largely by her father, Atticus Finch. Therefore, she has been allowed to grow into a bit of a tomboy. Even though she is a well-behaved child with a conscience and good morals, her aunt Alexandra is appalled that she has not been taught proper etiquette for

ladies. She tries to convert Scout into a Southern belle by putting her in dresses and bringing her to social gatherings, such as volunteer clubs and church teas. She and others feel it is imperative for girls to behave as traditional Southern belles. This preoccupation with lady-like behavior undoubtedly serves to strengthen stereotypes about women as Southern belles.

Another piece of literature that is traditionally associated with Southern life is Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind*. This classic novel is replete with images of plantation life, mint juleps, hoop skirts, Southern belles, and the Civil War. Mitchell's images of the South serve to confirm the stereotypes that many people associate with the South. Scarlett O'Hara is the consummate Southern belle. She lives on a thriving plantation, attends social events as a debutante, and is depicted in the traditional Southern lady garb of corsets and hoop skirts. Her mannerisms and speech patterns are those expected of a Southern belle, soft and deferential. In fact, "In 1936, when Margaret Mitchell told the reader that, 'Scarlett O'Hara was not beautiful,' but that 'men seldom recognized it when caught by her charm,' she was continuing a long tradition in the physical description and personality of the southern belle" (Seidel, 1985, p. 3).

The novel is divided into five parts. In Part One, the novel seems to be a sappy love story with a Southern setting. This section of the novel revolves around Scarlett's coquettish behavior around all men, and her underlying love for Ashley Wilkes, who is about to be married to another woman. When her love is unreciprocated, however, Scarlett's outward Southern belle behavior begins to change, as she throws physical tantrums and shows her fiery, unladylike temper. Despite this deviation from traditional Southern-belle behavior, though, Scarlett O'Hara is still frequently viewed as the consummate Southern belle, probably because of her attire of hoop skirts and her usual demure demeanor.

The setting of Part One is Georgia, immediately before the Civil War. The initial images the reader sees are of rolling fields and huge plantation homes. Slaves are in abundance, working while the owners attend social events, like the barbeque in this section. These images reinforce stereotypes of the antebellum South as a prosperous, slaveholding society. While this was certainly the case for a select few families during this time, many non-Southerners still perceive this image to be accurate, even in the 21st century.

Part Two of the novel continues with images of Southern belle socialites, like Scarlett and Ashley's new wife, Melanie. Again, they wear traditional upper-class Southern lady apparel, and their days revolve around planning and attending social events. In this section, despite her introduction to Rhett Butler, Scarlett continues to pine for Ashley, begging and sobbing for him to reciprocate her love. This behavior is considered by many readers and critics to show the typical weak nature of Southern ladies.

In parts Three and Four of the novel, the Civil War takes center stage, slowly destroying the characters' beloved South. Further, in these sections, a stereotypical distaste for "Yankees" becomes apparent. A former overseer of Tara becomes greedy and raises taxes to force the O'Haras out of their home, and Yankee soldiers loot their homestead. These scenes are intended to show the Southern characters' dislike for their Northern counterparts, and the constant derogatory comments and unacceptable behavior of the Yankees serve to reinforce stereotypes of Southerners holding a vehement grudge against people from the North, though this is certainly not the case today.

The image of Tara, the O'Hara's family home and plantation, offers an interesting commentary on the South.

Before the Civil War, Tara was beautiful, an imposing home surrounded by rolling fields, with slaves conducting almost every manner of business, both indoors and outdoors. After the war, however, Tara is utterly destroyed, as the entire South was at the time. Ultimately, it is the North that is to blame for the devastation, as most readers assume that Tara was burned in the course of Sherman's march to the sea. Interestingly, while the images of plantations still pervade media depictions of the South, the idea of the North destroying those images is omitted.

In another literary example, William Faulkner is an author who set all of his writings in the South, mostly in the fictitious Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi. His works, from his novels to his short stories, make use of Southern stereotypes to drive their plots. For instance, in his short story, "A Rose for Emily," Faulkner bases his story around a spinster named Emily Grierson, whose treatment by the townspeople is typically Southern. Miss Emily came from a wealthy family, and after her father dies, she is left alone. In small-town Southern fashion, the ladies of the town gossip about Miss Emily, fluctuating between envy and pity for her. When Miss Emily, who has nearly always been a loner, starts to be courted by Homer Barron, the gossip begins in earnest. Homer Barron is a

"Yankee" and is a "day laborer," making him an unfit beau for Miss Emily in two respects. The townspeople's opinion of Homer is certainly based on the Southern stereotype of this being a region that detests people from the North and firmly supports the practice of noblesse oblige.

The townspeople's gossipy nature is perhaps best exemplified by their behavior after Miss Emily dies. The townspeople invade her home out of sheer curiosity. They do not care to pay their respects; rather, they want to see the inside of her house, which has never been opened to them. The behavior of the townspeople undoubtedly strengthens the stereotype that the South is a region that thrives on gossip and nosiness. Certainly, this is true in many areas of the South, but it is not confined to Southern borders. However, this story helps make this stereotype more concrete in non-Southerners' minds.

In another short story, "The Life You Save May Be Your Own," Georgia native Flannery O'Connor uses an ultra-rural setting and the Southern dialect. This story is rife with stereotypical images of destitute Southerners. The story begins, for instance, with a focus on the setting. Two women, a mother and daughter, sit on their porch one evening, watching a drifter come up the road. Already, the images are expected---people spending their free evening

hours sitting on the porch. When the drifter stops and strikes up a conversation, though, readers are bombarded with additional images of poverty. We learn that Lucynell, Sr. and Lucynell, Jr.---the names alone would indicate a lack of deep thinking on the part of the characters---live in a home that needs quite a few repairs, such as a new roof. Thus, the image of a shack is introduced. Then, when the drifter looks around the property, he notices an old, rusty car. When his eyes alight on it, Lucynell, Sr. offers it to him as payment for helping around her farm. Thus, the readers encounter a Southern man and his infatuation with a "junk car," a stereotype that many people envision about the South. While the Deep South is in fact a poor region, it is also a region with a large middle class population. In the O'Connor story, however, this segment of the population is left out of the plot, leading some readers to focus only on the images she offers.

In addition to the setting, the dialect in this story is typically Southern. For instance, when the drifter inquires about the rusty car, Lucynell, Sr., replies by saying, "That car ain't run in fifteen year" (p. 531). With her use of the ever-present "ain't" and the lack of an "s" at the end of "year," Lucynell offers a common notion

of a poor Southern woman as uneducated. Later, near the end of the story, a worker in a diner notices Lucynell, Jr., saying "She looks like an angel of Gawd" (p. 537). In this line, the Southern dialect is emphasized with the invented spelling for God, which indicates how it would sound pronounced with a Southern drawl. In addition to the dialect, the religious reference is also typically Southern.

Throughout many genres, including fiction and drama, the search for identity is a prevalent theme in Southern literature of the mid-twentieth century. According to Lawrence Grossberg, struggles over identity focus on "politics of difference and representation" (p. 13). Thus, in this quest, the characters may reveal traits that are stereotypically associated with the South, especially since "people are always anchored or invested in specific sites" (Grossberg, p. 15). In many literary works of the period, the protagonist seeks to discover some hidden aspect of himself. Perhaps this confusion about identity stems from the general chaos in the South during the mid-1900s. Regardless of the source, however, authors ranging from the aforementioned Faulkner to Tennessee Williams created characters intent on resolving questions about their identities. Interestingly, though, while the characters

may search for their identities, readers from areas other than the South may also formulate stereotypes about the identities of these characters, and of Southerners in general. Indeed, it would seem that Southern literature is rife with material that can be used to negatively stereotype the South. The pervasive idea of a search for identity may ring true with Southern writers, as people in the South must constantly struggle to establish their identity in the eyes of others, especially people who are not from the South.

Joe Christmas, the primary character in Faulkner's *Light in August*, is an excellent example of a protagonist searching for his identity. Christmas constantly struggles with questions of his racial heritage. The illegitimate son of a white woman and a man of uncertain ethnic background, Christmas spends the majority of his childhood and adult life battling the desire to fit in with one race.

Joe Christmas was the ultimate in displaced persons. He was the son of an errant Southern white girl and a carnival man of a darker hue. . . . [He] could never know with certainty whether he was black or white in a society in which everything began with that definition.

(Williamson, 1993, p.405)

Indeed, the struggle for Christmas is not simply one of mixed racial ancestry; it is a struggle to fit in within a Southern society that places all emphasis on skin color. In a novel such as *Light in August* that places much of its emphasis on race relations, the idea that the South is inhabited by bigots seeps through to the readers.

In the novel, as a child, Christmas lives through the mild torment of other children referring to him as "nigger." "As a child, at the Memphis orphanage, he became aware of himself as an object of contempt and hatred through the other children's taunting voices. . . ." (Bleikasten, 1987, p. 83). However, he manages to overlook this daily chant until the defining moment in his childhood, the moment when his nanny yells at him in hateful, racially-tinted language. He has snuck into her room to eat some of her toothpaste, which he thinks tastes delicious. However, he catches her in a passionate moment with an intern. When he has gorged himself on toothpaste, he vomits, thus revealing himself and incurring her rage.

The toothpaste episode is the "primal scene" in the course of which Joe's sense of blackness gets enmeshed for the first time with the temptations and terrors of sex. Henceforth womanhood, food, and sexuality will be joined

with his racial obsession in a single knot of guilt. (Bleikasten, 1987, p. 88).

At this moment, Christmas is confronted with a major question that will plague him for the rest of his life: How do I know what color I really am? Again, the focus on race and on the use of racial slurs emphasizes an area for which the South has become famous---prejudice against non-whites. While this particular novel is fairly true to its time period, many readers may fail to make that connection and may erroneously assume that this behavior is still largely accurate and generally acceptable.

Continuing, Christmas must blatantly confront this question of identity almost immediately upon his adoption. As he was adopted and raised by the McEacherns, his identity was suppressed, as he was allowed to think and do only as his adoptive father, a very manipulative man, commanded. Indeed, Christmas was treated almost as a slave, which quite possibly led to further internal conflict about his racial roots. Again, the notion of slavery and denigration of non-whites is highlighted by Faulkner.

Christmas' entire quest, though, revolves around the need to overcome such stereotypes based on his heritage. While people may certainly still be classified based on

such superficial aspects as skin color, people must not struggle to overcome the same kinds of stereotypes that faced Joe Christmas. Now, the concern is not about falling in love with a person of a different race, or living in an integrated neighborhood. Rather, the areas of discrimination have shifted into the realms of academics and careers. Now, the struggle is to get into the right schools and gain employment based on merit. Regardless of this shift, though, the South is still very much perceived as the same area that Joe Christmas encountered in this book that was set in the 1800s.

Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is replete with characters on a quest to know their identity, too. In this drama, the primary character, Brick, suffers from major confusion about many aspects of his personality. Despite his marriage to Margaret (Maggie), a beautiful young woman, Brick continues to mourn the loss of his friend, Skipper. While it is only natural to grieve after a friend's death, Brick seems to be harboring some deeper emotion---maybe guilt about the true nature of his relationship with Skipper. Perhaps, "that is just the trouble with Brick. . .he [is] endowed . . .with the attributes of both. . .male and female masks" (Boxill, 1987, p. 113). In fact, in his confusion, Brick totally

isolates himself from his wife, repeatedly threatening to leave her.

