CAN YOU SAY IT MORE SOUTHERN?:

RENEWING HOLLYWOOD'S MEDIA

COLONY IN SOUTHERN

REALITY TELEVISION

by

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ABSTRACT

Recent reality television programming has reawakened the popular use of the American South and, specifically, working-class white southerners, for mass entertainment purposes. Nonfiction media have historically represented the South as a distinct and often inferior region of the United States, and an occasional critic has attempted to raise concerns about the disenfranchisement of a subculture of people, but scholars have yet to conduct major research on southern-themed reality shows.

Using multidisciplinary approaches, this dissertation examines how nonfiction media have exploited and are currently exploiting the image of the working-class white southerner. As both southern media historian and an active practitioner in the television industry, I have a unique perspective that allows me to address this current trend and its potential problems. I begin the research by surveying prior nonfiction media dating back to the 18th century. This understanding of past publishing, journalism, films, and broadcasting helps identify specific conventions that media producers have historically applied to the mediated South. Countless stereotypes include excessive drinking, obesity, indecency, and anti-intellectualism. I then closely examine three recent reality television series, analyzing how these past conventions are transformed for modern audiences. Finally, by directly observing and participating in the production of a new, southern-themed reality program, I offer insight on how production culture can foster the perpetuation of stereotypes and serve the needs of both producers and on-screen subjects.

By using cultural studies theories such as postcolonialism, I approach such exploitation as potentially harmful because it can revive regional conflict, reinforce stereotypes that affect actual people who live in working-class conditions in the South, and simultaneously allow the dominant white majority to excise or deny its own negative qualities and maintain status quo power structures. My research leads to my conclusion that "southerners" and southern culture are fundamentally discursive formations, part of what I call the "mediated" or "media South," and that the "real" South cannot be successfully defined within the confines of a television show, despite explicit claims otherwise. The voyeurism involving these discursive constructs is not new, but the form has evolved with the reality television trend.

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himself on being interdisciplinary, it was also highly beneficial for me to work with the faculty in the Department of History and the Department of American Studies.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

On the set of a recent reality show production, the director asked one of the on-camera subjects, "Can you say it more southern?" The premise of the show is a rural, southern version of *People's Court*, with a judge and attorneys taking on peculiar cases outside of the legal justice system. The director seemed to be suggesting that the scene could be funnier and more meaningful if the subject's "southernness" were made more obvious for the audience. The cast, made up entirely of white southerners, acted out the scenario again, and this time the client not only accentuated his southern accent, he also improvised with anecdotes that, to him at least, were essentially southern, drawing big laughs from the cast and crew.

As a white southerner and a film and television practitioner, I find myself curious about this incident and the dozens of southern-themed reality television series that have appeared in the past few years. From my perspective, the modern, multicultural "South" is nearly impossible to define, no matter how hard some people try to explain the culture and the inhabitants of the southeastern United States. Yet, when evoked as a collective people, white southerners are represented by writers, filmmakers, television producers, photographers, and even academics as a monolithic cultural group—probably more than any other *geographic* collection of Americans. Negative overtones often accompany rigid representations of any group, and the typical white southerner in the media is commonly associated with culturally devalued markers: rural, working class, poor, and so on. More extreme representations approach the grotesque. Despite historic

advancements in how mass media portray and empower other traditionally underrepresented groups, today's television landscape contains more images of the peculiar, antisocial, redneck, white southerner than ever before.[1]

As this dissertation demonstrates, this "mediated" South is a relic from decades past that combines misunderstandings, sloppy research, and sometimes well-intentioned fun with the need to churn out serial stories, conventions, and archetypal characters. Prior generations of southern stories reinforced a few generalizations for entertainment purposes, with most audiences understanding the specific characters and situations to be largely fiction. In the post-network era of cable and video-on-demand television, however, reality TV has put to the forefront of mainstream entertainment images of "real" characters and situations that American audiences have consumed at historic rates. A&E's *Duck Dynasty,* for example, brought the network its highest rated episodes in history and was the most successful nonfiction series on cable in 2013.[2] Eric Deggans and other critics in the press have taken note, using terms like "redneck TV" and "hicksploitation" to bring attention to the potential dangers of repeating southern stereotypes.[3] But what exactly are these stereotypes? Who are TV producers exploiting, and how? Bloggers and conscientious watchdog journalists like Deggans have made assertions about the genre's

[1] Whereas past images of southerners on television were not necessarily positive, they were at least rare. G. Scott Campbell's meticulous dissertation demonstrated that, while southern states comprise roughly 20% of the nation's population, they have accounted for only about 5% of the television landscape between 1947 and 2007. See G. Scott Campbell, "Perfection, Wretched, Normal, and Nowhere: A Regional Geography of American Television Settings," (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 2011).

[2] Eric Deggans, "Why No Protests Against 'Hicksploitation' TV Reality Shows?" *Tampa Bay Times*, March 3, 2013, accessed December 2, 2013, http://www.tampabay.com/features/media/why-no-protests-against-hicksploitation-tv-reality-shows/1277224; see also Daniel Holloway, "Truth Is, TV Is Not Quite Southern-Fried," *Broadcasting & Cable,* March 10, 2014, 18.

[3] Deggans is one of the few national writers to publish multiple articles and radio broadcasts about his concerns. As a critic for the *Tampa Bay Times* and frequent contributor to NPR, his stories include the one cited above plus "Disappointing 'Redneck' TV Shortchanges the American South," *Morning Edition*, aired December 7, 2011, on NPR, accessed March 3, 2013, http://www.npr.org/blogs/monkeysee/2011/12/07/142861568/disappointing-redneck-tv-shortchanges-the-american-south; and "On 'Hicksploitation' And Other White Stereotypes Seen on TV," *Morning Edition*, aired May 10, 2013, accessed March 3, 2013, http://www.npr.org/blogs/codeswitch/2013/05/10/178791792/on-hicksploitation-and-other-white-stereotypes-seen-on-tv.

most obvious problems.[4] To date, however, few media scholars have systematically analyzed individual episodes and framed them as part of a larger group of reality television texts that feature working-class southern whites.[5]

In this dissertation, I use some of the concerns and questions of these critics, as well as raise new questions, to understand if and how reality television producers and subjects exploit storytelling conventions, essentialize poor and working-class southern whites as a monolithic group, and reinforce harmful stereotypes that deny the existence of diverse cultures and values among white people in the South. Specifically, I am interested in the significance of humor in creating character and driving storylines. Although I acknowledge this to be an agenda of a prior generation of southern studies scholars, the current surplus of reality shows and the popular discourse around them demonstrate that the South, despite many trends towards homogeneity and assimilation, is still regarded as a distinct and sometimes inferior region by a critical mass of people. This perception, while largely a media construct, nevertheless carries the possibility of reinforcing power structures that lead to historic problems such as lower education levels, increased poverty rates, and higher obesity rates in the rural South.[6] As both a scholar in

[4] In addition to Deggans, see Emily Yahr, "Texas-Based Reality Shows Feature Same Old Cat Fights," *Washington Post*, August 11, 2011; Roger Catlin, "Y'all Have a Hankerin' for that Stereotypin'?" *The Washington Post*, June 7, 2012; Ivy Brashear, "New Wave of Rural Southern Reality Shows Most Watched By Southerners; But How Real Are They?" *The Rural Blog,* January 10, 2013, accessed February 22, 2016, http://irjci.blogspot.com/2013/01/new-wave-of-rural-southern-reality.html; Christian Toto, "CMT Promotes New Southern Reality Show With Dixie Stereotypes," *Breitbart* (blog), January 14, 2014, accessed February 22, 2016, http://www.breitbart.com/ Big-Hollywood/2014/01/14/mtv-new-southerner-show.

[5] One exception to this claim is an excellent article by Angela Cooke-Jackson and Elizabeth K. Hansen entitled "Appalachian Culture and Reality TV: The Ethical Dilemma of Stereotyping Others," *Journal of Mass Media Ethics* 23 (August 2008): 183-200, which uses theories of Levinas, Kant, and Aristotle and contends stereotyping in the media can be harmful but is also inevitable and even beneficial at times. In addition, UNC-Charlotte professor of history Karen Cox wrote a thoughtful article in the *New York Times*, September 18, 2011, called, "The South Ain't Just Whistlin' Dixie," surveying the current landscape of southern reality programming, but the article is not meant to be a detailed analysis on the scope of a dissertation.

[6] Establishing a direct cause-effect relationship between exploitive media images and economic and social ills in the South is beyond the scope of this research. However, few deny the legitimacy of statistics compiled by government and corporate entities. For education statistics, see for example "High-Poverty, Low Graduation Rates in the Rural South," The Rural School and Community Trust*,* accessed February 22, 2016,

southern media history and an active film and television producer, I have a unique perspective on the current landscape of southern reality television, and I feel compelled to address the issues at hand.

I begin the dissertation with an extensive literature review that incorporates elements of southern studies, cultural studies, and media studies. I first review how southern studies scholars have approached Hollywood's depictions of the South in film and television. I then introduce the cultural studies lens of postcolonialism and apply it to portrayals of working-class southern whites. Specifically, I use the term "neocolonization" to conceptualize how the South has been used as a "media colony," exploited by producers and perpetuating a hegemonic relationship between a dominant and subaltern culture.[7]

I also review media studies literature with a focus on reality television. Existing literature on reality television is sizable, but I am specifically interested in theories and data regarding believability and treatment of traditionally disenfranchised populations. My review also encompasses documentary research dating back decades in order to establish audience desire to consume what are represented as true stories and the attraction to authenticity that reality television promises. Finally, because part of my research involves direct participation on the set of a southern-themed reality show, production studies literature will inform my fieldwork with media producers.

Following my literature review is a historical survey of the predecessors to the current batch of reality programming. These early texts date back centuries before the advent of

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http://www.ruraledu.org/articles.php?id=2481; for poverty rates, see for example "Percent of total population living in poverty, 2014," USDA, accessed February 22, 2016, http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/county-level-data-sets/poverty.aspx#.UzIZi1wXf8t; for obesity rates, see for example "Adult Obesity Facts," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, accessed February 22, 2016, http://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/adult.html.

[7] From my research, I found the first use of the term "media colony" in describing the South comes from Jack Temple Kirby, *Media-Made Dixie: The South in the American Imagination* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 162.

television but involve similar themes and development as "hicksploitation" TV, including the use of supposedly real first-person narrators, non-actors playing themselves, and unscripted scenes of "real" life. In this century, CBS's short-lived *The Real Beverly Hillbillies* project and Fox's wildly successful *The Simple Life* are the direct forebears of today's southern reality TV. The objective of this survey is not to provide detailed critical analysis, but to identify common, long-standing themes and conventions that Hollywood and mass media have explored when attempting to bring southern white culture to their audiences.

The second phase of the research includes textual analysis of three recent reality television series—*Mud Lovin' Rednecks* (Animal Planet, 2011-2014), *My Big Redneck Vacation* (CMT, 2012-2013), and *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* (TLC, 2012-2014) which are part of the southern sub-genre and which often incorporate humor as a major appeal for audiences. These series are set in the South and feature mostly characters raised in the South and, in particular, those who identify themselves as southerners. The precise beginning of the current generation of southern reality shows is difficult to pinpoint, but this study limits itself to series airing between 2011 and 2014 because of the clear jump in ratings and rhetoric during those years.[8] I pay close attention to episodes' narrative storylines, structure, character types, dialogue and descriptions, and, based on my review of past research on Hollywood and its depictions of southerners, I identify conventions that are considered traditionally "southern" and note overt references to the South, southerners, and southern culture. Additionally, I analyze consistent character types, values, actions and humorous situations that may legitimately be interpreted as exotic or undesirable yet essentially "southern" and therefore create possibilities for exploitation. In order

[8] See for example Nellie Andreeva, "CMT Renews Hot Freshmen 'Bayou Billionaires' & 'My Big Redneck Vacation,'" *Deadline Hollywood* (blog), February 23, 2012, accessed August 14, 2014, http://deadline.com/2012/02/ cmt-renews-hot-freshmen-bayou-billionaires-my-big-redneck-vacation-234926/; James Hibbard, "'Duck Dynasty' Finale Shatters Records, Top Broadcast," *Entertainment Weekly*, December 7, 2012, accessed August 14, 2014, http://www.ew.com/article/2012/12/07/duck-dynasty-finale-ratings/.

to keep the scope of this project manageable, I cannot analyze every episode of every series. Perhaps future studies can follow up with quantitative studies that search for specific variables. However, a purposive sample of episodes offers enough material and examples to support conclusions.

The third and final phase of my research is an ethnographic case study. As a practicing filmmaker, I used covert participation to observe the making of a major network reality show with a clear southern theme (including the word "southern" in its title). I took note of behavior from producers, crew, and on-camera subjects in order to understand how they may or may not conceive of conventional media portrayals of southerners which in turn manifest themselves in the program. Along with the analysis from the first phases of this dissertation, my observations on the set informed my conclusions about potential southern image exploitation. While I cannot generalize my observations to all reality shows, I gained valuable insight into how the culture of a reality production—the formal and informal relationships among cast and crew; the time and financial constraints on the set; the pressure to create immediately successful material—contribute to the essentialization and exploitation of working-class southern whites.

Because this portion of my study involved human subjects, I have received approval from the Institutional Review Board based on a detailed study protocol (see Appendix). The approach of the study was covert, ethnographic participant observation.[9] As a member of the production crew, I was privy to conversations among the producers and participants. However, in order not to influence their actions, I did not reveal my intentions. I kept a journal of my observations on the set, but I ensured that this activity did not interfere with my duties as a member of the crew. As the audio mixer for this production, I have access to audio recordings of most of the action on

[9] Field research methods and terms informed by Tracy L. Tuten, "Case Studies and Field Observations," in *Research Methods in Communication*, eds. Shuhua Zhou & Wm. David Sloan (Northport, AL: Vision Press, 2009), 265-271.

the set. These audio files are stored digitally, and it is common practice in the film and television industry for audio mixers to keep copies of their audio files as backup for years after the production. Once the production wrapped, I reviewed these recordings and supplemented the notes in my journal. I organized the data and built explanations according to meaningful labels based on my prior textual analyses of other series.[10] For ethical and privacy considerations, I have taken extreme measures to ensure that neither my notes nor the audio recordings are made available to anyone. In the written analysis, I have kept all names, titles, locations, and corporate entities confidential.

Before commencing with my literature review and analysis, I believe this Introduction is a good place to define some basic concepts which will affect my reading of the texts involved and my descriptions of my conclusions to my reader. To begin, the term "reality" is a deceptively difficult concept with which to work. For my purposes, I define "reality television" or "reality show" as nationally televised programming that purports to be unscripted nonfiction and that purports to use non-actors as on-camera subjects. I refer to people on camera as "subjects" or "participants" and refer to off-camera crew as "producers," regardless of their specific crew title—although at times in the ethnographic chapter I may also refer to someone's actual title. Furthermore, although I would prefer not to homogenize the "audience" as one like-minded mass, my descriptions may at times appear to be doing exactly that. For example, I may write, "the audience sees…" or "the audience hears…," however I avoid making interpretive statements such as "the audience believes…" or "the audience interprets..." I expound on these critical discussions on the audience as reader in the literature review on ideological readings.

[10] Tuten, 270. Although predictions are helpful in organizing the observed data, Tuten advises researches to "remain open to new insights and attempt to provide evidence from multiple sources for any conclusion drawn."

Approaching "the South" or "southerner" can also be tricky. I use the term "the South" generally as the geographic region in the southeastern United States, but I feel no need to strictly define it in advance. Reality subjects use the term often, and when necessary I offer my interpretation of their meaning. I likewise treat the terms "southern" and "southerner." By avoiding the tendency to dictate my own definitions, I reduce the potential damage of my ideological judgments. Nevertheless, my choice of texts and subsequent analysis and conclusions have the potential to be highly subjective. Just as producers bring their own subjectivity when creating reality TV, critics and researchers use subjectivity when forming conclusions. As Edward Said suggested in *Orientalism*, anyone approaching a colonial subject, including scholars, "belongs to a power with definite interests."[11]

STATEMENT OF SELF-REFLEXIVITY

Self-reflexivity is often necessary in an inquiry like this in order to position the researcher within the context of the study. My experiences as a native, white southerner, a television producer, and a media-studies scholar are integral to every component of this project, and I believe my reader will more fully appreciate the material by understanding my background and approach. Although raised in a small town in Alabama, my own southernness was never important to me until I met people from outside the South during my days attending Vanderbilt University—a university with a diverse population of students from many parts of the world. From my perspective, my southernness preoccupied their minds more than my own. I heard plenty of jokes about losing the Civil War, about southerners marrying their own cousins, about being lucky to "escape" Alabama, and so on. Even international students seemed interested in exploring the subtleties of southern culture, with one Croatian student detecting more peculiarity

[11] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978), 11.

in my accent than his own. Perhaps surprisingly to some, these are jokes that I had honestly never heard before. Rarely was I offended personally, yet clearly this experience fostered my early curiosity about southern culture.

Having lived and worked in New York City and Los Angeles for almost a decade, I often experienced similar encounters with non-southerners. More than occasionally, a new acquaintance or colleague acknowledged their surprise to meet someone from Alabama, sometimes making the assumption that people from the Deep South do not *want* to leave home, and on rare occasion assuming people from the region do not have the means to *escape* their home. I want to be clear that these encounters by no means represented the majority of my experiences working outside the South. Hard work and results in any industry, including entertainment media, quickly quell doubts about a person's background. However, questions about my home region occurred frequently enough to keep my mind actively wondering if the next person I met would have preconceived, prejudiced opinions about me.

Interestingly to me, questioning me about my home state has not been limited to the big media centers of New York and Los Angeles. Even in Atlanta, I encountered polite jabs about being from Alabama. For example, a human resources representative at a production company needed to photocopy my driver's license, and upon seeing I was from Alabama, he joked multiple times about Forrest Gump, asking if I were from "Greenbow" and wondering if the average IQ in my high school was 65. While I might typically laugh along with the joke, this was during a particularly stressful production and so I appeared annoyed. He interpreted my lack of enthusiasm as self-consciousness, yet, instead of moving away from the subject, he apologized and then proceeded to ask if "things" were really "that bad" in Alabama. I wanted to point out that the state line was only about an hour's drive from his office, however we both knew that it

was not physical distance, but a potential cultural distance, that separated him from his neighboring state.

What stuck with me about that encounter was, first, the sense of superiority that this person felt, and second, my inability to define exactly to whom or what he was referring. In one sense, I feel "we" collectively know the jokes about being from the South. Yet the specificities of these jokes may not be as well-defined or universal as one thinks. Even among southerners, significant variations exist that incorporate race, occupation, rurality, values, religion, etc. I found myself more and more curious about the roots and nuances of southern disparagement and I decided to dedicate my scholarly efforts to understanding historic southern portrayals in popular culture. After all, some of the most important films of all time have negotiated southern themes, including *The Birth of a Nation* and *Gone with the Wind*; and many of my favorite films feature white southerners as heroes, including *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* and, yes, even *Forrest Gump*.

Coinciding with the beginning of my graduate studies, however, was the undeniable emergence of a new manifestation of southern culture in the form of reality television. As much as I wanted to dedicate my research to past representations of the South, I realized that looking at the past was often part of the problem. Popular media have too often situated southerners in the past by demonstrating little interest in progressive southern characters and using southern settings predominantly to explore social problems such as racism, poverty, and fanatic conservatism. The films I mentioned above, for example, are not just films *from* the past; they are all *set* in the past. And while analysis of these films is still a worthy endeavor, I see a great opportunity to look at the present, understanding that past representations of white southerners

likely influence this current generation of southern material and will likewise influence how future media producers choose to portray white southerners and southern settings.

When I was hired to run audio recording for a reality television series which had the obvious intent of capitalizing on the current fascination with white southern individuals, I knew I would have the rare triangulated perspective of subject, practitioner, and scholar. Thus, I am a white southerner who is helping to create the very media that I study. It is an exciting opportunity, yet one that comes with responsibility. I have to be aware of the combination of forces, including the need to turn a profit by all involved (even myself, having earned a salary). I must resist the impulse to take jokes personally; I cannot make mass assumptions or conclusions that apply to all producers and subjects; and I will remind myself and my reader often of the difference between the "mediated" South and the "actual" South. The nature of this kind of textual analysis combined with direct hands-on experience has the potential to get complicated (or "messy," as is exemplified by scholars in my literature review). After this journey, however, I hope to at least be able to decipher my own feelings about being a white southerner and a media producer, and I am optimistic that my explorations and analysis will contribute to our understanding of being southern in a contemporary global culture.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO STUDYING SOUTHERN REALITY TELEVISION

The following literature review establishes the theories and historical scholarly work that inform my research. The intersection of traditions of southern studies, cultural studies, and media studies ties specifically to my research on exploitative images of working-class southern whites in recent reality television. I begin with scholarship on southern identity and, because cinema predates television by about half a century and influenced its content, I find early scholarship on movies to be clearly relevant.

SOUTHERN STUDIES

In *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies*, author Robert Sklar alluded to the roots of American comedy originating with the "conservative Southern gentry in the early nineteenth century."[1] In an attempt to quell a threatening spirit of democracy, these humorists wrote tales of crude commoners who were clearly incapable of governing themselves. Sklar referred to the use of "comic masks," writing as if the inept "louts and slatterns" were ridiculing themselves. The result was a widespread stereotype that would work its way into popular literature, theater, and eventually cinema and television. Ironically, the victims of these jokes often identified with and took pride in these unflattering portraits, a trend that continues today with comic routines from Jeff Foxworthy, radio personalities Rick and Bubba, country

[1] Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 104.

singer Gretchen Wilson, and lovable fictional characters like Ricky Bobby from *Talladega Nights*.

But tracing the history of the southern stereotype was not Sklar's intention. He was making the more general point about the birth of the comedy genre. When broad cinema and media textbooks and popular histories do contain the words "southern" or "South," their authors are usually referring to the film industry's home in southern California or to specific pictures like *South Pacific*. Unlike the West or westerns, rarely have Hollywood historians covered the American southeastern states as a region that inspired a specific kind of storyline or character and attracted a certain kind of audience.[2] Does this lack of specific attention represent an oversight or slight of a genre? Or does it simply demonstrate the integration of the Deep South into the narrative tradition of the country at large, similar to the Midwest or the Northeast? The progression of scholarship on southern media history clearly indicates this dichotomous relationship with the larger history of Hollywood.

Despite the lack of acknowledgment by cinema historians, popular opinion has clearly imagined the South as a separate and at times foreign region within the realms of film, television, literature, journalism, and advertising. The range of depictions has varied in degrees of positive or negative views, but media outlets have consistently portrayed southerners as one people, united in their own culture and distinct from the rest of America.[3] Considering this attitude, held by southerners and non-southerners alike, and given that the South has always comprised a significant portion of the population of the United States, surprisingly few major works have

[2] See genre descriptions and analysis, for example, in Louis Giannetti and Scott Eyman, *Flashback: A Brief History of Film*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2001); Gerald Mast and Bruce F. Kawin, *A Short History of the Movies* (New York: Pearson, 2009).

[3] For a comprehensive history of southern identity, see James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). For an empirical study on southern depictions in popular press in the twentieth century, see Kelly Saxton, "Image of the Deep South in *Time, Newsweek,* and *U.S. News & World Report*" (master's thesis, University of Alabama, 1992).

concentrated on the subject of southern portrayals in entertainment media. A wealth of literature exists pertaining to epic films like *The Birth of a Nation* and *Gone with the Wind*, but often such research focuses on race relations or Hollywood production history rather than the image of the southerner and the movie-made effect on audience perceptions.

The interdisciplinary field of southern studies has attracted scholars from history and English departments for nearly a century, but, in recent decades, film and mass communication scholars have made some important contributions to our understanding of the South and its place in popular imagination. As early as 1966, in an article in *Mississippi Quarterly*, Peter Soderbergh was one of the first historians to explore the overall treatment of southern themes by Hollywood.[4] Written during a turbulent decade which saw harsh, worldwide criticism of southern culture, Soderbergh noted defensively the abundance of films between 1930 and 1960 that exploited the "sordid, reactionary, and isolationist aspects" of southern character.[5] Stopping short of actually blaming Hollywood for all ill will towards the South, he nevertheless concluded that audiences would attribute any wrongdoing by southern characters as an indictment on the entire people of the South, whereas the same act by a non-southern character would simply be the fault of that individual. With his focus on plot summaries and general trends, the scope of Soderbergh's article did not allow him to demonstrate exactly how this effect would happen, but he apparently took it for granted that audiences had pre-conceived notions of uniquely southern plotlines that did not apply to stories set outside the South.

Beginning in the late 1970s, after the major efforts of the civil rights movement, a few book-length histories expanded on Soderbergh's research. In *Media-Made Dixie: The South in the American Imagination,* Jack Temple Kirby generally agreed with Soderbergh's Hollywood

[4] Peter Soderbergh, "Hollywood and the South, 1930-1960," *Mississippi Quarterly* 19 (Winter 1965-66): 1-19.

[5] Ibid., 16.

timeline—films exploited Old South nostalgia before World War II then moved towards more gothic or decadent stories during the 1950s and 1960s.[6] Kirby attempted to explain national and regional conceptions of the South by incorporating analysis not just of film but also of literature, television, popular and academic histories, and even national advertising campaigns. He noted, for example, the influence that romantic Old South tales from writers like Thomas Nelson Page and Joel Chandler Harris had on the more academic official histories posited by William Dunning, Claude Bowers, Walter Fleming, and the Vanderbilt Agrarians.[7] The stories of the southern myth rarely included yeoman farmers, favoring instead the aristocratic cavaliers and their faithful black servants. Filmmakers and movie audiences generally accepted this "escapist" fare in the silent era and through the Depression.

In the 1930s, instead of following popular culture, Kirby contended that the historical scholarship began to move ahead and in turn influenced narrative filmmaking. Revisionists such as W.E.B. DuBois and W. J. Cash worked to debunk the myth of southern aristocracy and indirectly helped to lay a foundation for popular reception of southern writers like William Faulkner, Erskine Caldwell, and Tennessee Williams. Although other recent historians have explained in more detail the evolution of southern historiography, Kirby's point was to fully understand how such work influenced the entertainment media and how the media, in turn, created and reinforced popular conceptions of the South. Early country music, for example, "pressed out to national boundaries a pervasive image of the visceral white southerner. He was languid, innocent of caprice and wisdom in handling money, moonstruck, and often drunk."[8]

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[6] Jack Temple Kirby, *Media-Made Dixie: The South in the American Imagination*. Rev. ed. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986). The first edition of Kirby's book was published in 1978 by Louisiana State University Press.

[7] These nationally renowned writers and scholars became known for their pro-southern arguments and defense of southern mythology.

[8] Kirby, *Media-Made Dixie,* 90.

Kirby acknowledged that his only evidence for asserting a correlation between popular representation and academic history was best-seller lists, record sales, and box office figures. He perhaps took leaps with some of his conclusions, but more often he was simply bringing up valid questions. An interesting chapter summation revealed Kirby's overall thesis. "Hank Williams' mindless South was soulful and occasionally wry," he stated. "Jack Cash's mindless South was violent but endearingly extravagant. Tennessee Williams' mindless South was pathological, doomed unless it put mind aside, then doomed to lose its distinctive identity. The media were set for a deeper plunge."[9] Kirby's prose was thoughtful, but his conclusions were vague. Did this imply Cash influenced artists directly? Or did it mean audiences were more receptive to this brand of southern decay than other brands because of Cash's influence? Kirby did not try to offer any evidence either way. But he alluded here to a loss of southern distinctiveness which he addressed further in the closing chapter of his book. The election of a southern president in 1976 and the transcendent American qualities of *The Waltons* were examples of a "southernization" of the rest of the country and a simultaneous nationalization of the South. In Kirby's revised edition publish eight years later, he acknowledged some southern distinction in recent images in *Dallas* and *The Dukes of Hazzard*, but he further demonstrated the loss of southern distinction in other popular and political discourse. It was a bold assertion, but not inconsistent with observations from some other southern historians.

Three years after Kirby's book first appeared, Edward D. C. Campbell published *The Celluloid South: Hollywood and the Southern Myth*. Campbell's thesis concentrated almost exclusively on depictions of the Old South in period films, noting that they were "more often than not disappointing in their concept of history and race, [but] they were nonetheless

[9] Ibid., 96.

remarkable escapes. They well assessed the public's beliefs, desires, and needs."[10] In contrast to Kirby's method of comparative analysis with other media, Campbell focused mostly on the discourse surrounding the movies themselves—reviews, posters, advertisements, and box office numbers—to demonstrate the diverging movement of national reception of southern stories. For example, in reviews of early pictures like D. W. Griffith's *His Trust Fulfilled* (1911), Campbell pointed out universal acceptance of the contented slave and benevolent master. Later renditions of similar master/slave relationships, such as *So Red the Rose* (1935) and *Song of the South* (1946), were heartily accepted in the South but encountered intense criticism from black and northern critics.

Although Campbell gave an obligatory review of literature from Page, Thomas Dixon, and the Vanderbilt Agrarians, he asserted that the movies were by far the most influential force in creating and reinforcing national opinions of the South. Like Kirby, he only had the money trail as evidence. The nostalgic pictures of the 1930s, for example, generated much more revenue than gothic literature from Faulkner, Caldwell, and T. S. Stribling. Campbell otherwise rarely mentioned contemporary portrayals of the South in film and television, viewing them as byproducts of southern mythology rather than contributors.

Building on Soderbergh and Kirby before him, Campbell made bold claims about Hollywood's indictment of the entire South. Even in the late 1970s, "there were few films which examined the South without a trace of bitterness or superiority. Film repeatedly provided audiences with the view that the South, not the nation, was responsible for the racial turmoil."[11] Campbell occasionally recognized the possibility of a disappearing South in movies, but he more

[10] Edward D. C. Campbell, *The Celluloid South: Hollywood and the Southern Myth* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), xi.

[11] Campbell, *The Celluloid South,* 179.

often asserted that the South—consciously or not on the part of filmmakers—continued to serve as a setting for storytellers and audiences to explore the worst aspects of human nature.

In the same year that Campbell published *The Celluloid South*, Warren French edited a collection of essays in a volume simply entitled *The South and Film*. Perhaps the book's most interesting chapter is French's own introduction in which he explained why an official "southern" genre does not truly exist.[12] Because race and war were the principal themes that silent era filmmakers explored in southern settings, the subject matter was too painful, and the conflict too real, to support repeated serial stories. Additionally, the expectations for accuracy and authenticity of southern iconography required expensive production value. Hollywood could support only the occasional southern epic. The West, in contrast, was always neutral territory, available for new and fresh conflicts that filmmakers could explore year after year. Few Americans were attached to a pre-conceived "western" culture as they were with the South, so filmmakers had free reign to invent and reinvent the West whenever the market allowed. Although the South provided a setting for many films, such as the decadent stories of Faulkner and Williams in the 1950s, French maintained that these "usually depressing stories did not appeal to the young mass audiences that had for decades supported the Western."[13]

Other contributors in French's book generally concurred with the major movements and eras in cinema that previous historians have identified, but many of the essays were simply plot summaries and chronologies. A few authors, however, made interesting and unique conclusions. Ida Jeter, for example, contended that the Bette Davis film *Jezebel* (1938) was the first

[12] Warren French, "Introduction: Another Lost Cause," in *The South and Film*, ed. Warren French (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1981), 3-13.