In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* Maggie and Brick, presumably, had a satisfactory sexual relationship early in their marriage. Problems began to develop, however, when Maggie decided that Brick's close friendship with Skipper indicated homosexual tendencies. After the death of Skipper, Brick. . . insisted upon sleeping separately. . .but Maggie would not leave him. (Blackwell, 1977, p. 104)

Brick is not self-confident enough to leave Maggie, so he tries unsuccessfully to drive her away. On a deeper level, he seems to loathe the idea of being alone, while he cannot live with the idea of being with Maggie and thinking of Skipper. Brick's ambivalence about his relationship with these two people indicate the ambiguity in his sexual preference. His inability to be happy with Maggie is likely due to his unexpressed feelings for his late friend, Skipper. Homosexuality is perceived to be quite taboo in the South, and Brick's behavior would reinforce that idea.

Maggie also seems to be searching for her true identity. She has resigned herself to staying in an unhappy marriage, even though she could easily find a

better life for herself. The purpose of her life seems to be to make Brick happy again. "Her relation to her detached and self-destructive husband is like those in which the belle. . . tries in vain to save the foredoomed wanderer" (Boxill, 1987, p. 115). Perhaps it is love for Brick that keeps her in her marriage, or perhaps it is something more base, like family money, that influences her to not simply leave.

In this play, Maggie's behavior is certainly unusual, but it also reinforces the idea that Southern women are intent upon making their men happy, even if this means sacrificing their own happiness. While this is certainly no more true in the South than in any other geographical region, images such as the martyred Maggie in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* tend to stick in the minds of readers, creating a stereotype that is difficult to overcome. Further, women in Southern literature often seem more manipulative and seductive than women from other geographical regions. Likely, this is due to their quiet, eye-batting comments that yield the desired results. Women in Southern literature are not domineering or particularly outspoken, yet they manage to achieve their goals through subtle behavior, thus resulting in the labels of "seductive" and "manipulative."

It is apparent that Maggie certainly cares for Brick, though her love has changed from a romantic love to a kind of maternal compassion. Since Brick refuses to function in the adult world, Maggie must work doubly hard to make life appear "normal" for them. "Brick is a child in a world of adults, sharing a room, if not a bed, with a maternally protective young woman" (Boxill, 1987, p. 117). This almost maternal relationship is exhibited at the opening of the play, when Maggie must coax Brick into making himself presentable for his father's birthday party. This maternal behavior may be an indication of Maggie's desire to be a mother. This desire is yet another aspect of Maggie that is rife with conflict. She longs to be a mother, yet she appears to loathe children (at least the children of Mae and Gooper). It is as if she almost feels as though becoming a mother will make her a better wife, with better social status.

One aspect of Maggie's personality is lacking, though. She seems to lack self-confidence. While she no doubt loves Brick, she also seems to be very insecure with the idea of leaving him. It takes an inner strength to leave a man and fend for oneself; Maggie certainly seems to lack this strength. She is apparently very fearful of failing

in her marriage, so she allows herself to be deluded into believing that everything is essentially normal.

Again, Maggie's behavior serves to reinforce several stereotypes about Southern women. First of all, she is overly concerned with social status, and feels that having children will raise hers. This manner of thinking lends itself to the idea that the social hierarchy is still of the utmost importance in the South. Secondly, Maggie is portrayed as a weak woman who cannot survive without being married; indeed, she sacrifices everything, even her own mental health, to hold on to her crumbling marriage. While this behavior may be true of some women, this phenomenon is certainly not confined to the South. However, literary pieces such as this that portray women as weak and needy reinforce the notion that Southern women actually are that way. In fact, "Signi Lenea Falk has called the playwright's female characters either Southern gentlewomen or Southern wenches" (Blackwell, 1977, p. 1).

Brick's mother, Ida, seems to be another character in this story with confusion about her identity. Her behavior, similarly to Maggie's, revolves around maintaining appearances of a happy marriage. She clearly adores her husband, despite his indifference and even mild hatred toward her. At his birthday party, he angrily vents

at her, “. . .for three years now you been gradually taking over. Bossing. Talking. Sashaying your fat old body around the place I made” (Williams, 1985, p. 58)! Rather than responding angrily or retaliating with more insults, she merely laughs away his rude, derogatory comments. Indeed, she seems to lack the self-identity and self-esteem to separate herself from such a detrimental marriage. As Southern stereotypes often show, Ida is an abused wife who chooses to remain married to her husband rather than try to survive on her own.

Finally, Brick himself seems to have a bit of an identity crisis. His attachment to his dead friend is often perceived by readers and critics to be a bit suspect. Indeed, there is much critical literature to indicate that Brick was actually homosexual. However, this notion is never mentioned within the plot of the drama. In the play, “homosexuality is only implied. . .[but] Brick’s repressed sexuality was a crucial element to the drama” (Kerkhoffs, 2000). It is as if the characters who aim for a genteel Southern lifestyle are too uncomfortable mentioning this idea, indicating that homophobia is a problem in the South.

The images in this play may hold some validity, but they are not as far-reaching as some people imagine. Is homophobia prevalent in the South? Yes. However, to

stereotype an entire region based on the irrational beliefs of only some of its inhabitants is absurd. In the Bible Belt of the South, fundamentalists abound and speak out about homosexuality. However, within the same region, very tolerant pockets exist, too. In Atlanta, for instance, both Midtown and Buckhead are very friendly areas for people with alternative lifestyles. This is true in most cities, and even in some smaller communities. Certainly, not all Southerners are homophobes.

The image of Maggie and Ida sacrificing their happiness to keep their husbands is an image that is not confined to the South, but undoubtedly happens across the nation and around the world. However, the ever-increasing divorce rate would indicate that people no longer make such sacrifices just to stay in a marriage.

Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain* is a more contemporary piece of Southern literature that still embodies the theme of the search for identity. Ada is character in *Cold Mountain* who experiences an identity-shift. In this novel, however, rather than the search for identity serving to reinforce stereotypes, this one breaks many stereotypes about the American South.

Ada has been reared in Southern genteel society, learning how to socialize as a proper Southern belle. Her

transformation begins when she moves from Charleston with her father to a lonely mountain community. Suddenly, Ada is no longer expected to be a socialite. Instead, she is her father's sole companion, free to roam and read as she will. With this subtle change in behavior, the stereotype of a Southern socialite begins to disintegrate.

Ada's identity takes on an entirely new facet, however, after her father's death. Because all of the men are at war, Ada must quickly learn how to maintain a home and a farm. "With the death of her father and loss of income from his investments, Ada can no longer remain a pampered Charleston lady but must eke out a living from her father's farm. . ." (*Publisher's Weekly* 1). The former Charleston socialite learns to plow and plant, as well as cook and clean. Her priorities undergo a major shift, as reading and books take a back seat to the everyday tasks necessary to maintaining a household. At this point, Ada actually takes on a man's role, which is quite a shift from the traditional perception of a Southern lady.

Ada is taught how to perform simple farm tasks, such as planting, canning, and cooking. In addition, she must learn how to secure her financial situation by bartering for necessary goods. Months of farming and manual labor toughens Ada from a pampered socialite into a capable

woman. "The sweeping cycle of Inman's homeward journey is deftly balanced by Ada's growing sense of herself and her connection to the natural world around the farm" (*Publisher's Weekly* 1). As Ada's body begins to strengthen, so does her personality. On many days when her former self wants to quit working and read a book, a new facet of Ada's personality forces her to continue to work. Eventually, she begins to feel a sense of pride in her accomplishments around the farm. Ada's major changes emphasize the strength of a Southern woman, as opposed to the weakness and reliance on men.

Another character who offers an alternate image of a Southern woman is Ruby, the hard-working, rough-around-the-edges neighbor who helps Ada become self-sufficient. She is neither genteel nor refined. She is plain-spoken and almost mannish in her behavior. However, she is the sole reason that Ada survives during the war.

In this novel, the North is not the downfall of the community. Rather, it is the males of the South who stay behind; they savagely terrorize their neighbors and ruthlessly steal. However, Ada and Ruby manage to hold their own, a prime example of how Southern women are strong, not the "delicate flowers" that are often shown in media images.

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* is a good example of Southern literature that exemplifies the search for identity. Walker hails from Eatonton, Georgia, and for much of her life, was on her own quest for identity. Much of her young adulthood was spent in a state of depression, largely due to her blindness in one eye from a childhood accident with a bb gun. She spent much of her time trying to find her place in a society that shuns difference.

Similarly, her classic novel verbalizes this search to find normalcy. In *The Color Purple*, which is set in rural Georgia, chronicles the life of Celie, a young woman who constantly seeks love and acceptance. She struggles through a series of abusive relationships, starting with physical and sexual abuse by her father. She is then "given" to Mr. _____, who beats her frequently. Ultimately, Celie finds consolation and contentment in a relationship with Shug, a female character in the novel. As time wears on, Celie comes to truly love Mr. _____, as she becomes more content with herself. No longer does she try to find contentment through others, but she is content with herself, and can thus be content with others.

In another piece of minority Southern literature, Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* tells the story of Janie Crawford, a young black woman on a quest to

find contentment with herself and in relationships with others. Janie's first marriage is essentially arranged by her grandmother, and she marries a much older man named Logan Killicks. Their marriage is a loveless one, and Logan treats her more like a paid worker than a wife. Unhappy with this arrangement, Janie meets Joe (Jody) Starks, an ambitious man to whom she is immediately attracted. She marries him, and they go to the all-black town of Eatonville, Florida (where Hurston herself was raised). Jody becomes mayor of Eatonville, and he expects Janie to act like an "appropriate" mayor's wife. She is allowed to have no voice of her own, yet she tolerates this behavior for many years. When Jody finally dies after a prolonged illness, Janie is free yet again. At this point, she is able to find love for herself, and not merely a man to help her out of a difficult situation. This is when she meets Tea Cake, a man who is much younger than she. She runs away with him, deeply in love. Unfortunately, during a hurricane, Tea Cake contracts rabies while saving Janie from a rabid dog. When Tea Cake is delusional and tries to attach her, Janie shoots him to save herself. The novel ends with Janie alone again, but finally content in her decisions and independence. Throughout each of these relationships, Janie learns more about herself. With each

man, she craves more independence and learns to think for herself. Thus, in the end, when she is alone, she is confident on her own.

Each of these pieces of literature exemplifies a strong focus on the social hierarchy of the South. According to bell hooks, "Class is the pressing issue, but it is not talked about. The closest folks can come to talking about class in this nation is to talk about money" (2000, p. 5). In all of these examples of Southern literature, this is the case, too. Nobody explicitly mentions the class structure of the South, or how it undoubtedly hinges on race. Rather, readers must infer this tension from the treatment of the black characters. In her book, hooks continues, saying "We live in a society where the poor have no public voice" (2000, p. 5). This notion is also included in much Southern literature. The poor, typically minority, characters are frequently static in their roles, changing very little, saying very little, only being manipulated by characters higher up the social ladder.

In all genres of Southern literature, protagonists are often on a search for identity. The impetus for these searches range from abuse to hidden love to war. Further, this recurring theme's prevalence is likely due to the

Southern writers' (and readers') sense of ambivalence about their identity. Putting the struggles with identity into words may either reinforce existing notions about identity, or break down stereotypes about how people in the South should behave. Whatever the reason, however, the characters who try so desperately to find their identities constantly evolve, while also changing those people they encounter.

In all of these pieces of writing, though, while Southern stereotypes may be derived from some of the recurring images, it must be noted that these images are also what make these pieces quality Southern literature. Southern writers, quite simply, write about what they know. So, these images are largely accurate when they are placed in the context of when and where they were written. The problem emerges, however, when non-Southerners take these images out of that context, and further, when they internalize them as the dominant images of the South. Yes, we speak with accents and we frequently use the word "y'all." Yes, we harbor a history of racial intolerance and slavery. Yes, we have many areas of very rural living. However, these are not the only truths about the South. They are just the most widely recognized, since they are recurring themes in much Southern writing.