[13] Ibid., 6.

Hollywood picture to incorporate aspects of decadence in the antebellum South.[14] Before this movie, most stories set in the Old South subscribed to the "divided culture" thesis, portraying the southern way of life as superior even in impoverished conditions after the Civil War. The South in these films would surely have continued to prosper if the North had not invaded, and northerners had to accept this fact in order to achieve reconciliation, often illustrated through romantic relationships. *Jezebel*, although containing much of the romantic imagery attributed to the Old South, portrayed a South doomed even before the Civil War because of the characters' inability to adapt to any changes. The scope of Jeter's essay was small, but she included enough context with films before and after *Jezebel* to make an interesting thesis.

Jeter's conclusions, unlike those from previous historians cited above, derived from deep analysis of a film itself rather than reactions and speculations of intent. Such textual analysis was a significant part of Allison Graham's 2001 contribution to the field, *Framing the South: Hollywood, Television, and Race During the Civil Rights Struggle*.[15] Close analysis of *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), for example, demonstrated how Blanche's fragmentation represented the demise of the Old South myth. Conclusions such as this one were similar to Kirby and Campbell, but Graham derived them from the text more than the context.[16]

More important than method, however, was Graham's focus. Rather than making broad statements about the South, Graham concluded that popular film and television had specifically established the southern working-class as the principal impediment to racial and cultural reconciliation. Filmmakers' attention on rednecks and crackers exonerated the southern upper-class, as well as whites across the nation, for institutional racism. A common theme that Graham

[14] Ida Jeter, "*Jezebel* and the Emergence of the Hollywood Tradition of the Decadent South," in *The South and Film*, ed. Warren French (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1981), 31-46.

[15] Allison Graham, *Framing the South: Hollywood, Television, and Race During the Civil Rights Struggle* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

[16] Ibid., 31-34.

exposed was the possibility of redemption for southern women, often with the help of northern heroes, and the impossibility of reformation for most southern white men. "The essential, class-bound criminality" of low class southerners "is offered up, movie after movie, as proof of the inherent goodness of all other whites."[17]

A good comparison of methods and conclusions is revealed in analysis of *Band of Angels* (1957), a Civil War epic starring Clark Gable playing a character similar to his role as Rhett Butler almost two decades earlier. The thematic evolution from *Gone with the Wind* was obvious—*Band of Angels* explicitly explored racial themes and the barbarous nature of the slave trade, subjects that *Gone with the Wind* hardly touched. Yet Campbell, with his focus on Old South films, noted the high production value, attention to authentic production design, and financial success of *Band of Angels* and also of *Raintree County* in the same year. He contended that America still craved tales of the Old South and questioned why more southern period pieces were not made during this era. Graham, in contrast, noted that Gable's character, a slaveholder, was allowed redemption only because of his class. Other white men in the film had no hope of overcoming their racial intolerance and surviving in the post-slavery South. Instead of moving her discussion to *Raintree County*, Graham had the insight to recognize the curious and hopeless southern character in *Sayonara*, also released in 1957, but set in the Pacific after World War II. In other words, Graham added the extra dimension of class and contemporary depictions to the otherwise black and white dichotomy that Campbell addressed exclusively in period pieces.

Graham was not immune to making exaggerated generalizations similar to previous historians. Her broad statement of "the inherent goodness of other whites" did not take into account antagonists in films like *No Way Out* (1951), for example, which featured a hopeless, lower class racist with no connection to the South. Furthermore, in addition to the southern

[17] Ibid., 17.

working class, southern elites were portrayed as racist or otherwise intolerant in such films as *Storm Warning* (1951) and *In the Heat of the Night* (1967). Still, Graham's work represented maturity in approaching Hollywood's portrayal of southern characters. A similar sensibility was found in J. W. Williamson's 1995 book *Hillbillyland: What the Movies Did to the Mountains and What the Mountains Did to the Movies*.[18] Although many characters in Williamson's analysis hailed from southern Appalachia or the Ozarks, his approach transcended region and focused more on class conflict in such diverse films as *The Grapes of Wrath* (1940)*, Raising Arizona* (1987)*,* and even *Crocodile Dundee* (1986) featuring working-class whites from regions beyond the South.

That an analysis of southern characters could circumvent analysis of the South as a unified region conflicts directly with assertions dating back to Soderbergh. This trend is further demonstrated in research on the treatment of blacks in Hollywood films. Although people of both races might typically exclude blacks from the label of "southerners," black characters nonetheless are consistently involved with southern themes. Yet in major historical works on black portrayals in cinema, the South hardly has a presence. Donald Bogle avoided explicitly addressing the South as a distinct place portrayed by Hollywood in his book, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*.[19] For example, he noted the criticism of 1946's *Song of the South* as a "corruptive piece of Old South propaganda put together to make money."[20] Bogle focused on the criticism directed at Disney for its paternalistic racism, not direct indictments of the South. Even in Bogle's brief discussion of *They Won't Forget* (1936), he described the "small town's racist police force" and ignored the

[18] J. W. Williamson, *Hillbillyland: What the Movies Did to the Mountains and What the Mountains Did to the Movies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

[19] Donald Bogle, *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (New York: Continuum, 2001).

[20] Ibid., 136.

fact that the film was heavily dependent on ongoing North-South tensions.[21] To Bogle, racism in this film was taken for granted but was an insignificant part of the story.

In his account of *Pinky* (1949), a film about a light-skinned mulatto who decided to remain in her southern hometown rather than pass as white in the North, Bogle did recognize the Deep South as the "area more closely associated with racial hostilities," but he otherwise only summarized the film's plot.[22] His citations of reviews from 1949 did not mention the South. Likewise with *Intruder in the Dust* (1949), Bogle made no attempt to situate the film with its author—Faulkner—and his place in southern historiography. He acknowledged southern racial codes to which the characters adhered, but only as part of his plot summary. Elsewhere in his commentary on the film, he described the "character—savage and venomous—inherent in one 'typical' small American town." For Bogle, the film "unearthed…a somber piece of Americana: a black man on trial has little chance for justice in our country."[23] His repeated allusions to "small" town rather than "southern" town, along with his reference to America, demonstrated his attempt to indict the entire country, not the South. Just as the prosecutor in *They Won't Forget* claimed that convicting a helpless black man would be too easy, perhaps Bogle was not interested in exposing systematic racism in the South only, preferring to hold all of America accountable for the historically negative portrayals of blacks in films and historically unfair treatment of blacks in real life.

By reviewing many southern and non-southern films together and skimming over the role of specifically southern injustice in these stories, Bogle contributed to the assertion from Kirby and others that the South was losing its distinction. But at the same time, Bogle made a quiet assumption that many audiences might make: the South as a whole is so racist that it needs no

[21] Ibid., 138.
[22] Ibid., 150.
[23] Ibid., 155.

acknowledgment. These conflicting interpretations are still worthy of further exploration, but the progression of the historiography from Soderbergh to Graham and Bogle demonstrates the maturity of the field. The straightforward approach of Campbell, for example, exemplified the simplicity of the films he was researching. As Campbell himself stated, Hollywood presented two extremes of the South, either all good or all bad, with no middle ground. Campbell likewise approached the South as a unit, not interested in addressing the complexities of a multicultural region. Although his collection of reviews and other film discourse was impressive, Campbell acknowledged that a consensus on how to receive any particular film was rare in the 1940s and 50s.[24] Yet he made multiple assertions that the movies had negative implications for attitudes towards southerners. Kirby, too, was guilty of essentializing the South by simply recognizing it. His claims of a unified "American Imagination" of the South served to reinforce the very stereotypes he tried to expose because he took shortcuts in defining all southerners. The grand scope of his book was promising because of its consideration of all mass media, but the lack of detailed analysis of any particular medium or text prevented him from making significant conclusions about our "imagination."

Kirby, Campbell, and Graham all recognized the widespread use of the South to explore humanity's shortcomings, but perhaps a combination of all three approaches would more completely uncover the relationship between Hollywood and the southerner—Kirby's broad scope in context with southern historiography, Campbell's rigorous collection of discourse surrounding all the films he examined, and Graham's close textual analysis and recognition of subsets within the southern population. Still, it would be difficult to develop an indisputable thesis about southern identity except to acknowledge the enormous complexity involved. Although the "southern" should have been labeled an official Hollywood genre decades ago, for

[24] Campbell, *The Celluloid South*, 158.

the latter years of the 20th century the potential themes to explore by Hollywood and scholars alike seem to have been filtered, disguised, and molded with too many non-southern themes to maintain any uniformity.

Consistent with this line of thinking, in the new century, many in the academy have repositioned themselves as postsouthern or new southern scholars. As early as 1990, Michael Kreyling popularized the term "postsouthern" as he embraced a paradigm shift that framed the South without essentializing it as a unified entity with a monolithic population.[25] In media texts, even those created decades ago, a critical eye understands that literal and figurative boundaries between southern, national, and global spaces are constantly crossed. Kreyling and others who subscribed to new southern studies found little value in deconstructing images in order to define the South or southern culture. In Kathryn McKee and Annette Trefzer's 2006 collection of essays in *American Literature*, the editors were "interested in the region's fascinating multiplicity and its participation in hemispheric and global contexts."[26] Instead of the traditional preoccupation with rural white sloth or decadence, new southern scholars see the South as multiple "Souths," diverse, unstable, elusive, complicated, and very much part of the modern global culture.

Although Deborah Barker and McKee claimed that new southern studies is not "genre" study, scholars can nevertheless view texts as "southern."[27] Building on this premise, for example, Tara McPherson described the landscape of documentary filmmaker Ross McElwee as postsouthern. In his films, McElwee expresses his personal nostalgia for southernness after

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[25] Michael Kreyling, "*The Fathers*: A Postsouthern Narrative Reading," in *Southern Literature and Literary Theory*, ed. Jefferson Humphries (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 186-205.

[26] Kathryn McKee and Annette Trefzer, "Global Contexts, Local Literatures: The New Southern Studies," *American Literature* 78, no. 4 (December 2006): 677.

[27] Deborah E. Barker and Kathryn McKee, eds., *American Cinema and the Southern Imaginary* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 2.

living in the Northeast for most of his adult life, but the films themselves resist (perhaps unintentionally) actual nostalgia by recoding or recontextualizing traditional elements of southern character.[28] Indeed, countless nonfiction and fictional media texts can be set in the southeastern United States and have no southern identity at all, demonstrating the increased freedom of the imagined South to explore new scenarios. In congruence with Barker & McKee, such texts "undercut or complicate traditional iconic elements" and "unsettle the conviction that there is a 'real,' definitive South lodged somewhere just beyond our reach."[29]

The new southern movement in academia and independent media, however, cannot attempt to claim that all producers, readers, and audiences have abandoned traditional uses for the South. Barker & McKee themselves acknowledged that "the cinematic South often served in terms of both place and time (the past) as a repository for the nation's unresolved problems and contradictions."[30] By this, they agree with the prior generation of southern media scholars like Soderbergh, Kirby, Campbell, and Graham that mass media producers have historically used southern themes for exploitive purposes. The recent paradigm shift, then, depends as much on the strategic choice of texts to analyze as it does a new lens with which to analyze them. While their efforts are extremely valuable in the academic community and confirm that multiple mediated Souths can potentially evolve from prior conventions, the texts analyzed in this dissertation clearly demonstrate that producers and audiences of today's reality television have not followed postsouthern trends.

[28] Tara McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Imagined South* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

[29] Barker and McKee, *Southern Imaginary,* 13.

[30] Ibid., 5.

CULTURAL STUDIES

Southern studies and cultural studies scholars may use different terminology and focus on canons unique to their traditions, but few deny the obvious potential for crossover studies. Modern scholars in media studies, communication studies, English, history, American studies, and new world studies increasingly attempt to unpack the complexities of culture, power, and media, acknowledging their complicated network of relationships. In this section, I introduce the broad approach of cultural studies scholars and its lens of postcolonialism and apply a specific form—neocolonization—to media uses of the South.

Hegemony and Ideological Analysis

Long before the advent of television, thinkers like Karl Marx and Antonio Gramsci considered how dominant groups maintained and advanced their agendas. Cultural studies evolved when scholars began to consider how power grew through culture and how culture in turn was defined and delivered. The mass media emerged as a primary subject for analysis. Today Marx would likely see American media as a commercial entity and its function as maintaining an unequal distribution of wealth, with a select group guarding their position of power through a dominant ideological structure. Indeed, historian Eric Barnouw demonstrated that as early as the 1930s, the commercially sponsored model for broadcasting in the United States was well established, "which made the salesman the trustee of the public interest, with minimal supervision."[31]

Today, scholars in a variety of disciplines use Gramsci's hegemonic theories as an approach to studying ways that media entities produce knowledge and values and then prime audiences to receive and even claim them for themselves. In its simplest form, the hegemony model demonstrates a way by which mass media lull audiences into accepting television content

[31] Eric Barnouw, *The Tower of Babel*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), 281.

as common sense. Gramsci was specifically concerned with the intellectual values of the elite being imposed onto lower classes who in turn accepted these values against their own interests.[32] As John Fiske explained, hegemony is

> the process by which a dominant class wins the willing consent of the subordinate classes to the system that ensures their subordination. This consent must be constantly won and rewon, for people's material social experience constantly reminds them of the disadvantages of subordination and thus poses a constant threat to the dominant class.[33]

Today's mass media in the United States is much more complex than the Fascist controlled media that Gramsci knew, yet scholars from a diverse group of disciplines still subscribe to his theory of hegemony. In the words of Marshall McLuhan, "All media work us over completely. They are so pervasive…that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, and unaltered."[34] These pervasive media texts in the form of popular entertainment create the content of our culture and determine what is meaningful. What we do as scholars, then, is to look at the most pervasive of these texts—reality television included—and attempt to understand how they produce our cultural reality. Two widely cited cultural studies scholars are Fiske and Stuart Hall. Fiske described media texts as polysemic and contended that audiences could resist dominant messages and take part in the creation of culture. "Ideology is constantly up against forces of resistance," he noted, "not just to extend its power but to hold on to the territory it has already colonized."[35] Critical analysis can therefore be considered political action.

Similarly, Hall outlined three reading strategies when considering mass media texts: dominant, negotiated, and oppositional.[36] Dominant or preferred readings occur when a viewer

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[32] For more on interpretations of Gramsci and an excerpt of his writing, see Simon During, ed., *The Cultural Studies Reader*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2007).

[33] John Fiske, "British Cultural Studies and Television," in *Channels of Discourse, Reassembled*, ed. Robert C. Allen (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 291.

[34] Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967), 26. Note, "Massage" is spelled correctly, a reference to McLuhan's earlier phrase, "the medium is the message.".

[35] Fiske, "British Cultural Studies, 291-292.

[36] Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies,*

agrees with and accepts the dominant ideology. A dominant reading of a mass media text is likely rare, an exception perhaps occurring with young children. Oppositional readings are in direct conflict with dominant messages. An audience member, in this case, is positioned to completely resist the textual content. Like the dominant reading, an oppositional reading by audiences may be rare when dealing with television shows designed as entertainment. A negotiated reading is likely the most common among mass audiences, depending obviously on the text and the reader. Negotiated readings fit into dominant ideology generally but take into account the reader's prior experiences, values, culture, and social position. The process of reading a television show involves active making of meanings where, perhaps subconsciously, the reader must reconcile some conflict of interests.

Both Fiske and Hall maintained that a media text should generate a range of negotiated meanings in order to attract the largest possible audience, yet media gatekeepers must constantly invent new ways to maintain their economic and social power through preferred readings. A new television show may frame itself to some audiences as a reflection of reality by catering to popular opinion, yet it may also seek out new audiences by introducing seemingly new variations of storylines, characters, and conventions. In the process, media texts shape new reality rather than simply reflecting it, keeping the industry valid while maintaining the status quo. Jon Kraszewski, for example, observed this phenomenon in his analysis of MTV's *The Real World.* Assuming their target audience to be young, urban, and liberal, the show's producers instigated debates about potentially racist comments from rural white cast members yet often neglected to examine the cloaked racism of white and black liberal cast members.[37] Kraszewski used Fiske's

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1972-79, ed. Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Wills (London: Hutchison, 1980), 128-138.

[37] Jon Kraszewski, "Country Hicks and Urban Cliques: Mediating Race, Reality, and Liberalism on MTV's *The Real World*," in *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, ed. Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 205-222.

term of "nonracist racism" which he described as an expression with seemingly no racial intent that actually conceals a deeply racist position.[38] Expressions such as these are often more dangerous than overt racism because they are elusive, and those in power sometimes use them, intentionally or not, to sidestep being labeled as racist. The media gatekeepers in this case—MTV and its producers—could shine as a progressive outlet where social issues are debated even as familiar stereotypes of both urban blacks and rural whites are reinforced.

Postcolonialism and Neocolonialism

Conclusions such as Kraszewski's resulted from deep oppositional readings to media texts, and my study will follow that ideological approach in the analysis of southern-based reality television. To use Hall's terminology, deep readings can "detotalize" and "retotalize" the message within some alternative framework of reference."[39] I combine these tenets with a branch of cultural studies known as postcolonialism in order to unpack the representations of working-class southern whites in reality television. In its broadest sense, the postcolonial project is an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the evolving power relationships between peoples and cultures. One can certainly use the approach in the study of institutions directly established by colonizing forces, but many scholars today find more subtle hegemonic forces that linger. Mass media texts invariably play a large role in creating, sustaining, or combating contemporary power structures, and many postcolonial scholars target these texts for analysis. Recent new southern scholars have embraced postcolonialism, but I find the term to be loosely applied to different approaches. Charles Baker, for example, described William Faulkner and other Southern Renaissance writers as "postcolonial" in that they undercut the myths of the Old

[38] John Fiske, *Media Matters: Race and Gender in U.S. Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 37-39.
[39] Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," 138.

South in similar fashion to other postcolonial writers worldwide.[40] We might therefore refer to Faulkner's efforts specifically as "de-colonial."

Another early work to use a postcolonial lens to examine southern culture was a 2003 double volume of *Mississippi Quarterly* edited by Jon Smith, Kathryn McKee, and Scott Romine.[41] Contributors in this series and several books and articles that followed in subsequent years likened the South to other colonial regions in order for readers and scholars abroad to understand the overall American experience. As previously stated, these postsouthern scholars sought out texts that may reinterpret southern culture or claim the author's individualism. This line of research demonstrates an important desire to bridge the gap created by early film and media scholars who neglected to view "the southern" as an integral part of American and international cinema. However, to date, no one has approached mass media texts such as reality television as neocolonial forces.

In the realm of neocolonization, Raka Shome summarized research in this arena by suggesting that media texts in particular have the ability to legitimize and reinforce "neo-imperial" power structures between dominant and colonized people: "Whereas in the past, imperialism was about controlling the 'native' by colonizing her or him territorially, now imperialism is more about subjugating the 'native' by colonizing her or him discursively."[42] Although the southeastern United States is not often considered a colony—and southerners are

[40] Charles Baker, *William Faulkner's Postcolonial South* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000).

[41] Jon Smith, Scott Romine, and Kathryn McKee, eds., "Postcolonial Theory, the U.S. South, and New World Studies, Part 1," special issue, *Mississippi Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (Fall 2003): 487-691; and "Part 2," special issue, *Mississippi Quarterly* 57, no. 1 (Winter 2003–04): 1-194.

[42] Raka Shome, "Postcolonial Interventions in the Rhetorical Canon: An 'Other' View," *Communication Theory* 6, no. 1 (1996): 42.

not "subjects"—of an imperial colonizer, the notion of discursive neocolonization can apply to any people that are not empowered to represent themselves in mass media.[43]

Scholars such as Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak have used terms such as "Orientalism" and "subaltern" in their explorations of neocolonization.[44] According to Said, Orientalism is the construction of a people of non-Western cultures as an insignificant "Other" in Western discourse. In its most basic form, Orientalism in the mass media constructs groups as homogenous entities, distinctly inferior, and "inherently vulnerable to scrutiny" in order to benefit the dominant culture.[45] In the process, depictions of the subaltern Other in film and television can also provide a way for individuals from the dominant culture to define themselves. Construction of self-image indeed *requires* comparison with the Other or subaltern.[46] In Robert Stam and Louise Spence's words, the camera can transform viewers into "armchair conquistadores, affirming our sense of power while making the inhabitants of the Third World

[43] Some historians argue that the South was, by definition, a colony of the United States at certain points in history. Even before southern states were defeated in the Civil War and subjected to new laws and sanctions during Reconstruction, white settlers in the original southern frontier were often strategically "placed" for political and economic interests by Washington or northeastern entities. Many settlers did not have the means to succeed financially back in the eastern states, but they were the ideal buffer against English, Spanish, and Native American infiltration. See for example Jon Kukla, *A Wilderness So Immense: The Louisiana Purchase and the Destiny of America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003); James Webb, *Born Fighting: How the Scots-Irish Shaped America* (New York: Broadway Books, 2004); and James E. Doan, "How the Irish and Scots Became Indians: Colonial Traders and Agents and the Southeastern Tribes," *New Hibernia Review* 3 (Autumn1999): 9-19. Furthermore, business and industrial ventures in the developing South later in the 19th and 20th centuries were often bankrolled by and therefore profited northern corporations. For examples, see Brian Kelly, *Race, Class, and Power in the Alabama Coalfields, 1908-1921* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), and Ronald L. Lewis, *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside: Railroads, Deforestation, and Social Change in West Virginia, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

[44] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978); Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988): 271-313.

[45] Said, *Orientalism*, 32.

[46] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 392-403; Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs Identity," in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996), 1-17.

objects of spectacle for the First World's voyeuristic gaze."[47] The concept of "Orientalism" clearly originates from Western colonization of Middle Eastern, African, Indian, and East Asian peoples, but we can borrow Said's original approach in order to analyze the essentialized image of the working-class southerner by dominant entertainment media in the United States, often caricaturized in Hollywood productions throughout much of the twentieth century, and now recently in reality TV.

Because of the assumption that race must be a factor in colonial relationships, postcolonial research has been criticized for its lack of discursive analysis of class conflict.[48] By systematically lumping all white people together, postcolonialism has neglected to effectively interrogate the social construction that cultural scholars refer to as "whiteness." The movement to specifically study whiteness, in fact, developed partially from postcolonialist thought, but with the lens inverted to identify ways in which race is constructed to advance white privilege.[49] Whereas many mainstream audiences might see whiteness as "neutral" or otherwise unrecognizable, by making whiteness visible, scholars can work to "dislodge" white people from positions of power.[50] However, whiteness possesses the elastic ability to transform itself in order to maintain dominant white hegemony in the face of challenges. Scholars have demonstrated how media reinforces status quo power structures, whether consciously or unconsciously,

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[47] Robert Stam and Louise Spence, "Colonialism, Racism, and Representation: An Introduction" (1983), in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, 5th ed., ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 238.

[48] See Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, introduction to *Multiculturalism, Postcoloniality, and Transnational Media* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 15.

[49] Thomas K. Nakayama and Robert L. Krizek, "Whiteness: A Strategic Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 81, no. 2 (August 1995): 291-309; K. E. Supriya, "White Difference: Cultural Constructions of White Identity," in *Whiteness: The Communication of Social Identity*, ed. Thomas K. Nakayama and Judith N. Martin (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1999), 129-148.

[50] Richard Dyer, *White* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 2.

through strategies such as tokenism, appropriation, hybridity, and abjection.[51] Despite progressive efforts by scholars, politicians, and even entertainers, white, heterosexual masculinity consistently emerges as dominant in the media.

In similar fashion, *intra*racial conflict can serve to advance white hegemony. By exposing extreme actions of white supremacists, for example, the white majority can continue their otherwise invisible ways of maintaining dominance, an exercise that historian Joseph Crespino referred to as "practical segregation" by moderate southerners during the civil rights movement.[52] Specifically, Crespino analyzed actions from conservative leaders in Mississippi who strategically accommodated liberal demands. In contrast, more radical white supremacists in Citizens' Councils and the Ku Klux Klan openly and violently acted against federally forced integration. While these white supremacists became the face for the backward South, moderate southerners fostered a conservative counter-revolution which gained strength in national politics by the 1980s and is still prominent today.

Discourse in national television programming can likewise purge the dominant white majority of its undesirable elements while still maintaining status quo power structures, similar to the conclusions offered by Allison Graham which I mentioned previously. Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz, for example, suggested conservative white Americans blame the rural poor for many of the nation's problems. And because they are a "classed and racial identity degraded by

[51] For example, Dana L. Cloud explored the idea of the token minority as a mask for hegemony in "Hegemony or Concordance? The Rhetoric of Tokenism in 'Oprah' Winfrey's Rags-to-Riches Biography," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 13, no. 2 (June 1996): 115-137; Helene A. Shugart argued that privileged male heterosexuality is renormalized by recoding homosexuality in formulaic mainstream films in "Reinventing Privilege: The New (Gay) Man in Contemporary Popular Media," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 20, no. 1 (March 2003): 67-91; Shugart assessed how whiteness is protected in the face of challenges by ostensibly embracing hybridity in the mediated construction of Jennifer Lopez in "Crossing Over: Hybridity and Hegemony in the Popular Media," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 4, no. 2 (May 2007): 115-141; Claire Sisco King described how hegemonic masculinity remains invisible yet reproduces its cultural privilege in "It Cuts Both Ways: *Fight Club*, Masculinity, and Abject Hegemony," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 6, no. 4 (November 2009): 366-385.

[52] Joseph Crespino, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counter Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

dominant whiteness," poor whites can be approached similarly to racial minorities in both critical studies and political action.[53] Yet poor whites differ in at least one respect from non-white minorities because of mainstream assumptions that they are not systematically victimized socially and economically—in other words, they have only themselves to blame for their condition. When one considers how often mass entertainment depicts "the South" as the central hub for white trash clichés, it is surprising that more scholars do not see the constructing of poor southern whites as media subjects or colonists under a dominant white American class. The South as a setting in storytelling serves as a proving ground for storylines that audiences want to see but not necessarily in a typically "American" setting. Just as offering a neocolonial image of a foreign country helps Westerners define themselves and maintain domination internationally, controlling representations of an internal region offers Americans a scapegoat for racial and economic problems in their own country. Although Jack Temple Kirby published well before new southern studies scholars used the term "postcolonial," he contended over thirty years ago that, "the South has always been a media colony, an elsewhere for the American majority's amusement or negative example."[54] His concept of a "media colony" is the true heart of this study.

MEDIA STUDIES

The research in this dissertation deals strictly with southern-based reality shows, but media producers, critics, and scholars might often regard all reality television as a broad genre. The concept of reality programming is not necessarily a recent invention, but its widespread acceptance is a relatively new phenomenon in the context of televisual history. Cinema,

[53] Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz, *White Trash*: *Race and Class in America* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 5. See also Jim Goad, *The Redneck Manifesto: How Hillbillies, Hicks, and White Trash Became America's Scapegoats* (New York: Touchstone, 1997).

[54] Kirby, *Media-Made Dixie*, 162.

interestingly, has often treated reality television as an inherently evil conjuring of empowered media producers. The popularity of the fictional TV shows in *The Running Man* (1987), *The Truman Show* (1998), and *The Hunger Games* (2012), for example, creates or maintains the mass moral bankruptcy of their audiences. Despite skepticism from filmmakers and early media critics, however, reality television seems to have taken hold in the fabric of popular mass consumption, proving to be more than a fad. Scholars likewise began focusing on reality television in terms of its content, its economic impact on media industries, its production techniques, and its cultural relevance. In this section, I offer an overview of the progression of reality television to its current state, followed by a brief historiography of nonfiction scholarship and the abundant literature dedicated specifically to reality television.

A Brief Genre History of Reality Television

The term "reality television" is a recent addition to mass media lexicon, but audiences have been aware of the genre and its possibilities for decades. Bradley D. Clissold traced the game show reality tradition back to *Candid Microphone* on the radio and its television version *Candid Camera*, debuting in 1949.[55] The premise of the show focused on honest and unscripted reactions from unsuspecting nonactors faced with staged scenarios and broadcast with hidden cameras and microphones. Most game shows since have been produced in a controlled studio environment, with some beginning to dabble with elaborate segments produced in the field with more realistic situations, often involving celebrities, but always contending that the participants are truly playing themselves and not following a script. In the new century, game shows such as *Survivor* have dominated the reality television landscape, while hidden camera shows like *Punk'd* remain popular.

[55] Bradley D. Clissold, "*Candid Camera* and the Origins of Reality TV: Contextualising a Historical Precedent," in *Understanding Reality Television*, ed. Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn (New York: Routledge, 2004), 33-53.

The subgenre of reality star sitcom dates back to programming such as *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, debuting in 1952 and featuring the real Nelson family playing themselves. Networks have occasionally aired special news segments showcasing the real lives of celebrities, but the Nelsons' sitcom was unique because it was on every week. More importantly, although most audience members recognized the show was scripted, scholars like Jennifer Gillan have contended that it was popular because it offered "a peak into the daily life of the actual family of a former star bandleader."[56] The characters seemed to let down their pretenses, encounter everyday problems, and actually live normal suburban lives. Gillan indeed compared the multiple similarities to the more recent reality program, *The Osbournes*, featuring former rock star Ozzy Osbourne and his family, the major difference being the shooting style and presumption of spontaneity and unrehearsed reaction to situations by the family members.

An obvious forerunner of modern reality television was PBS's 1973 series, *An American Family*, described by Laurie Ouellette and Susan Murray as "the landmark cinéma vérité series."[57] The show purported to accurately show us the lives of a regular family in California, the Louds, by unobtrusively shooting hundreds of hours of footage with handheld cameras over a six-month period in 1971. It drew both praise and criticism, seen by some as a revolutionary innovation in social scientific research, by others as deceptively manipulative and focusing largely on arguments and stress. Indeed producer Craig Gilbert himself described his creation as a "real-life soap opera."[58] Critics at the time could not agree whether it was closer to documentary or drama, but regardless of genre classification, *American Family* was a seminal

[56] Jennifer Gillan, "From Ozzie Nelson to Ozzy Osbourne: The Genesis and Development of the Reality (Star) Sitcom," in *Understanding Reality Television*, ed. Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn (New York: Routledge, 2004), 56.

[57] Laurie Ouellette and Susan Murray, "Introduction," in *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, 2nd ed., ed. Murray and Ouellette (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 4.

[58] Susan Murray, "I Think We Need a New Name For It: The Meeting of Documentary and Reality TV," in *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, 2nd ed., ed. Susan Murray and Laurie Ouellette (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 65.

event because it demonstrated that mass audiences could be interested in regularly-scheduled programming featuring non-celebrities living normal lives, with no gags, no revealing of hidden cameras, and no prize money at stake.

The popularity of reality programming increased in the late 1980s with crime shows such as *Unsolved Mysteries, America's Most Wanted* and *Cops*. Dating back to the era of yellow journalism in late nineteenth-century newspapers, crime has always been a popular subject for entertainment, and Gray Cavender and Mark Fishman traced the gritty and raw style of reality crime shows back to radio, film, and early television cop serials that seemed to draw on actual cases and used documentary-style shooting and editing.[59] In the mid-1970s, *Crime Stoppers* dramatized real crimes and asked audiences to help solve them. The successful fictional crime drama *Hill Street Blues* likewise used hand-held cameras with unusual angles, dialogue that sometimes seemed to be off-mic and overlapping, and general chaos that conjured feelings of nervousness and spontaneity. These style choices merged with public anxiety in the 1970s and 1980s that led to the advocating of retribution and strict punishment for violent criminals, a departure from the liberal approaches to criminology and rehabilitation of the 1960s. At the same time, technological and industrial changes were happening in the world of mass media. Smaller and cheaper cameras combined with increased satellite uplink capability to make easier the coverage and transmission of breaking news and petty crimes, and the proliferation of new cable and broadcast channels meant programmers needed a much bigger selection of inexpensive material.

Perhaps the show that most directly influenced the subsequent rise in reality programming was MTV's *The Real World,* premiering in 1992. According to Ouellette &

[59] Gray Cavender and Mark Fishman, "Television Reality Crime Programs: Context and History," in *Entertaining Crime: Television Reality Programs*, ed. Fishman and Cavender (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1998), 3-15.

Murray, the producers intentionally found a young but otherwise diverse group of strangers and put them in close quarters with each other with the explicit purpose of creating conflict. They filled the house with cameras and microphones and edited the massive amount of footage using fast-paced cutting and a serial episodic structure. The vérité camera style and use of available light gave credence to the claim of authentic reality, but the addition of the "confessional" interview allowed the producers to control the narrative and accentuate the drama. These techniques would largely define the reality genre up to the present date. "It could also be argued that *The Real World* trained a generation of young viewers in the language of reality TV."[60] Programming of various subgenres—game shows like *Survivor*, dating shows like *The Bachelor,* celebrity shows like *The Surreal Life,* and even spoof reality shows like *The Office*—borrowed from and built upon these techniques. The texts analyzed in this study, produced over twenty years after the first *Real World* episodes, largely follow suit.

Early Scholarship on Realism and Reality

Since its inception, reality television and its predecessors have offered rich material for scholars to turn their attention. The connection between realism and enjoyment has been debated for centuries, with Aristotle noting the pleasure that humans feel in recognizing accurate depictions or mimicry of truth and indeed adopting the purpose of art as helping us further understand reality.[61] Samuel Taylor Coleridge may have been the first to coin the phrase "suspension of disbelief" in 1817's *Biographia Literaria*, writing that even as a reader might be conscious of a text's fictional elements, willing suspension of disbelief allows for a more visceral response by letting the reader imagine the content to be possible.[62] The first motion pictures

[60] Ouellette and Murray, "Introduction," 4-5.

[61] Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. George Whalley, ed. John Baxter and Patrick Atherton (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997).

[62] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (1817; repr., London: Oxford University Press, 1958).

from Edison and the Lumière Brothers in the 19th century, of course, were nonfiction, and film scholars soon began attempts to understand and theorize on the attraction audiences had for "movies."[63] Regarding the cinema—applicable in my view to any form of mass-produced televisual entertainment—the dichotomy between the Lumières' pure photography and Georges Méliès' pure fantasy brought to the forefront questions of aesthetic preference. Realism was valued because it had been so long elusive in traditional painting and even still photography. People marveled at motion pictures because they understood the images to be replication of real life, a mechanical representation of the world, free of human error or subjectivity.

As the novelty of images of everyday life dwindled, however, cinema reached the level of art when filmmakers began to create reality, not just replicate it. The period pieces of Griffith, the persuasive montage techniques of Eisenstein, and the jarring worlds of German Expressionists became the most popular films until the sound era began in 1927. Adding the crucial element of sound reinvigorated a renewed interest in realism. Films by Jean Renoir in the 1930s and Orson Welles in the 1940s were examples of spatial realism—they were fiction, but their use of sight and sound seemed otherwise unmanipulated, with deep focus, minimal cutting, and a soundtrack with natural perspective, for example.[64] Roberto Rossellini and the neo-realists of Italy in the 1940s insisted on non-actors, locations shooting, mundane views of everyday life, and dramatization of real social issues that common people faced—familiar concepts to producers and fans of reality television today. Concurrently, what would become known as the classical Hollywood style of continuity shooting and editing dominated filmmaking in the United States and abroad. As content and subject matter pushed the limits of farce and fantasy,

[63] The following summary of theories is informed heavily by Andrew Tudor, *Theories of Film* (New York: Viking Press, 1974) and Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[64] See André Bazin, *What is Cinema?*, trans. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

filmmakers had perfected the art of realistic style in which audiences did not notice the camera or editing decisions. Whether or not producers chose to use this style in decades since, however, would depend on the subject matter, target audience, budgets, new technology, and of course trends, including the trend of reality TV popular worldwide since the 1990s.

Realism as a subject of critical and theoretical debate generally followed its popularity on screen, and most of the early people writing about it were practicing filmmakers themselves. As early as the 1920s, Russian newsreel photographer Dziga Vertov advocated an observational style of shooting, which he termed *kino pravda* ("cinema truth") and later evolved into *cinéma vérité* (also "cinema truth") in France, Free Cinema in the United Kingdom, Direct Cinema in the United States, and similar "fly-on-the-wall" approaches. Vertov believed in the camera's ability to capture pieces of "life as it is" and present it to an audience in such a way that helped them understand it better than if they had seen it with their own eyes.[65] He was a staunch opponent of dramatic fiction in cinema, and even in nonfiction he was suspicious of the dependence on straight narrative to convey values and culture, preferring to let audiences depend on images only. In practice, Vertov often shot mundane scenes of life and rarely sought out the most beautiful shots or other elements that cinema audiences expected. In a 1923 essay entitled, "On the Significance of Nonacted Cinema," he wrote that "cinema has been and still is on the wrong track…Cinema's path of development has been dictated solely by considerations of profit."[66] His choice of subjects reveals some not-so-subtle Soviet bias, however, evident in the contrast between his presentation of capitalism and socialism. People in marketplaces, for example, often

[65] Dziga Vertov, "The Man with the Movie Camera" (1928), in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

appeared haggard and desperate in his films, whereas workers in government projects seemed to enjoy their contributions to community.

Vertov also compromised some of his purist tendencies when he let his subjects become aware of and even react to the presence of his camera. Along with editing techniques such as slow motion and repeating shots, Vertov justified these choices as a way to further the audience's understanding of the true subject itself. In other words, understanding truth is still the ultimate goal, but one can (and should) use the entire repertoire of cinematic techniques to convey truth. "All these we consider to be not trick effects but normal methods to be fully used."[67] As long as the use of these techniques is transparent, the filmmaker has done honest and ethical work. Vertov, however, never acknowledged or seemed to be aware that his techniques, no matter how transparent, conveyed only his own interpretation of the real world. By definition, purist realism does not condone such an interpretation, and the vérité filmmakers of later generations resisted these techniques. Postmodern theorists, on the other hand, would embrace these techniques, relinquishing the modernist or positivist assumptions that one "truth" exists instead of individually constructed by each observer.

Similarly to Vertov, John Grierson championed an approach to realism in film grounded in his general views of society and his vision for the role of cinema. He wrote that observing and conveying real life was the ultimate potential for cinema, and he is credited with coining the term "documentary."[68] Although Grierson acknowledged that documentary might not create anything, he advocated its potential as an art form to help audiences interpret the real world. His

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[66] Dziga Vertov, "On the Significance of Nonacted Cinema" (1923), in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 36.

[67] Dziga Vertov, "From Kino-Eye to Radio-Eye" (1929), in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 88.

[68] John Grierson, "Flaherty's Poetic *Moana*" (1926), in *The Documentary Tradition*, ed. Lewis Jacobs (New York: Hopkinson & Blake, 1971), 25-27.

purist ambitions put him in agreement with Vertov, yet the two had starkly contrasting political motives behind their arguments. Whereas Vertov was a Soviet citizen and lifelong supporter of socialist agendas, Grierson was British and a strong advocate of democracy. As the industrial world became more complex in the 20th century, Grierson saw documentary film as a tool to unravel politics and industry and explain to the masses how they could stay involved in the democratic process. Many films that Grierson supervised intentionally sought to expose social problems and illuminate distinct sectors of government operations and industrial processes. He maintained that common people involved in uncommon events had the greatest potential to spark interest for audiences—a Hollywood staple then and now—but he demanded that structure and style remain subservient to the purpose of encouraging an informed citizenry. His uncommon events were therefore real events.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Siegfried Kracauer introduced a more strict philosophy of realism. In contrast to Grierson's theories based on content and social responsibility, Kracauer attempted to construct a context-free aesthetic system of film purely based on style, arguing an almost dogmatic view that film alone has the ability and responsibility to capture physical reality.[69] His core thesis was that photography is the decisive factor in establishing film content. Editing, sound, performance, and other elements are possible only because of photography. Photography's essence, furthermore, is the capturing of reality, the straightforward recording and revealing of nature. Realism is therefore the principal criterion of aesthetic value in cinema.

Like Vertov and Grierson, Kracauer also addressed the sense of pessimism in contemporary society. He believed that social problems related to the lost sense of generally agreed upon beliefs and value. People no longer felt in touch with reality because it had become

[69] Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1960).

too abstract. Kracauer was concerned that modern people did not have the ability to recognize reality and cope with the complexities of industrialization. He went as far as claiming German Expressionist filmmakers in the 1920s allowed the rise of Hitler by diverting audience attention from social reality. Cinema, Kracauer claimed, should focus on reality in order to help solve social problems. The camera was the people's answer—technology to help untangle technology. Yet the undeniable power of Hollywood in the 1940s and 1950s, according to Kracauer, directly fueled tensions between nations by inaccurately or simplistically portraying foreign characters for the purposes of self-assertion for American audiences.[70]

Many of Kracauer's contemporaries—such as Pauline Kael—pointed to obvious holes and contradictions in his aesthetic postulations. Regarding realism's lofty status as the essence of cinema, he had no evidence to back up his assertions. Indeed, some might claim that other processes in cinema are what gave it its uniqueness—montage editing, for example. Kracauer himself justified some unrealistic montage sequences by noting that they served to make the "real" sequences more real, i.e., the exception proving the rule. He even gave approval to the musical genre in which the songs seemed "natural." Yet he ignored the fact that these scenes forced a specific theme or emotion onto the viewer. The basis for Kracauer's tenet about core values was generally agreed upon by many contemporaries, although later critics would question the existence of a dominant core of beliefs and values in the first place. Instead of disappearing, this supposed dominant culture simply conceded to a diversity of beliefs and values that became more obvious after the 1960s. Nevertheless, regarding the relationship between dominant core values and Kracauer's strict mandate for realism, it seems his aesthetic was formed not out of a logical truth or "essence" of cinema but out of the context for the social use of cinema, a context

[70] Siegfried Kracauer, "National Types as Hollywood Presents Them," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 13, no. 1 (Spring 1949): 53-72.

which Kracauer denied existed. The constant concessions to popular Hollywood films led down a slippery slope from pure realism towards the acceptable use of audiences' suspension of disbelief. His later writings also discussed recording "interesting aspects of physical reality," indicating an approval of subjective choice by the filmmaker.[71] These concessions were evidence that Kracauer himself never fully understood or believed in his own prescribed aesthetic of universal realism.

A contemporary of Kracauer's, André Bazin also began publishing his theories of film in the 1940s.[72] He too argued that "true realism" was the ultimate goal for filmmakers, although he did not claim as adamantly as Kracauer did that realism is the only way to make an effective or worthy film. His ambition was to attempt a grand theory with realism as its core, but he acknowledged his concessions (unlike Kracauer) along the way. Although he did not approve of deception in photography and editing that gave the illusion of realism—what he termed "pseudorealism"—he did allow the cinema to lend realism to illusory subjects. Monster movies and science fiction were fair game, then, as long as they followed the rules of reality that they themselves set up. Ultimately, if the audience believed it, then it was more real than simply "duplicating the world outside." Bazin, however, never gave explicit description of believability that could apply to every film. And he neglected to address the issue of subjectivity in the audience. The question, "realistic or believable to whom?" has little to do with the "nature" of the film medium.

Bazin's sense of realism was open to variations, specifically two conceptions: objective realism and spatial realism. Objective realism included purist depictions of reality in

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[71] Kracauer, *Theory of Film*, 30. Conclusions and criticism here is informed heavily by Andrew Tudor, *Theories of Film*, 77-96.

[72] André Bazin, "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" (1945), in *Film Theory and Criticism*: *Introductory Readings,* 5th ed., ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 195-199. See also Bazin, *What is Cinema?*.

documentaries, the "honest" worlds of Vertov and Robert Flaherty, for example. But Bazin also deemed neo-realism as "pure" because of its faithfulness to its original subject. Filmmakers like Rossellini seemed to elicit "real" action with real consequences, not performances and dramatization. Scenes of mundane, everyday life, particularly involving the working class, represented to Bazin the greatest use of cinema to date. Spatial realism, on its own, was purely an aesthetic which could apply to works of fiction. Films like William Wyler's *The Best Years of Our Lives* and Welles' *Citizen Kane* used believable space and sound perspective, deep focus, and minimal cuts, but because their performances and storylines were clearly dramatic, they could never be considered neo-realist.

Perhaps not coincidental with the advent of television, film scholars began to concern themselves more with other elements of filmmaking and less with the merits of using realism. Realistic stories and style could be achieved on the big screen if desired, but the ability to deliver current news helped the small screen to quickly become the domain of actual real events. From my reading of Vertov, Grierson, Kracauer, and Bazin, I believe some (certainly not all) modern newscasts, documentaries, and reality television series—with no actors, no contrived storyline, and no designed mise-en-scene—would meet the standards for their ideal cinematic production, if producers could be trusted to have social conscience. Clearly, episodic or serial production of reality cinema would have been difficult in their times without the inexpensive and speedy processes available to today's producers. Perhaps more significant to note is the confusion these men may have experienced with the blurred lines of reality that modern audiences seem to accept. Interest in real subjects, not just realistic aesthetics, has led to the creation of quasi-documentaries, sitcoms in which actors play themselves, and hundreds of reality shows with

varying degrees of staging, scripting, acting, and outright fiction. The intentional blurring of reality was the principal topic that kicked off initial scholarship in reality television.

Modern Scholarship on Reality Television

Like the films mentioned earlier that envisioned reality television as the product of a warped society, early scholarship reveals a clear bias against reality programming. In *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture,* media scholar Bill Nichols was harshly critical of the reality trend in the early 1990s, describing the hybridity of reality drama as a "perversion" created by the powerful machinery of television and offered as spectacle for a passive, voyeuristic audience.[73] Richard Kilborn believed reality producers too often shaped or twisted "the very reality they claim to be presenting" and therefore confused viewers more than enlightening them.[74] The voyeuristic nature of reality television is compounded when individual audience members consider themselves part of a larger culture watching en masse. A popular show is "water cooler TV" when it becomes part of the national discourse.[75]

Once mass audiences began to embrace the new genre, television critics like film scholars before them broadened their attention from ethical and idealistic considerations to the material itself. How do reality producers establish and manipulate realism? And how do audiences consume and react to it? Ouellette and Murray pointed to the crucial commonality that defines all reality television as "an unabashedly commercial genre united less by aesthetic rules and certainties than by the fusion of popular entertainment with a self-conscious claim to the discourses of the real."[76] Popular entertainment implies not just marketable subject matter but an

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[73] Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 51.

[74] Richard Kilborn, "How Real Can You Get?: Recent Developments in 'Reality' Television," *European Journal of Communication* 9, no. 4 (December 1994): 431.

[75] Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn, *Reality TV: Realism and Revelation* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005), 11.

[76] Ouellette & Murray, "Introduction," 3.

embracing of television's conventional methods of delivery. In other words, a show's own self-consciousness combines with established televisual language to create the framework that lends legitimacy and increases audience interest.

Ultimately, everything "real" on television is subject to a producer's interpretation. Jeremy Butler posited that all content must be recast in "the language of television" before audiences can consume and understand it.[77] The handheld cameras and voyeuristic angles that *The Real World* and other shows established are part of that language, along with the "pseudomonologue" that purports to be a confessional space within which the subject speaks directly to the audience. Yet these confessionals are in fact a product of an interview conducted by a producer, and even the voyeuristic shots and supposedly pure observational scenes are pretenses—examples of a "sham," in Butler's words—because cameras and producers in the room will often affect behavior and dialogue.[78] Looking further into the production and post-production processes, producers must shoot hundreds or perhaps thousands of hours of footage and then shape characters and storylines with montage sequences, music cues, and other techniques borrowed from fictional storytelling in order to maximize audience enjoyment and maintain high ratings that were once quite elusive for nonfiction content.

Although reality participants and producers are often bound by confidential agreements not to divulge any trade secrets, plenty of evidence exists to confirm the manipulation of otherwise real characters and situations.[79] How, then, do audiences interpret these manipulations? Stuart Hall assumed that audiences must be aware of the basic liberties that

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[77] Jeremy Butler, *Television: Critical Methods and Applications,* 3rd ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2007), 83.

[78] Ibid., 94.

[79] See for example George Bagley, "A Mixed Bag: Negotiating Claims in MTV's *The Real World*," *Journal of Film and Video* 53 (Summer 2001): 61-76; and Robin Nabi, Erica N. Biely, Sara J. Morgan, and Carmen R. Stitt, "Reality-Based Television Programming and the Psychology of Its Appeal," *Media Psychology,* 5, no. 4 (December 2003): 303–330.

media producers take in order to deliver content.[80] In the most extreme of examples, seeing a crewmember on-screen scurrying to get out of a shot or muddy water hitting a camera lens draws attention to the production process and can momentarily interrupt the important suspension of disbelief. Even without obvious production mistakes, audiences are likely aware that what they see on screen is subject to the filming process. Butler wrote that, "criticizing reality television for not being real enough is too easy" and "condescendingly presumes an extremely naïve, and probably non-existent, viewer who does not know that television's reality has been manipulated."[81]

We can assume a certain level of sophistication among many audience members, but specific understanding of audience effects is extremely difficult to ascertain when even blatant manipulations of reality could conceivably have subconscious effects on viewers. The more subtle conventions and stereotypes that have concerned cultural studies scholars for decades can easily apply to the study of reality television. Rebecca L. Stephens, for example, analyzed reality shows that glorified conventional female aspirations regarding marriage and motherhood. Programs such as *A Wedding Story* and *A Baby Story* hide social fears by "normalizing rituals that serve to erase ambiguity."[82] The producers use the stories of the participants to embrace supposed universal feminine values and in turn deny the potential for alternate values and lifestyles. Furthermore, these representations are powerful because they construct objects of mass desire which indeed seem attainable. Stephens' qualitative textual analysis methods can be

[80] Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage Publications/The Open University, 2003).

[81] Butler, *Television*, 119.

[82] Rebecca L. Stephens, "Socially Soothing Stories? Gender, Race and Class in TLC's *A Wedding Story* and *A Baby Story,*" in *Understanding Reality Television,* ed. Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn (New York: Routledge, 2004), 207.

used to study many other groups, communities, and subsets of the larger population, as this present study aims to do.

Like qualitative studies, empirical studies can also help us understand the effects that reality shows have on their audiences. The detailed surveys of Zizi Papacharissi and Andrew L. Mendelson revealed that a significant number of reality fans perceived the content as realistic, and many audience members used reality television to fulfill a sense of voyeurism and companionship.[83] Specifically, they found that people of lower socioeconomic mobility and fewer outlets for their own interpersonal interaction were most affected by reality television's claim to realism. Other studies support claims that viewers often want to identify with real people and indeed believe they are experiencing someone's real life drama.[84] After conducting a focus group study of young reality television fans, Alice Hall concluded that audience members might be willing to negotiate the mix of realistic and contrived images and interpret a viewing event as a plausible and authentic experience of real life.[85] Using the example above, seeing water splash on the camera lens might actually confirm that the events portrayed are real and that the crew is simply trying their best to capture interesting reality as it occurs. A mistake-free scene could conversely be interpreted as less believable, more akin to the high production values of Hollywood cinema rather than observational documentary. How believable the shows are might not concern media producers and executives, as long as audiences are watching and advertisers continue to buy airtime. Communication scholars, on the other hand, should clearly concern themselves considering the potential to perpetuate exploitive hegemonic messages.

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[83] Zizi Papacharissi and Andrew L. Mendelson, "An Exploratory Study of Reality Appeal: Uses and Gratifications of Reality TV Shows," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 51, no. 2 (June 2007): 355-370.

[84] See for example Samuel Ebersole and Robert Woods, "Motivations for Viewing Reality Television: A Uses and Gratifications Analysis," *Southwestern Mass Communication Journal* 23, no. 1 (Fall 2007): 23-42; and Kristin M. Barton, "Reality Television Programming and Diverging Gratifications: The Influence of Content on Gratifications Obtained," *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media* 53, no. 3 (July 2009): 460-476.

[85] Alice Hall, "Viewer Perceptions of Reality TV," *Communication Quarterly* 54, no. 2 (May 2006): 191-211.

As previously mentioned, few studies have attempted to merge interdisciplinary strategies involving postcolonialism with reality television studies, but I will mention two that I have found in order to demonstrate possible approaches. In 2006, Leslie Steeves argued that reality shows such as *Survivor* set in Africa continued a colonization tradition established years ago in other media and also created new ways of exoticizing and commodifying the entire continent.[86] Yuval Karniel and Amit Lavie-Dinur's 2011 study of Palestinian representation on Israeli reality television demonstrated that programming reflects clear Jewish hegemony by portraying Arabs as the "other" for the majority Jewish audience.[87] One could argue that these studies, which frame the relationship between dominant and victimized as colonial, represent the same approach as other studies of reality television and its exploitation potential, simply with different terminology. While ample literature exists examining exploitive portrayals of women and other racial groups in the United States and abroad, I have yet to find scholarship on the colonial status of working-class southern whites in reality television.

Humor Theories

At this point I will briefly depart from my review of reality television literature in order to examine general humor theories that I apply to my analysis of reality programming. I find some approaches and terminology in humor theory to be useful in informing negotiated and oppositional readings in this study because of the abundance of humor and lighthearted drama in reality programming. Because all humor theories suggest a relationship between the joke teller and the audience, and because television is a mass medium, TV comedy is a cultural phenomenon.

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[86] H. Leslie Steeves, "Commodifying Africa on U.S. Network Reality Television," *Communication, Culture, & Critique* 1, no. 4 (December 2008): 416-446.

[87] Yuval Karniel and Amit Lavie-Dinur, "Entertainment and Stereotype: Representation of the Palestinian Arab Citizens of Israel in Reality Shows on Israeli Television," *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research* 50, no. 1 (March 2001): 65-87.

Analysis of humor has roots in the works of Plato, who wrote that comic situations often involve putting characters in their place by superior characters or by the reader.[88] In *Leviathan*, Thomas Hobbes is credited with the creation of a specific theory of "superiority" when he described the psychological benefits that can occur by laughing at others. By recognizing fault in someone else, one feels relief and even elation not to share that fault. Hobbes generally wrote of extreme cases of superiority, such as encountering "some deformed thing in another," and he had little regard for those who laugh at deficiencies in others simply as a means to improve their own self-esteem.[89] When applied to television comedy, Brett Mills suggested a tie-in with cultural studies because a feeling of superiority invites mass audiences to laugh at "the behavior of marginalized groups…through cultural texts assembled by those from privileged positions."[90] Hobbes' theory has indeed been successfully operationalized by media scholars such as Dolf Zillmann who empirically tested audience response to superiority in comedic situations.[91]

Despite Hobbes' personal preference, laughs at the expense of others are widespread in mass media entertainment. This kind of tendentious humor is what Sigmund Freud identified as the most powerful in creating laughs.[92] Freud suggested that the more hostile and damaging a joke is to the victim, the funnier it will be for an audience who roots against the victim. Building on this premise, Mills identified what he labeled as "relief" theory of comedy which allows expression of otherwise rude and offensive subject matter. To Freud, suppression of such subjects as sex, violence, and death can lead to unhealthy mental states, and humor offers a

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[88] Plato, "Philebus," in *The Dialogues of Plato*, vol. 3, ed. and trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901), 121-209.

[89] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1651; repr., Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1968), 125.

[90] Brett Mills, *The Sitcom* (Edinburgh, England: Edinburgh University Press, Ltd, 2009), 82.

[91] Dolf Zillmann, "Disparagement Humor," in *Handbook of Humor Research*, ed. Paul E. McGhee and Jeffrey H. Goldstein, vol. 1*, Basic Issues* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1983), 85-107.

[92] Sigmund Freud, *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious* (1905), trans. Abraham Arden Brill (Stilwell, KS: Digireads.com Publishing, 2008).

release valve.[93] When these uncomfortable subjects also involve a victim, the potential for laughs increases.

The opposite kind of humor that Freud identified is innocuous, victimless humor which often depends on simple wordplay and, on its own, has limited comedic power. Freud, however, considered the incorporation of innocuous humor to be necessary for tendentious humor to have full effect. As Zillmann noted in his translation of Freud,

> He believed that the display of blunt, demeaning hostility cannot be enjoyed, for reasons of social censure, unless it is playfully embellished with innocent jokework. Freud argued that this jokework would bribe our senses by camouflaging the associated hostile component of humor. It is the presence of innocent features, then, that makes unacceptable derision acceptable. It sets us free to enjoy what we otherwise would not.[94]

An important result of Freud's identification of both kinds of humor working together is the formulation of the "misattribution" theory of humor by Zillmann and Jennings Bryant. Their study provided evidence that material is much more humorous when audiences clearly recognize the butt of a hostile joke yet are not forced to consider the true meaning or cause of the hostility.[95] Examples of misattribution surfacing in my study include moments when characters are mocked for being overweight or uneducated. We may not know precisely why an audience member might laugh at these conventional jokes, but when we consider the context and subtext involved, we may connect the scenes with actual obesity and education issues that plague southern states. These serious social problems alone are likely not humorous to most audiences, but they are masked and supplemented by innocuous jokework that allows audiences to laugh. Obesity and poor education then become further normalized as essentially southern.

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[93] Mills, *The Sitcom*, 88.

[94] Dolf Zillmann, "Humor and Comedy," in *Media Entertainment: The Psychology of Its Appeal,* ed. Dolf Zillmann and Peter Vorderer (Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 2000), 48.

[95] Dolf Zillmann and Jennings Bryant, "Misattribution Theory of Tendentious Humor," *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 16, no. 2 (March 1980): 146-160.

Another common humor theory that critics readily apply to television comedy analysis is the "incongruity" theory which originates in the work of Immanuel Kant and contends that humor "comes from the surprise of confounded expectations."[96] Sitcoms and other forms of television comedy rely on the unexpected, but they also require quick understanding of the joke by the audience. One might note how sitcoms, including some reality television sitcoms, deliver jokes in rapid succession by setting up easy-to-understand situations. These situations often build expectation and then confound the audience with something incongruent and unexpected yet easily understood. The necessity for jokes to be "gotten" quickly by the audiences often depends on the use of accepted social norms and recognizable deviant character-types. Cultural studies scholars have indeed criticized television comedy for repeated mockery of recognizable character types that audiences might interpret as representative of real individuals and groups. Comedy therefore presents the possibility of reinforcing unhealthy and even hostile differences among groups, significantly between the majority culture and traditionally disenfranchised minorities based on race, class, gender, and other identifiers. "Comedy often involves an understanding of who is 'us' and who is 'them,' with 'them' often forming the butt of jokes made by 'us.'"[97]

Zillmann also proposed that an audience member's "disposition" heavily influences how she/he will react to a joke, concluding that humor "increases with negative sentiments and decreases with positive sentiments toward the debased agent."[98] In other words, we are more likely to find something humorous if the victim of a joke is a character that we dislike. Although this may be true in general terms, during the course of a television show such as reality or

[96] Mills, *The Sitcom,* 82.
[97] Brett Mills, *Television Sitcom* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), 11.
[98] Dolf Zillmann and Joanne R. Cantor, "A Disposition Theory of Humor and Mirth," in *Humour and Laughter: Theory, Research, and Applications*, ed. Antony J. Chapman and Hugh C. Foot (London: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 1976), 112.

sitcom, the disposition of the audience is constantly changing from character to character. Programs "aggregate a considerable number of humorous encounters, one following another in rapid succession. The encounters amount to miniature plots."[99] So, referring back to the hypothetical example of the obese character, audience members may not root against him in general, but the producers set up this particular moment as an opportunity to align with other characters who are not obese. The set-up and resolution of the joke comprises a miniature plot in which audience disposition is against one character, but within seconds, our disposition can shift so that he is no longer the brunt of subsequent jokes.

It is important to further distinguish between temporary and established disposition. A writer can skillfully shift audience disposition from character to character in order to facilitate new jokes. However, each audience member also brings personal disposition to the experience. This inherent foundation encompasses personality characteristics, current mood state, and predetermined opinions relating to race, class, politics, and other broad issues. Personal disposition is unlikely to waiver from joke to joke, or even through the course of an entire show. On the contrary, inherent personal disposition will be a major factor in determining differences in tastes for certain kinds of humor among audience members. These differences in taste ultimately affect who will select certain media texts and find them entertaining.

Because the aforementioned theories of humor rely heavily on the pre-existing relationship between the joke teller and the audience, we must acknowledge the difficulty in interpreting any joke from a televised reality show or sitcom. The relationship between the many layers of producers and the thousands or millions of people in the audience is too complex to understand. Analysis must therefore encompass much more than interpretation of any single joke, character type, or scenario. Regarding stereotyping of groups, for example, Mills noted

[99] Zillmann, "Humor and Comedy," 42.

that a "stupid, ignorant and self-deluded" character does not necessarily represent an entire racial, religious, gendered, or classed group.[100] Fully unpacking the meaning of televised programming requires careful analysis of many subtleties, including what Mills labeled "cues" that productions give their audience to help them understand the intent of humorous scenarios.[101] Cues in reality television might be less obvious than those in sitcoms (which often contain laugh tracks), yet deciphering the cues is part of the cultural studies process and can indeed help audiences know not only when to laugh but to know specifically why they are laughing. Depending on the cues provided, Mills' example of the "stupid, ignorant, and self-deluded" character might in fact serve to break down stereotypes instead of reinforce them if presented in a satirical manner. Reactions shots, for example, are vital cues in creating audience disposition for or against certain characters and in interpreting the intent of a joke. Cues might also include promotional material, on-screen titles, sound effects, music, and even popular and critical reviews that frame a series before we see an actual episode.

As previously mentioned, one of the characteristics of hegemony is its ability to mask its own mechanisms. By methodically applying these principles of humor to analysis of reality television texts, we might be able to form oppositional readings and understand how comical situations disguise their exploitive potential. Furthermore, hegemony has the elusive ability to gain consent from the subordinate classes themselves. Southerners, in effect, can consume reality television, laugh at it, and even participate in its creation, and yet not understand how it maintains their subordination.

[100] Mills, *Television Sitcom*, 110.
[101] Mills, *The Sitcom*, 92-94.