Chapter 3: The South in Television and Movies

Television now occupies a prominent position in American society, and has come to shape the way Americans view the world around them. Today, television wields more widespread power than books do. "Not only has it transformed the social, political, and economic organization of our society, TV has begun to alter our very ways of seeing and knowing" (Joyrich, 1996, p. 22). For a medium that has been in existence for barely fifty years, it has usurped family time and taken the place of imaginary games and outdoor play for children. In fact, it would seem that one thing that nearly all Americans have in common is frequent television viewing. Along with that trend, though, comes images that bombard the viewers, giving them glimpses into places they have never seen and lives they will never lead. "Television is centrally concerned with the representation of people" (Fiske, 1987, p. 149). In many instances, viewers may perceive the images and people they see to be an accurate representation of reality, even if they are not. "Sometimes such stereotypes are disguised as national American traits, a part of the American scene" (Adorno, in Ingram & Simon-Ingram, 1991, p. 81). Thus, we must put more effort into examining and deconstructing these images. According to

Theodor Adorno, "By exposing the socio-psychological implications and mechanisms of television, often operating under the guise of fake realism. . .the public at large may be sensitized to the nefarious effects of some of these mechanisms" (in Ingram & Simon-Ingram, 1991, p. 69). As Adorno suggests, the inauthentic version of reality audiences see via television must be exposed for viewers, so that they can discover the authentic cultures of the places they see, rather than simply accepting stereotypes. Indeed, "the actual television viewer is primarily a social subject. This social subjectivity is. . .influential in the construction of meanings" (Fiske, 1987, p. 62). Thus, as viewers interact with television programs, they are constantly making meanings, whether or not they are grounded in reality. In fact, "reading the television text is a process of negotiation between this existing subject position and the one proposed by the text itself" (Fiske, 1987, p. 66). This would indicate that viewers must work diligently to distinguish what they know to be reality and what the television or movie propose as reality.

To add to this constant struggle, Adorno points out that "the increasing strength of modern mass culture is further enhanced by changes in the sociological structure of the audience" (in Ingram & Simon-Ingram, 1991, p. 71).

His point deserves consideration, as in years past, television was reserved for the upper classes who could afford it. Now, nearly everyone has access to television. Hence, whereas once the people who could afford access to television were likely of a more educated, well-traveled class that could distinguish between appearance and reality, now the range of people who can afford this medium is far more diverse, spanning the spectrum of social and economic classes.

Certainly, television creates an alternate reality for its viewers. During the half hour or hour while viewers are engaged in a television program, they become part of the world that they watch. Thus, that world becomes something of a reality to them, even if neither the setting nor the situations are truly familiar to them. For that brief period, though, the reality of the television program becomes the reality of its viewers. Still, though, viewers unconsciously evaluate and critique the images they encounter on television, determining what seems plausible and what does not.

Since the inception of sitcoms and television dramas, the broadcast media has portrayed the South as a slower-moving area of the country, often with fewer worries than other regions. Succinctly, the South is shown as an area

that lives off the land and does not worry about the problems of modern society. In some portrayals, the South may be represented as a bit of a respite from the hustle and bustle of daily life in other areas. However, most viewers walk away from these portrayals with an ingrained perception that the South is behind the rest of the country, in some way or another, whether in education, housing or social beliefs. Indeed, the South has become the Other, the place that deviates from the norm and is thus unacceptable. However, "continuous plugging to institutionalize some obnoxious type does not make the type a sacred symbol of folklore" (Adorno, 1991, p. 81). Thus, while the South may often be portrayed as slow, or home to illiterates and racists, this does not make either stereotype true.

In many cases, the only contact non-Southerners have with the South is through images they see on television. While some images may portray a small region or population segment of the South, non-Southerners may unconsciously perceive these images to be an accurate portrayal of what the South is truly like, in a widespread manner, especially if they have never experienced life in the South directly. An example of this phenomenon is *The Dukes of Hazzard*. Several Southern notions are propagated by this show,

including ultra-rural surroundings, overly-pronounced twangs, extended-family living arrangements, and moonshining.

The setting for this show is the fictitious Hazzard County, Georgia, which includes primarily dirt roads, small, run-down homes, and a tiny town run by the "good ole boy system." In every episode, the Duke boys are seen speeding down dirt roads, leaving a red cloud of dust behind them wherever they go. As they tear down the roads, they pass small homes, which are often in need of repair and frequently resemble shanties. These reappearing images likely only serve to further instill this stereotype in non-native Southerners. They see this show and have their often naive views of the South as only a rural area reinforced.

Further, within these rural surroundings, the Duke family lives together in a rather unusual household. Uncle Jesse is the head of the household, and he is uncle to Bo, Luke, and Daisy, who are not siblings, but cousins. Yet again, a persistent Southern stereotype is reinforced merely with this living arrangement. There is a stereotype of Southerners as overly family-oriented, often living in extended family units. Additionally, the idea of incest often plagues images of the South, and this show is no

exception to that stereotype. While Daisy is an immediate cousin to Bo and Luke, they do not refrain from ogling her and commenting on her long legs and other attractive features.

The most common Southern stereotype, that of the Southern drawl, is undoubtedly represented in this show. While some of the speech patterns, like the omission of the 'g' in words ending in '-ing', are accurate, they are often over-exaggerated. Words are drawn out, and the Duke boys' signature "Yeehaw" is utilized in excess, making not only them, but all Southerners seem like "hicks." Undoubtedly, the South has its own speech patterns, just like any area of the country, but many of the speech patterns are exaggerated by the media.

Perhaps another common image of the South in the minds of non-Southerners who have never visited the South or analyzed Southern living is that of moonshining. Again, while this practice has certainly existed in the Southern region, it is given frequent attention in "The Dukes of Hazzard." In multiple episodes, Uncle Jesse's stills are the focus of attention for the Duke boys. He certainly takes part in this illegal practice, and the fact that it would be mentioned repeatedly only reinforces the notion that this is a common occurrence in the South.

In yet another stereotype of the South, the Duke boys are often portrayed attending and participating in events such as demolition derbies. Even though I have grown up in the Deep South, I have never attended and have really never heard much about these events. Ironically, my husband, who is from northern Illinois, regularly attended demolition derbies and tractor pulls at local fairs. So, even though stereotypes of these events are associated with the South, they actually seem to be more prevalent in the Midwest, based on my own experience. Since the South is a geographic region that is isolated from much of the country, people who have not been to the area may simply assume that these activities are widespread in the South. Further, the Midwest is a region that is considered to be wholesome and "typically" American. Certainly, the Midwest is not a region of mystery to many people, as the South is. Thus, even though these events may be common in the Midwest, little attention is given to them, as the Midwest is a region known and seemingly understood by much of the nation.

Another television show that exemplifies stereotypes of the South is *Designing Women*. The premise of this show is based on a business run by four women. While owning a business may not be typical of the Southern belle image,

the type of business is: interior design. This group of ultra-feminine ladies seeks to beautify society homes in the Atlanta area. The show is always punctuated by their lilting Southern accents. Their business is run from the home of Julia Sugarbaker, a consummate Southern society lady. Julia relies heavily on manners and codes of propriety, never acting vulgar or seeking to blatantly offend anyone. Her partners in the business are her sister, Suzanne Sugarbaker, and friends Mary Jo Shively and Charlene Stillfield.

In the pilot episode of the show, a few typical Southern stereotypes are employed. For instance, the speech patterns of the women, especially Mary Jo, are traditionally Southern, both in lilt and in grammar. For instance, as the episode begins, Mary Jo describes a house she has recently been asked to decorate, ending by saying that they seemed to like her "pretty good," reinforcing the notion that Southerners perpetually use poor grammar. Also in her discussion of the home, Mary Jo seems awed by the sheer size and elegance of it, indicating that people from this region rarely encounter opulence.

Julia's sister, Suzanne Sugarbaker, is a former beauty queen. In her first appearance in the pilot episode, Suzanne sashays into the room, announcing that everyone

looks "bright-eyed and bushy-tailed," a use of traditional Southern idiomatic speech. Then, further into the discussion, she speaks in a hushed tone about an "interracial couple" that has hired her to decorate. Her tone indicates that the idea of people from different races forming a union is a bit harsh for the Southern sensibilities.

Suzanne also dwells in the past, focused on her physical appearance and always concerned about weight gain. Suzanne's frequent references to beauty pageants and her physical beauty are quite stereotypical of what non-Southerners may expect from modern-day Southern belles. Suzanne's behavior is exemplified in the episode entitled, "They Shoot Fat Women, Don't They?" (1989). This entire episode is predicated on Suzanne's constant attention to her physical appearance. She is particularly concerned that she must attend her class reunion and has gained weight. To her, this is not merely a fact of life but a crisis of monumental proportions. It is difficult to be a dainty Southern belle if you are overweight.

In an episode entitled, "Killing All the Right People" (1987), the show begins with Charlene's late arrival to work. She claims that her tardiness is due to a stop at a local convenience store. In her rant about convenience

stores, Charlene reveals her frustration that they are typically run by "Middle Easterners" named "Abdul". Her comments reveal that she holds prejudicial attitudes many people perceive to be typical of the South. Thus, with these brief comments, Charlene's words have served to cement a stereotype about the South being a region of severe narrow-mindedness toward diverse ethnicities.

Another issue in this same episode is whether or not birth control should be made available in public schools. The majority of the parents are of the opinion that abstinence is the only acceptable mode for preventing pregnancy. Mary Jo, however, tries to make them see that just because they do not have birth control does not mean that kids will refrain from having sex. While Mary Jo may be quite open-minded about this matter, the other parents are portrayed to hold what many people perceive to be the typical Bible-belt, Southern belief that teenagers should abstain from sex.

Anthony is another character in a stereotypical role. He is the sole man involved in the decorating business, and he is African-American. Not only do the ladies sometimes treat Anthony a bit like a slave, forcing him to do menial tasks like make deliveries, but they often make slightly derogatory references to his race. In what many would

consider a stereotypical background, Anthony came to the Sugarbakers after he was released from prison; he was incarcerated for his involvement in a robbery. While Anthony is clearly a true friend to the ladies in the design business, the occasional stereotypical behavior may override this in the mind of people who have never actually experienced the South. For instance, Bernice, an elderly friend of the Sugarbakers treats Anthony a bit like a sex toy, making references that embarrass him and frequently bursting into the song, "Black Man, Black Man," yet another way of stereotyping race relations in the South.

Race is always a subtext on this show, further reinforcing the stereotype that the South is a region that will never see past color lines. An example of the racial subtext of the show is exemplified in the episode, "The Candidate" (1988).

The ladies gather around Mary Jo's television to watch Julia's one-minute speech on the news against Commissioner Brickett.

SUZANNE: I know someone who's not going to think Julia's too wonderful.

CHARLENE: Who?

SUZANNE: Wilson Pickett.

CHARLENE: Wilson Pickett?

SUZANNE: You know, that black guy with the bow tie. Where have you been, Charlene? I mean that's what we're doing here.

CHARLENE: Suzanne, his name is not Wilson Pickett, it's Wilson Brickett. Wilson Pickett's a black singer.

SUZANNE: Okay, so I was close.

CHARLENE: How do you figure you were close, because they're both black? You might as well have said Don King.

(<http://www.designingwomenonline.com/Quotes/Funny.html>)

This conversation is an excellent example of how race enters into many episodes. The episode was not based entirely on the premise of race, yet this conversation shows how insensitive and stereotypically Southern, regarding race, Suzanne is. In her mind, all black people are the same. She sees them as a race only, not as people.