PRODUCTION STUDIES

My final examination of literature involves the field known as "production studies" or "production culture." Despite the obvious pervasiveness of the media in most of our lives, media critics and historians have often misunderstood industry culture itself and many of its most powerful subcultures. The film and television industries, which many people simply call "Hollywood," have occasionally been the subject of cultural studies using sociological and anthropological methods. In 1941, Leo Rosten, a novelist and scholar who also wrote for film and television, published an early work on the culture and social structure of the film industry titled *Hollywood: The Movie Colony, The Movie Makers*.[102] Rosten offered specific data such as executive and actor salaries, but he also discussed personal information and informal relationships that affected how people in the industry worked together and created the entertaining media that had seemed to take over the world by the late 1930s. In 1950, Hortense Powdermaker conversely set out to understand how the culture within Hollywood might have adversely affected the quality of films being released at the time.[103] The "Golden Era" of Hollywood had clearly passed, and Powdermaker concluded that several factors were contributing to a general anxiety in the industry, notably the fear of financial flops and the resistance to put out anything controversial. What may be more interesting to cultural scholars was Powdermaker's sense of frustration during the data collection process. The many dichotomies in the industry included: official vs. unofficial rules of production, distribution, and exhibition; regulation vs. self-regulation; rigid rules of apprenticeships vs. favoritism and nepotism; and widely publicized deals vs. backroom negotiations. These industry peculiarities combined with the growing sprawl of the city of Los Angeles to make impossible a true cultural

[102] Leo C. Rosten, *Hollywood: The Movie Colony, The Movie Makers* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1941).

[103] Hortense Powdermaker, *Hollywood the Dream Factory* (New York: Little, Brown & Company, 1950).

understanding of Hollywood workers and insiders. Since the 1950s, the landscape of the industry has only grown in complexity. Yet attempts at cultural understanding have largely conceded to more general social studies of the business and macroeconomics of Hollywood, examining aggregate numbers and their fluctuations after major changes in practice and regulation.

At the other extreme are inquiries of individual filmmakers, power producers, and gossip. Individual auteur and critical examinations (even of agents, productions, and organizations) are often superficial in nature, meaning these case studies are not considered in context with the larger industry. Many human interest and journalistic accounts have appeared concerning industrial practices, but they rarely have theoretical application past the individual cases they studied, i.e., they lacked any critical framework for understanding broader concerns. Authors of these endeavors certainly had justification and sound research methods, and we can understand their hesitancy or inability to attempt broad cultural understanding of the people in the industry. This understanding is only getting more difficult given the changes in convergence and interconnections in all aspects of media.

Some useful cultural studies contributions appeared in the 1980s, however, possibly in response to the growing importance of cultural history and cultural studies in many other fields after decades of dominance by social history and studies. These contributions demonstrated how dominant cultural and capitalist imperatives infiltrated the industry and influenced production. Todd Gitlin's 1983 book, *Inside Prime Time*, was a groundbreaker in critical media studies, focusing on negotiations among many people within many media industries.[104] By conducting over 200 interviews and months of observations, he raised the standard for media historians and other researchers who look at creative production processes and their structural constraints.

[104] Todd Gitlin, *Inside Prime Time* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983).

Because he chose to examine television networks in the late 1970s (by far the most powerful media entities at that time period), he exposed the intersection of many industrial practices, including advertising, audience research, affiliate relationships, and program development. His descriptions allowed us to get "inside" the industry and understand the processes of production by comprehensively explaining the forces that dictate texts and schedules in primetime programming, the ultimate goal of production studies, in my opinion.

Joseph Turow's 1992 exploration of media culture was not quite as broad as Gitlin's, yet his thick descriptions of the culture in one case study provided solid understanding of the industry.[105] He looked at the various relationships between anyone involved with the operation of one specific media company, including above- and below-the line workers (from executives down to unskilled laborers). Among many interesting finds, he demonstrated that each level and individual relationship is unique and potentially masked by broad generalizations of rank. Not to say that power and hierarchy do not exist, but media personnel work within complex circumstances that enable many employees to influence the media product before it is delivered to the masses.

Recently, production culture has attracted a new generation of scholars interested in understanding how workers in all levels of Hollywood see themselves and their industry. By unraveling the social and cultural contexts of the daily lives and processes in Hollywood, we are better equipped to analyze their products—the films and TV shows that are such a big part of culture at large. John Caldwell's 2008 *Production Culture* and Vicki Mayer, Miranda Banks, & Caldwell's 2009 collection of essays in *Production Studies* are two of the major works in cultural

[105] Joseph Turow, *Media Systems in Society: Understanding Industries, Strategies, and Power* (New York: A.B. Longman, 1992).

studies of the media.[106] In the introduction to Mayer et al., the authors described their interest in how media producers form communities and converse with each other using shared practices and language. As they cope with constant changes in economics, politics, industry, and audiences, they shape their own identities and careers and, in the process, create culture with the texts they produce. Like other burgeoning fields, production studies scholars use theories and methods borrowed from other social sciences and humanities, including ethnographic case study, to generate descriptions of producers and industries, formulate theories, and examine power relationships similar to other cultural studies.

The challenges presented by this approach include gaining access to insiders who are often the most important units of observation but naturally protective of revealing trade secrets for fear of inhibiting their product's marketability and the anxiety concerning reprisals from future employers. Without direct observation of media processes, one would have to depend on interviews and historical records which are subject to memory and context. Scholars must also beware of the brilliant spinning of media products by producers and distributers. What may appear to be honest "insider" looks at media practices—such as "behind-the-scenes" videos—often construct a preferred perception that media producers want to instill in audiences. Even direct observation, such as I am proposing in the ethnographic portion of my study, can be deceptive when individuals consciously or subconsciously hide the true nature of their intentions. These local considerations combine with the complex interconnectedness and rapid evolutionary change in all media industries, texts, and audiences, problematizing the conclusions we wish to make.[107]

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[106] John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); and Vicki Mayer, Miranda J. Banks, and John Thornton Caldwell, eds., *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

[107] Mayer et al, *Production Studies*, 26.

To address these challenges, Caldwell conceded that his methods of research were "messy," meaning he had to remain open to using multiple methods and constantly reevaluating and crosschecking his data based on new information. His process in fact required years of observing and interviewing Hollywood workers, from the lowest production assistants to the most powerful executives, from technical and trade personnel to artistic and creative types. He supplemented his observations and interviews with textual analysis, not of finished products, but of internal artifacts from workers and companies (such as corporate videos, internal memos, or blogs from insiders). He distinguished data in terms of embeddedness in the industry. Publically disclosed texts, for example, were often less reliable than "fully embedded" deep texts and rituals.[108] He was wary of anyone's self-importance and excuses yet he valued self-analysis and self-reflexivity. The subtitle of his book is in fact "Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television." The many self-ethnographic accounts contributed to what he called "critical industrial practice."

These practices lead to the formulation of Caldwell's two principal theories. *Industrial auteur theory* explores how industrial activities place constraints on creativity and challenge conventions of authorship. Companies or undefined groups, not individuals, create Hollywood products. *Industrial identity theory* expands on authorship, marketing, corporate image, financial responsibility and other industrial factors that directly or indirectly influence what we see on the screen. For my purposes, I am principally interested in how Caldwell's notion of self-reflexivity influences content, creates a cycle of expectation between audience and media producer, and provides content for audience interpretation—the creation of culture by a culture. Reflexivity and other forms of industry "self-theorizing" usually relate to building or maintaining an audience, including mass audiences (i.e., the paying consumers of Hollywood products) or local,

[108] Caldwell, *Production Culture,* 346-349.

inside audiences (i.e., colleagues and potential employers) whether for financial gain or egotistical reasons.

On a bigger scale, media corporations disguise their promotions as practitioner talk, sometimes baiting audience feedback with "fake buzz."[109] These acts of symbolic marketing create self-images for public consumption. Self-reflexivity constantly dictates that individuals and companies maintain the illusion of artistic integrity even as they mine anything of financial value. Caldwell characterized Hollywood as the "forced marriage of art and commerce," and the personalities involved in both tend to be volatile when the need to create quality work clashes with the need to generate money.[110] Caldwell's broad conclusion was that Hollywood is not just a *producer* of culture in the form of film and television but a collection of cultures with their own values and modes of expression. The media industry as a whole is an aggregate of communities and discourses which are difficult to unravel and constantly changing as fast as or faster than society as a whole. To complicate matters, the industry invests heavily in producing self-analysis and critical knowledge about itself, in the form of metaphors and mythology, much of which is difficult for researchers to frame or interpret.

Examples of specific studies from Mayer et al that interest me include Elana Levine's reflections on geography and identity.[111] She studied a series produced and developed outside of Hollywood (in this case, Canada) and concluded that producers had a dualistic pride in their series' national setting and its presumed appeal to American audiences. Group identity or uniform commitment within a production team can therefore affect the content of the resulting texts. In another chapter, Stephen Zafirau conducted ethnographic research of film producers

[109] Ibid., 62.
[110] Ibid., 232.
[111] Elana Levine, "Crossing the Border: Studying Canadian Television Production," in *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries*, ed. Vicki Mayer, Miranda J. Banks, and John Thornton Caldwell (New York: Routledge, 2009), 154-166.

and observed that they often represent themselves alternatively as either members of their audience or superior to their audience in order to justify their career decisions.[112] He demonstrated that producers inevitably constructed an assumed, monolithic audience; that true audience knowledge is indispensable to insiders; and that public discourse from producers about their audience is often unreliable for researchers. Many studies such as these demonstrate the wealth of new knowledge that can be obtained through observation of media producers in action.

What specifically makes the study of production culture relevant to me is that it bridges important gaps. Some people may make assumptions about Hollywood's general tendency to create stereotypes and inform audience perception of reality, identity, and other social definitions, but understanding production culture helps explain the connection between general market forces and audience reception by examining the media industry itself, i.e., the "middle man." Insiders have traditionally found academic conclusions of their industry to be self-evident. "So what?" they might say. They already know that most people in the business have selfish motives, are greedy, are divas, etc. They understand the process of mentoring, pitching, greenlighting, giving notes, and negotiating credit that Caldwell and others explicate. However, even insiders may not always connect the dots and understand the nature of their own product until an objective eye points it out to them.

Furthermore, as in other disciplines or subfields, the results of any particular study of production culture are not always meant to be bombshells. My study, for example, will be very much a local case study of one particular production over the course of a few days. It is not designed to generate a comprehensive description of Hollywood culture but instead may help, even if only marginally, better understand potential ways that media texts are created and

[112] Stephen Zafirau, "Audience Knowledge and the Everyday Lives of Cultural Producers in Hollywood," in *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries*, ed. Vicki Mayer, Miranda J. Banks, and John Thornton Caldwell (New York: Routledge, 2009), 190-202.

delivered to audiences. This understanding may be seen as a small but important part of the puzzle of both our society and of individual human nature.

As with the other approaches discussed in this review, I have not found any ethnographic study of film or television culture relating to the production of southern-themed content. As I mentioned, I will consider in my study Caldwell's concept of self-reflexivity and how it can influence content. The producers and subjects of today's reality television have themselves been media consumers all their lives. What do they discuss internally about the scenarios they present onscreen and how their audiences will read them? Are they familiar with conventions from prior iterations of southern content? Do native southerners approach the material differently than non-southerners? To complicate analysis, Caldwell would remind us of his industrial auteur theory that individual creativity and authorship is largely an illusion because of the nature of widespread collective labor and the marketing and business strategies of media corporations. I will therefore avoid the temptation to directly attribute a causal effect between the actions of individuals on the set and specific audience interpretations. My observations will instead help inform my broad conclusions based on analysis of many texts and the larger media environments in which they are involved.

CHAPTER THREE

FROM BYRD TO BEVERLY HILLS: A SURVEY OF SOUTHERN NONFICTION

Popular representations of poor and working-class southern whites in mainstream nonfiction media go well beyond the recent trend in reality television. The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the colonial and neocolonial relationship between the media, its consumers, and poor or working-class whites in the South. A thorough analysis of all past nonfiction media is beyond the scope of this study, but I have synthesized an array of texts and secondary analyses which substantiate claims by many scholars that authors and producers of popular media have historically sketched stereotyped portraits of poor southern whites.[1] Furthermore, media producers and consumers have applied these portraits broadly to all southern whites—not just the economically disadvantaged. My objective here is to concretely identify specific conventions from almost three centuries of media production, how these conventions have evolved over time, and how they may or may not play out in current reality television.

I divide this chapter chronologically and based on medium, beginning with travel writers and essayists and moving to audio and visual media, including film, radio, and finally television. The chapter concludes with descriptions and analysis of two direct progenitors of today's southern reality television—the development and cancellation of *The Real Beverly Hillbillies* (CBS) and the immensely popular *The Simple Life* (Fox, 2003-2007). In the process, I develop

[1] In addition to the many scholarly texts in my literature review, examples of more complete histories of poor southern whites in media include J. Wayne Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People: The South's Poor Whites* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1979); and Patrick Huber, "A Short History of Redneck: The Fashioning of a Southern White Masculine Identity," *Southern Cultures* 1, No. 2 (Winter 1995): 145-166.

my theory that each new medium seems to have utilized a cycle of southern exploitation and that, prior to the current trend of reality television, the South as a distinct media colony had begun to lose its essential nature. Although I focus on nonfiction accounts and studies, I note in this chapter the strong relationship between nonfictional and fictional writing, filmmaking, radio, and television programming. Specifically, I use the term "pseudo-documentary" to address media texts that purport to be true, presented to readers and audiences with similar styles as nonfiction storytelling, using literary conventions of biography, travelogues, observational documentary film, and modern reality television. The texts I choose to analyze are strictly contemporary, meaning they are set in the time period in which they were produced—period films, for example, even supposedly "true" stories, cannot be read as observational documentary because the action is clearly staged for the camera. Southern content, however, is often tied with past values or primitive ways of life, so deciphering which texts to include in my analysis is admittedly a challenge. Likewise, the blurred line between fiction and reality varies from text to text, and lacking documentation that a particular text is staged or real and how it was interpreted by readers and audiences, I can only depend on my own analysis to determine its appropriateness for this study and its influence on the current trend of southern reality television.

TRAVEL WRITERS AND ESSAYISTS, 1728-1900

The earliest chronicles of poor whites in the American South likely originated with travelers and transplants from Europe and northern colonies capable of publishing in media centers like London, New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. The first substantial descriptions are often attributed to William Byrd, II, and his *Histories of the Dividing Line Betwixt Virginia and North Carolina*, appearing in 1728. As a wealthy and highly educated Virginia landowner, Byrd surveyed the colonial boundaries between his home state and North Carolina and, along the way,

described the majority of the people he observed as "indolent wretches" with a "disposition to laziness."[2] Similarly to explorers' descriptions of primitive peoples in tropical lands, Byrd theorized that comfortable climate and easy access to food fostered heavy drinking, disrespect for the law, sleeping late, and "aversion to labor," among other uncivil attributes.[3] This group of people Byrd described were relatively small in number, yet the literary convention took hold in the national consciousness, and with the wealthy planter class representing a small fraction of the population, the logical deduction forwarded by these conventions was that the majority of white southerners were not middle class workers but poor and unsavory white trash.[4] By ignoring individual character and aggregating all poor whites together as one "lubber" class, Byrd's report represents, in the words of Southern Studies scholar Jolene Hubbs, a "germinal work of racial and socioeconomic formation, because it bears witness to a dividing line not simply between states of the future United States but also between states of whiteness."[5] As I demonstrate further in this chapter, Byrd's descriptions are indeed germinal because of their similarities to countless future works of fiction and nonfiction. According to M. Thomas Inge, Byrd "fathered a long-continuing series of descriptions of poor white degenerates, extending through nineteenth-century southern writing, the humor of the Old Southwest, and local color fiction, down to Erskine Caldwell's lustful and depraved sharecroppers."[6]

As the colonies progressed toward independence and nationhood in the eighteenth century, more specific accounts of southern white degeneracy emerged. Although comedy may

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[2] William Byrd quoted in Patrick Gerster, "Stereotypes," and from Merrill M. Skaggs, "Lower Class, Literary," in *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, ed. Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 1126, 1398.

[3] Skaggs, "Lower Class, Literary," 1398.

[4] See Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People;* Frank Owsley, *The Plain Folk of the Old South* (1949; repr., Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008).

[5] Jolene Hubbs, "Revolting Whiteness: Race, Class, and the American Grotesque," (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2009), 1.

[6] M. Thomas Inge, "Agrarianism in Literature," in *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, 845.

not have been the purpose of these writers, today's readers might chuckle at their unmitigated lack of political correctness. In 1737, a Scotsman named Gabriel Johnston, serving as governor of North Carolina, wrote that lubbers in his adopted state "build themselves sorry huts and live in a beastly sort of plenty." He blamed the poor conditions in rural areas on the people themselves who were, from his perspective, "devoted to calumny, lying, and the vilest tricking and cheating."[7] In the 1760s, Charles Woodmason claimed a common cultural practice among rural Carolina men was

> swopping their wives as Cattel, and living in a State of Nature, more irregularly and unchastely than the Indians…No shoes or stockings—Children run half naked. The Indians are better Cloathed and Lodged…They were as rude in their Manners as the Common Savages, and hardly a degree removed from them.[8]

John Fothergill of London, in likening the southern colonies to the island colonies in the West Indies, described southern whites as idle and extravagant, particularly in comparison with the industrious farmers of the northern colonies.[9] Another observer wrote in 1783 that

> Southern colonies are overrun with a swarm of men from the western parts of Virginia and North Carolina, distinguished by the name of Crackers. Many of these people are descended from convicts…, and inherit so much profligacy from their ancestors, that they are the most abandoned set of men on earth.[10]

Heavy drinking was the prominent theme in the 1790 *American Museum* article "A Georgia Planter's Method of Spending His Time."[11] Although this particular article's purpose is an examination of the aristocratic class in Georgia, what is interesting is the preoccupation with southern culture and the attempts to merge all southern whites into broad archetypes by non-

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[7] Gabriel Johnston quoted in Bernard Bailyn, *The Peopling of British North America: An Introduction*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1988), 177.

[8] Charles Woodmason quoted in Gary B. Nash, *Red, White, and Black: The Peoples of Early America* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974), 235.

[9] See descriptions of Fothergill and other writers in James Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 12.

[10] Anthony Stokes quoted in A. Roger Ekirch, *Bound for America: The Transportation of British Convicts to the Colonies, 1718-1775* (Oxford: Clarendon Paperbacks, 1987), 193.

[11] Cobb, *Away Down South*, 14.

southern intellectuals. The multitude of publications demonstrates a commonly held perception of southern people as distinct and inferior. Southerners themselves likely ignored or were not privy to these evocative and disparaging descriptions and showed little interest—or ability—to counter with their own observations during the eighteenth century.

Nineteenth-century travelers continued to remark about the differences in the regions leading up to the Civil War. The earliest known use of the term "redneck," meant as a slur for evangelical North Carolina Presbyterians, came from Anne Royall's 1830 *Mrs. Royall's Southern Tour.*[12] In 1850, a New Hampshire school teacher named Emily P. Burke, while working in Georgia, observed the masses of "crackers, clay-eaters, and sandhillers" who, "though degraded and ignorant as the slaves, are, by their little fairer complexions entitled to all privileges of legal suffrage."[13] Her portrait of the intimate relationship between poor southern whites and the earth echoes Governor Johnston from a century prior. Along with the vulgar description of the Georgia whites she encountered, Burke implies resentment that the southern white "masses" would consider themselves her equal.

As a civil war became imminent, some writers sought to explain potential reasons for the tension felt across the country. In *The Impending Crisis of the South* (1857), Hinton Rowan Helper blamed the system of slavery for the impoverished conditions of the non-slaveholding majority of southerners.[14] Yet in a chapter dedicated to "The Poor Illiterate Whites of the South," Helper essentially claims that even without slavery, they could never rise above a servant class. Daniel Hundley, an Alabama writer, took a more defensive tone in a chapter called "Poor White Trash" in his *Social Relations in our Southern States* from 1860. He distanced himself from the lower-class people in his state by commenting on their "natural stupidity" and "dullness

[12] Anne Royall quoted in Huber, "A Short History of Redneck," 163.
[13] Emily P. Burke quoted in Huber, "A Short History of Redneck," 152.
[14] Hinton Rowan Helper, *The Impending Crisis of the South* (1857, New York: Collier Books, 1963).

of intellect" and specifically expressed disgust at their dirty living conditions.[15] Although he believed poor whites to be descendants from convicts, he nevertheless blamed them for their own economic conditions. "They are about the laziest two-legged animals that walk erect on the face of the Earth. Even their motions are slow, and their speech is a sickening drawl."[16] This strategy of elite southerners ridiculing poor whites represents a unique form of colonialism, consistent with hegemony and what I have previously identified as neocolonialism.

Appearing concurrently with these nonfiction travelogues and essays was a new form of literature, which scholars have labeled Old Southwest humor.[17] Characters like Ransy Sniffle from Augustus Baldwin Longstreet's 1835 *Georgia Scenes* were rude and disgusting to the sophisticated travelers they encountered.[18] Longstreet and other writers who followed, including Johnson J. Hooper, George Washington Harris, and Joseph Glover Baldwin, were southern Whigs with an anti-Jacksonian agenda, afraid of the growing power of working-class commoners. Though often educated in the North, these writers were native southerners who were defending the status quo that afforded them comfortable lifestyles at the expense of poor whites and black slaves. The trashy characters in their stories were often described as "clay-eaters" and generally lived in close proximity to dirt, not unlike the Georgia masses in Burke's and Hundley's nonfiction accounts. The authors strategically used aristocratic narrators, sometimes in first person, mixed with the unmistakable vernacular of poor white archetypes, to enable their readers to take a superior position against these characters and associate the

[15] Daniel Hundley quoted in John Shelton Reed, *Southern Folk, Plain and Fancy: Native White Social Types* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 44.

[16] Reed, *Southern Folk, Plain and Fancy*, 43-44.

[17] Note, during this era, references to "Southwest" and "West" pertained to states such as Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Kentucky.

[18] Mark A. Keller, "Longstreet, Augustus Baldwin," in *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, 888.

economic and social problems of the South with savage cultural tendencies of the masses of unsophisticated whites.[19]

While these stories may have entertained readers and forwarded the short-term elitist goals of the authors, they also reinforced the vulgar literary conventions initiated by Byrd and other nonfiction writers and left a lasting effect on the national consensus of all southern whites, not just the poor. In a review of *Georgia Scenes*, Edgar Allan Poe noted unequivocally the existence of "southern barbarity" and the "unprincipled barbarity not unfrequently practised in the South and West."[20] Specifically regarding the poorer class in the South, Poe complimented Longstreet's short story "The Shooting Match" for its "portraiture of the manners of our South-Western peasantry."[21] The influence on later fiction writers like Mark Twain is undeniable, but the suggestion of generalizable authenticity in these works of fiction is more pertinent to this study. In *The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi* (1853), for example, writer Joseph Glover Baldwin likely had good intentions when describing a chaotic southern frontier with no order and a population with little respect for laws.[22] He was advocating for reform, yet by blending true stories and first-person accounts—what I define as pseudo-documentary—with exaggerated examples of corruption, exploitation, and savage behavior, his version of backward white southerners merged with previous notions in the national consciousness and reaffirmed the existence of a distinct and hopelessly unchangeable South.

Following the Civil War, southern fiction writers of the "Lost Cause" tradition—including Thomas Nelson Page and Thomas F. Dixon—typically moved away from humorous

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[19] For more detailed examinations of Old Southwest humorists, see Mark Steadman, "Humor," in *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, 855-856.

[20] Edgar Allan Poe, "Georgia Scenes, Characters, Incidents, &c. In The First Half Century of The Republic. By a Native Georgian. Augusta, Georgia," in *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe: Vol. VIII, Literary Criticism - part 01*, ed. James A. Harrison (New York: T.Y. Crowell & Company, 1902), 261, 263.

[21] Ibid, 265.

[22] Charles S. Watson, "Order Out of Chaos: Joseph Glover Baldwin's *The Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi*," *Alabama Review* 45, Issue 4 (Oct 1992): 257-272.

accounts of poor whites in favor of depictions of dangerous white trash who occasionally disrupted an otherwise peaceful southern existence. Northern journalists and travel writers, however, perhaps with less romantic goals than aristocratic southern elites, continued to perpetuate the notion of a monolithic culture in the South that acted as the nation's "id," to use the phrasing from sociologist John Shelton Reed.[23] Sidney Andrews, for example, working as a reporter for the *Chicago Tribune* and *Boston Advertiser*, lumped the South Carolina "sand-hiller," the Georgia "cracker," and the North Carolina "clay-eater," all together by claiming they all belonged to the "lowest in the scale of human existence."[24] A U.S. Bureau of Labor worker named Clare de Graffenried published in 1891 a harsh indictment of Georgia cotton mill workers, claiming they possessed a "genius for evading labor" and that "the favorite occupation of the men is to spit, stare, and whittle sticks."[25] Contemporary geography scholar Jamie Winders indeed noted that northern travel writers specifically and consistently represented the majority of white southerners, not just the poor, as distinctly inferior in class and education compared with the average northern white person, resulting in a continued colonial relationship even after the official end of Reconstruction in 1877.[26] In turn, as southern media historian Karen Cox has noted, enterprising southern entrepreneurs reinforced some of the specific notions of pastoral life, laziness, lavishness, and primitive living by offering "authentic" products and attractions that northern tourists expected to see.[27]

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[23] Reed, *Southern Folk, Plain and Fancy*, 66.

[24] Sidney Andrews, *The South Since the War As Shown by Fourteen Weeks of Travel and Observation in Georgia and the Carolinas* (Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1866), 344.

[25] Clare de Graffenried, "The Georgia Cracker in the Cotton Mills," *Century Magazine*, February, 1891, 488, 490.

[26] Jamie Winders, "Imperfectly Imperial: Northern Travel Writers in the Postbellum U.S. South, 1865-1880," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 95, Issue 2 (June 2005): 391-410.

[27] Karen Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South Was Created in American Popular Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 109-110.

One particular nonfiction story that has had an enduring effect on the image of poor southern whites is the Hatfield-McCoy feud. Early newspaper coverage of the Hatfields and McCoys in Kentucky and West Virginia coalesced into Theron C. Crawford's 1889 *An American Vendetta: A Story of Barbarism in the United States*.[28] A journalist from the *New York World*, Crawford and his contemporaries may have been caught up in the trend towards sensational, "yellow" journalism; the resulting descriptions and illustrations moved away from the comic, lazy southern white and toward a more menacing character that actually posed a threat to modern civilization by hindering American progress. Northern newspapers and eventually filmmakers and television producers would return to this story for decades, and its lasting popularity underscores how important some element of truth or "reality" can be when selling media to the public. Even fictional versions of the Hatfield and McCoy family members, such as the dangerous "Hatburns" in the film drama *Tol'able David* (1921), or the buffoonish "Hatrocks" in an episode of the cartoon series, *The Flintstones* (1964), were recognized by audiences as representative of "real" people and repeatedly characterized a large subset of Americans living in southern mountains.[29]

As the twentieth century approached, the term "travel writing" was used less frequently, yet the media's neocolonial relationship with the South saw few changes. Other derogatory nicknames began to replace "clay-eater" and "sand-hiller" in journal and newspaper articles, but they remained specifically associated with southern whites. Because the vast majority of blacks still lived in the South, the terms "poor whites" and "poor white trash" remained almost exclusively associated with the South because of the need to differentiate poor whites from poor

[28] Theron C. Crawford, *An American Vendetta: A Story of Barbarism in the United States* (1889; repr., Chapmanville, WV: Woodland Press, LLC, 2013).

[29] For more examples of entertainment media repurposing the story of the Hatfield-McCoy feud, see J.W. Williamson, *Hillbillyland: What the Movies Did to the Mountains and What the Mountains Did to the Movies* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).

blacks. In other parts of the country, poor whites could simply be called "the poor." "Redneck," perhaps first coined by Anne Royall decades earlier as a specific epithet for close-minded churchgoers, by 1900 had been applied generally to any poor, rural white southerner.[30] The Alabama "hill-billie," according to an article in the *New York Journal* in 1900, "dresses as he can, talks as he pleases, drinks whiskey when he gets it, and fires off his revolver as the fancy takes him."[31] Although poor people lived in hills and mountains as far north as Vermont, the "hillbilly" remained associated with southern rural whites for much of the 20th century.[32]

20th CENTURY JOURNALISM AND SCHOLARSHIP

With the new century came new media technologies, but the printed word would still command a critical influence. Although the larger focus of this dissertation is the examination of television texts, I maintain that a diversity of media types have had effects on lasting southern stereotypes that still exist today. Indeed, the most pervasive form of nonfiction media for much of the twentieth century was the short article, designed for quick consumption by the masses, and published in newspapers and magazines that were well regarded for their credibility and authority. Few articles have been as critical to the continued neocolonization of the South as H. L. Mencken's essay, "The Sahara of the Bozart," from 1917.[33] Holding nothing back, Mencken compared the entire South to the Sahara Desert, implying the region had no potential to grow or contribute anything to American culture. Plenty of reactions, analyses, and criticisms of Mencken's diatribe have appeared over the decades, but what I want to specifically note is his assumption that poor whites represented a dominating force in all facets of southern life, and that

[30] Huber, "A Short History of Redneck," 146.

[31] Julian Hawthorne, "Mountain Votes Spoil Huntington's Revenge," *New York Journal*, April 23, 1900.

[32] It is important to note here that the terms "redneck" and "hillbilly" during most of the 20th century were considered derogatory and offensive in most contexts. This stands in contrast to the fun-loving image that white southerners embraced beginning in the 1970s and continuing with modern reality television in attempts to reclaim the terms.

[33] H. L. Mencken, "The Sahara of the Bozart" (1917), in *The American Scene: A Reader*, ed. Huntington Cairnes, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 157-168.

even those southerners who had access to money, capital, land, or power were nevertheless "poor white trash." He also theorized extensively that the grotesque habits of southern people were genetic, inherited from the inferior blood of non-Anglo-Saxon criminals—echoing the prejudices of travel writers from centuries prior. In a classic neocolonial maneuver, he sought to purge American culture at large by blaming southern provincialism, not just for the South's own poor conditions, but for the entire country's economic problems.

The attacks from Mencken, whom Walter Lippmann described as "the most powerful personal influence" of his generation, undoubtedly caused a reaction in all regions of the country.[34] Regardless of how dated some of his criticisms seem to readers today, the compounding effect of decades of similar critical essays reinforced the media's tendency to treat the people of the South as one culture and to dismiss the individuality of all southerners, not just poor whites. Even if one were to agree with Mencken that the South is more provincial than the rest of the country, or that maintaining a provincial distinction is an inherently negative characteristic, much of the responsibility for this concept lies with repeated national portraits that perpetuate national and regional consciousness. Consumed by southerners and non-southerners alike, Mencken's piece incited further criticism by his contemporaries, defensive reactions from southern apologists like the Twelve Agrarians, and even inspiration for Southern Renaissance writers like William Faulkner and Tennessee Williams who expressed the desire to continue exploring what it means to be southern.[35]

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, southern states felt the economic and social ills more than any region of the country, and the problems that southerners faced may have

[34] Walter Lippmann, "H. L. Mencken," *The Saturday Review of Literature*, December 11, 1926. See also Fred Hobson, *Serpent in Eden: H. L. Mencken and the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1974).

[35] The Twelve Agrarians were southern historians with ties to Vanderbilt University. Among their publications was *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* in 1930.

seemed a fitting retribution for consumers influenced by Mencken's treatise. Along with comic strips *Li'l Abner*, *Snuffy Smith* and *Esquire's* "Mountain Boys" series, all debuting in 1934, nonfiction stories may have helped Americans cope with their concern about nationwide difficulties by giving them a scapegoat to blame. A 1935 article in *The Nation*, for example, titled "The Hill-Billies Come to Detroit," epitomized the fear that Americans felt about southerners moving to northern industrial centers, ruining the already precarious economy, and perhaps sending society back to regressive, agrarian conditions.[36]

Even with healthier economic conditions in the 1950s, journalists continued to build their stories around the timeless image of the poor white southerner. In a 1958 *Harper's Magazine* article, "Hillbillies Invade Chicago," writer Albert N. Votaw made no attempt to hide the national contempt for southern whites. He begins his article with: "The City's toughest integration problem has nothing to do with Negroes…It involves a small army of white, Protestant, Early American migrants from the South—who are usually poor, proud, primitive, and fast with a knife."[37] Votaw cited a Chicago newspaper's descriptions of "clans of fightin', feudin', Southern hillbillies" who "descended like a plague of locusts."[38] As a monolithic group, the people in question "have the lowest standard of living and moral code (if any), the biggest capacity for liquor, and the most savage tactics when drunk, which is most of the time."[39] The clear bias in tone against an entire geographic and racial group showed no hint of evolution since William Byrd's seminal work two-hundred years earlier.

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[36] Louis Adamic, "The Hill-Billies Come to Detroit," *The Nation*, February 13, 1935, cited in Lewis M. Killian, *White Southerners* (New York: Random House, 1970), 98.

[37] Albert N. Votaw, "The Hillbillies Invade Chicago," *Harper's Magazine* 216, no.1293 (February 1958): 64.

[38] Ibid., 66.

[39] Ibid.

Alongside newspaper and magazine articles, longer works of opinion, nonfiction, and pseudo-documentary continued to appear in the first half of the twentieth century, many of which were similar in form to the travel writing tradition. Carl Carmer's *Stars Fell on Alabama* (1934) and Clarence Cason's *90 Degrees in the Shade* (1935), while taking slightly different approaches, both essentialized the South in a similar way. Carmer, born and raised in upstate New York but working for a few years as a professor at the University of Alabama, represented Alabama as a distinct and "strange country," claiming Alabama was as foreign to the rest of America as the Congo.[40] Similar to the Old Southwest humorists, Carmer related anecdotes with an observational tone from the viewpoint of himself or that of a few of his upper-class, educated friends. Most of his stories focused on his reactions to the peculiar activities of lower-class people, including Klan rallies, spiritual revivals, and superstitious conjurings. Carmer's Alabama, like much of the South in prior media, was linked with the past: "Like a character in imaginative fiction, I feel that I have stepped into a past that lives and is concurrent with today."[41] In the "Author's Note," Carmer claimed, "All of the events related in this book happened substantially as I have recorded them. It has been necessary in a few instances to disguise characters to avoid causing them serious embarrassment (for instance my hosts during the lynching)." Yet, like the stories from travel writers in the past, and like many reality television shows today, it is difficult for a reader to be sure of the accuracy of Carmer's character descriptions, dialogue, and details of each incident. Reviews from the period, both positive and negative, imply Carmer's words were taken at face value.[42]

[40] Carl Carmer, *Stars Fell on Alabama* (1934; repr., Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000), xxiv.
[41] Ibid., 270.
[42] See Philip Beidler, "Yankee Interloper and Native Son: Carl Carmer and Clarence Cason, Unlikely Twins of Alabama Expose´," *Southern Cultures* 9, no. 1 (February 2003): 18-35.

Appearing just a year after Carmer's book was Cason's *90 Degrees in the Shade*.[43] Unlike Carmer, Cason was a native of Alabama and, rather than simply noting the existence of social ills in his home state, provided commentary that expressed a genuine desire to foster improvements in matters such as economic conditions and race relations. He was conscious of the media's long history of negative portrayals of blacks and poor whites in the South, and he made the argument that the majority of white southerners were good people with much capacity to be productive citizens. Despite the progressive intent, however, Cason's voice and approach were similar to Carmer's, comprising a distance from his subject and exoticism of the region. Whether lamenting demagoguery, racism, or the potential for laziness among southerners, Cason often took on a scolding tone, treating the white people of Alabama and the South as one childlike race rather than a collection of individuals. The tagline on the original cover of Cason's book was "A psychograph of the South – a paradox of unrest in a land of enchantment." Although he did not explicitly state it as Carmer did, Cason's Alabama was stuck in the past. Additionally, his framing of a "psychograph of the South" implied a unified mental process that all southern people share, a framing similar to the "mind" of the South forwarded by W. J. Cash six years after Cason's book appeared.

Cash's *The Mind of the South* was read by millions of Americans during its first appearance in 1941 and continuing through the 1960s.[44] Cash built on the unsubstantiated opinions of prior writers by claiming southern white distinctiveness was linked to intentional nonconformity. To Cash, maintaining southern distinctiveness came from a pathological need to remain southern for its own sake, and anyone who sought to improve themselves through education or economics was sacrificing their own southern identity. Based mostly on his own

[43] Clarence Cason, *90 Degrees in the Shade* (1935, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001).
[44] John Temple Kirby, *Media-Made Dixie: The South in the American Imagination* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 80.

observations in his native North Carolina, Cash's book claimed that all southern culture was paralyzed by hedonism, xenophobia, ignorance, and anti-intellectualism, and his descriptions clearly reduced the majority of southerners into a class of poor whites.[45] Cash himself might not have been aware of how much he was influenced by generations of writers before him, but for several years he was hailed as the foremost expert on southern culture.[46] Although his claims were later discredited by more thorough historians like C. Vann Woodward, Cash's book was influential for years in forwarding into popular culture the notion of the monolithic southern white.[47] Southern Agrarians like Frank Owsley attempted to counter Cash by demonstrating that the white middle-class, made up of hard-working, neighborly farmers and entrepreneurs, was much more significant than previous scholars and essayists assumed.[48] Yet historians like Woodward and Owsley could not compete with public perception inspired by Mencken and Cash that the majority of white southerners were more similar to fictional characters like William Faulkner's Flem Snopes from *The Hamlet* and Erskine Caldwell's Jeeter Lester from *Tobacco Road*.[49]

Other long-form works of nonfiction in the 20th century include Jonathan Daniels' *A Southerner Discovers the South,* from 1938. In the tradition of the travel writer, Daniels offers blanket criticism of the poor, southern masses. "Indeed, the gentlemen and the Negroes are afraid together. They are fearful of the rednecks, the peckerwoods."[50] He quotes a wealthy planter, for example, who says that all rednecks "are raised on hate," which, in this case, applies

[45] W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (1941; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1991).
[46] For example, after the height of civil rights unrest in the South, more than two decades after Cash's death, he was hailed as a "prophet" in Joseph L. Morrison's *W. J. Cash: Southern Prophet*, published in 1967.
[47] See for example C. Vann Woodward, *American Counterpoint: Slavery and Racism in the North-South Dialogue* (Boston: Little Brown, 1971).
[48] Owsley, *The Plain Folk of the Old South*.
[49] Kirby, *Media-Made Dixie*, 62-63
[50] Jonathan Daniels, *A Southerner Discovers the South* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938), 172.

not only to blacks but to anyone who might treat blacks with sympathy.[51] To Daniels and his sources, it was irrefutable that being a poor southern white person was synonymous with being racist. Other criticisms in his book include sloth, wastefulness, rudeness, and general lack of understanding for how to contribute to the economy. Yet the familiar criticism of poor southern whites is magnified by the unspoken assumption that an entire region could be "discovered," as if the land or the people were knowable and quantifiable based on one road trip.[52]

During the heated years of the civil rights movement, even conservative southerners with the agenda of defending states' rights and maintaining the racist status quo were not immune to the temptations of homogenizing their own region. William Workman's desperate but unoriginal treatise entitled *The Case for the South* (1960) echoed similar thoughts of writers like Daniel Hundley a century prior. A South Carolina journalist, Workman deflected criticism about current segregation practices by claiming the South had a multitude of "po' white trash" who threatened peaceable southerners, especially "when inflamed by liquor."[53]

Long form travelogues and commentaries like those of Carmer, Cash, Daniels, and Workman, while bringing short-term acclaim to their authors, may not have been the most damaging neocolonial force among twentieth-century nonfiction media. Depression-era impressions of poor southern whites were inarguably influenced by the growing field of photojournalism, with Erskine Caldwell and Margaret Bourke-White's *You Have Seen Their Faces* (1937) serving as a seminal work.[54] Caldwell was already nationally known for his fiction

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[51] Ibid., 175.

[52] For more on Daniels, see Jennifer Ritterhous, "Dixie Destinations: Rereading Jonathan Daniels' *A Southerner Discovers the South," Southern Spaces* (20 May 2010), accessed December 4, 2014, http://southernspaces.org/2010/dixie-destinations-rereading-jonathan-daniels-southerner-discovers-south#sthash.ewVQwPUH.dpuf.

[53] William D. Workman, Jr., *The Case for the South* (New York: Devin-Adair Co., 1960), 139.

[54] The photojournalism trend was also aided by federal government projects like the Farm Security Administration's extensive documentation of rural life during the Great Depression. The FSA's premiere

(*Tobacco Road*, 1932, and *God's Little Acre*, 1933), and hailed as a trusted authority on southern culture. Likewise, Bourke-White was one of the most highly-acclaimed photographers in her generation, and her surreal images of actual southern sharecroppers, dirty living conditions, and rugged landscapes brought Caldwell's prior fictional characters to life.[55] Bourke-White admitted later that she waited patiently until the workers' "faces or gestures gave us what we were trying to express."[56] Many readers misinterpreted Caldwell's captions as the subjects' own words, and reviewers often criticized the subjects for their own poverty, worrying that the entire South was "so sick from its old infections of prejudice and poverty" and was therefore a threat to the rest of the nation.[57] Sales of the book and accompanying media attention greatly overshadowed any competing images that other photojournalists tried to publish, and "the look" of the South in *You Have Seen Their Faces* would endure for decades in both fictional and documentary films.[58]

An unadulterated retort to the Caldwell/Bourke-White book was Alabamian Herman Clarence Nixon's 1938 *Forty Acres and Steel Mules*. Another documentary book with photographs of rural southerners, Nixon's goal was not to scare the American public into action but to demonstrate the potential for progress among southern farmers and warn against the continued dependence on northern capital.[59] As with Cason's *90 Degrees in the Shade*, however, Nixon's paternalistic approach reveals today a clear continuation of the neocolonial and hegemonic relationship between southern whites and the media that portrayed them. One of the Vanderbilt Agrarians, Nixon affirmed, "This book is a hillbilly's view of the South," and further cemented the image of working-class southerners as rural, poor, unsophisticated, and

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photographic artist, Walker Evans, would later publish some of his pictures in the pseudo-documentary book, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (see below).

[55] Kirby, *Media-Made Dixie*, 59-60.

[56] Margaret Bourke-White quoted in Allison Graham, *Framing the South: Hollywood, Television, and Race During the Civil Rights Struggle* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 2.

[57] Kirby, *Media-Made Dixie*, 59-60.

[58] Graham, *Framing the South*, 2.

[59] Cobb, *Away Down South*, 126.

ignorant of modern industry.[60] Furthermore, by excluding any other class of southern whites, he inadvertently reinforced the notion of a monolithic white southern culture. Unfortunately, it does not appear to be ironic to some southern scholars that Nixon be remembered as a "southern liberal," a "hillbilly modernist," and a "hillbilly realist."[61]

James Agee and Walker Evans' *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941) is another important example of photojournalism's ability to manipulate sentiment of working-class southerners. The book functions more as pseudo-documentary, similar to Carmer's *Stars Fell on Alabama* and to modern reality television, in that the three Alabama families that Agee and Walker chronicled bore little resemblance to the characters on the pages. Agee's prose, in fact, resisted any claim of objectivity, and Walker intentionally withheld photographs of family members cleaned and ready for church, using instead only images showing dirty and unhappy faces, sloth, and poverty.[62] Yet the book was received, and is remembered today, as a work of photojournalism.

Whether or not the real families in these books were exploited victims or were responsible for their own conditions is not the point of this study. The reading public saw these poor characters as real, as uniquely southern, and representing a vast majority of southerners. Lacking any additional media evidence of other types of people living in southern states, these mediated families therefore became the new faces of the same old white South. Furthermore, even if some writers and photojournalists believed in the documentary integrity of their work, they lacked the foresight to seek out diversity in the actual South or believed there was no market

[60] Herman Clarence Nixon, *Forty Acres and Steel Mules* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1938), 3.

[61] Sarah Newman Shouse, *Hillbilly Realist: Herman Clarence Nixon of Possum Trot* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005), 186.

[62] Kirby, *Media-Made Dixie*, 61; Kevin Starr, *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

to distribute such images of diversity. Although popular media began to take on new forms as the twentieth century progressed, travel writers occasionally found it hard to look past surface impressions of the poor whites they encountered in the South. V. S. Naipaul, for example, in 1989 quoted a middle-class man in Jackson, Mississippi, who said that all rednecks "don't like being told what to do," and are "satisfied to live in those mobile homes."[63]

A critical issue is the multitude of southern voices implicated in the creation of their own southern essentialisms. The Jackson man cited above perhaps did not realize the potential damage caused by lumping people into groups, and he perhaps did not perceive that non-southerners might even associate him with the very "rednecks" he was denigrating. In more recent years, self-proclaimed "rednecks" and working-class southerners seemed to have gained a voice in the national media. With a reclamation of redneck culture beginning with 1970s country and southern rock music, and continuing with "blue collar" comedians such as Jeff Foxworthy, historian James Cobb noted that southern whites were eager to "consume their own regional identity as rapidly as commercial marketers could commodify it," a phenomenon that easily fits Antonio Gramsci's notion of hegemony.[64] The best seller, *All Over but the Shoutin'* (1997), from author Rick Bragg, for example, represented a shift from travel writers and Southern Renaissance writers who had approached southern working-class from a distance.[65] Bragg was an insider who simultaneously embraced and was embarrassed by his southern, working-class roots. His writing, while often humorous, conveyed a sense of pain and anger at unchangeable cultural forces. Memoirs from Tim McLaurin (*Keeper of the Moon: A Southern Boyhood*) and Janisse Ray (*Ecology of a Cracker Childhood*, 1999) likewise transported readers to lonely, rural

[63] V. S. Naipaul, *A Turn in the South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 207-208.
[64] Cobb, *Away Down South*, 228.
[65] Rick Bragg, *All Over but the Shoutin'* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997).

existences that the authors perceived as essentially southern.[66] One could argue that such memoirs are more authentic or "real" than earlier forms on southern nonfiction and that working-class southerners now have a voice in national media. As I have demonstrated, however, the repetitive themes in southern nonfiction have not evolved much, even if the point of view has. These memoirs are consumed precisely because readers—southern and non-southern—believe in an essential, consumable South.

Most native southern writers have likely contemplated how their negative descriptions of southern whites in the media could have lasting effects. The possibility of exploitative interpretations or backlash from their fellow southerners may have weighed heavily on Cason and Cash; the authors of the "psychograph" of the South (Cason) and the "mind" of the South (Cash) each committed suicide the year of their book's publication. Scholars like David R. Jansson have looked specifically at Cash and affirmed the existence of the "media colony" concept that I have forwarded. "Portrayals of the South such as Cash's denote the South as the repository of a set of negative characteristics (such as poverty, racism, violence, and backwardness), and I argue that as a result, these undesirable traits are excised from the national identity."[67] By creating a state of "internal orientalism" (using the term introduced by Edward Said), media texts like Cash's serve not only to criticize a minority group but to define a majority culture. "The geographic ideas 'America' and 'the South' are opposite poles of a binary, and the identity of one cannot be understood except as linked to the identity of the other; therefore, representations of a degenerate South inform an exalted national identity."[68]

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[66] Tim McLaurin, *Keeper of the Moon: A Southern Boyhood* (Asheboro, NC: Down Home Press, 1998); Janisse Ray, *Ecology of a Cracker Childhood* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 1999).

[67] David R. Jansson, "Internal Orientalism in America: W.J. Cash's *The Mind of the South* and the Spatial Construction of American National Identity," *Political Geography* 22, no. 3 (March 2003): 293.

[68] Ibid.

Moreover, regardless if the portraits are generally considered negative or unflattering, individual southern whites have not been able to shake the stigma of attachment with a broad southern culture or "mind." The repeated media tendency to associate all southern whites together reinforces a self-fulfilling mindset that continues a tradition of a particular form of southern identity among white southerners. Indeed, many works by sociologist John Shelton Reed suggest southerners are and will remain a distinct ethnic group.[69] A psychoanalytic approach to this process is clearly beyond the scope of this study, but my intention here is to point out the sheer number of media texts, as well as the contexts of their creation and consumption, that have contributed to exploitive southern conventions over the past three centuries.

NONFICTION AND PSEUDO-DOCUMENTARY FILM, 1890-2000

Nonfiction literature and print journalism, as I have demonstrated, established not only the mediated South but the creative techniques and context to convince readers of its authenticity. In order to garner a critical mass of readers, writers developed a craft that could combine entertainment with realism and believability, requiring point-of-view, voice, character, and other tactics. Similarly, the advent of the cinema in the 1890s brought a new, potent form of realism to mass media. As stated previously in my literature review, the earliest motion pictures were largely promoted and interpreted as scenes of real life, despite probable staging on the part of the filmmakers. The first notable appearance of the South or southerners on film was Edwin S. Porter's 1903 version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Although clearly fiction, it established a

[69] See for example, *Southerners: The Social Psychology of Sectionalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983). See also Cobb, *Away Down South*, 231-232. Cobb cites the creation of academic departments, such as the University of Mississippi's Center for the Study of Southern Culture, and the publication of ambitious journals and collections, such *Southern Cultures* and *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, as evidence of attempts to maintain southern immutability in an era of rapid change in population diversity and economic changes.

precedent of southern themes associated with the past, with violence, and with unoriginal material, as it was adapted from a fifty-year-old novel.

Perhaps the first southern-themed film marketed for its sense of realism was *The Moonshiner* (Biograph, 1904). According to historian J. W. Williamson, the producers of *The Moonshiner* promoted its "local color," and copyrighted it as nonfiction, despite the fact that it was produced in New Jersey and consisted entirely of fictional characters and storylines.[70] The film was hugely successful and was followed by a decade of moonshine and feud melodramas, including several that adapted the well-known true story of the Hatfields and McCoys (many titles, in fact, are evocative of modern reality television titles, e.g., *Moonshiners, Hillbilly Blood,* and *Mountain Men*). Their signature, initiated by *The Moonshiner*, was "dependable and cathartic violence" inherent in all hillbilly characters.[71] The villains, predictably, were more closely associated with the land and with barbarity, whereas the hero often had to choose the right balance of civilization and ruggedness. Early biopics of southerners like Davy Crockett and Daniel Boone, for example, were touted for their historical accuracy and depended heavily on the use of simple, manly virtues in defeating Indians and violent hillbillies. In reality, however, both Crockett and Boone were upper middleclass.[72]

The second decade of the twentieth century saw a rise in films produced in southern states with much more documentary value. Today it is difficult to know how widely seen these films were, and because most prints have been lost, I rely heavily on archived promotional materials and reviews collected by Williamson to get a sense of what audiences were seeing. *Sensational Logging* (Essanay, 1910), *Black Diamonds* (Vitagraph, 1913), and *How Gold is*

[70] J.W. Williamson, *Southern Mountaineers in Silent Films: Plot Synopses of Movies About Moonshining, Feuding and Other Mountain Topics, 1904-1929* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1994), 3.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Williamson, *Hillbillyland*, 78-88.

Mined in Georgia (Gaumont/Mutual Film Corp, 1916), for example, were educational/industrial films showing logging, coal mining, and gold mining processes, respectively.[73] Although they featured few characters, films like these did help forward the notion—created generations prior in print—that stories set in the South must involve hard-living and working-class people closely associated with the land. In *The Southern Highlands* (Pathé, 1917), a reviewer noted, "It allows us to glimpse at the people of the mountains of Tennessee and North Carolina and their primitive dwellings. An old woman carding, spinning and weaving is an interesting sight as an example of some of the primitive methods still in use in those districts."[74] These terms—"glimpse at," "primitive" (used twice), and "those districts"—imply a voyeuristic quality to the film, not unlike the work of Byrd or other travel writers two centuries earlier.

In 1918, *Motion Picture World* reviewed two nonfiction films set in the South—*In the Moonshine Country* (Paramount-Bray Pictograph) and *Our Southern Mountaineers* (Paramount-Bray Pictograph). Both reviews use the word "primitive" and focus on hardships, closeness with the land, and the past, alluding to "forefathers" or a "mode of living unchanged for five generations."[75] The use of the possessive "Our" in one title potentially frames the people and the land as colonial. The people *In the Moonshine Country* are "By nature lawless" and "a quaint race" who make illegal moonshine and hunt and fish "without respect for the game laws." Another interesting detail about the review is that the scenes take place in "the rugged mountains of North Georgia and Kentucky."[76] The assumption by the filmmakers and/or reviewers that people and cultures were interchangeable in states as far apart as Georgia and Kentucky is a classic case of essentialism.

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[73] Williamson, *Southern Mountaineers*, 44-46, 87, 209.
[74] Ibid., 233.
[75] Ibid., 240, 244.
[76] Ibid., 240.

The review for *Primitive Life in Tennessee* (Kineto Review) from 1921 is another example of the moviegoer's intrigue with the past and with "primitive" southern whites—the film's title in itself might be considered offensive if it were applied to other cultures. The descriptions in the review continue to portray a passive people. Phrases such as "their habits, their manner of life … are exhibited," and a "pioneer cabin, giving an idea of how nearly primitive the mountain folk are, is seen on screen," give the active verb to the filmmaker or audience, not the subject.[77] What is interesting about sheering sheep, making clothes, and cooking? It is difficult for us to know today, but when the subject is framed as foreign and passive, audiences perhaps gain a sense of superiority.

A key sentence in the review for *Primitive Life in Tennessee* invoked the subject of genetics and breeding. "What is said to be people of the 'purest American pioneer stock,' are shown."[78] Again using a passive verb in the description, the reviewer was likely quoting a title card from the film itself. The question of poor southern whites and genetics was still very much a topic of popular discussion in 1921, nearly two centuries after travel writers and eugenicists first suggested that most southern whites' descended from criminals and non-Anglo-Saxons. As previously mentioned, H. L. Mencken's landmark article, "Sahara of the Bozart," first appeared during this same era—in 1917—and specifically addressed his belief in the inferior blood of most southern whites. Mencken's piece, not coincidentally, was motivated partly by the reaction in southern states regarding the Scopes trial in Tennessee, in which a science teacher challenged a state law banning the teaching of evolution.

While the title cards in *Primitive Life in Tennessee*, *In the Moonshine Country*, and other films during this time period may not have directly put forth the same condemning tone that

[77] Ibid., 269.
[78] Ibid.

Mencken did, the pervasive context of his article was omnipresent for many moviegoers. Furthermore, audiences were encouraged to make their own judgments regarding the "primitive" quality of the people on screen, and in many ways these films may have been more influential than contemporary printed criticism in reinforcing notions of southern inferiority and neocolonial status. Recent immigrants, for example in urban centers like New York, might not have given much prior thought to the differences between southern and non-southern people in the United States. Few read or spoke much English and may never have heard of Mencken, yet they would clearly detect a sense of superiority over the southern subjects.[79]

We should also acknowledge the likelihood that camera operators and editors, like many media producers before or since, chose to feature on the screen the most primitive modes of living, the most peculiar facial expressions, and the most illicit behavior, knowing these details would likely draw larger audiences. Although we have no evidence of staging in the films I have discussed so far, we do know that early filmmakers and photographers were limited by the technology of the time. They struggled to get acceptable exposure when light was low and to compose images during quickly developing, "natural" moments in the field. Consequently, camera operators were often willing to stage events for "documentary" purposes.[80] Even if many stories and characters shown on screen were accurate, media producers and distributors from the Northeast and Hollywood chose only to tell and exhibit these types of stories about southern people. Clearly there seemed to be no market for nonfiction stories set in contemporary southern cities and featuring educated, intelligent, and innovative southern people.

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[79] For more on the importance of early movies in formulating mass culture, see Garth Jowett and James M. Linton, *Movies as Mass Communication* (London: Sage Publications, 1989).

[80] The most famous contemporary example was Robert Flaherty's 1922 film *Nanook of the North*, but clearly the tactic of staging had occurred since the Lumière Brothers' first motion picture shorts and continuing with newsreels supposedly covering live-fire combat in World War I.

Blurring the Lines—Pseudo-Documentary in Filmmaking

When John Grierson coined the term "documentary" in a 1926 review of Robert Flaherty's *Moana*, he had in mind not simply realism or truth but a role for cinema to play in the education of audiences.[81] The 1919 film *Hope of the Hills* (Universal) likely would have fit his definition well. Produced by Universal's educational division on location with all local actors, it purported to tell the true story of Alice Lloyd, a Boston woman whose goal was to raise awareness of poverty in the Kentucky hills.[82] According to the *Motion Picture World* review, the film "contains the simple life story of the Kentucky mountaineer and presents the pathos of his helpless, isolated situation, of which he himself lives in blissful ignorance."[83] The review acknowledges that characters are "portrayed" yet also claims the piece should serve "as a historical record of an unhappy situation."[84]

As with other reviews I have discussed, this review clearly originates from a position of superiority. The film furthermore represents the apparent beginnings of pseudo-documentary in cinema and its acceptance among documentary filmmakers. I define pseudo-documentary as fictional storytelling that purports to be true or is at least presented to readers and audiences with similar styles as nonfiction storytelling. Its appeal depends heavily on audience belief that its content is nonfiction, not staged and fabricated. Today's reality television, as I have defined in my literature review, contains numerous programs with a range of fiction and nonfiction, conceived from a similar approach as *Hope of the Hills*, Flaherty's *Nanook of the North*, and many of Grierson's and Dziga Vertov's documentary films. A crucial concept for cultural

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[81] Andrew Tudor, *Theories of Film* (New York: Viking Press, 1974) and Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[82] *Hope of the Hills* description drawn from J.W. Williamson papers and the "Southern Mountaineers Filmography," *Special Collections at Belk Library*, Appalachian State University, accessed May 5, 2015, http://collections.library.appstate.edu/southernmountaineersfilmography.

[83] Williamson, *Southern Mountaineers*, 250-251.

[84] Ibid., 251.

studies scholars to remember is that audiences often believe that content on screen framed as "documentary" or "reality" is indeed true. The more raw or unprofessional the production, in fact, the more likely it may be perceived as real, and the use of local non-actors, authentic locations, and a woman who plays herself would likely have influenced audiences in 1919 that *Hope of the Hills* was indeed a documentary.[85] And while the subject matter alone in *Hope of the Hills* may seem relatively harmless and even benign, it could have had an effect in strengthening the neocolonial status of southern states by contrasting a noble, educated Boston woman with the local Kentuckians who live in "blissful ignorance." These local people, in addition, were willing to oblige filmmakers who directed them, embracing the conventional portrait of their people and demonstrating the continued cycle of hegemony in southern states.

Analysis of the content and making of the 1927 pseudo-documentary film, *Stark Love* (Paramount Famous Lasky Corp), provides further insight into the process of hegemony, essentialism, and neocolonization. Paramount and director Karl Brown wanted to capitalize on the recent documentary trend that Flaherty had helped to initiate, but the studio refused to finance a lengthy research period.[86] Brown got the greenlight for the project with no script, no characters, and no locations in mind, so he traveled from Los Angeles to New Orleans to search for a primitive location and isolated hillbillies to populate his film. Unhappy with his choices there, Brown followed a lead to Berea College in Kentucky, but he found clear disapproval and insult about the exploitive nature of the project. Travels to Nashville and Knoxville in Tennessee, then Ashville and Bryson City in North Carolina, eventually led to his settling for a

[85] I remind my reader of empirical studies cited in my literature review by Kristin M. Barton (2009), Samuel Ebersole and Robert Woods (2007), Alice Hall (2006), and Zizi Papacharissi and Andrew L. Mendelson (2007). I also find extremely relevant the 1933 Payne Fund studies that demonstrated that even fictional movies influenced and reinforced potentially harmful stereotypes in the early years of cinema. See Garth S. Jowett, Ian C. Jarvie, and Kathryn H. Fuller, *Children and the Movies: Media Influence and the Payne Fund Controversy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[86] John White, "Myth and Movie Making: Karl Brown and the making of *Stark Love*," *Film History* 19, no.1 (2007): 49-57.

piece of land near Robbinsville, North Carolina. The film's location, meant to be a place filled with a primitive, backwoods population, was ironically a place with no population at all—an abandoned area that had been cleared recently for a new dam project.[87]

With an acceptable location secured, Brown's next challenge was to find actors who could play the kind of isolated hillbillies he had in mind. But again he encountered resistance. Most people in the Robbinsville area seemed skeptical of Hollywood, regardless of the storyline that Brown pitched to them.[88] Although critics today do not consider the final version of *Stark Love* to be nonfiction, we have much evidence to suggest it was deceptively marketed to its contemporary viewers for its realism. Brown synthesized the storyline, about a son who must save the girl he loves from his own monstrous father, based on prior published fiction and nonfiction media. Yet he told multiple versions to reporters after the film's release about how the story originated based on tales from local people near Robbinsville, NC.[89] He kept the story to himself and shot out of sequence in order to avoid offending the local population and the extras, and Brown himself acknowledged that the "remarkable natural acting" was possible because the cast did not know the plot. In a *New York Times* story, Brown described them as "children" and claimed the native men were "lazy, drunken, good-for-nothings…who hunt, fish, fight, and get drunk."[90]

The film's main cast, however, was imported from other parts of the South. Both lead actors, Forrest (Fob) James and Helen Mundy, were from educated, middle-class families. James was a multi-sport athlete in college from Auburn, Alabama, yet the *New York Times* portrayed him as a character similar to those in earlier exploitive nonfiction films, having "never

[87] Williamson, *Hillbillyland*, 198-200.
[88] Ibid., 202-203.
[89] White, "Myth and Movie Making," 51.
[90] Williamson, *Hillbillyland*, 200.

seen a railroad train, automobile, electric lights or a telephone."[91] In the film's marketing, Paramount insisted James was a barefoot hillbilly who escaped back to the mountains after filming was completed and refused to come out, even when executives searched for him to offer a lucrative Hollywood contract. Brown and his studio bosses, however, knew exactly where James was—back with his family in Alabama. He would later become a successful teacher, coach, business owner, and community leader in Alabama, and his son, Fob James, Jr., was twice elected the state's governor.[92]

Brown's deception seemed to work when he garnered the media attention he wanted. A *Motion Picture World* review claimed, "it will be a revelation to know that such primitive people exist right at our doorstep. No attempt has been made to lighten the drabness and even unpleasant phrases of daily life."[93] A *Variety* article described *Stark Love* as "a freak" because of the lack of star power and attributed its initial success at the New York premiere to the voyeuristic nature of looking at a "native" cast of "real hillbillies." To promote the film to exhibitors across the country, Paramount was mindful to evoke the novelty of its documentary style, clearly hoping to ride the success of other recent pseudo-documentary films.[94] *Motion Picture World* called it "the true picture of Southern mountaineer conditions."[95]

Years after *Stark Love* appeared, Brown acknowledged the difficulty in finding actual people and locations to fit the image he wanted to portray.[96] All he knew about southern working-class people was what he had seen in other movies or read in fictional tales, travel literature, or perhaps commentaries by opinion-makers like Mencken. Here, we have an attempt

[91] Ibid., 203.
[92] White, "Myth and Movie Making," 53-55.
[93] *Motion Picture World*, March 19, 1927, 214, quoted in Williamson, *Southern Mountaineers*, 288.
[94] *Variety* and *Motion Picture World* articles quoted in Williamson, *Hillbillyland*, 190.
[95] Williamson, *Hillbillyland*, 205.
[96] Ibid., 196-199.

to create "reality" not by direct observation but by mimicking prior media. As I will discuss later in this chapter and in the next chapter, Brown's trek, in many ways, parallels that of contemporary reality show producers who approached many communities before finally securing a location and cast for their series. It seems that even as Hollywood was approaching its golden age, many "real" southern people were not as comfortable associating with the industry as producers wanted to imply.