Despite the many stereotypes it may convey, *Designing Women* is actually a rather complex show in that it also defies many stereotypes of the South. In fact, the friendship between this group of women and Anthony is quite shocking to many viewers. These women have truly taken him into their circle of friendship, sharing intimate details

of their lives with him. Further, the fact that Anthony works in a rather non-stereotypical role in their interior design business defies some traditional views of gender roles in the South. Further emphasizing the gender-reversal is the fact that this business is owned and run by women; the only man merely serves as an assistant, a role typically falling to women.

Even with its humorous overtones, *Designing Women* offers food for thought for many viewers; in fact, Southern viewers may glean more from this show than viewers from other regions. This show makes viewers pause and think about their own friendships and relationships with others.

Even television programs from the 1960s, such as *The Andy Griffith Show*, *The Beverly Hillbillies* and *Green Acres* offer glimpses into what viewers may perceive to be typical Southern living. However, each of these programs offers an unique perspective on the South.

The Andy Griffith Show is the most traditional of the three, as it portrays characters native to the South in a traditional, small-town Southern setting. In the fictitious North Carolina town of Mayberry, Andy Taylor is the local sheriff, raising his son with the help of his Aunt Bee, who takes on traditional female roles of cooking, cleaning, and nurturing. The show is replete with stereotypical images

of slow Southern living. For instance, Andy and his son Opie are frequently found leisurely fishing and enjoying father-son bonding time. In a more comical stereotype, Barney Fife, Andy's deputy, is completely incompetent as a law enforcement officer. His antics add humor to the show, and give the lingering notion of lack of education even in prominent community figures.

In an episode entitled "Barney and the Cave Rescue" (1964), Andy and Barney plan to attend a town picnic with their dates. This concept alone offers a view of the South that implies that everyone is very close-knit and, moreover, that even government officials can step away from their jobs to enjoy a day of freedom and leisure. Andy and Barney plan to have Gomer "mind the jail" while they enjoy their day at the picnic. The first several minutes of the show, Barney gives Gomer a crash course on how to be a good deputy. He begins by showing Gomer the two jail cells and making Gomer remember which is "number one" and which is "number two;" Gomer shows his dimwittedness by being unable to properly label them. Despite the fact that this task proves too difficult for Gomer, Andy still insists that he is capable of babysitting the jail and answering the phone. This sequence would indicate to viewers that Southerners are innately trusting, and further, that small Southern

towns are lacking in crime. While crime rates in small towns may certainly be low compared to larger towns and cities, episodes such as this emphasize the idyllic stereotype of the rural South.

In nearly every episode, Andy demonstrates two consistent traits. He is respectful of women, and he teaches morals to his son and others. Andy acts the part of a typical Southern gentleman in that he opens doors for ladies, and compliments Aunt Bee on her cooking. Additionally, Andy spends quite a bit of time with Opie; sometimes, Opie stays at the police station with Andy, while at other times, the two may go fishing together. Whatever the setting, Andy frequently helps Opie with a problem, or corrects/punishes Opie in such a way that he learns a moral lesson.

Indirectly, the *Andy Griffith Show* conveys a message about race. All of the characters in the show are white. While during the time period, Jim Crow laws kept white society very separate from black society, there are no black characters anywhere in this show. This subtlety indicates that white society is privileged over black society, certainly during this time period, and it may further concerns of viewers about racial discord in the South. Rather than dealing with racial tension directly,

though, this show simply removes part of the equation so that it is no longer an issue.

In the other two aforementioned shows, *Green Acres* and *The Beverly Hillbillies*, viewers see characters who are at odds with their surroundings. In the former, a couple from the city is transplanted to a rural farm, while in the latter, a family of Ozarks "hicks", the Clampetts, come into a fortune and move to Beverly Hills. In both programs, the incompatibility between characters and setting offer some interesting perspectives and twists on traditional Southern tableaux.

In *Green Acres*, Oliver Wendell Douglas is an attorney with a posh life and a socialite wife, Lisa, living in Manhattan. In fact, his name alone suggests affluence and education, being named for two Supreme Court justices. However, he has become disillusioned with his life in the big city, and longs for a simpler lifestyle. Thus, he buys a farm in Hooterville, the name of the town alone suggesting its rural location. The show itself hinges on the constant struggle between the couple's big-city background and their newfound farm-living. The two city-dwellers must decipher how to repair their farm, which is in shambles, all while they try to learn to communicate with their new neighbors, whom they find to be quite

different than their city friends. Their country neighbors' affinity for all things agrarian, especially the livestock, is quite bemusing to the city couple. Frequently, these neighbors are portrayed as less educated than the Douglasses, and far less refined than them. Thus, viewers are inculcated with images of the glamorous city juxtaposed with the dull country.

In the opening sequence of the show, Oliver is shown in a suit on a tractor, emphasizing the two competing worlds. In the series pilot (1962), viewers are first introduced to the Douglasses and their Park Avenue penthouse. Oliver expresses his immense distaste for the city, while Lisa tells of her love for it. Then, viewers are taken to the home of the couple's newly-purchased farm, Hooterville, contrasting the two settings immediately. A group of men sit around a country store with a pig in the corner, as the uptight businessman Oliver comes in. Even the pig, Arnold, gets an introduction, indicating the difference in priorities and etiquette in Hooterville.

As Oliver drives Lisa to their farm, she is appalled by the odor of their surroundings, which Oliver smilingly tells her is a local pig farm. His love for the rural community evidently escapes her. Her horror continues into the second episode, as they are settling into their new

farmhouse. The former owner proudly offers the Douglasses a worn-out broom as they approach their new house. Again, Lisa is appalled, stating that "her maid" usually does things like that for her. They enter their home through a window, as the front door is broken, only to encounter filth and peeling wallpaper. This rural "charm" escapes Lisa, though Oliver has big plans for the farm; indeed, he makes the best of his decrepit shack, promising to fix every problem. In the most overt display of ignorance about their new surroundings, Oliver proudly shows Lisa the "shower," which is in fact the piping for the toilet. After discovering a lack of electricity, it becomes increasingly obvious that they are both completely out of familiar surroundings. The setting makes the rural countryside seem outdated and desolate.

Another underlying theme running through the series seems to be Lisa's continuous submission to Oliver. She relinquishes her life in the city merely to follow her husband, after he purchases the farm without warning her. This mentality likely suits her well in the rural surroundings, where men are supposed to take charge. This is made even more apparent by Lisa's discussion with Mrs. Bradley (the wife of the owner of the local hotel) about the difficulty of living in the country. She claims to

have followed her husband to the country, too, giving up a career in show business.

The Beverly Hillbillies offers the opposite view, where the country folk move to the city. In this program, too, most of the situations contrast the Clampetts with their new neighbors. However, in this new context, the hillbillies are the protagonists, the ones with whom viewers identify or side. Thus, even though the Clampetts are portrayed as quirky, or even a bit backward, they are not overtly disparaged for their country roots. Granted, the stereotypes are still there, but viewers are less likely to grasp them as quickly because of their attachment to the characters.

Even in the opening credits for the show, the differences between the Clampetts and their new surroundings are emphasized with their vehicle. It is an antiquated car, piled high with the Clampetts' treasures, which most people would consider junk. The Southern dialect is emphasized in the opening scene of the first episode. Jed and Granny are discussing Elly, when Granny calls her "That youngun o' yourn" and later responds to Jed with, "I reckon." Elly makes her entrance, saying "Howdy, y'all." Additionally, they are befuddled by such concepts as telephones and airfields; in their ultra-rural

surroundings, they have never encountered either. This further emphasizes the lack of access to formal education by Southerners. Further, they are completely confused by the term "millionaire," which they have never heard before. For their celebratory dinner, they plan to have "mustard greens and 'possum innards," evoking more images about the poor South.

In the series' second episode, entitled "Getting Settled"(1965), Elly asks Mr. Drysdale, "Is this thang a hooouuuuse," emphasizing her Southern drawl. The Clampetts are completely taken aback by their new mansion. They stand in the grand foyer in their hillbilly garb, down to tattered hats and rope belts. Granny is stunned by a fully equipped kitchen, when she is more accustomed to her old wood stove and ancient pots and pans. In fact, she does not even know how to use an electric oven; she prepares to put wood in it. Further, she is puzzled by the freezer, as they have never had one before. Her Southern heritage is further shown in her conversations, as well. At one point, she exclaims, "I'll have no Yankee talk in my kitchen," as Jethro explains that Jefferson Davis "ain't president no more."

Other characters display their incongruity with their surroundings, too. Elly goes to find firewood and chops

down a telephone pole; Jethro calls chickens and finds flamingos "by the cement pond," as he calls the pool. Jed sets up his grinding wheel on the front stoop of his new Beverly Hills home, showing a lack of understanding about his new surroundings. Then, he invites the unsuspecting Mr. Drysdale and his wife to dinner, saying Granny will "whomp us up a mess of grits and hog jowls," hearkening back to their rural roots. However, Jed surprises viewers with a heart-to-heart discussion with Elly, explaining why she must be more ladylike. He draws an analogy between her trying to be a boy and the dog trying to be a cat. For a moment, there is a depth to Jed viewers have not previously seen.

Stereotyping is not confined to sitcoms and dramas, though. This trend is true of virtually all of the reality television shows that have inundated cable television in the past few years, as well. In fact, they seem to be based largely on stereotypes. For instance, on VH1's current reality shows, *I Love New York 2* and *Rock of Love 2*, celebrities conduct a game show to find true love. Ironically, both shows are in their second season, indicating that the search was unsuccessful the first time. In *I Love New York 2*, a young black woman named Tiffany is in search of love. She rose to fame by her own appearance

on a reality show, as a love interest of Flava Flav in *Flavor of Love*. Tiffany is very temperamental, very outspoken, and epitomizes every stereotype that white people may conceive of brash black women. She wears skimpy clothing and uses foul language; she moves from man to man, kissing each of them, and crawling into bed with many of them. Truly, she seems to have no morals or manners. For the most part, her array of suitors is what a viewer would expect, too, many seemingly shiftless young black men who come across as "thugs." Pitted against these men, and drawing attention to the stereotype, however, are the suitors that Tiffany's mother has chosen. They consist of lawyers and businessmen; their manner of dress and their behavior reflects their professions and money. Truly, the number of stereotypes in this show is virtually endless. The young black "thugs" who appeal to Tiffany wear baggy pants, heavy gold chains, and diamond earrings. Their demeanors are harsh and street-wise. On the other hand, the suitors chosen by her mother epitomize the stereotype of wealth and class. They wear suits, speak eloquently and with proper grammar, and are educated and successful.

VH1's other series, *Rock of Love 2*, is based on a similar premise, with Bret Michaels, the lead singer of Poison, searching for true love. As one may expect, the

competitors for the love of this hair band icon consist largely of scantily-clad, bleach-blond, anatomically-enhanced girls. The lengths to which they go to get Bret's attention are equally as cliché, from flashing him to sitting in his lap, to kissing him. Surely, most viewers of both shows realize that this is not a realistic way to find true love, yet watchers are pulled into this contrived world on a weekly basis. These shows indicate widespread stereotyping which may not be limited to the South. Nonetheless, they emphasize the power of television to perpetuate stereotypes.