Sound-Era Docufiction, North and South

Although most fiction films set in the South in the 1930s evoked the nostalgic "moonlight and magnolia" motif of the Old South, the gritty reality that reflected hard times during the Depression did make some appearances in the form of movies based on true stories.[97] One interesting case study is *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* (Warner Brothers) from 1932. Based on the true story of Robert Burns who twice escaped a Georgia chain gang, the film itself only hinted at sectional differences. An on-screen map illustrates the nomadic journey of war veteran James Allen (the fictional name given to Burns' character) from his home in the Northeast around the country and eventually toward the South, where he is arrested for a petty burglary and given a harsh prison sentence. After experiencing the cruelties of the chain gang, Allen concludes that his treatment is unfair and orchestrates a dramatic escape. The handy on-screen map again illustrates to the audience Allen's journey, this time north to Chicago. There he establishes himself as a productive member of society for several years, but he is eventually apprehended. After again experiencing brutal treatment on the chain gang, Allen escapes, this time staying permanently and miserably undercover.

[97] For a good analysis of the nostalgic era of southern films, see Edward D. C. Campbell, *The Celluloid South: Hollywood and the Southern Myth* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981); for a comprehensive list and description of films and southern sub-genres, see Larry Langman & David Ebner, *Hollywood's Image of the South: A Century of Southern Films* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2001).

The conflict between officials of the two states involved—the state of Illinois who believes Allen should not have to return to prison, and the unnamed state that wants him extradited—is the only remnant of the regional conflict stressed in Burns' original book, *I Am a Fugitive from a Georgia Chain Gang*.[98] Part of the book's indictment of the Georgia prison system was that it was inherently southern, and therefore foreign to the American sense of justice. Burns claimed he was an unwilling accomplice during the burglary and that he was only charged with stealing $5.80, yet the courts sentenced him to six to ten years of hard labor. He claimed he and other prisoners were cruelly beaten, not given proper food, and forced to labor while wearing painful chains on their ankles. While these conditions do exist for the character in the film version, no other indication was made that an entire culture or region of the country is to blame. Furthermore, the fact that Warner Brothers omitted the word "Georgia" from the film's title indicated their desire not to place any blame or offend potential audiences at the box office or face a lawsuit by the allegedly brutal Georgia authorities.

Like the film itself, Hollywood press about the film generally danced around the sectional issue. During pre-production and production, many trade announcements mentioned the original book's title but did not otherwise present Georgia as a distinct or foreign place. Some articles generalized the South—such as the *New York Times'* description of the project as "that Southern prison camp film"—but did not specifically pass judgment or take sides about the conflict.[99] One review that might have implied an essentialist judgment of the South appeared in *Variety*. The column stated parenthetically that the character is a fugitive of "a state (somewhere below the Mason-Dixon line)."[100] Although only a brief mention, one might interpret this as a blanket description for all southern states rather than a state that happens to be in the South. How

[98] Robert Burns, *I Am a Fugitive from a Georgia Chain Gang* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1932).
[99] "Before the Cameras and the Microphones," *New York Times*, September 11, 1932.
[100] *Variety*, November 15, 1932.

audiences in the fall of 1932 actually received comments like this in the press, as well as the film itself, cannot be known for certain. But because Burns' original work clearly indicted the South, many filmgoers who were aware of the book might have attributed the film's conflict to an inherent, essential southern culture.

Adding complexity to the discourse was the ongoing case of Burns himself. With the popularity of the book and the success of the Hollywood version, columnists often reminded readers that Burns was indeed a real fugitive from justice, traversing the country and rarely staying in one place for more than a few nights.[101] Further exacerbating the situation were recent reports of a New Jersey man who died in a Florida prison camp.[102] Warner Brothers, in order to take advantage of the free publicity, boldly set the film's world premiere in Georgia's capital city of Atlanta. The *New York Times* noted the obvious controversy involved, as Burns' accusations against Georgia's prison system "have not boosted his stock with the authorities down there." The innocent geographic descriptor "down there" is enough to denote some southern distinction, although the spirit of that particular article was intended to be entertaining, not critical. "About all that remains is for Burns to make a personal appearance at the Georgia premier."[103]

Ironically, probably because of the new publicity, authorities tracked down Burns in New Jersey a month after the film's release. While Governor Russell of Georgia and prison warden Harold Hardy actively sought extradition, Governor Moore of New Jersey listened to the large public outcry to protect Burns. Both sides took stabs at each other in the press, and many likened the ongoing hearings as a renewal of North-South hostilities. One *Time* article casually described the extradition papers that Georgia officers were to "take North," and another

[101] For example, "On the Screen Horizon," *New York Times*, July 24, 1932, reports that Burns collaborated with Warner Brothers producer Daryl Zanuck while still actively evading his pursuers.

[102] "Crime: Florida Sweatbox," *Time*, October 24, 1932, 17; "States & Cities: Fugitive Free," *Time*, January 2, 1933, 13.

[103] "Forthcoming Picture Offerings," *New York Times*, October 30, 1932, X5.

compared the extradition hearing to "an oldtime anti-slavery meeting." The Assistant Attorney General of Georgia resented public opinion making his state "the butt of ridicule" in a case in which he thought justice was not being served, despite the fact that the Georgia grocer who was the original victim of the burglary said Burns should not have to go back to prison. Eventually, Governor Moore of New Jersey refused to extradite Burns. Burns, in turn, later denied ever having been whipped or chained in Georgia. Burns' former wife in Chicago resented how she was portrayed in the film, and Georgia prison warden Hardy sued the film's producers and distributors for two million dollars for "vicious, untrue and false attacks" upon him and his camp.[104] The real conflict, it seems, was as much personal as it was regional, and today's historian is left with no clear understanding of the effects of the entire discourse as it played out in print and on screen.

I have maintained, however, that a story presented as true has advantages over fictional stories in terms of audience interest and influence. Because of the success of the film, in conjunction with its high praise as a rare American film that tackled social issues, attention was inadvertently drawn to southern distinction in general and injustice in the South in particular. RKO's *Hell's Highway* (1932), released just months prior to *I Am a Fugitive*, also dramatizes cruel prison camps, but no indication is given in the film or in any reviews that the South should be indicted. The *Washington Post* described the outrage over "modern penal practices," implying chain gangs existed throughout the United States and the modern world.[105] Seven years later, in contrast, Edward G. Robinson's innocent character in *Blackmail* (MGM, 1939) lamented being stuck in a Deep South prison camp, and the guards speak with an unmistakable

[104] "Chain-Gang Convict Fights Extradition," *New York Times*, December 16, 1932, 3; "States & Cities: Fugitive," *Time*, December 26, 1932, 9; "States & Cities: Fugitive Free," *Time*, January 2, 1933, 13; "Sue on 'Chain Gang' Movie," *New York Times*, January 6, 1933, 23.

[105] "RKO's-Keith's," *Washington Post*, September 26, 1932, 10.

southern drawl. The reference is subtle yet direct, and some reviewers followed the lead by identifying the southern setting in their columns.[106] Neither *Blackmail* nor *Hell's Highway* received the acclaim that *I Am a Fugitive* garnered, possibly because they both reverted to a formulaic Hollywood happy ending and therefore lost some of the potential biting criticism. Alternatively, because they did not have the dramatic and continuing true story accompanying them, audiences did not attribute the sectional context to them as they may have with Burns' story. Without that context, critics had nothing specific to attack.

Another film of the 1930s—Fritz Lang's 1936 *Fury* (MGM)—offers some insight into contemporary thinking about mob violence in the South, even though it is actually set in the Midwest. The story is about a lynch mob who targets a suspected kidnapper, Joe Wilson (Spencer Tracy). The kidnapping itself is later solved and the real perpetrators are brought to justice off screen, but the main storyline here is Wilson's quest for revenge after he escapes jail during a fire, in which he is presumed to perish. The result is, like *I Am a Fugitive*, a well-received commentary on American justice. The story is set in the Midwest and, additionally, it was inspired by a 1933 incident that took place in San Jose, California. Nonetheless, some reviewers and presumably some audience members mistook the setting for the South—largely because of its lynching theme. While Frank Nugent described it as occurring in a "nonexistent Midwestern city" and *Variety*'s review placed Joe's destination as "west,"[107] British reviewer Graham Greene completely missed the subtle geographic story points in the film and assumed that *Fury* was "the story of how a mob in a small Southern town lynches an innocent man."[108]

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[106] Richard L. Coe, "Flaming Drama is Revealed in Capitol Film," *Washington Post*, September 9, 1939, 11; Frank S. Nugent, "The Screen: Four Films in Review," *New York Times*, September 15, 1939, 30.

[107] Frank Nugent, "Fury, a Dramatic Indictment of Lynch Law, Opens at the Capitol—Other New Pictures," *New York Times*, June 6, 1936, 21; *Variety*, June 10, 1936, 18.

[108] Graham Greene, *The Spectator*, July 3, 1936, in *The Graham Greene Film Reader: Reviews, Essays, Interviews & Film Stories*, ed. David Parkinson (New York: Applause Theatre Book Publishing, 1995), 116.

Kenneth Fearing, writing for the Marxist magazine *New Masses*, did not make this explicit mistake. Rather, he allowed himself, and asked his reader, to "imagine the victim to be Negro, as he usually is and not white." He contended that the film's relatively happy ending diluted some of its bite. "Remember," he stated, "we have to sell these pictures in the South. See the film, and imagine what might have been done with it."[109]

If readers caught these southern references—mistaken or intentional—some might have been confused, but others would have picked up on the implications. First, by most accounts in the 1930s, lynching was more prominent in the South than any other region of the country, especially lynching of blacks by whites. Anti-lynching laws had been a hot political issue for years, but they were largely resisted by southern lawmakers.[110] Yet no film to date had portrayed unjust southern vigilantes. Second, the true incident that inspired the film was noteworthy, in contrast to other lynchings, primarily because the mob's actions were caught on newsreel footage, a detail dramatized during the murder trial in *Fury*. Additionally, the governor of California actually endorsed the mob's actions and, by doing so, created more national headlines.[111] In reacting so strongly to this particular case and using it as the basis for one of the first anti-lynching message movies, Hollywood might have inadvertently made a comment on the national perception of lynching practices in the South. Either Hollywood did not want to touch on the controversy of southern lynching, or the lynching of blacks in the 1930s was simply not controversial enough. That such an objectionable incident would happen in a more American place like California or some "nonexistent Midwestern city," however, was

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[109] Kenneth Fearing, *The New Masses*, June 16, 1936, quoted in *American Film Criticism: From the Beginnings to* Citizen Kane, ed. Stanley Kauffmann (New York: Liveright, 1972), 340.

[110] See for example "N.A.A.C.P. Lists 19 Lynchings in 1933; 10 for 1932," *Chicago Defender*, October 28, 1933, 3; "Outlook For Passage Of Anti-Lynching Bill in 75th Congress Favorable: Cong. Mitchell," *Chicago Defender*, February 13, 1937, 1.

[111] "Hoover and Rolph Counter Rebukes in Lynch Dispute," *Atlanta Constitution*, December 1, 1933, 1; "Urge Californians to Oust Gov. Rolph," *New York Times*, December 3, 1933, N3; "San Jose Lynch Mob 'Unknown,'" *Washington Post*, January 28, 1934, 10.

newsworthy enough to shoot a picture with one of the world's most famous directors and one of Hollywood's biggest stars.

Similar extrapolations can be made about the public discourse surrounding two films that quickly followed *Fury*. Both *Legion of Terror* (Columbia, 1936) and *Black Legion* (Warner Brothers, 1937) were based on true accounts of a terrorist society that wore black hoods and robes. Called the Black Legion, some journalists likened it to a short-lived Michigan-based version of the Ku Klux Klan.[112] Its members were responsible for numerous murders in the Midwest, and rumors spread that local chapters comprised of millions of members throughout fifteen states and including the nation's largest cities.[113] In contrast to the KKK's association with the South and southern culture, print media rarely portrayed the Black Legion as representing a significant part of the population in the Midwest or any other region. Yet, like the Klan, the Black Legion explicitly targeted groups such as blacks, Jews, and Catholics.[114]

When translating two of the Black Legion's cases to the big screen, Hollywood clearly continued its tradition of not indicting any particular region of the country, and official film reviews followed suit. The *Atlanta Constitution*'s review of *Legion of Terror* reminded its readers that the real group portrayed was "exposed last summer in the midwest," but such obligatory descriptions of context do not necessarily represent blame on a region or a culture.[115] The *New York Times* review, in fact, did not mention any location of the true events of the story,

[112] Nelson B. Bell, "The Warner Brothers Go to Newspaper Headlines Again for Subject Matter of Their New Melodrama," *Washington Post*, January 27, 1937, 17.

[113] "Federal Aid Asked On 15-State Inquiry Into Black Legion," *New York Times*, May 28, 1936, 1.

[114] If anything, the Black Legion was associated with one city—Detroit—because most of its leaders were based there. One judge lamented during the sentencing of five Black Legion defendants that "your offense has made Detroit as famous as the auto-mobile industry, only in an infamous way. See "Judge Sentences Five Black Legion Slayers," *Chicago Defender*, December 12, 1936, 1.

[115] "Thrilling Drama, Legion of Terror, Is Given Acclaim at Rialto Theater," *Atlanta Constitution*, November 1, 1936, 4K.

and it described the fictional setting as "the mythical city of the film."[116] Two months later, the Humphrey Bogart film *Black Legion* was released with much higher critical praise. Because the case involved in this film was more famous than that of *Legion of Terror*, virtually every reviewer included an obligatory sentence about the real organization "which operated in Michigan" or "terrorized the Midwest."[117] The *Wall Street Journal* attributed the original story to Michigan but also noted that the terrorists had branches throughout the country.[118] All of these descriptions implied that the Black Legion was an extremist group operating inside the Midwest but not representative of the Midwest. Interestingly, British critic Graham Greene made no comment on the setting in *Black Legion*, whereas only one year prior he (incorrectly) associated *Fury* with the South.[119]

Regionalism, as demonstrated from these few responses in the media, was clearly not the point of the two Black Legion films or *Fury*. The horror of these semi-true stories was, in fact, an indictment of the entire country, with the "Midwest" representing all of America. Frank Nugent's remarks about *Black Legion* provide a poignant example of the ability of film entertainment to address a hypothetically universal audience. After acknowledging that the true story happened in the Midwest, he noted, "this is the unforgettable, the horrible thing about 'Black Legion'—it did happen here! Thousands of our illustrious Midwestern citizens did take an oath 'in the name of God and the devil to exterminate the anarchists, Communists, the Roman hierarchy and their abettors.'" Nugent further described Bogart's portrayal of the lead character as a "typical American workman, proud of his wife and son."[120] One week later, Nugent again

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[116] "At the Globe," *New York Times*, November 2, 1936, 24.

[117] Frank S. Nugent, "The Strand's 'Black Legion' Is an Eloquent Editorial On Americanism—'Conflict' Opens at the Globe," *New York Times*, January 18, 1937, 21; "Atlanta Theater News: 'Black Legion' To Play At Fox Show Tonight," *Atlanta Constitution*, January 23, 1937, 10.

[118] "The Theatre: Hooded Terrorism," *Wall Street Journal*, January 23, 1937, 11.

[119] Graham Greene, *Night and Day*, July 8, 1937, in *The Graham Greene Film Reader,* 202.

[120] Nugent, "The Strand's 'Black Legion'" 21.

reviewed the film, noting that the story goes deeper than the lives of the individual characters. "It is the nation's tragedy," he wrote. "'Black Legion' will not stay in its place as a cinema fiction. It strikes too hard, too deep and too close to the mark. Hollywood was not half so courageous in making it as we are in seeing it. I hope the Midwest can take it."[121] Nugent's equating of the Midwest to the entire nation is obvious. He joined phrases like "here," "typical American," "nation," and "too close to home" with "the Midwest" and "our illustrious Midwestern citizens." And because the film so clearly spoke to the entire nation, a traditionally apolitical profession such as film criticism can allow itself to transform into a platform for instigating change without offending significant portions of the population.[122] The more pertinent question for this research, however, is how similar stories found in *Fury* and *Black Legion* would be received if they occurred in the South. Would critics apply their moral lessons to the entire country? Indeed, I question whether or not critics would ever refer to southern characters as "our illustrious citizens."

Only months after the anti-lynching films about the Black Legion appeared, audiences got to taste a similar theme, this time with an overtly southern flavor, in *They Won't Forget* (Warner Brothers, 1934). Directed by Mervyn LeRoy (who also directed *I Am a Fugitive*), the story follows the misfortunes of a small-town teacher on trial for murdering one of his female students. He is eventually found guilty and sentenced to life in prison, but during transport a lynch mob captures and murders him. Anyone who has seen the film, of course, knows that this plot description is inadequate, because the real power of *They Won't Forget* is not the personal story but the obvious conflict between two cultures running through almost every moment, as well as the context of the true story that inspired it.

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[121] Frank S. Nugent, "Second Thoughts on 'Black Legion,'" *New York Times*, January 24, 1937, 153.

[122] See also Bell, "The Warner Brothers Go to Newspaper Headlines Again…," 17: "The judge's speech at the end of the picture conveys a lesson in true Americanism that no one should permit himself to miss."

To heighten the sectional conflict, the opening credits are filled with Civil War era music and imagery. The murder happens on "Confederate Memorial Day," a day in which all businesses close, an elaborate parade occupies the town, and any living Confederate veteran dresses in uniform and receives glorious accolades. The teacher is a northern transplant who had never felt accepted in his new home. During the course of the trial, northern lawyers and journalists become involved in the defense's case, and the national press covers the proceedings as enthusiastically as the local press, only serving to agitate the conflict. A soft-spoken and frightened black janitor is another potential suspect for the murder, but the district attorney is an ambitious politician who knows how to get his electorate excited. He intentionally plays down the janitor's role, knowing that convicting a "helpless nigger janitor" would be too easy. He in fact uses the janitor to testify against the teacher, preparing him by warning of the "tricky fellas from up North. You got to be careful what you say." The closing arguments on both sides clearly evoke the cultural tension at work rather than the facts of the case, and the defense is ultimately helpless to overcome the bias that the stonewall jury members hold. Although the jury's decision-making process is indeed a mockery demonstrating southern prejudice, the angry mob that waits and comments throughout the trial is the real looming factor that the audience knows will decide the defendant's fate. Immediately after the sympathetic governor commutes the teacher's death sentence, the working-class mob acts out the formality of lynching the northerner. In the film's final moment, as the district attorney is ascending towards a more powerful political office, he and his reporter friend casually wonder aloud if the teacher was actually guilty.

The basic elements of the story seem clichéd today, but few filmmakers before 1937 ever risked stirring up this specific brand of controversy. Indeed, *They Won't Forget* was the first

significant film to openly dramatize the contemporary North-South rivalry that still existed more than seventy years after the Civil War. As with the other films cited above, the incident dramatized in this picture was loosely based on a true story in which Leo Frank, a Jewish man from New York, had moved to Atlanta and there was convicted and lynched for killing a 13-year-old girl who worked in his factory. Audiences, of course, did not need a true story context to help them detect southern distinction in *They Won't Forget*—as they did with *I Am a Fugitive*—because the film made it so explicit on its own. Indeed, the fiction version embellished many aspects of the real case of Leo Frank in order to accentuate the North-South conflict. Its source material, in fact, was not the case directly but a fictionalized novel, *Death in the Deep South: A Novel about Murder* by Ward Greene, whose title alone was enough to indict a specific region of the country. At least one columnist, most likely in an attempt at thrift, truncated the title to simply *The Deep South*, implying that the murder story summarized everything and everybody in the South.[123] Dan Terrell of the *Washington Post* noted the trial in the book would "prove once again the prejudice and ignorance of the South." He was describing the trial's effect on characters within the context of the story, but he also addressed the story's effect on real readers. "Reading 'Death in the Deep South' is an experience that will remain," he wrote. "Like a recent film, 'Fury,' this book is a mature and forceful recording of significant events. The sociologist as well as the average reader will be interested."[124]

The practice of novelists or other literary writers drawing attention to southern distinction was not new in the mid-1930s. Hollywood filmmakers, however, had always played by unique rules, so the appearance of *They Won't Forget* had the potential of creating controversy. Claude Rains, who played the fiery prosecutor, claimed he was "frightened to death" to attempt the role.

[123] Nelson B. Bell, "One of the Year's Notable Motion Picture Weeks Leaves the District's Citizenry Slightly Chilled," *Washington Post*, September 15, 1937, 15.

[124] Dan Terrell, "Two Books on Murder," *Washington Post*, November 22, 1936, B7.

Picking up a southern accent was one source of anxiety, but he also knew that the subject matter would conflict with the industry's strict Production Code, which prohibited material that might offend groups or cultures. In its final form, Rains was disappointed that the Hays office had mandated that the film show the northern press "goading the South into lynch-law tactics."[125]

Trying to gauge the critical and popular reception of any film from the past is always difficult because of the scope and diversity of the record. Some columns downplayed the sectionalism by offering a simplistic summary of the story. Frank Nugent of the *New York Times* referred to the story's defendant as "a stranger" rather than "a northerner." Although he did briefly refer to the original Frank case, as well as the more recent Scottsboro controversy in Alabama, he made only one direct reference to sectional conflict. His description of the "New York detective" and the "New York attorney" might conceivably be read as a big city-small town conflict. Readers of his column outside of the South who had not seen the movie would have had no idea of the significance of details such as Confederate Memorial Day.[126] Nugent wrote a follow-up article a few days later, however, in which he briefly described the conflict as "a grim and savage drama of the southland."[127] This subtlety in the record could imply that the film's major theme was not quite as obvious as we might believe today. Or perhaps Nugent did not want to invoke controversy in the first review of the film for fear of upsetting a segment of his readership.

Because of the nature of the film itself, most reviewers found it impossible to dance around the controversy, even if they did not make a commentary on it. Graham Greene definitively identified the defendant as "a Northerner" and described a detective "sent by a

[125] John T. McManus, "Traffic Is Jammed By Heavy Rains," *New York Times*, July 11, 1937, 134.
[126] Frank S. Nugent, "The Strand's 'They Won't Forget' Is an Indictment of Intolerance and Hatred," *New York Times*, July 15, 1937, 16.
[127] Frank S. Nugent, "A Boy Wonder Grows Up," *New York Times*, July 18, 1937, X3.

Northern newspaper and…beaten up by a Southern mob."[128] Some writers went further than simply describing the plot by noting the potential societal implications. The *Wall Street Journal*, for example, noted that the film "carefully instills into us the fact that the split between the North and the South has not yet healed."[129] The *Atlanta Constitution* described prejudice as inherently "dangerous."[130] In his *McCall's* column, Pare Lorentz described contemporary sectionalism as "the deep-seated ancient social antipathy between the small-town Southerner and the urban Northerner."[131]

Many columnists did find ways to use the film as a springboard for true commentary. Nelson B. Bell of *The Washington Post* praised the filmmakers for revealing "in broad, crimson strokes, the murderous evil that can result from the resurrection of sectional hatreds and an inflamed 'public opinion.'"[132] The *Post* later described the film as a "bitter indictment of sectional prejudices and crooked politics."[133] Although comments such as these did not directly indict the South and absolve the North, clearly the sectional bigotry in the film belongs to southern characters, and the innocent, righteous character is a northerner.

By far the most cryptic review of the film came from *Variety*, which ostensibly addressed the setting of the story only for the purpose of speculating how the box office would fare in southern theaters. Yet this traditionally apolitical trade magazine put into language what many people perhaps thought but did not want to state explicitly:

> The locale is the Deep South, and the pic appears certain to run up against difficulty there. The South isn't indicted, but due to the fact the story is spotted where U.S. necktie parties have been most numerous, and because not only the participants in the climatic

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[128] Graham Greene, *Night and Day*, November 4, 1937, in *The Graham Greene Film Reader*, 236.
[129] "The Theater," *Wall Street Journal*, July 15, 1937, 8.
[130] Sheilah Graham, "Hollywood Today," *Atlanta Constitution*, October 16, 1937, 14.
[131] Pare Lorentz, *McCall's*, October 1937, quoted in *Lorentz on Film: Movies 1927 to 1941* (New York: Hopkinson & Blake, 1975), 148.
[132] Nelson B. Bell, "'They Won't Forget' Is a Sensational Murder Drama Loaded With Dynamite, Packed With Controversy," *Washington Post*, September 16, 1937, 14.
[133] "Serious Drama Will Dominate New Film Week," *Washington Post*, September 23, 1937, 10.

> lynching but the standers-by and agitators as well are prime professional and prideful Southerners, there seems certain a storm due in the sub-Mason-Dixon states.[134]

The use of the word "there" contrasts with similar geographical distinctions such as "here" used to describe non-southern films like *Black Legion*. *Variety* hedges its commentary by claiming, "The South isn't indicted," obviously an acknowledgment of the supposed neutralization efforts by the Hays office. But if the South were not indicted, why would a reviewer be concerned about southern box office support for the film? Perhaps this particular critic was commenting not on the inherently unjust South but on southern sensitivity and self-consciousness concerning the region's reputation for lynchings, a.k.a. "necktie parties."

Some interested parties voiced agreement with this point, and openly supported *They Won't Forget* for its potential to motivate change. "This is the South, U.S.A.; time, the twentieth century," stated the *National Board of Review Magazine*. "The South may not like the film, but it is certain to be moved by it."[135] In contrast, other voices feared the picture might do more harm than good, serving "to inflame the still burning issue between North and South."[136] A candid editorial from Birmingham columnist John Temple Graves described the film as "a bitter and harmful play upon sectional prejudice." To Graves, the "implication seems to be that northerners will be hated, suspected and unfairly treated in the south forever and ever." Whereas southern characters in the film are prejudiced against northerners, Graves feared the effect of the film would actually be the reverse, reinforcing northern prejudice against southerners. He verbalized his belief that such "cheap and vicious sensationalism" and "commercial-minded

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[134] *Variety*, June 30, 1937, 20.

[135] *National Board of Review Magazine*, October 1937, 11, quoted in Peter Soderbergh, "Hollywood and the South, 1930-1960," *Mississippi Quarterly* 19 (Winter 1965-66): 10-11.

[136] *Fox West Coast Theatres Corporation Bulletin*, June 26, 1937, cited in Soderbergh, "Hollywood and the South," 10.

appeal to prejudices and hates" should not be repeated or supported if reconciliation and progress were our common goals.[137]

While contemporary, overt North-South prejudices like those in *They Won't Forget* were indeed rare in Hollywood films, the tendency to paint southern culture as foreign nevertheless endured in both pseudo-documentary and neo-realism. Examples of southern neo-realism include *Tobacco Road* (Twentieth Century Fox, 1941) and *The Southerner* (United Artists, 1945). Erskine Caldwell's 1932 novel, *Tobacco Road*, is fictional, yet non-southerners and even urban southerners believed it was intended to represent the majority of working class southerners. Southern apologists, in fact, resented Caldwell's work precisely because of their fear of essentialism.[138] John Ford's film adaptation, similarly to Italian neo-realist filmmaking, focuses on the mundane. The Lester family represents the poorest of southern sharecroppers during the Depression, preoccupied with trivial things and showing no inclination to better their circumstances by working or evolving with the changing industrial economy in Georgia.

French director Jean Renoir's *The Southerner*—made during his brief sojourn in the US during World War II—also focuses on the economic hardships of tenant farmers—in this case an honest, hardworking man in rural Texas. The film's title implies a universal story about all people living in the Southeast, and its storyline suggests the majority of southerners have a pathological resistance to economic innovation. While this representation may not be grotesque or revolting, it is nonetheless neocolonialist in that it ignores the complex relationship between financial capital and supply and demand. Even though the main character works hard, the film places blame on the local people and the culture at large for their own economic conditions.

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[137] John Temple Graves II, "This Morning," *Atlanta Constitution*, July 31, 1937, 4.

[138] Kirby, *Media-Made Dixie*, 55-56. Kirby cites Caldwell's own autobiography which discusses hundreds of letters that disapproving readers sent to the author, objecting to his exploitive portrait of working-class southerners.

Whether the characters are noble or grotesque, by not contriving a complicated or melodramatic plot and by using a neo-realist shooting style, both Ford's and Renoir's films encouraged audiences to seek out the documentary nature of the characters and their values, using a similar exploitive technique established by Flaherty and adopted later by reality television producers.

Flaherty himself embraced the exotic elements of working-class southern culture in his 1948 film, *Louisiana Story* (Lopert Films). Shooting on location in rural Louisiana and using local residents as actors, Flaherty incorporated mundane scenes of supposedly real life and dialogue in his fictional story. Entire sequences contained no dialogue at all, only scenes of rural existence or industrial processes that affect rural life, a stark contrast with most Hollywood fictional films. Reviewers commented on the importance of both the "primitive life" and the "real-life Huck Finn" quality of its star, and they understood the events on screen as a continuation of Flaherty's documentary tradition.[139] Decades later, in fact, an entry in the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* mistakenly claimed the film to be "Another documentary classic set in the South."[140]

The techniques of docudramas and pseudo-documentary continued to blur the lines between true stories and exploitation for several decades. *Thunder Road* (United Artists, 1958) and *Moonrunners* (United Artists, 1975), based on true stories of moonshining in Tennessee, were filled with characters with universal disregard for the law, obsession with cars, and a need to remain isolated from the rest of society. *Moonrunners* was also the direct inspiration for television's *The Dukes of Hazzard* in the 1980s. These films, however, contrasted with the many hillbilly and moonshine movies that preceded them in that they seemed to come from an

[139] Bosley Crowther, "'Luisiana Story,' a Flaherty Film About a Boy in the Bayou Country, at the Sutton," *New York Times*, September 29, 1948; "Bayou Boy: 'Louisiana Story's' Star Is a Real-Life Huck Finn," *Life*, May 2, 1949.

[140] Gorham Kindem and Laurie Schulze, "Film, Documentary," in *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, 918.

insider's perspective.[141] As with other media, popular genres are difficult to sustain without reinvention, and the more authentic framing of these films may have made their exploitive nature more palatable for moviegoers. Furthermore, their popularity with working-class southern audiences demonstrated the hegemonic nature of popular media, with colonized groups embracing the values that serve to exploit them. [142]

In more recent years, stand-alone documentaries and docudramas addressing southern whites have continued to appear in various forms, including theatrical release, television and cable specials, and on-demand video. But most nonfiction subgenres began to fall into the realm of television news, either in short segments or news specials. Unlike historical documentaries and docudramas that depend on the past and its association with the South, nonfiction films featuring contemporary southern whites have not resonated with mass audiences in recent decades. Occasionally, independent filmmakers can break into the market; intellectual documentaries like Ross McElwee's *Sherman's March* (First Run Features, 1986) have addressed the filmmaker's own southernness, while exploitive documentaries like Jacob Young's *Dancing Outlaw* (WNPB TV, 1991) and later spinoffs, *Dancing Outlaw II* (1999) and *The Wild and Wonderful Whites of West Virginia* (Tribeca Film, 2010), have made temporary celebrities out of working-class southerners—not unlike modern reality television stars. Yet even these films back away from blindly essentializing all southerners and instead try to present personal stories. McElwee faces his southern heritage head on by acknowledging certain cultural pressures; *The Wild and Wonderful Whites* features interviews with local people who urge audiences not to assume the Whites represent all southern Appalachians. This self-

[141] Williamson, *Hillbillyland*, 124-135.

[142] For example, see Allison Graham, *Framing the South*, 131. Graham notes that *Thunder Road*'s distributor, United Artists, regarded it as a "regional oddity" and marketed the film more heavily in southern theaters.

consciousness perhaps signals a general evolution in long-form nonfiction and the sophistication of its audiences.

As we consider the progression of films into the twenty-first century, I must reiterate my hesitation to claim a universal prejudice against all southerners based solely on the individual cases I am surveying in this chapter. Instead, I offer these documentaries and docudramas as examples of the continuing use of the South as a media colony, reinforcing prejudices that were created centuries early in other nonfiction and pseudo-documentary media. Still, it is interesting to note the possible lasting effects that any one viewing of a film can have. Renowned *Los Angeles Times* critic Kenneth Turan, who first saw *I Am a Fugitive* and *They Won't Forget* decades after their release, said these docudramas "scared the heck out of me, leaving me with the strong feeling that the South was not exactly a place that was friendly to outsiders. Many years have passed since then, but when I consider why I've never spent extended time in the Deep South, not even for a visit, I wonder how much my childhood memories of those movies have held me back."[143] Turan's candid remarks in the 21st century demonstrate that films can influence the values of even the most intelligent, savvy movie audiences.

RADIO AND RECORDS, 1923-PRESENT

As southern identity evolved in literature and film in the early twentieth century, so too were the formats for broadcast radio programming. Even before permanent national networks were in place in the late-1920s, individual stations played a variety of music genres that became familiar to national audiences, including the new "hillbilly" music that New York studios had begun to record.[144] One of the earliest nationally known programs originated with WSM in Nashville, whose signal reached the entire country by 1930. Initially called *Barn Dance*, George

[143] Kenneth Turan, quoted in Godfrey Cheshire, "Personal in My Memory: The South in Popular Film," *Southern Cultures* 17, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 34.

[144] Williamson, *Hillbillyland*, 48.

D. "Judge" Hay's show consisted mostly of musical performances, interviews, commentary, and anecdotes. In an introduction to an early airing of *Barn Dance*, Hay famously proclaimed that "we will present nothing but realism," and he soon changed the name of the show to *The Grand Ole Opry* to contrast with the grand opera that also aired on NBC's radio network.[145] Hay made his performers wear "countrified costumes" and dubbed their acts folksy names like "Possum Hunters" and "Fruit Jar Drinkers." Although "proper" Nashvillians saw the show as a threat to the city's genteel reputation, fan letters and rising insurance income convinced WSM's owner, the National Life and Accident Insurance Company, to continue the program.[146] Quite intentionally, then, Hay helped to bring the old clichés to the new medium by seemingly embracing unsophisticated culture and presenting it as "real." Country singers from the beginning focused on simple, rural life, intentionally distancing themselves from urban life and progressive ideals. The influence that *Grand Ole Opry* has had over southern identity in the twentieth century is undeniable, and it still airs today on national radio networks.

Following the path blazed by the *Opry,* radio and vaudeville acts that promoted themselves as "southern" were obligated to demonstrate a certain level of authenticity in order to gain wide acceptance. In the 1930s, "hillbilly" revues in New York and California played up southern stereotypes in order to get paid, and both performers and music critics began playing on the words "Hollywood" and "hillbilly;" one band in California even called themselves "The Beverly Hillbillies."[147] Between 1932 and 1954, Lum and Abner appeared on their national radio show and later in films, staring as simple and lovable Arkansas bumpkins. Their popularity, however, was dependent on the public's belief that their personas were real, even off-

[145] Colin Escott, *The Grand Ole Opry: The Making of an American Icon* (New York: Center Street, 2006), 12.

[146] John W. Rumble, "Grand Ole Opry," in *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, vol. 18, *Media*, ed. Allison Graham and Sharon Monteith (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 260-261.

[147] Williamson, *Hillbillyland*, 47-49.

mic or off-screen.[148] Likewise, Arkansas-native Bob Burns became a national hit with his comedy and music routines that aired on national radio. Burns went on to play "himself" in films like *Mountain Music* and *Arkansas Traveler*, which, although fictional, featured characters based on his own comedy routines about supposedly real people he had encountered in his home state, at least hinting at a blurred line of pseudo-documentary.[149] Later musicians and comedians followed similar career paths. Andy Griffith debuted nationally as a standup comedian in the early 1950s with folksy routines like "What It Was Was Football" and "Romeo and Juliet," in which he poses as a backwoods yokel who had never encountered civilization. His first agent compared him to "a real Li'l Abner," and he maintained character in all his public appearances and later in most of his movies before finally being allowed to play a more rounded character in his 1960s sitcom.[150] Ferlin Husky likewise played in movies only characters similar to himself—a simple country musician. Like previous iterations of southern or country musicians who were only allowed to play versions of themselves, Husky's characters in *Country Music Holiday* (1958), *Forty Acre Feud* (1965), and *Las Vegas Hillbillies* (1966) were country clowns who wandered into the city and seemed to accidentally demonstrate why country life is preferable to city life.[151]

Country music itself began to coalesce during this time as well, and most country singers were associated as much with their homeland and values as they were with their art. The lyrics of Hank Williams, for example, were somber, often involving a longing for simple or rural lifestyle. His words rejected the city and therefore indirectly seemed to reject progress and intellectualism. As John Temple Kirby described, "In terms of American perception of the

[148] Tim Hollis, *Ain't That a Knee-Slapper: Rural Comedy in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: University Press of Mississippi, 2008).
[149] Ibid.
[150] Allison Graham, *Framing the South*, 101.
[151] Williamson, *Hillbillyland*, 50.

South, the significance of country music's commercialization is that it pressed out to national boundaries a pervasive image of the visceral white southerner. He was languid, innocent of caprice and wisdom in handling money, moonstruck, and often drunk."[152] Their songs about "real" life encouraged stronger public perception that they represented the "real" white southerner.

Over the next few decades, country music began to address its own image in past national media portraits, helping a new "redneck pride" evolve in music, television, and film. Merle Haggard's 1968 song "Okie from Muskogee" criticized drug use, free love, and draft dodging that he associated with the hippie movement. Rather than treating rural upbringing as shameful or comedic, Haggard expressed pride in old-fashioned values. Whereas the term "redneck" had historically equated to ignorance and resistance to progress, historian James Cobb noted that by the 1970s, it "began to convey a fierce and even admirable resistance to American mass society's insistence on conformity."[153] Patrick Huber concluded that, partially as a response to mass criticism during the civil rights movement, and partially as response to the counterculture revolution and women's liberation movement, southern whites chose the "redneck" to convey "their own emerging sense of racial and class solidarity."[154] Examples of this theme in country music are found in the lyrics of songs like "Longhaired Country Boy" by Charlie Daniels, "Longhaired Redneck" by David Allen Coe, and "Country Boy Can Survive," by Hank Williams, Jr. While the meaning of any individual media text may be interpretive, the larger issue here is the continued tendency of media producers to imply that an essential nature exists for southern whites. In the case of country singers and comedians, they have rarely found mass

[152] Kirby, *Media-Made Dixie*, 90.
[153] Cobb, *Away Down South*, 226-227.
[154] Huber, "A Short History of Redneck," 157.

audiences unless they construct a sense of authenticity through their acts and their persona.[155] For many historians of country music, this is a distinguishing characteristic of the genre's relationship to its listeners. As much as, and perhaps even more than, any other genre of music, country-music performers seem to depend on authenticity.

This unofficial movement is complicated, however, when considering the diversity of cultures and values among fans, even among those who call themselves southern. Charlie Daniels' 1973 song "Uneasy Rider" relates the story of a proud country singer who is ideologically opposed to the conservative people he encounters on a road trip across the country. This dichotomy in the mediated image of working-class white southerners became more substantive with the 1976 election of President Jimmy Carter; on one hand, Carter's success seemed to signify an acceptance of rural southerners in the national arena, yet Carter's liberal agenda was a clear source of contention among many conservative southerners. Meanwhile, media producers began to find more ways to commodify the redneck image. The Swedish electronica band Rednex, who covered the song "Cotton Eyed Joe" in 1994, provides a classic example of the southern rural character moving into the global mainstream. Closer to home, Atlanta radio DJ Moby was famously fired in 2002 from a country station because his accent was "too country" for the market.[156] The growing trends of homogenization and assimilation of the country music industry and pop culture is linked with an increase in country music artists from outside the South. Native southerners like Alan Jackson still sing songs like "Where I Come From" (2000), but fans are just as likely to embrace Illinois native Gretchen Wilson singing "Redneck Woman" (2004) while Georgia native Brantley Gilbert proclaims country music, fans,

[155] For more substantive analysis, see Richard A. Peterson, "Class Unconsciousness in Country Music," in *You Wrote My Life: Lyrical Themes in Country Music*, ed. Melton A. McLaurin and Richard A. Peterson (Langhorne, Penn.: Gordon and Breach, 1992), 35-62.

[156] Cobb, *Away Down South*, 235.

and values are no longer unique to the South in "Country Must Be Country Wide" (2011). The new century indeed seemed to offer some opportunities for working-class southern whites to escape the old media conventions in radio and records, yet the reality boom was just beginning on another medium—television.

NONFICTION AND PSEUDO-DOCUMENTARY TELEVISION, 1948-2000

As with most forms of emerging media, television introduced a new conduit for audiences to experience a combination of supposed realism and popular culture, but perhaps the most important and immediate contribution of television was the transition of broadcast journalism from the radio to the screen. News producers were attracted to outrageous behavior, and their cameras gravitated to racist authorities like Harold Strider in Sumner County, Mississippi, Bull Connor in Birmingham, Alabama, and Jim Clark in Selma, Alabama, who contributed to the "cultural shorthand" of the violent and unjust southern law official that American audiences had come to expect.[157] Giving credence to films like *I Am a Fugitive from a Chain Gang* and *They Won't Forget*, these men and their supporters became representative of working-class southern whites in the eyes of many Americans, both outside and inside the South. National reporters covering civil rights activities found it tempting to stereotype all rural southerners they met, comparing many to archetypes found in Faulkner novels.[158] Perhaps more than any form of media in the previous three-hundred years, civil rights news coverage offered an obvious and immediate reinforcement of negative opinions of southern whites.

In the realm of fictional television, the image of southern whites did not fare much better than in news coverage. The sheer lack of southern settings likely helped to maintain the South's foreign status in the minds of many national audience members. Despite comprising roughly

[157] Allison Graham & Sharon Monteith, "Southern Media Cultures," in *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, 21.
[158] Allison Graham, *Framing the South*, 2.

twenty percent of the nation's population, states in the southeast have collectively accounted for less than five percent of television settings in national television programming between 1947 and 2007.[159] Additionally, southern-themed shows, not unlike the situation that country music artists faced, seemed to embrace a sense of authenticity both on and off camera to capture the essential South. Andy Griffith said of his popular *Andy Griffith Show* (1960-1968), "Even though we shot it in the sixties…it was like it was the thirties."[160] Paul Henning, creator of *The Beverly Hillbillies* (1962-1971), insisted that CBS conceal the real personalities of the actors who played the Clampetts, believing that the show would find more success if the public believed the characters were authentic.[161] Conventions and practices like these allowed Hollywood to continue its tradition of associating southern themes with the past and with "real" southern people, reinforcing its hold on its media colony. After the show's run ended, some critics suggested the hypocrisy involved, with humorist Roy Blount, Jr., describing the exploitation in *The Beverly Hillbillies* as "an atrocity that would never have been perpetuated as late as the sixties of any other ethnic group."[162] At the time, Blount's words may have seemed prophetic in that fictional television began to tone down the use of clownish southerners for comedic purposes.

Similar to 1960 situation comedies like *The Beverly Hillbillies, Green Acres*, and *Petticoat Junction*, variety shows also reinforced the colonial status of southern whites. One of ABC's first variety shows was *Hayloft Hoedown*, debuting in 1948 and consisting of country music, square dancing, yodeling, overalls, and rural comedy.[163] The *Grand Ole Opry* made the

[159] G. Scott Campbell, "Perfection, Wretched, Normal, and Nowhere: A Regional Geography of American Television Settings," (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 2011).
[160] Allison Graham, *Framing the South,* 158.
[161] Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 189.
[162] Roy Blount, Jr., *Crackers* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1982), 108.
[163] Christopher D. Geist, "Television Series," in *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, 174.

move from radio to television in 1955, with various incarnations appearing on network and cable channels up until the present day. Charles Kuralt's 1962 TV special "Christmas in Appalachia" on CBS brought awareness to poor economic conditions in the southern mountains, and every appearance on network variety and talk shows, hosted by television pioneers like Ed Sullivan or Merv Griffin, gave southern and country acts more opportunities to take advantage of humor conventions that had already been reinforced by radio and records.

Probably the most recognizable southern-themed variety show is *Hee Haw*, which began its first run on CBS in 1969 and later in syndication and reruns through much of the 1990s. Set in fictitious Kornfield Kounty, it had an enormous impact on the image of the South, commanding between twenty and thirty million viewers each week for years.[164] With a format modeled after *Grand Ole Opry*, its humor depended on old-fashioned wardrobes and hoedowns combined with dated phrases and dialects. Playing "themselves," regular cast members like Buck Owens and Roy Clark were wholesome musicians who took the role of straight man while more outrageous characters like Minnie Pearl, Grandpa Jones, and a rotation of guest hosts allowed themselves to be the butt of many jokes. Concurrent with the rehabilitation of the redneck image in popular culture, and contemporary with fictional television series like *Green Acres* and *The Waltons*, *Hee Haw* contributed to this period of resurgence for the image of white southerners following the civil rights movement. But at what cost? While the jokes and characters might have been interpreted as innocent or sentimental, they certainly reinforced timeless southern stereotypes involving drinking, poor education, laziness, and corrupt politics. The people of Kornfield Kounty were all white and completely rural, not representative of the actual southeastern states during *Hee Haw*'s heyday of the 1970s and 1980s. And although few

[164]Ibid., 175; see also Sally Hodo Walburn, "Hee Haw," in *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, 269.

audience members would have interpreted the show's sketches as purely nonfiction, these comic bits incorporated the real names of performers and abutted with interviews and interstitials featuring real, recognizable people. While distinct in look and style from today's reality programming, *Hee Haw* clearly attempted to carry on the literary and Hollywood traditions of using "real" people and associating southern settings with past values and conventions.

Television in the 1980s encountered both advances in technology and changes in regulation, resulting in new cable channels and a growing trend of niche programming. In 1983, two new regional channels, The Nashville Network (TNN) and Country Music Television (CMT) were launched out of Nashville. Early TNN nonfiction programming included *Country Sportsman*, with singer/hunter Bobby Lord, and *Nashville Now*, a "lifestyles" talk show featuring country entertainers and hosted by Ralph Emery. CMT, in contrast, focused more on country music videos, themselves often reflections—or at least idealized versions—of values of real country fans and performers.

While this kind of specialized programming remained popular in southern states, the cycle of southern-themed shows on national networks waned in the late 1980s and 1990s. ABC, for example, gave Dolly Parton a variety show called *Dolly* in 1987, but it lasted only one season. Fictional series like *The Dukes of Hazzard, Dallas*, and *Designing Women* had largely lost popularity by 1990. As Kirby concluded, television shows from the 1970s and early 1980s, like *The Waltons*, had helped popular notions of "southernness" to evaporate, or merge, into national consciousness, and Dixie itself had lost its value as a commodity.[165] The seeming disappearance of southern exceptionalism might be evidenced by the election of another southerner, Bill Clinton, to the White House in 1992 and the choice of Atlanta as the site for the 1996 Olympics. Jeff Foxworthy, known for his "You Might Be a Redneck…" comedy routine,

[165] Kirby, *Media-Made Dixie*, 144.

debuted a sitcom in 1995 in which he starred as himself, yet the show was set in Indiana. Even regional channels like TNN and CMT, which had found national homes on cable systems by the late 1990s, had new conglomerate owners and had begun to lose their southern identity. CMT, now part of MTV Networks, desperately tried to gain a national audience and heavily promoted non-southern country singers like Billy Ray Cyrus and Shania Twain. Perhaps the most literal symbol of southern identity slipping away from the national consciousness was the rebranding of TNN, from "The Nashville Network" to "The National Network," and eventually to Spike TV, in the early 2000s.

REALITY TELEVISION, 1992-2006

With every new mass media technology or format introduced to readers and audiences, with more rapid means of production and consumption, comes the possibility that popular culture trends will cycle through faster and faster. As the twentieth century drew to a close, the tendency to essentialize the image of the working-class white southerner seemed rather atypical. The travel writing of Naipaul and the memoirs from Bragg were exceptionally rare forms of nonfiction literature by this time; pseudo-documentary films and television newscasts were less likely to associate violence or extreme behavior with southern culture, even when these events occurred in southern states.[166] The contrast of southern identity with American identity was certainly not extinct, however, and the new reality television vogue in the 1990s and 2000s needed an infusion of material to sustain its growth. The boom of southern reality television programs came in the 2010s, but it was preceded by a gradual buildup of southern essentialisms in years prior.

[166] For example, the bombing in Atlanta during the 1996 Olympics was committed by North Carolina native Eric Rudolph.

One of the most influential programs of the modern reality television era is MTV's *The Real World* (1992-). The first-season cast consisted of seven young men and women from various parts of the United States living together in New York City; but only one, Julie Gentry, a 19-year-old white woman from Birmingham, Alabama, was introduced in her hometown. A montage of Birmingham includes a Confederate flag and a scene in her church. Her father speaks with a clear southern accent and expresses his disapproval for her ambitions to be a dancer. The rest of the roommates, however, do not have similar establishing scenes; the audience meets them when they are already in New York.[167] By introducing Julie in this way, the producers can construct a fish-out-of-water character to maximize conflict with the other characters and with New York City itself.

During an early meeting with all seven roommates, a conflict among the cast members involves a formulaic southern storyline, although it was not directly framed as southern. Heather Gardner's pager sounds off, and Julie jokingly asks if Heather is a drug dealer. As African Americans, Heather and another roommate named Kevin Powell begin a discussion about the potential racism involved with Julie's joke—the assumption that black people are more likely than whites to sell drugs, and that anyone with a beeper must be involved with illegal activities. Most of the discussion that the audience hears comes via the "confessional" interviews conducted later and intercut with the table scene. Back at the table scene, Kevin seems dismissive and even amused by the comment, but the producers are able to manipulate the conversation with selective sound bites to make it seem more heated than perhaps it was. Julie later said the cast realized after the episodes aired that the producers had the right to create storylines through exaggeration and even fictionalization, using stereotypes of blacks,

[167] *The Real World*, "This is the True Story…," aired May 21, 1992, on MTV.

homosexuals, and other groups to create drama.[168] In this case, although *The Real World* offered an avenue for MTV to promote cultural diversity, the producers depended on audience members' assumptions that Julie's background was connected with racism. By the end of the first season, Julie was eventually allowed to represent herself as an individual, but the show's prevailing sentiment was that she had escaped her homeland and been converted by exposure to the big city and her new friends, implying the rest of the South was still stuck in the past. As media scholar Jon Kraszewski concluded, these storylines perpetuated rather than dismissed common prejudices and stereotypes.[169]

The thousands of reality television participants appearing since *The Real World* first aired in 1992 have obviously included many southern whites, some of whom play up the role of "southerner" and others who blend in effortlessly with other non-southern cast members. Knoxville, Tennessee-based *Trading Spaces*, for example, shot episodes in many southern and non-southern locations over the course of its run on TLC and Discovery Home channels, yet southernness was scarcely part of any participant's storyline. Knoxville native Alan Frye, on the other hand, was a fan favorite on *Murder in Small Town X* (Fox, 2001), partially due to his accent and "Andy Griffith/Southern style."[170] *American Idol* (2002-) has seen a disproportionate number of southerners fare well, with the clear majority of winners and runners-up coming from southern states in the first few years of the show's run.[171] In 2002, *The Real World* recruited another white southern woman, Trishelle Cannatella, who, in her own words,

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[168] Show stars Julie, Heather, and Norman Korpi discussed this in an "Oprah: Where Are They Now?" segment, December 21, 2014, accessed May 19, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EPZphYDp2r0.

[169] Jon Kraszewski, "Country Hicks and Urban Cliques: Mediating Race, Reality, and Liberalism on MTV's *The Real World*," in *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, ed. Susan Murray & Laurie Ouellette (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 205-222.

[170] Terry Morrow, "Female fans show fondness for Fox competitor" *News Sentinel* [Knoxville, Tenn] August 13, 2001.

[171] Christopher Blank, "Southern Charm—A Little Drama Never Hurts, But Be Polite," *The Commercial Appeal* [Memphis], July 23, 2005.

feared that she might be cast as "a dumb girl from the South." During dinner together the first night, one of the roommates remarks he is pleasantly surprised that none of his new friends are racist, and the editor quickly cuts to a shot of Trishelle, whom the audience already knew was from a small town in Louisiana. Like Julie Gentry a decade earlier, Trishelle was quickly allowed to assimilate with the rest of the cast, and while each cast member may have brought some kind of cultural diversity to the dynamic, no other participant had any historic regional baggage for which to compensate like Trishelle did, and no other participant's home or upbringing was addressed nearly as much.[172]

Gradually, some reality and pseudo-documentary series began to resort to more overt South-bashing storylines in occasional episodes, bringing back the southern racist/rube conventions that had seemed dormant for several years on television. In HBO's *Da Ali G Show* (2003-2004), British comedian Sasha Baron Cohen effortlessly made unsuspecting southerners lower their guard and look foolish. In one segment, for example, a Mississippi man named Norman Harris seemed to imply that "he's a little bit upset that there's no longer slavery in Mississippi."[173] Whether or not his sound bite represents the man's true feelings about slavery is difficult to discern. The more troubling component of this segment is the implication that Mr. Harris and other people who play themselves in *Da Ali G Show*, whether or not they appear to be "working-class," actually represent a broader culture of racist southerners. Although Cohen's characters, and Cohen himself, never explicitly state that "outrageous politically incorrect prejudiced opinions" are unique to or common among southerners, the frequency of Cohen's TV sketches—and later film scenes—in southeastern states cannot be discounted. As Allison

[172] *The Real World,* "Welcome to Las Vegas," aired September 17, 2002, on MTV.

[173] This was Cohen's interpretation in an interview by Robert Siegel, *All Things Considered,* NPR, July 23, 2004, accessed May 22, 2015, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=3613548; the episode discussed is *Da Ali G Show,* "Respek," aired July 18, 2004 on HBO.

Graham concludes, Cohen often "reduces the South to the imaginary terrain of regional exotica," reviving a brand of comedy prevalent in the 1960s with acts like Lenny Bruce and the Smothers Brothers who found easy targets in racist white public figures in the South.[174]

Another British production, BBC's *Top Gear* (2002-), aired a "US Special" in 2007 that consists of the three main characters driving separate cars from Florida to New Orleans and inventing challenges for themselves along the way.[175] In one segment in Alabama, they paint phrases on each other's cars designed to incite violence from reactionary people "in this Bible-bashing redneck deeply Christian part of the union." While pondering what to write on his friend's car, Jeremy Clarkson thinks out loud, "The South. The South. It's Christian. Short-haired. They don't like communists," and in a monologue for the camera, he claims, "Three religions down here: George Bush, God, country and western." The phrases that they settle on include, "Hillary for President," "Country & Western is Rubbish," "NASCAR Sucks," and "Man-Love Rules OK." At a rural gas station, the three characters and their film crew encounter hostility when "the rednecks arrived," and they have to make a run "for the border." Back on the highway, with dramatic score music, they imply their lives are in danger, and Clarkson sums up the segment by noting that "in certain parts of America now, people have started to mate with vegetables."

Most viewers of this segment could likely guess the "certain parts of America" to which Clarkson refers include the southeastern states. The obvious stereotyping involved with the episode's plot was perhaps overdone to ensure their target audience in England would understand the nuances of the assumed southern/American dichotomy. Adding to the insult was

[174] Allison Graham, "Red Necks, White Sheets, and Blue States: The Persistence of Regionalism in the Politics of Hollywood," in *The Myth of Southern Exceptionalism*, ed., Matthew D. Lassiter and Joseph Crespino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 155.

[175] *Top Gear,* "US Special," aired February 11, 2007 on BBC.

the recap for American audiences on *60 Minutes* three years later and the insistence from the show's cast and producers that none of the extreme action was staged, and that the chase actually continued off screen for two hours.[176] The possibility exists, of course, that the actions on screen were true or "reality," although the likelihood of a major BBC production team facing death is dubious. Again, the more important consideration is the sheer lack of sensitivity for a disenfranchised part of the population and the obvious generalities applied to the entire South. *Top Gear* has in fact been criticized for dozens of its segments, and several web pages are dedicated to outlining instances of racism, homophobia and cultural insensitivity regarding Germany, Argentina, India, Mexico, Burma, and other nations.[177] Except for occasional personal blog sites and user comments, however, none of these web pages mention the American South, perhaps demonstrating that *Top Gear* audiences do not recognize rural southern whites as a potentially vulnerable population.

Aside from these occasional segments, episodes, or characters, American networks in the early 2000s had not focused the entire premise of a reality show around southern culture or used the supposed dichotomy between southeastern states and the rest of America as a recurring source of humor. This changed in 2002 when CBS greenlit the development of a new series called *The Real Beverly Hillbillies*. The premise was simple and instantly recognizable to potential audiences—find a poor family from the southern Appalachians or Ozarks, put them in a Beverly Hills mansion, and then let the cameras role. In an early interview, CBS executive Ghen Maynard said, "We want a family who has a sense of humor about themselves," stating the

[176] *60 Minutes*, aired October 24, 2010, on CBS.

[177] See for example: "Top Gear's Biggest Controversies from Jeremy Clarkson's 'fracas' to offending most of Mexico," *Independent*, March 24, 2015, accessed May 22, 2015, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/tv/features/top-gears-biggest-controversies-from-jeremy-clarksons-fracas-to-offending-most-of-mexico-10129922.html; Dugald Baird, "Top Gear: Jeremy Clarkson's Biggest Controversies – in Quotes," *The Guardian*, March 25, 2015, accessed May 22, 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/mar/25/top-gear-jeremy-clarkson-biggest-controversies-quotes.

obvious "fish-out-of-water" premise "will be funny, but a lot of it will be real."[178] One of the series developers, Dub Cornett, who himself hails from rural Virginia, asserted that the joke would be on the people of Beverly Hills, not the working-class family who moved there.[179] As in the original *Beverly Hillbillies* sitcom and countless fictional and pseudo-documentary shows from the past, the simpleminded southerners would be likable characters in their storylines, especially in comparison with more conformist—i.e., American—characters like the greedy Mr. Drysdale. Cornett likely saw the potential for valid social criticisms of dominant cultural values and attitudes, but he was naïve about the likelihood of his show reinforcing negative southern stereotypes long after CBS was finished with its new "Clampett" family.

Indeed, as CBS casting directors began searching for families in several different southern states—Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Arkansas—local people began to grumble about the potentially exploitive nature of the project.[180] Even some southerners who worked in Hollywood frowned upon the idea, predicting the inevitability of typecasting an entire region of the country, despite good intentions.[181] Eventually, Dee Davis and the Kentucky-based Center for Rural Strategies led an impressive campaign to get CBS to reconsider the series development. "These 'real people' that they're talking about would be chosen because they're poor, rural, uneducated, and haven't traveled far from home," said Davis, adding that "'Reality' TV is pretty much humiliation TV."[182] Morris Dees, of the Alabama-based Southern Poverty Law Center, noted that popular culture still finds it acceptable to make

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[178] Josef Adalian, "CBS Hoping Hicks Click: Eye Shootin' At Some Crude With Reality 'Hillbillies,'" *Variety*, August 27, 2002, accessed May 28, 2015, http://variety.com/2002/scene/markets-festivals/cbs-hoping-hicks-click-1117871994/.

[179] Lisa de Moraes, "Creating 'Real' Beverly Hillbillies," *Los Angeles Times*, August 30, 2002, accessed May 28, 2015, http://articles.latimes.com/2002/aug/30/entertainment/et-moraes30.

[180] Bronwyn Lance Chester, "In Defense of 'Dimwitted' Southerners and Hillbillies," *Norfolk Virginian-Pilot*, September 4, 2002.

[181] De Moraes, "Creating 'Real' Beverly Hillbillies."

[182] Meg James, "'Beverly Hillbillies'? CBS Has Struck Crude, Appalachia Says," *Los Angeles Times*, February 11, 2003, accessed May 28, 2015, http://articles.latimes.com/2003/feb/11/business/fi-cbs11.

fun of poor white southerners, and that CBS would never consider putting a poor black family in a similar situation. "That would serve the same CBS purpose of getting people to laugh at them, but I don't think they'd do that."[183]

CBS spent months searching for families to audition for the show, with phone hotlines, fliers, and even rewards for anyone who could connect the producers with the right participants; some critics labeled the search a "hick hunt."[184] Perhaps not surprisingly to their critics, the producers never seemed to look anywhere outside the southeast for participants, despite the abundance of rural people across the entire United States. The network eventually gave up the struggle and canceled the series in 2003, apparently sensing an unwinnable multimedia public relations battle against the Center for Rural Strategies and its allies.[185] The "hick hunt" had been reminiscent of Karl Brown's quest to find the essential hillbilly family for his pseudo-documentary film for Paramount, *Stark Love*, and one may wonder if he would have found the same fate as Paramount subsidiary CBS did had rural southerners in the 1920s had the World Wide Web as a resource to voice their objections.

The legacy of *The Real Beverly Hillbillies*, however, is not the death of rural southern stereotypes on national television, but a resurrection. Even as CBS was waging a highly publicized battle to get their show off the ground, NBC quietly developed and even produced a pilot episode for their "rural-to-riches" show, *The High Life*.[186] Although NBC canceled the series just days after public confirmation that it existed, within a few years the same themes and premises which critics blasted in 2003 would become common in shows like *My Big Redneck*

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[183] Ibid.

[184] Ibid.

[185] "About the Campaign," *Center for Rural Strategies*, accessed May 20, 2015, http://www.ruralstrategies.org/about-campaign.