Recently, MTV aired a marathon of *America's Next Top Model*, Cycle 6. The premise of the show, which was created by Tyra Banks, is a competition for a modeling contract. Approximately fifteen potential models are chosen, and each week, one of them is eliminated based on photo shoots. In this cycle, one of the contestants was a young lady from Arkansas named Danielle. As the competition wore on, and the judges began to view the girls as potential spokesmodels, and not just print models, the panel began to make derogatory comments about Danielle's Southern accent. The comments started out as simply telling her she needed to neutralize her accent. However, they gave her no pointers as to how that might be done; it was if they

assumed she could merely "turn off" her "Southern-ness." As the contest heated up and the final three contestants remained, Banks explained that spokesmodels must speak "eloquently," thus implying quite readily that the Southern accent is unrefined and ugly to most people's ears. People from outside the South who watched this cycle of *ANTM* undoubtedly would use these comments to affirm their preconceived notions of the South, or to develop negative stereotypes about the South. *ANTM* is a hotbed for the propagation of stereotypes, whether they are about accents or body image. This television show does not discriminate in who it lumps into its vast stereotypes, but rather incorporates many of these notions in the course of a season.

Interestingly, the realm of television news may be an area in which some stereotypes may be broken. FOXNews is widely known to be the conservative news outlet, juxtaposed with the more liberal views of CNN. The surprising facet to this is that the liberal outlet, CNN, is a Southern-based news organization, operating out of Atlanta, Georgia, while FOXNews is not based out of the South at all. Based on the notion that the South is the land of conservatism, this fact may be a bit of a shock. It also emphasizes that

the South is changing, despite many overt images on television and in movies.

Stereotypical images are not confined to the television set; the big screen is replete with them, as well. Considered by many to be the epitome of movies depicting the South, *Deliverance*(1972) offers numerous stereotypes of the South. Further, because of the widespread popularity of the film, these particular stereotypes have become ingrained throughout American culture.

The setting for the film offers the initial stereotype, as it takes place in an extremely rural area of Georgia. Because the four main characters at the beginning of the movie are urban professionals, the contrast makes the setting seem even more stark.

Intertwined with the wilderness setting are the hillbilly antagonists. While the educated, refined protagonists from the city seek an adventure paddling down the river, they are attacked by the hillbillies who inhabit the area. Again, a widespread stereotype of the South is maximized here. In fact, one of the first "natives" encountered by the city tourists is a young mentally-retarded boy who plays the banjo at a country store. The implication here is that his mental state is due to

probable inbreeding, a notion that is continually perpetuated about the South. To make this stereotype clear, Bobby, one of the protagonists, mentions the "genetic deficiencies" of the locals.

Later, the tourists are attacked by hillbillies along the way, even being raped by one of them, who elicits the famous quotation, "You got a real purty mouth." Thus, the local inhabitants are portrayed as ill-mannered, even brutal, and quite uneducated. Ultimately, the once-civilized tourists sink to the level of their attackers and shoot and kill one of them with an arrow. The implied message arising from this incident and the subsequent disposal of the body is that in order to survive in this region, one must become uncivilized, even animalistic. Again, this portrayal of the South, while not truly accurate, is one that has been inculcated into the minds of non-Southerners, many of whom may believe that this is indeed a portrait of the South. Movies give a power to viewers to "form concepts about things we have never seen, and possibly can't or won't ever see" (Hall, 1997, p. 17), as is evidenced by the perceptions formed by viewers of this movie.

A more recent movie with similar images is *The Hills Have Eyes* (2006). In this film, a family on vacation has

car trouble and becomes stranded in the desert. In the seemingly desolate location, the family soon learns that it is not alone. When family members succumb to brutal murders, and the baby of the family is kidnapped, the remaining characters realize they must not only save the baby but must find a way out of this situation. Upon further exploration, they discover that a group of deformed people, who were harmed by radiation, are living in a near-deserted town. These images and setting are quite comparable to those in *Deliverance*, with social outcasts in a very rural setting wreaking havoc on tourists. While the newer version is set in a different part of the country, it has not gained nearly the degree of notoriety as *Deliverance*, perhaps because it seems more far-fetched that this could happen in the West. The South, in many ways, is a foreign region to many Americans. They have not traveled to this part of the country. Somehow, the western setting of *The Hills Have Eyes* seems more familiar and accessible to viewers.

In an equally contemporary setting, the South is still portrayed as a very rural area stuck in a time warp in *Sweet Home Alabama* (2002), which stars Reese Witherspoon. This film directly juxtaposes the contemporary South with its antithesis, New York City. The general plot revolves

around Melanie Smooter, played by Witherspoon, who must decide whether to continue to live her posh life in New York, engaged to the son of the mayor, or to return home to rural Alabama to fix her long-estranged marriage. The two settings are set apart as dead opposites. In New York, Melanie lives the good life, associating with high-ranking officials, eating in the finest restaurants, and shopping at the best stores. In Alabama, Melanie's parents live in a double-wide, where her mother makes renowned jam and her father participates in Civil War reenactments (yet again showing that Southerners refuse to forget about that devastating loss). The decision seems to be a no-brainer to Melanie's city friends. They cannot fathom why she would possibly want to return to "that life." To them, life in the South is utterly undesirable. On the other hand, Melanie's friends and family in Alabama cannot understand the person she has become or her desire to live in New York City. In fact, when she approaches her husband, Jake, about granting her a divorce, he refuses, saying, "The only reason I ain't signing is cause you've turned into some hoity-toity Yankee bitch, and I'd like nothing better right now than to piss you off." In this quotation, Jake succinctly reveals the stereotypical Southern feelings about Northerners, as "Yankees" who act

as if they are better than Southerners. On the other side of the equation, Melanie's soon-to-be mother-in-law, Mayor Henning, reveals her stereotypical notions about the South when she makes a last-ditch effort to coax Melanie back to New York, and leaves Melanie's parents by saying, "Why don't you go back to your double-wide and fry something?" Both the settings in this film and the verbal stereotypes that are conveyed are prime examples of Southern stereotypes.

Chapter 4: The South in Music

Music has increasingly become an integral part of our daily lives. Thus, the influence music exerts is quite widespread. Young and old people alike hear song lyrics on television (on channels such as MTV, CMT, and VH1) as they sit at home, on the radio as they commute to and from work, and even on their iPods as they go for a daily jog. Since music is such a vital part of contemporary society, the messages lyrics convey become ingrained in our ways of thinking. In addition, the words that are repeated through song lyrics become part of our own notions of what are acceptable beliefs and modes of behavior. Further, "since music is the most pervasive and noticeable of the youth cultural forms then perhaps it is not surprising that it is here that statements are made, positions and identities are staked out" (McRobbie, 1999, p. 115).

For a younger generation that has become increasingly visually-oriented, music video channels have helped musical lyrics further invade our homes. "The world of popular music has moved rapidly and changed dramatically through the availability of new musical technologies and techniques" (McRobbie, 1999, p. 111). Not only do young people now hear these messages on the radio, but they see them integrated with the images on television. Truly, the

videos are the lyrics brought to life. In fact, "a rock video is a more or less effective commercial for the record or group it is promoting" (Fiske, 1996, p. 218). These videos promote an artist and his/her message far more effectively than radio alone ever could. Ultimately, though, music helps us decipher what changes may be occurring in social thought processes and relationships.

"[M]usic can contain significant evidence about important changes in social relations" (Lipsitz, 2001, p. 140). Music is, in many ways, a gauge of society's beliefs and standards. Musicians compose music and lyrics that reflect societal concerns and points of focus. Over the years, music has focused on timeless themes such as love and love lost, friendship, and family. However, it may also reflect more specific concerns, such as the after-effects of September 11, as in Alan Jackson's "Where Were You When the World Stopped Turning" or the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as in Toby Keith's "Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue" and "American Soldier".

However, it can also indicate the continuance of certain beliefs, and thus a stagnation in perceptions. While music may change to reflect current concerns, some images persist throughout time. In country music, for instance, many songs still focus on the rural nature of the

South. Even though much of the South may be rural, especially compared to other geographic regions, the focus is disproportionately on this aspect of the South, rather than on more urban areas. Similarly, in other musical genres, the focus may not shift to reflect societal changes. Therefore, listeners unfamiliar with certain segments of society may continue to believe that the lyrics are accurate in their reflection, even if they are not.

Indeed, music can be modeling systems of thought (Blacking 2001). In a culture where people, especially younger people, are near-constantly listening to music on the radio or on mp3 players, music plays an important role in shaping people's perceptions of our culture. Listeners are endlessly inculcated with lyrics about relationships and regions that they may otherwise not have known. When they repeatedly hear lyrics that create images for them, these listeners may develop stereotypes.

The genre of music typically associated with the South is country music. The jokes surrounding country music seem almost endless--- What happens if you play a country record backwards? You get your wife back, your dog back, and your trailer back. Along with the stereotype of country music being full of doom and gloom comes the stereotype of country music being the music of the South, giving images

of the "real" South. During the 1970s, country music, which had once been relegated to the South, began to spread across the country. "Country radio stations cropped up all over the dial. In 1961, there had been but eighty 'all-country' stations in the nation, but by the mid-1970s there were more than a thousand" (Cobb, 1999, p. 85). With the growing popularity of country music came the spreading stereotypes of Southern life. In fact, "country music of the 1970s was still more traditionally 'country' and 'southern' than anything else" (Cobb, 1999, p. 87). Further, "country songs continued to emphasize the darker side of life. . .[and its]prescription for coping with life was a large dose of lowered expectations" (Cobb, 1999, p. 87). Thus, to non-Southerners, the South must have seemed like a truly depressing place.

Perhaps the most recognized Southern-oriented song of all time is Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Sweet Home Alabama;" Southerners view it as a kind of anthem, and even other listeners likely hear it as an ode to the Southern lifestyle. In the lyrics of this song, the band pays homage to everything it finds endearing about the South, from "Sweet home Alabama/ Where the skies are so blue", which discusses the beautiful weather in the South, to "Now Muscle Shoals has got the Swampers/And they've been known

to pick a song or two/Lord they get me off so much/They pick me up when I'm feeling blue," which discuss the inspiring qualities of Southern music. Also embedded in the course of the song lyrics, however, are the ominous lines, "I heard ole Neil put her down/ Well, I hope Neil Young will remember/ A Southern man don't need him around anyhow" (http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/l/lynnyrd_skynyrd/sweet_home_alabama.html). These lines refer to Neil Young's song "Southern Man," which was widely perceived by Southerners to be an attack on the South and the Southern way of life. With references to Klansmen, "your crosses are burning fast" and religious fanatics, "Don't forget what your good book said" (<http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/neilyoung/southernman.html>), Southerners took instant offense to this song. Young has defended his lyrics, saying that they were meant to bring attention to racial injustice in the South. As the song was released in 1970, his intention was certainly to bring attention to the continuing racism in the South, which refused to acknowledge much of the Civil Rights Act of 1968. Regardless of intent, however, his lyrics certainly exploit long-held stereotypes of the South. The song reinforces the image that many non-Southerners hold of the region, "I saw cotton and I saw black/ Tall white mansions and little

shacks." Today, many listeners may not consider the context of Young's lyrics, and therefore do not see them as an attempt to expose racial injustices, but rather see them as timeless portrayals of the South.

Another classic country song that broadcasts stereotypes of the South is Hank Williams, Jr.'s "Country Boy Can Survive." Each stanza offers a view of the rural South consistent with the stereotypes held by many Americans. For instance, the lines "I live back in the woods, you see/ A woman and the kids, and the dogs and me/ I got a shotgun rifle and a 4-wheel drive" evoke images of country living and oversized trucks. Additionally, the next stanza says "I can plow a field all day long/I can catch catfish from dusk till dawn/We make our own whiskey" (<http://www.cowboylyrics.com/lyrics/williams-hank-jr/country-boy-can-survive-10123.html>), which speaks of fishing, farming, and moonshining--all activities traditionally associated with the rural South. While the song may not explicitly mention the South, non-Southerners automatically associate country music with this region.

Even more contemporary songs, typically of the country genre, reinforce Southern stereotypes. "Red Dirt Road," a 2003 song by the country duo Brooks and Dunn, for instance, raises images of backwoods living and poor, barefoot

children with the lines, "I was raised off of old Route 3/
Out past where the blacktop ends/ We walked to church on
Sunday morning/ Race barefoot back to the Johnsons' fence"
(<http://www.cowboylyrics.com/lyrics/brooks-and-dunn/red-dirt-road-14756.html>). While the images may be accurate,
and even endearing to some people, for people who have
never traveled to the South, this may offer another glimpse
into what they perceive to be typical Southern living.

In another example, Billy Currington's country song
"Good Directions" starts with a stereotypical Southern
setting, "I was sittin' there sellin' turnips on a flatbed
truck/ Crunchin' on a pork rind when she pulled up", then
makes mention of "sweet tea," and ends with, "Thank God for
good directions...and turnip greens"

(<http://www.cowboylyrics.com/lyrics/currington-billy/good-directions-16463.html>), all hallmarks of the South.

Again, while sweet tea and turnip greens may indeed be
staples of Southerner's diets, this is a recurring image
that all listeners receive repeatedly, and thus may use to
create their image of the real South, even if they have not
experienced it firsthand.

Little Big Town's "Boondocks" is another example that
offers many images of the rural South. While the South is
never explicitly mentioned in the song, since people

associate country music with this region, listeners likely only assume that the images are of the South. For instance, the title itself raises images of extremely rural areas, which many people refer to as the "boondocks." This term usually describes an area that is sparsely populated and a bit "behind the times." Further, the song mentions "muddy water," presumably in reference to a river--likely the Mississippi---that is portrayed in many Southern anthems. Another line states "I can taste the honeysuckle," which evokes another image of the South. Honeysuckle is a flowering vine that is frequently associated with Southern settings. Perhaps the most stereotypical image portrayed in the song is, "Give me a tin roof/a front porch and a gravel road." These two lines seem to portray a small shack of a house in a rural area that does not even have paved roads. Interestingly, the song states, "I feel no shame/I'm proud of where I came from" (<http://www.cowboylyrics.com/lyrics/currington-billy/good-directions-16463.html>). These lines imply that Southerners should be ashamed of their heritage, making it seem inferior to backgrounds of people from other geographical areas. So, after hearing this song, a non-Southerner may broadly stereotype the South as a rural area without paved roads, having small shanty-type homes on the

river, surrounding by honeysuckle. Finally, the people who live here long to be from another area and are secretly ashamed of their background.

A final example of a song that inculcates less-than-attractive Southern images into the minds of listeners is Brad Paisley's "Ticks," which repeats the line, "I'd like to check you for ticks"

(<http://www.cowboylyrics.com/lyrics/paisley-brad/ticks-21177.html>). While the song is a playful idea for how to get close to a girl, the image of checking her for ticks once again evokes the traditional redneck stereotype of Southerners, who spend too much time in the tick-infested woods.

To reiterate the Southern hillbilly or redneck stereotypes, many artists who sing songs about the South make connections with the South by referring frequently to the Confederacy. This is true in the mere name of the band Confederate Railroad. As if their name alone would not portray the connection to the South, the band also uses a modified Confederate flag as their emblem. Other recording artists may also exploit the Confederate flag, by using it on the covers of the albums and in their concert and publicity attire. For example, Hank Williams, Jr. and Willie Nelson frequently wear the "Stars and Bars" in

publicity photographs and in concert appearances. Also, albums that are considered typically Southern often feature the confederate flag. An example of this usage would be Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Family" album. These oft-repeated images only reiterate that the South is a land of bigotry.

On the other hand, however, some country artists set out to break the stereotypes that often surround this genre. For instance, in the early 1990s, Garth Brooks broke through many country music stereotypes by landing on the popular music charts with his album *No Fences* (1990). While his lyrics in some cases seemed "traditionally country," focusing on cheating spouses ("The Thunder Rolls") and ongoing regrets ("The Dance"), the music itself began to take on an overhaul. No longer was the focus on steel guitars and banjos, but the music sounded more like rock music.

In another example, in the late 1990s, the Dixie Chicks took the country music scene by storm, continuing with the new rock feel of country music, and landing on the pop charts. This group of strong women was also a change for country music. In a genre dominated for decades by male artists, both solo and group, and female solo acts, the Dixie Chicks offered a new image to country music. Further, their lyrics were often shocking, as in "Goodbye,

Earl" (2000), their anthem for abused women, which outlines the murder of a friend's abusive husband. While at first, the lyrics about an abused wife may sound like the basis for a typical country song, as "Goodbye Earl" continues and two women kill Earl by poisoning his blackeyed peas, the lyrics are entirely different from anything country music had experienced before. Traditionally, country music has been a "family friendly" genre, and though lyrics have often alluded to domestic violence and other atrocities, this song explicitly states that Earl has beaten his wife and has now been murdered. In fact, this song was so shocking that many radio stations refused to play it.

In another example from Brad Paisley, "Online" is a single that is completely antithetical to traditional country lyrics. The mere fact that the song focuses on computer communication is quite different from the typical country focus on nature and rural interests. In this song, however, the premise is that an unattractive young man finds solace in creating a fictitious life for himself on the internet, where he can chat with women who would otherwise ignore him. "Online I'm out in Hollywood/
I'm 6 foot 5 and I look damn good. . . even on a slow day/
I could have a three way/ Chat with two women at one time/
I'm so much cooler online"(www.completealbumlyrics.com).

The focus on technology and deception is quite a shock for a genre of music that traditionally focuses on honesty and nature.

Interestingly, though, country music has begun to break the barriers that once confined it to a very small listening population. Now, country music is considered quite mainstream, so the entire genre that was once associated solely with the South now appeals to a much wider audience. "[T]he 'country' culture has been appropriated by a generalized working-class audience, both urban and rural, that represents various racial and ethnic backgrounds" (Wilson, in Harrington and Bielby, 2001, p. 292). However, it still retains its Southern heritage, "In relation to the mainstream music and entertainment industries centered in Los Angeles and New York the Nashville industry represents a successful regional-cultural force that has gained a national audience, yet remains independent and appears somewhat radical in its advocacy of Southern, white, working-class culture" (Wilson, in Harrington and Bielby, 2001, p. 292).

In addition to shaping the views of non-Southern listeners, music also shapes Southerners' perceptions of themselves. For instance, when I recently attended a Brad Paisley concert in Middle Georgia, the audience undoubtedly

consisted of people from a variety of social classes, people who may not typically even associate with each other. However, the audience cheered as one when, between sets, the sound technicians piped in "Sweet Home Alabama." It seemed to offer the notes and lyrics that bound us all together. Similarly, when Rodney Atkins, the opening act, sang "About the South," I found myself laughing and nodding in agreement with the lyrics. With references to beverage and cuisine, like, "Fried pickles, drunk chicken, crawfishin' in the creek/Wild Turkey, deer jerky" (www.cowboylyrics.com) and pretty Southern girls with accents, "Southern Belles with a drawl make you stop and drop your jaw" (www.cowboylyrics.com), while the song may have focused on common images portrayed by the media, it also struck a chord for those of us who were raised in this region. In this regard, then, these stereotypical images are based in some truth. Unfortunately, though, these discrete images are the only contact that some people may have with the South, and they create a biased perception of the South for these people.

Chapter 5: Another View of the South

Despite the many stereotypes that plague the South, this region has progressed considerably since the Civil War, and certainly since the Civil Rights Movement. Though the South may lag behind the rest of the country in some aspects, the region has made gains, particularly in the realms of education, economics, and racial tolerance. The South has long been considered an area where a large segment of the populace is uneducated, or at least undereducated. While it was once common for students to quit school before acquiring a high school education, this trend is on the decline. Young people rarely have to quit school to work the farms anymore, and measures have been put into place to encourage extending one's education. For instance, the dropout age in the state of Georgia is 16, meaning that students must complete some high school before they may quit. Further, in Georgia, students of driving age must be in school to acquire a driver's license, another measure that encourages school attendance. While these measures certainly function as forms of bribery, they are effective in encouraging students to further their education. These measures are especially necessary in the South, where historically, students have dropped out at early ages. Even after the time of agricultural necessity

of having students quit school, in contemporary terms, students in the economically-depressed South must still sometimes work to help support their families. Even though academics and economics are improving in the South, these facets of life are still inexorably intertwined. Thus, incentives are necessary to keeping students in school.

How did we come to this situation? In most of the South, the idea that a child should drop out of school goes back to when we were primarily an agricultural state, and kids needed to work full time on the farm. Clearly times have changed. If the dropout age were raised to 18, students would have more time to mature. Many might just become good students and graduate (Young 2006).

Thus, raising the legal age to quit school from 16 to 18 is a viable notion to continuing to further students' education. This move, while necessary for encouraging students to stay in school, will certainly help create a more educated citizenry in Georgia. In fact, efforts such as these have been effective, as is evidenced by the 75.4% graduation rate in Georgia. This information was released on September 30, 2008, and it is the first time the state has surpassed the 75% mark. This percentage has risen

substantially since 2002, when the graduation rate was barely more than 60%. (www.13wmaz.com)

Perhaps the most widespread movement toward improving K-12 education in the South can be found within the newly-implemented Georgia Performance Standards. Picking up on a successful new national trend, Georgia opted to abandon the old Quality Core Curriculum in favor of a curriculum designed around standards and outcomes. Standards-based education provides more authentic learning opportunities for students, as opposed to rote learning and memorization. Thus, when students sit in a classroom, they are active learners instead of passive listeners. Education is more meaningful. Further, standards-based education requires more careful planning by teachers, as well as more intensive grading of written—as opposed to multiple choice—tests. By requiring more rigorous work by students and educators alike, the quality of education will inevitably improve. Soon, students who graduate from Georgia schools will have completed a totally standards-based curriculum, indicating that they are well-versed in their academic subjects. However, this new GPS approach has drawbacks, too. Even though the theory that drives the standards-based movement is sound, in practice, GPS has started out

on shaky ground. Many educators are intimidated by this shift in approach, so teachers are sharing lesson plans, often without spending much time considering how to best deliver a lesson that was originally designed by a colleague. Teachers have lost some degree of autonomy in this shift in approaches, because even though GPS allows for teachers to design a wide variety of lessons, many veteran educators find this task to be daunting. So while GPS strives to deliver a rigorous quality education for all students, there are still improvements that need to be made in the process.

Another way in which Georgia encourages education is through the HOPE Scholarship program. When students successfully complete high school with a B average, this program will pay the majority of their college expenses, as long as they can maintain a B average. For students who once had no incentive to complete high school, as they could not afford college, this program gives them an opportunity to acquire a higher education. Further, they may acquire this information at a noted university, since in 2005, "seven southern state schools would place among the top twenty in an influential ranking of the nation's best public universities" (Cobb, 2005, p. 12). For a region that was once considered nearly devoid of quality

academics and where students who aspired to a higher education had to attend universities in the West, Midwest, and New England areas, the recognition of Southern universities is an impressive indication that positive changes are occurring in higher education in the South.

For a region once quite economically deprived, the South has made great strides. "Fuller employment at better wages. . .gave the post-World War II South the consumer spending potential to attract more upscale market-oriented manufacturers" (Cobb, 2005, p. 5). Further, the largely agrarian society of the South was beginning to shift toward manufacturing and city living in "the transformation of the majority of southerners from country people to town people, or more accurately, 'metro people'" (Cobb, 2005, p. 13). Interestingly, the South's growth in the realm of industry has been much more pronounced than that of other regions, "Since World War II, the South has persistently outpaced the rest of the nation in growth of incomes, industry, jobs, commerce, construction, and education" (Wright, 2005, p. 77). In Georgia, "the Southeast that Atlanta serves is the South of the future" (Reed, 2005, 145). Atlanta is a thriving metropolis of culture and industry, a site for international conventions, and even the 1996 Summer Olympic Games. Further,

while Georgia may be best known for hot weather, college football, and peaches [note the stereotypes here], Atlanta is no slouch when it comes to technology and the Internet. Home to telecommunications and Internet service providers BellSouth and EarthLink, as well as Cox Communications, the third-largest U.S. cable company, Atlanta beat several cities [in a 2006 Forbes ranking] more closely associated with the Web (www.forbes.com).

This ranking indicates not only that the South is not lagging behind the rest of the country in technology and economics, but in fact it is leading the pack in certain areas, such as the communications industry.

The South has always been characterized by racial conflict. Lynchings and KKK gatherings have long dominated images of the South. That image is changing, though, albeit slowly. In fact, "[The South] strode self-confidently into the twenty-first century as the nation's most racially integrated and economically dynamic region" (Cobb, 2005, p. 1). Race cannot be ignored, though. It has always factored into relationships in the South, and in relationships across the nation. As Hal Crowther notes, "Race is like a big crazy cousin locked in the basement, a

red-eyed giant who strangled a dog and crippled a policeman the last time he got loose. We never forget that he's down there. But it's amazing how long we can ignore him" (2000, p. 63). So it is with race relations in the South. We know the harm that racism causes; we understand the pain from past injustices. However, much of the time, we ignore it. And, while the South has made great strides toward racial equality, with the election of African-American mayors in major cities such as Atlanta, there are still steps to be taken. Even if white flight from the city explains, at least in part, the election of African-American leaders, it does not explain the shifting tide of the state as a whole. In pre-election polls, presidential hopeful Barack Obama tightened the race in Georgia between himself and John McCain. In mid-September 2008, McCain led the polls in Georgia by 16 percentage points. In October 2008, that lead has been cut in half. (ww.13wmaz.com).

We cannot forget the age-old race-related hurts that often rise to the surface. The underlying issue of slavery is always seething just under the surface in the South. Further, while changes may be afoot in some realms, such as local politics, in rural areas, there are still clearly demarcated racial lines in terms of jobs, living arrangements, and dining establishments. In rural areas,

management positions are often held by white workers, while manual labor jobs are held primarily by black workers. In those same towns, the race lines are evident in neighborhoods, where different races live in different areas of the town/county. In addition, even the dining establishments in these communities represent a racial demarcation. Fine dining and ethnic establishments often cater to white families, while black families eat in locally owned "country cooking" restaurants. Certainly, this is not true across the board, it is a fairly common trend, and one which is likely tied to the racially segregated living arrangements. People eat close to where they live.

Thus, while the tides of race relations are changing for the better, there are still more changes that need to be made.

We're innocent, most of us, of overt racism or of supporting overt racists. . .In our innocence, we're easily wounded by stereotypes. But just as white policemen and cab drivers have a hard time distinguishing black college students from black thugs, African Americans have a hard time distinguishing white liberals from our fathers and grandfathers (Crowther, 2000, p. 87).

After decades and centuries of conflict, change is slow to arrive, as we all must learn to trust again. However, this change in mentality must happen in places other than the South, too, as "the South has no monopoly on racial and religious hate...more crosses are now burned outside the South than in it and swastika-painting has never gone down well in a region as patriotic as ours" (Reed, 1990, p. 22). While the South is moving in the right direction, it must still admit its shortfalls in regard to racial equality, but so must the rest of the United States.

Perhaps the most notable shift toward racial tolerance and equality is the 2008 Presidential election, beginning with the primaries, in which Barack Obama won many Southern states by a hefty margin. Despite his racial heritage, many Southerners voted for him over white opponent Hillary Clinton. This is further contrasted in the 1990s election of Bill Clinton, "[who] would also succeed in denying the Republicans a southern sweep in both of his campaigns, but garnered little more than one-third of the southern white vote" (Cobb, 2005, p. 7).

In addition to accepting a minority politician on a national scale, Southerners are increasingly influenced locally by politicians from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. "[T]he African American influence in southern

politics is apparent. . . Elections of black mayors often have a dramatic effect on the allocation of municipal contracts" (Wright, 2005, p. 89). When black leaders are elected, the power shift helps propagate racial tolerance in other venues, as well, as black leaders are more prone to move away from the "good ole boy" system of hiring contractors and other workers and allot contracts to a variety of people. With Obama, however, it was thought that the true test would come about in the general election, when conservative Southern Republicans would vote on one side, opposed to more liberal Southern Democrats. In fact, Obama won several states that have traditionally been Republican strongholds, like North Carolina and Virginia. Further, even though the states generally dubbed the "Deep South" still showed as "red states," the percentages of people who voted for the Democratic candidate were on the rise from the 2004 Presidential election, indicating that both attitudes toward race and feelings about politics are beginning to shift even in the Deep South. It is no longer a one party battle, and the movement toward equality made great strides in November 2008 with the election of Barack Obama.

There are numerous ways in which the South has progressed and overcome many of the stereotypes that have

longed plagued it. However, there are other changes that are yet to be made.

Chapter 6: The Southernization of America

While the South has often been othered, labeled implicitly as an undesirable variation to the norm of American culture, in recent years, it has become increasingly obvious that the South is just the opposite. It is actually the heartbeat of our country in some respects. Many practices and interests that were once considered specific to the South are now widespread throughout America. Indeed, "the rest of the country is starting to look like the South" (Reed, 2005, p. 150). Further, "stock car racing and country music [are] examples of relatively new manifestations of southern identity that have been exported well beyond the boundaries not only of the South but of the United States as well" (Cobb, 2005, p. 10). It seems as if the South no longer has features that once distinguished it, as these features are absorbed by the rest of the country, too. "[M]any argue that the South's culture has become virtually indistinguishable from that of the rest of the United States" (Reed, 2005, p. 146). Characteristics that were once confined to the South and identified it as a region unto itself have now become so widespread that these features are now merely considered American, not just Southern, indicating that stereotypical Southern traits may not be just Southern, after all. This

melding of cultures and regions can be noted across the United States. Slang terms that were once associated with one geographical region, for instance, are now being used around the country. For example, the term "y'all," while still predominantly used in the South, can be heard in other regions of the country, too. The same is true of "dude," once associated with California surfers, and "wicked," a descriptive term initially used primarily by New Englanders.

The melding of characteristics associated with various regions could be attributed to several factors. First, in an age of nearly continuous media influx, we are inundated with images of people living in various areas, and are thus exposed to their traditions, cultures, and ways of life. Another possible explanation for this meshing of cultures is the transient population in America, particularly within military families. As people live in certain regions and then move to other regions, they spread mannerisms and traditions from the various places that they have lived.

As noted above, an example of such a phenomenon is NASCAR, once considered a sport enjoyed primarily by white Southern rednecks. Now, however, NASCAR is a nationwide phenomenon, drawing drivers from across the country, and even around the world, and selling out races at tracks

around the country. While the majority of race teams are located in North Carolina, a Southern state, drivers come from a variety of locations. For instance, Kyle Busch, the long-time leader in 2008 points standings, and his brother, Kurt, hail from Las Vegas, Nevada. Popular driver Tony Stewart is originally from Indiana. A number of renowned drivers are from California, as is the case with the majority of the 2008 Hendrick Motorsports Team; Jeff Gordon, Jimmie Johnson, and Casey Mears all hail from the Golden State. Thus, even though NASCAR has its roots in the South, "Southern stereotypes are there, but not overwhelming" (Soto, 2007).

On an even larger scale, drivers from other countries are bringing international attention to this sport once relegated to the South. Relatively new drivers Marcos Ambrose and Juan Pablo Montoya are examples of this globalization of NASCAR. Ambrose is from Australia, while Montoya is a Colombian native. 2008 NASCAR rookie Dario Franchitti is originally from Scotland, taking NASCAR out of the Americas and into Europe.

Montoya, Franchitti and fellow driver Sam Hornish, Jr., also have previous racing experience in the IndyCar series. As Indy racing is watched all over the world, their participation in NASCAR brings a whole new audience

to this beloved American sport. Indeed, NASCAR has come a long way from the dirt-track, moonshine-running sport of years past. Now, it enjoys national, and even global attention.

Not only are the NASCAR participants more diverse than once acknowledged, but their audiences also now include people from a wide variety of backgrounds. In March 2007, I had the opportunity to park cars at the Kobalt Tools 500 at the Atlanta Motor Speedway. I was truly amazed that the diversity of the NASCAR fans. There were people of all ages, from babies in strollers to elderly people in wheelchairs. Perhaps even more surprisingly, though, was that the fans were racially mixed, too. People of all races came out to the event, dressed in the numbers and gear of their favorite driver. This is no coincidence. According to Brian France, director of NASCAR, "'(Reaching out to minorities is something I work on every day. I work on it personally. . ..'" (Gillispie, 2005). The sport that once appealed primarily to white fans is making a conscious effort to branch out. The social status of fans was mixed as well. People in expensive motor homes were parked on the infield next to people in gutted school buses painted over with primer. Further, because of the number of races across the country, not just in the South, spectators represent

all areas of the country. These people all enjoy a sport that was once considered to be only tolerable in the South. Certainly, "the sport [has] broken across the Mason-Dixon and [is] taking over [other] parts of the nation. My theory is that NASCAR has an inherent appeal to postmodern people" (Hall, 2005).

NASCAR is only one of the many reflections of the South across America. Another marked manner in which the South has infiltrated the country is in music. Country music was once considered the voice of the South, but now, country music can be heard on stations across the country. The lyrics of Southern music are no longer distinctly Southern; rather, they speak to the heart of the American lifestyle, focusing on such universal themes as love, friendship, hope, and loss. "Country music is a vital cultural tradition, and a specific kind of intellectual property. Country music is. . .an essential resource for the preservation of community and the expression of. . .working class identity" (Fox,2004, p. 22).

Just as listeners of country music are becoming more diverse, so are its singers. Popular country artists Toby Keith and Reba McEntyre are from Oklahoma, for instance. Dierks Bentley is from Arizona. Gary Allan and Buck Owens both hail from California, and phenom Keith Urban hit the

country scene all the way from Australia. To further note the diversification of country singers, it is apparent that the genre once dominated by white males is also becoming more amenable to racial difference. Charley Pride has been around for decades, but now Cowboy Troy, Darius Rucker, and Rissi Palmer have made a name for themselves in the ranks of country music. By no means has the genre become totally racially integrated, but it now incorporates more audiences than it once did.

Country music stations are prevalent across the United States, and throughout the North American continent. In Canada, there are nearly 100 country music stations (www.radio-locator.com). In the United States, of the more than 1000 country music stations located west of the Mississippi River, they are not all located in the expected states of Texas and Oklahoma. Numerous stations are also available in Minnesota (e.g. KAGE, KARL, KARP, KARS) Oregon (e.g. KAKT, KJDY, KCKX), and even San Francisco (KBWF). Country music radio stations are equally prevalent in the eastern half of the United States. As expected, many of these stations broadcast from the Southeastern states of Tennessee, Georgia, Kentucky, and Alabama. However, country radio frequencies are also abundant in surprising areas such as New England. Vermont is home to stations

such as WZLF and WWFY, while New Hampshire boasts country stations such as WYRY and WXXX. (www.radio-locator.com) The balance of the number of country stations on both sides of the nation, and the inclusion of country stations in a wide variety of states from the Pacific Northwest to New England indicates that this genre of music that was once confined primarily to the South had indeed spread throughout America. "In May 1991. . .country CD sales constituted 17 percent of the overall total for American music. . .second only to rock" (Malone, 2002, p. 420)

Perhaps the most widespread way, even if it is the least noted, that America has become "southernized" is in the general attitude of the American people. The South has long been considered a hotbed of conservatism and intolerance. However, in an age of terrorism, this attitude is no longer confined to this region. Both religious intolerance and racial intolerance are apparent in many regions of America, which is an alarming trend. Muslims are now suspect based solely on their religious beliefs, being viewed as potential terrorist allies. The same is true of anyone who "looks Arabic." These stereotypes were exacerbated by the 2008 Presidential election. Many people focused on Barack Obama's middle name, Hussein, and dubbed him a terrorist based on his

"Muslim" ties, when in fact, he is not of the Muslim faith. Numerous emails circulated the country, encouraging people to not vote for this "terrorist," proving that this belief was widespread.

Obvious in even more venues than intolerance is the vastly conservative nature of the American people. As a whole, Americans resist change. We are content with the status quo and fear the unknown. Generally, American citizens are unwilling to experiment or break away from what they know. This is particularly obvious in the realm of environmental friendliness. For decades, even though Americans have known about environmental problems, we have opted to continue acting in ways and using products that harm our environment. Only recently have Americans as a whole become even slightly more open to things such as alternative fuels; sadly, the reason for this change in views is largely a selfish one. People need relief from exorbitant gas prices. Otherwise, Americans would likely be content to continue using the more traditional fuel.

The South is no longer its own entity. Rather, with changes across the country, America is coming to resemble the South on a larger scale in many regards. No longer can many stereotypes be made and remain accurate about the South, as they now apply to the nation as a whole. This

change is possibly due to the shift political stances in the South. Once comprised of very "red," conservative states, the South is gradually becoming more and more "blue," holding more liberal beliefs. The South is beginning to resemble much of the rest of the country in its mindset.

Why has this southernization of the country occurred? In many instances, Southerners are directly responsible for marketing ourselves, in many ways perpetuating existing stereotypes. Tourists are welcomed to all parts of the state with images of peaches and plantations. Southerners market souvenirs replete with stereotypical images: peaches, rebel flags, and "y'all." So, even though the South has been "othered," some of this process may be self-induced. We allow, and may even want, others to view the South in terms of cotton fields and a lilting accent. Often, the "othering" within the South of our African-American population is overlooked in this marketing process. Businesspeople may see money in souvenirs displaying images of cotton and rebel flags, but these same images are directly hurtful to a large portion of the Southern population. Thus, through this marketing process, the perpetuation of stereotypes becomes something of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

"In the postmodern era it is no longer acceptable to marginalize voices" (Slattery, 2000, p. 215). All types of media, print, visual, and audio, offer images of the South, and other regions and groups, that remain with consumers, whether or not these images may be accurate. Undoubtedly, the portrayals of the media of Southern living and behavior and relationships are not an intentional attack upon the South. Rather, they are a simple way of giving consumers a cursory glimpse into a region of the country that many people do not see. However, as these images have continued in much the same form for several decades, many consumers may have come to believe that these images represent the South in its entirety. Therefore, many stereotypes about the South persist across America.

The issue of place is always at work, as is evidenced by an autobiographical curriculum. "As a figure of autobiographical inquiry, place signifies the diverse and intersecting worlds in which I dwell, to which I contribute meaning, and from which I take the measure of my being" (Casemore, 2008, p. 1). Everything I do and experience affects who I become and how I influence those around me. For that reason, understanding place is vital to understanding myself and my identity. "Place embodies the

social and the particular" (Pinar et.al., 1995, p. 291). Thus, place is about elements of my surroundings as well as my interactions with others in those surroundings. Metaphorically, place is where my mindset and thoughts currently are and it thus shapes how I interact with others. In keeping with the idea of currere, my place and my understanding of it is a constantly evolving process of conceptualization.

This conceptualization of place is closely linked with the shaping of one's identity. Identity is undoubtedly created by our interactions with our environment and with the people in that environment. Thus, place and identity are inextricably intertwined. I am a Southern woman who was raised in the Deep South. Thus, on one hand, I constantly struggle to overcome stereotypes that are placed on me simply because of my background. On the other hand, however, I also struggle to overcome all of the ingrained ways of thinking that come with being raised in a particular region. Since the region in which I was raised is the Deep South, then I struggle to open my mind a bit to move past the very conservative beliefs often propagated in the Bible Belt. My identity is therefore formed by not only working to show pride in my place but in also working to branch out in my mindset from the one place that I have

always known. This constant effort to deal with these two actions is a step in currere. I have entered into this curricular journey of understanding and defining myself based on my place and my experiences. This process is constantly evolving as my understandings change.

A step to making place more understandable and important to everyone is "a Southern curriculum dedicated to social justice—a curriculum that takes account of the autobiographical roots of knowledge and society using the interpretive tools of psychoanalysis. Place is central to such a curriculum" (Casemore, 2008, p. 1). Only when we can understand ourselves and our society can we evoke change. This notion of a Southern curriculum may include the aforementioned combined study of history and literature as it relates to the South.

Many elements of our culture are constantly at work, shaping our views of the world around us. The media allow us to garner a glimpse into realms we may otherwise never experience. "Technologies can take us beyond certain social blockages we now have" (Williams, 1986, p. 17). Popular culture texts can also transport us to places we have never visited, "[Electronics] promise to domesticate nature, giving the private citizen the chance to travel imaginatively into the outside world while remaining in the

comforts of the home" (Spigel, 1992, p. 182). As we garner a glimpse into worlds, or parts of the world, we may not have otherwise known, we begin to unconsciously develop beliefs about those unknown regions. Thus, not only do elements of culture and technology move us beyond our own social spheres, but they can also shape our perceptions about society. "If [we] are being constructed by popular culture texts then [our] identities are not only shifting but the meaning of these texts constantly shift as [we] read them" (Weaver & Daspit, 2000, p. xv) Therefore, in an ongoing cycle, as we consume elements of popular culture, our perceptions change; concurrently, the way in which we perceive those elements of culture also shifts. Thus, the process of consumption is ever-changing. Our identities are shaped by these perceptions, both our identities of ourselves and the identities of those around us. We come to see ourselves through others' eyes and in relationship to others.

In this constantly-evolving process, it is important that consumers of culture do not become focused only on our own perceptions, but we must also take into account the views of others. "[We] have to decenter our own readings and develop alternative readings of popular culture alongside our own" (Weaver & Daspit, 2000, p. xviii). In

such a diverse nation, maintaining the ability to see others' viewpoints is imperative to understanding and tolerance. When we encounter a popular culture text, whether it is in visual or audio form, we form our own images and opinions. This process is inevitable, but as consumers, we must be careful not to hastily form stereotypes. "Reading [text] is a negotiation between this existing subject position and the one proposed by the text itself" (Fiske, 1987, p. 66).

In addition to becoming savvy consumers of culture, it is also important that we use this process of consumption to empower and not marginalize groups that are often "othered." "There is some evidence that finding a discourse in a text that makes sense of one's experience of social powerlessness in a positive way is the vital first step towards being able to do something to change that powerlessness" (Fiske, 1987, p. 70). So, during the process of consumption, othered groups may find images of themselves that depicts them being empowered. Conversely, however, if othered groups see only negative images of themselves, those images only serve to further engrain that sense of powerlessness and marginalization. These same othered groups are the ones that typically lack the power to provide representations of themselves; rather, images of

these groups are provided by the people in power. "Power [includes] the power to represent someone or something in a certain way" (Hall, 1997, p. 259). Thus, the groups in power maintain the influence to represent marginalized groups on their own terms, frequently perpetuating existing stereotypes. Therefore, consumers must be educated about the images and sounds they receive, realizing that multiple meanings likely exist. "[Critical] pedagogy addresses the potential for multiple readings of popular cultural texts, the contradictory and shifting meanings of texts, and the shifting power struggles over control of texts" (Weaver & Daspit, 2000, p. xiv). When examining popular culture texts through a critical lens, then, consumers must consider the way in which all groups interact in this cycle of representation. Further, "when critical theorists offer their reading of popular culture texts, they often emphasize the ways in which these texts reinscribe or resist the hegemonic status of power blocs" (Weaver & Daspit, 2000, p. xxvi), meaning that texts must always be analyzed in how they perpetuate existing class lines.

In an age where the media exerts more influence on many people than books or peers do, it is imperative that we become savvy consumers of the images that are constantly presented to us. Since teenagers likely comprise the

largest segment of media consumers, it is vital that they learn how to deconstruct the images that the media offers them. This process could easily be incorporated into contemporary classrooms.

Discussing issues in popular music could be tied into the curriculum in any number of classes within a high school. Jane Addams' theory of social ethics asserts that society is interconnected, everyone is equal, and all people should work together for equality. (Fischer, 2000, p. 51). Following Addams' theory, everyone in a school should work together to rectify the problem of marginalizing certain groups. There are possibilities for doing this in virtually any subject. Generally, E.D. Hirsch's notion of cultural literacy is vital to contemporary classrooms. "Hirsch proposed imparting a common core of history, legend, myth, and literature to all students. Having recourse to this essential knowledge, students are able to function effectively in contemporary society. As society evolves, the list is reconstructed to address the new cultural essentials" (Schubert, et.al., 2002, p. 263). By following this guideline, students do not become bogged down only in old, canonical works, but they are also exposed to texts that connect with current society.

In an English classroom, the teacher could use popular lyrics in a study of poetry. A discussion on theme and symbolism would quite naturally lead into a discussion of roles in society. A discussion of images in music could also be easily incorporated into a social studies curriculum. Images of geographic regions could be examined alongside actual facts about these regions.

Perhaps the most logical way to dispel stereotypes throughout all demographics is through authentic discussion. While non-Southerners may be told repeatedly that their beliefs are inaccurate, truths may not be revealed to them until they engage in some form of authentic discussion. Authentic discussion may take place in a group of peers, in a classroom, or in any number of other places. The importance of authentic discussion is noted by McCann, et.al.(2006), "frequent, meaningful discussion. . .will make a significant difference in learning" (p. 4). As students, or people in general, discuss the reality of life in the South and come to understandings of their own, new schema will develop that will ultimately change their narrow views. This approach is far more effective than simply lecturing non-Southerners and others about the inaccuracy of their long-held stereotypes. When people are merely told, often

repeatedly, that their views are wrong, they typically become defensive, which only serves to further ingrain the stereotypes which they have long believed.

A humanities curriculum, incorporating social studies and literature could easily be used to create real knowledge about the South, thus helping students move past stereotypes. For instance, students could study the Civil War in this combined course, focusing on the implications of slavery in the social studies component of the class and focusing on how these implications are shown in literature of the period, using something as obvious as Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to indicate how the institution of slavery led to strained race relations.

"It is a difficult business to learn to think and speak in new ways" (Williams in Modleski, 1986, p. 17). Since the inception of mass media, we have been given access to various cultures and come to believe that these images are often accurate. When this is the only information we have, it is difficult to dispel these notions. However, if we are trained to become critical consumers of popular culture, such stereotypes may be overcome, giving voice to those who have long been silenced. Place as curriculum may then wield its power in a different way, where people may come to understand that

we are all products, intellectually and emotionally, of the region from which we hail.

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