[186] Associated Press, "NBC Quietly Shoots Pilot of 'The High Life,'" May 5, 2004, accessed May 20, 2015, http://www.today.com/id/4909513/ns/today-today_entertainment/t/nbc-quietly-shoots-pilot-high-life/#.VVzmokvkbfM; Joel Ryan, "NBC Takes Reality Series to Shed," *Eonline*, May 7, 2004, accessed May 20, 2015, http://www.eonline.com/news/47395/nbc-takes-reality-series-to-shed.

Vacation and *Hollywood Hillbillies*. An important bridge during the interim was Fox's hit series, *The Simple Life* (2003-2007), starring Paris Hilton, Nicole Richie, and a host of small town southerners.

The Simple Life, Seasons 1 and 2

Although the initial development of Fox's *The Simple Life* did not garner the negative press that the CBS and NBC shows did, executives still had to go on a similar "hick hunt" to find suitable locations for their show. In a pitch to one potential community, show producer Claudia Frank wrote, "Our show takes two 21-year-old celebrity daughters and places them in a small Southern town." The premise was that the young women would "learn the basics of small town life."[187] This premise seemed an exact reversal from *The Real Beverly Hillbillies*, yet the approach of the series nevertheless was that "simple" and "small town life" were to be found in the South. The opening scenes of Fox's *The Simple Life* indeed clearly contrast the wealthy lifestyles of Paris Hilton and Nicole Richie in Los Angeles against that of a rural farming family in the Ozark region of Arkansas.[188] In a montage accompanied by banjo music and a narrator with a southern accent, the women go from a scene at Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills, to a private plane, to a pickup truck where they meet the Leding Family in Altus, Arkansas. The stage is set for conflict, with the wealthy socialites established as spoiled and unhappy, while the Arkansas family is set up as poor but hard-working people with a sense of humor about the situation. In the first episode, Paris is disgusted that "pig's feet" are on her shopping list, and she and Nicole refuse to help skin and dress chickens for dinner, for which they receive a lecture from Grandma Curly about being able to fend for themselves. While buying pig's feet and skinning chickens may not be desirable activities for many audience members, the show does not frame the family

[187] Chase Squires, "Simply Put: Reality TV Degrades a Way of Life," *St. Petersburg Times,* December 12, 2003.

[188] *The Simple Life,* "Ro-Day-O vs. Ro-Dee-O," aired December 2, 2003, on Fox.

as unintelligent or unsuspecting about potential ridicule. In many ways, they evoke more empathy than the supposedly sophisticated girls from California.

While the individual family members might not be on trial, the first episode does establish a theme of exploiting a culture. The narrator makes jokes like, "They're about to find out how the other half lives," and "They've officially gone from fur collar to blue collar," relying on the implication that the world is either all rich or all poor, with no apparent middle-class or any level of sophistication in rural states. In a conversation about Wal-Mart, for example, Nicole seems to bait the family by asking about Wal-Mart, explaining to the audience, "In the South, people hang out there." One of the sons replies, "We're not that bad," implying that he understands the jab at his culture and the common stereotype that people in the rural South place a peculiarly high value in Wal-Mart. The conversation takes a turn, however, when Paris claims to not know what Wal-Mart is and asks if that is a store that sells walls. From the family's point of view, Paris seems sincere in her ignorance, and the producers' choice of facial expressions from Paris, in addition to cartoonish sound effects, encourages the audience to believe Paris is indeed ignorant. In interviews for A&E's *Biography* series, Janet Leding said she was convinced Paris truly did not know what Wal-Mart was, whereas Paris' sister Nicky claimed the whole scene was staged and that Paris was only playing a character for the cameras.[189] Whether Paris did or did not know what Wal-Mart was, the scene exemplifies a common conflict in the show, with Paris and Nicole continually stirring up trouble by testing the customs of the locals. It also demonstrates the potential believability that audiences—and, in this case, even unwitting cast members—attribute to entertainment programming supposedly based on realism.

One of the few direct insults to the South comes in episode six when Paris tells Trae, her temporary fling, that he is good-looking and does not belong in Arkansas. He could move to Los

[189] *Biography,* "Paris Hilton: Not So Simple," aired November 4, 2005, on A&E.

Angeles and be a model. She also condescendingly remarks that people like to hang out at "gas stations in Arkansas," surmising from her limited experience that the entire state of Arkansas has no other entertaining places to congregate.[190] Direct bashing of the South or southern culture is rare, however, likely because the target is too easy, and for this reason, *The Simple Life* represents a classic case of elusive hegemony. Paris and Nicole make themselves the butt of the jokes by being lazy, shirking their duties, and longing for petty items and an extravagant lifestyle unavailable in Altus. At Danny's Dairy Farm in episode 2, for example, a man mocks Nicole's work ethic and soft lifestyle back home, expressing pride that he works forty to fifty hours a week and has never flown in a plane before.[191] In the moment, these attributes are expressed as positives, yet when the season ends, Paris and Nicole get to go back to their life of luxury and do multiple *Simple Life* seasons, while the people of Altus who actually live the "simple life" fall back into obscurity.

Interpretations can be subjective, of course, and one could argue—as Dub Cornett tried in developing *The Real Beverly Hillbillies*—that audiences would be more likely to laugh condescendingly at Paris and Nicole rather than the Leding family. But clearly the rich girls were the winners, not only in the season finale when they go home, but even in individual episodes in which they are having fun and mocking the laboring people of Altus. In the words of Heather Hendershot, the series "manifests the shaky foundations of the American myth of class mobility. Unlike on the competitive shows, where merit is rewarded, here doing a bad job brings no real punishment, and people who work hard do not necessarily advance."[192]

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[190] *The Simple Life,* "Boy Crazy," aired January 7, 2004, on Fox.

[191] *The Simple Life*, "Dairy Farmin' Divas," aired December 3, 2003 on Fox.

[192] Heather Hendershot, "Belabored Reality: Making It Work on *The Simple Life* and *Project Runway*," in *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, ed. Susan Murray & Laurie Ouellette (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 251.

Although critics and scholars have paid less attention to season two of *The Simple Life*, the "road trip" that Paris and Nicole make across the South contains more exploitive material than season one. The premise is that Paris and Nicole drive from Miami to Los Angeles and, along the way, meet local contacts, get temporary jobs, and earn enough money for gas and food to get them home. Curiously, every episode takes place in southeastern states; after the final stop in rural Texas, the on-screen journey skips New Mexico, Arizona, and most of California, so while the premise may be a "cross-country" road trip, the final product is clearly a tour of the rural South. Some of the people they meet are African American, Hispanic, or Middle Eastern, but most of their contacts are working-class white people. In Batten Ranch, Florida, the host family helps Paris and Nicole prepare for a rodeo, and similarly to most situations in season one, the girls exploit the good nature of the locals and avoid doing any real work. They mock the family by claiming they do not know what "britches" are or laughing at the colloquialisms of the family's patriarch, J.O. Later they flatter J.O. by anointing him "a southern gentleman" and asking if he has ever modeled before. He replies he has modeled only for his wives, "running around naked with nothing on but a pair of chaps." The girls egg him on further and he reluctantly shows them his chaps. When they guilt him into buying them frivolous things, he says, "I'm pretty easy when it comes to good-looking women."[193]

Individually, each conversation or exchange with the people they meet on their road trip is relatively benign. The repetitive portraits of two-dimensional characters, however, can have an additive effect on audience conceptions of the working-class southern people, especially when contrasted with the personas that Paris and Nicole emit on screen. In the most dramatic moment of episode one, for example, Paris falls off a horse and is airlifted to a hospital. J.O. looks on dumbfounded as a helicopter lands on his own property and takes Paris away. He is never

[193] *The Simple Life 2: Road Trip*, "The Journey Begins," aired June 16, 2004, on Fox.

allowed to speak during this scene, at least on screen, just staring as if he cannot comprehend what is happening. In episode two, the girls spend the night at a trailer park and express amazement that people live there permanently. An attendant with a camouflage hat and a funny laugh helps them get settled. When Paris supposedly loses her pet Chihuahua, an elderly white couple, shown from a distance, sits on their porch, incapable of answering Paris' queries. Another elderly woman is also framed as ignorant, unable to speak.[194]

In episode four, as they cross the Mississippi state line, Nicole says, "I don't even know anything about Mississippi," to which Paris responds, "It's where Forrest Gump is from."[195] Nicole's dismissal of Mississippi and Paris' association of the state with a childlike fictional character, in addition to her confusing it with Forrest's home in Alabama, are all critical expressions that the girls use to remind their audience of their superior, i.e., colonizing, status. Even the narrator, with his southern accent, and the people of Mississippi themselves subtly reinforce classic conventions of the South as an essentialized media colony. The narrator notes that Paris and Nicole are "hoping to find some good old southern hospitality," and the hostess for this episode, Patty Skinner, quips, "Southern hospitality isn't something you just learn. You're born and grow up with it." By invoking the familiar concept of "southern hospitality," the show is directly pitting the people of the South against a dominant force, epitomized by the wealthy travelers. Patty speaks of "rules" and says, "I'll do my best to instill some of the southernness in them." After seeing the family's awkward interactions with Paris and Nicole, the audience has no further insight into what southern "hospitality" or "southernness" actually mean, yet Patty's conviction that they exists makes her seem stubborn and almost superstitious, believing strongly in some unknown concept.

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[194] *The Simple Life 2: Road Trip*, "Mermaid Outing," aired June 16, 2004, on Fox.
[195] *The Simple Life 2: Road Trip*, "Making Sausages," aired June 30, 2004 on Fox.

The Skinner men provide more overt examples of southern clichés that approach the grotesque images forwarded by travel writers centuries prior. In his attempt to make the girls do household chores, Patty's husband, Jared, threatens, "I'm gonna pop the whip on them," accompanied by his sadistic laughter off camera, over an establishing shot of their house, clearly framing the household as a strange place that the girls should fear. The Skinners' eldest son, James, takes on the role of male chauvinist, calling the girls "airheads," "blondes," and "dumb and dumber." He further evokes the divide between the South and the American mainstream when he remarks that Paris and Nicole "think they can run over somebody. No, not down here. We get even." The geographic modifier "down here" acknowledges the significance of region in his assessment of his own culture, and the threat that "We get even" is yet another example of the defiant white southerner in entertainment media.

James ultimately proves himself as naïve, because "down here" is exactly the kind of place where Paris and Nicole can "run over" everybody. The girls have not performed any meaningful work in Mississippi and in fact have had plenty of laughs at the expense of their hosts, culminating with James unwittingly eating dog food from Paris and Nicole's sausage factory job. As the episode nears its closing, the Skinner family is at home, praying before dinner, and both James and his younger brother Jimmy burp out loud, drawing unsophisticated laughter from their grandmother. Paris and Nicole, meanwhile, have found a casino, and the show intercuts the family's dinner with the girls dancing at a nightclub. While this family claims to represent "southernness," their culture is clearly framed as undesirable. The contrast is more than simply the net worth of the individuals in this episode; Paris and Nicole have a choice, and they choose to go dancing, while the Skinners choose to stay at home. Structurally, the juxtaposition between dance club and family dinner seems forced, with Paris and Nicole

smirking awkwardly at the camera while they dance. Perhaps the show's producers manipulated reality during production or editing, yet regardless if the events are real, partially staged, or completely fictional, the show's message is that the "simple life" is not a desirable life, and it exists primarily in the South.

While episode four presents the most aggressive attempts to essentialize southern working-class whites, other episodes do not offer many opportunities for alternative interpretations. In episode five in Louisiana, for example, the landscape is mostly swampy, and the girls express disbelief that someone as famous as Britney Spears could be from there.[196] They laugh out loud when Paris says, "No wonder she lives in L.A.," implying anyone with any means should and does leave the South. After giving their hosts' 13-year-old daughter a makeover to prepare for a date, Nicole scoffs, "She'll be pregnant in six months." Perhaps if given the opportunity, Nicole might have made a similar joke about teenage girls in other parts of the country, but because the show chooses to depict the "simple life" as unique to the South, this moment is yet another reinforcement of negative southern stereotypes.

Episode eight shows the girls working at a salon in Spicewood, Texas, and Paris and Nicole play the agitators at first, giving a punk rock make-over to a respectable, middle-aged customer.[197] The salon manager is a well-spoken woman with no hint of ruralism or "southernness" in her character, and the regular people of small-town Texas, it seems, are not much different than regular people anywhere in America. This illusion is shattered, however, when an overweight and hairy man named "Bama" enters the salon for a back wax. The girls are understandably repulsed, and they take pleasure in inflicting pain on him during the procedure, turning him into the butt of the joke in this scene. Individually, Bama might not necessarily

[196] *The Simple Life 2: Road Trip*, "Jenny's First Date," aired July 7, 2004 on Fox.
[197] *The Simple Life 2: Road Trip*, "Brand New Look," aired July 28, 2004, on Fox.

represent all southern whites for the average audience member. Yet again, because his scene is part of a consistent pattern of grotesque southern stereotypes, and because we are not privy to the entirety of the exchanges and interactions between Paris and Nicole and the locals that they meet, the body of work forwards a general lack of respect for the people along the girls' road trip through the South.

Paris and Nicole themselves rarely use the word "South" or "southern," and on the surface they do not seem to have the objective of blindly mocking the entire South. One episode indeed features the Cashes, a black family, as the host, and the girls seem quite respectful of their ritual of praying before meals or singing in the kitchen.[198] Nicole reminds the audience that "I'm a black folk, too," a reference to her being raised by pop-star Lionel Richie, himself a black Alabama native. The girls' tolerance for the Cash family's "simple" life, however, might be further evidence of the disdain that they have for southern whites, and even the Cash episode contributes to the voyeuristic nature of the show's entire second season. Paris and Nicole, meanwhile, having mined the resources of a media-constructed South and making a brand for themselves, went on to do three more seasons of *The Simple Life* with no dependence on southern conventions, including two seasons in which they never had to leave the Los Angeles area.

CONCLUSION

Like travel literature dating back at least to 1728, *The Simple Life: Road Trip* is a quick caper through a primitive land from the point of view of superior people and created for a superior audience. And like William Byrd and other aristocrats who explored working-class white southern culture, Paris and Nicole go back to their life of privilege after unwittingly establishing a new trend of southern exploitation. To review, the characteristics that the media

[198] *The Simple Life 2: Road Trip*, "Play Ball," aired July 21, 2004, on Fox.

have imagined for working-class white southerners include: a disposition to laziness, aversion to labor, heavy drinking (William Byrd, John Fothergill, Clare de Graffenried); living in "sorry huts," lying, cheating (Gabriel Johnston); lacking shoes, sexual promiscuity, rudeness (Charles Woodmason); a close connection with dirt, anti-intellectualism (Emily P. Burke, Daniel Hundley, H. L. Mencken); genetic inferiority, religious fundamentalism, nonconformity, xenophobia, isolationism (Mencken, W. J. Cash); and an array of other unsophisticated traits. My analysis in this chapter has also revealed a strong tendency by popular writers and producers to ignore other classes and characteristics of southern whites, despite the efforts of revisionist historians to point out the diversity of cultures in the southeastern states.

Many of these individual media conventions have historically conflicted with each other. Sexual promiscuity or heavy drinking may contrast with deep religiosity, for example; or isolationism and xenophobia may conflict with common notions of southern "hospitality." And producers would likely find it difficult to strategically invoke all conventions into any one media text, especially in a medium that claims to be nonfiction. By no means does *The Simple Life* or any other individual text incorporate every possible southern media stereotype or present conventionalized notions of the South in an entirely consistent, non-contradictory fashion. Further, because a majority of reality television programs are designed as comedic or lighter fare, they tend to avoid more controversial aspects of southern stereotypes, such as overt racism and bigotry or religious fundamentalism. More important than these specific characteristics is the idea that the entire South can be essentialized at all. Audience demand for a consumable South, whatever that might be, helps to conceal any dissonance they might encounter regarding distinct conventions or character types.

As I explore in my next chapter, the strategies that new reality programs use to tell their stories may be profitably compared and contrasted with the historic nonfiction media that I have surveyed in this chapter. For example, I have discussed how Carl Carmer, himself using a convention mastered by nineteenth-century humorists, juxtaposed a sophisticated author with the grotesque vernacular of southern whites in works beginning in the 1930s. Similarly, in 2012, CMT's *My Big Redneck Vacation* narrates the adventures of the uncouth Clampet family with a slightly more reputable blue-collar type, Tom Arnold. The most defining strategy of reality programming is its assertion to be nonfiction, and certainly southern-themed content has relied on claims of realism for centuries. From Joseph Glover Baldwin's tendency to mix first-person accounts and true stories with exaggeration and fiction, to pseudo-documentary theatrical films like *Hope of the Hills* and *Stark Love*, to the *Grand Ole Opry*'s claim of "nothing but realism" on the radio, audiences are accustomed to an element of supposed authenticity in southern storytelling. As I have theorized based on the progression of texts analyzed in this chapter, the trend of using the South as a media colony appeared to be on the decline in other entertainment media as the twenty-first century commenced. The reality television boom that gained strength in the 1990s, however, offered an ideal format to rejuvenate the exploration of southern themes constructed as "real."

While later series emulated many of these classic character types and story strategies that *The Simple Life* embedded into its jokes, the most obvious difference between *The Simple Life* and shows like *Duck Dynasty* or *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* is not the jokes, but the form; the latter lack non-southern characters needed to lead audiences through storylines and provide a non-southern perspective on southerners. This movement toward southern protagonists echoes the nineteenth- and twentieth-century trends of educated southerners, from Baldwin and Hundley

to Cason and Cash, taking over the mantle from foreign and northern writers and creating their own travel and pseudo-documentary literature—greatly reinforcing the negative stereotypes about southern working-class whites and inadvertently solidifying their own region's status as a media colony. Similarly, the wave of recent southern-themed reality shows is produced by and with southerners, demonstrating that audiences no longer need two non-southern princesses to guide their exploration of the South. While I have described the hegemonic effects in *The Simple Life* as elusive, subsequent reality programs analyzed in the next chapter demonstrate a more obvious hegemony, with many southern characters directly buying into the essentialisms that define southern culture and, unfortunately, maintain a neocolonial South for the world to exploit.

CHAPTER FOUR

EVERY CABLE CHANNEL HAS ITS OWN HICKSPLOITATION REALITY SHOW: A CLOSE ANALYSIS OF THREE RECENT REALITY SHOWS

One of Country Music Television's (CMT) first series that emulated the *Real World* style of modern reality television was *Trick My Truck* (2006-2009). Modeled after MTV's *Pimp My Ride*, the show featured mostly country or rural clients, their old vehicles, and a team of professional mechanics and custom designers who turn "the drivers' dreams into reality."[1] Although the reality television trend was several years old by 2006, prior to Fox's *The Simple Life*, southern-based reality series mostly consisted of competitive outdoors and motorsports shows or profiles of country music stars. *Trick My Truck* was perhaps the first successful attempt to consistently feature non-celebrity southern whites in a reality-based setting, and the number of such series began to steadily increase in subsequent years.

Table 4.1 contains significant programs that have appeared since 2003. This list is likely not comprehensive, but it contains significant reality series that have a clear dependence on white southerners and a supposed white, southern culture. The decade of the 2010s has clearly seen a notable rise in the number of southern reality shows, the majority of which feature rural or small-town settings. And this list does not even include series that might take place in southeastern states but otherwise contain characters that do not identify as "southern," such as Bravo's *The Real Housewives of Atlanta* (2008-) or DIY Network's *The Vanilla Ice Project* (2010-). While white southerners obviously appear in these shows, their references to southern

[1] "About the Show," *Trick My Truck: Main*, accessed October 8, 2015, http://www.cmt.com/show/trick_my_truck/series.jhtml.

culture or values—both direct and indirect—are minimal, and critical and audience responses demonstrate that they do not rely on a southern consciousness. Even without these shows, the list I have compiled should demonstrate how pervasive the southern reality show trend has been during this decade.

Table 4.1. Southern-themed reality series airing between 2003 and 2015.

YEAR	TITLE	NETWORK
2003-2007	*The Simple Life*	Fox/E!
2006-2009	*Trick My Truck*	CMT
2006-2007	*Two-A-Days*	MTV
2008-2011	*My Big Redneck Wedding*	CMT
2010-2011	*Southern Fried Stings*	TruTV
2010-2013	*Hillbilly Handfishin'*	Animal
2010-2015	*Swamp People*	History
2011-2012	*Bama Glama*	Food
2011-2012	*Day Jobs*	GAC
2011-2012	*Texas Women*	CMT
2011-2013	*Rocket City Rednecks*	NatGeo
2011-2014	*Call of the Wildman*	Animal
2011-2014	*Lizard Lick Towing*	TruTV
2011-2014	*Mud Lovin' Rednecks*	Animal
2011-2014	*Sons of Guns*	Discovery
2011-2014	*Sweet Home Alabama*	CMT
2011-	*Moonshiners*	Discovery

2012	*Bayou Billionaires*	CMT
2012	*Cajun Justice*	A&E
2012	*Southern Nights*	CMT
2012-2013	*Cajun Pawn Stars*	History
2012-2013	*Farm Kings*	GAC
2012-2013	*My Big Redneck Vacation*	CMT
2012-2014	*Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*	TLC
2012-	*Duck Dynasty*	A&E
2012-	*Redneck Island*	CMT
2013	*Porter Ridge*	Discovery
2013	*Deep South Paranormal*	SyFy
2013-2014	*Guntucky*	CMT
2013-	*Hillbilly Blood*	Discovery
2014	*Jersey Belle*	Bravo
2014-	*Country Buck$*	A&E
2014-	*My Big Redneck Family*	CMT
2014-	*Party Down South* (and *Party Down South 2*)	CMT
2014-	*Southern Charm*	Bravo
2014-	*Southern Justice*	Nat Geo
2014-	*Hollywood Hillbillies*	Reelz
2014-	*Appalachian Outlaws*	History
2015-	*Hot G.R.I.T.S.*	VH1
2015-	*Gainesville*	CMT

In this chapter, I conduct close analyses of episodes from three representative series that aired between 2011 and 2014, years that saw the highest ratings for southern-based reality programming. For each series, I reviewed the entire first season and many episodes of each succeeding season. Rather than using a purely scientific sampling process, my selection criteria were based on a purposive sample of shows meant to represent multiple networks. The series are *Mud Lovin' Rednecks* (Animal Planet, 2011-2014), *My Big Redneck Vacation* (CMT, 2012-2013), and *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* (TLC, 2012-2014). Although its home network is not generally marketed to southern audiences, I am interested in *Mud Lovin' Rednecks* because it explicitly contains "Redneck" in the title, and on the surface it features the most exploitive southern stereotypes. Promotional material on Animal Planet and sister networks like Discovery Channel featured some of the most outrageous activity and descriptions attributed to "redneck" culture that I have seen. *Mud Lovin' Rednecks* also spans across a few years, which is significant because its initial production and airdate in 2011 came one year prior to the explosion of popular series—including *Duck Dynasty, Here Comes Honey Boo Boo, My Big Redneck Vacation,* and *Redneck Island*—that launched in 2012 and cemented the existence of the hicksploitation trend. Its subsequent seasons witnessed a transformation in form that I believe aligned it more with the higher rated shows in the genre.

My Big Redneck Vacation is of high interest to me because it is a product of Nashville-based CMT, which historically targets southern audiences. Owned by Viacom and MTV Networks, CMT has featured several reality shows, such as *Party Down South* and *Redneck Island*, that contrast with series on other channels by promoting outrageous behavior and drinking, while simultaneously claiming a strong tie to southern culture. Although it is beyond the scope of this analysis to analyze every reality show, I certainly want to include at least one

CMT series to get a better understanding of how a southern-based channel presents southernness to southerners. *My Big Redneck Vacation* has been particularly successful for CMT, earning high ratings in multiple seasons, and also inspiring a spinoff. Furthermore, it represents the conceptual equivalent of *The Real Beverly Hillbillies*, a series that was cancelled a decade prior due to perceived insensitivities and exploitation.

Finally, I have chosen to analyze *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* primarily because of its sheer popularity and potential influence over audiences and over future programming trends. Its first season averaged 2.4 million viewers per episode, and its second season was the highest rated cable series in its time slot.[2] Within the individual episodes, characters themselves address their own southernness much less frequently than characters in other reality series that I have studied, yet the material nevertheless contains rich imagery worth studying in this analysis. Additionally, the discourse surrounding the controversial series provides an interesting context that indicates how audiences may interpret southernness.

Specifically, I divide the chapter into three sections. In the first, I examine direct references to the South and southern culture that align a show and its characters with all southern whites. These blanket associations assert that a monolithic southern culture exists and successfully frame a series as intrinsically "southern." In the second section, I further examine how such assertions equate all southern whites with a closeness with the earth, dirt, poverty, close-mindedness, obesity, and general lack of sophistication compared with non-southern Americans. In the third section, less tangible concepts such as character analysis and story

[2] Michael O'Connell, "'Here Comes Honey Boo Boo' Hits Ratings High With Finale," *The Hollywood Reporter*, September 27, 2012, accessed January 28, 2016, http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/here-comes-honey-boo-boo-finale-ratings-renewed-374905; The Deadline Team, "'Here Comes Honey Boo Boo' Breaks Ratings Records When Mama June Kinda Ties the Knot," *Deadline Hollywood*, September 12, 2013, accessed January 28, 2016, http://deadline.com/2013/09/here-comes-honey-boo-boo-breaks-ratings-records-when-mama-june-kinda-ties-the-knot-585985/.

structure supplement these direct references to reinforce the traditional neocolonial relationship between entertainment programming and the South. In each of these three sections, I have chosen to organize my written analysis by series rather than by category because I have found that various shows do not all portray the same stereotypes or conventions. For example, alcohol use is a common joke in *My Big Redneck Vacation*, but alcohol has almost no presence in *Mud Lovin' Rednecks* and *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*. Different series make claims to southernness in their own way, and I prefer to thoroughly analyze each series as its own case study rather than listing several stereotypical discourses and then providing examples that support each one.

Relying on Stuart Hall's notion of dominant, negotiated and oppositional readings, combined with my own experience as a white southerner and media producer, I use this textual analysis chapter as an opportunity to interpret these texts from a specific reading position, which may or may not apply to the average audience member.[3] However, when considering the historic patterns of southern conventions identified in the previous chapter and my personal experience on the set of a southern-themed reality television show detailed in the ensuing chapter, my interpretations can offer important context for potential meanings that many audience members and scholars may find useful. As I stress in Chapter One, many critics have made claims that southern stereotypes in film and television are exploitative, and the approach in this dissertation takes this assumption as a given. My goal in this analysis is to explicate exactly how current reality television is problematic. My analysis further demonstrates my theory that producers play up traditional southern conventions in early episodes and in promotional material in attempts to frame their series as inherently southern and to find dependable audiences. Once a show and its characters have been established, producers become more free to focus on

[3] Stuart Hall, "Encoding/Decoding," in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-79,* ed. Stuart Hall, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Wills (London: Hutchison, 1980), 128-138.

individual character and self-contained storylines, relying less and less on citing the original southern nature of the series' premise. This use and subsequent discarding of southern conventions represent classic neocolonialism of the mediated South.

DIRECT REFERENCES TO THE SOUTH

Mud Lovin' Rednecks

In Animal Planet's *Mud Lovin' Rednecks*, a few friends start a "mud bog" business in which customers pay a small fee and come out to their property to enjoy playing in the mud. "Bogging" includes wrestling, obstacles courses, and driving four-wheel-drive trucks, four-wheelers, and other vehicles in the mud, in addition to more leisurely activities like drinking and listening to music while watching others get dirty. The landowners are Anna "Lil Bit" Grantham and her husband Jerry "Bo" Grantham. Their friends Audrey "Fat Legs" and her fiancé Bubba are co-owners of the business. Bubba has a construction company and supplies machinery to create mud bog obstacles and tow vehicles stuck in the mud. In the second season, Fat Legs and Bubba are replaced by Savanah "Butterball" Creel and Michael "Big Sexy" Martin. Created by producer Mark Therrien, the show had a relatively short run, with a one-hour pilot episode airing in 2011 and eight additional one-hour episodes first airing in 2013 and 2014 and in reruns in 2015.

The opening narration for the pilot episode of *Mud Lovin' Rednecks* clearly suggests some kind of contrast, although on the surface it does not explicitly contrast the South with the rest of the country: in summertime, "most Americans can be found flocking to theme parks, beaches, and lakes in search of fun family entertainment," whereas we can see a "slightly different form of summer amusement" in the country's "heartland."[4] The southeastern states could be included in the "heartland," a term which typically suggests any hinterland region of the

[4] *Mud Lovin' Rednecks*, "Pilot," aired September 5, 2011, on Animal Planet.

country, including Midwestern and some western states, and not one of the major media centers on the coasts.

While the narrator himself may not be definitive at this point, the characters and the on-screen imagery imply mud bogging is an inherently southern activity, and this particular show is set in Alabama. During the opening montage, an intoxicated blonde man yells "Sweet Home Alabama, baby" to the camera, and a truck with "ALABAMA" spelled out on the back tailgate drives through the big mud pit. A montage of images includes mobile homes, beat-up mailboxes, dirty country roads, and a sign reading "Confederate Memorial Park." The on-screen text reads, "Chilton County, Alabama," and the narrator himself says, "It's early June in central Alabama."

Later episodes suggest an even greater association between mud bogging and broad southern culture. A customer in the first season, for example, wins one hundred dollars in a mud race. The cash has mud on it, and as the winner and his friends mug for the camera, he proclaims, "Mud money, son, from the South! This the way we do it in the South, with a little mud on our money!"[5] In the second season, Butterball bounces on the bog's new toy, the "Mud Blob," launching high into the air and landing in the mud. "We know how to have a good time down here in the South. Give us our mud, we know what to do with it."[6] Assertions like these imply that all southerners, not just the few that are on this show, have an affiliation with mud. Whether or not these characters have actually given their assertions much thought is difficult to determine, but obviously these direct statements contribute to a general assumption that many southerners embrace a close association with dirt.

[5] *Mud Lovin' Rednecks*, "High School Reunion," aired August 26, 2013, on Animal Planet.
[6] *Mud Lovin' Rednecks,* "Mudieval Times," aired September 1, 2014, on Animal Planet.

Producers have been known to direct or stage the action in reality programming, but we cannot know simply by watching whether or not they prompted the characters to make broad cultural statements. However, writing narration, choosing images to film, and editing choices do require an active role by the show's producers, and the opening narration for many episodes implies mud bogging is a universal activity in the state of Alabama. "In Alabama, there's an age-old tradition unlike any other," says the narrator as we see a montage of shots, including a barn, a highway sign reading, "Go to church or the devil will get you," and many images of mud bogging.[7] In this brief introduction, the producers are not so subtly associating their show with previous media stereotypes of Alabama—as rural and as fundamentally religious. By crafty writing and editing, they appeal to their audience to consider mud bogging to be just as "Alabama" as other media conventions. Throughout the series, in fact, the narrator reminds the audience that the setting is Alabama, and the producers use similar montages as scene transitions, with a musical score of banjos and other country music conventions playing. Furthermore, they intentionally withhold any imagery and characters—such as educated or professional people in cities—that might distract the audience from mud.

The characters themselves also substantiate the association between Alabama and general redneck culture. In addition to a client's seemingly random cheer of "Sweet home Alabama" that I described from the pilot, even the bog employees subscribe to the idea of the entire state of Alabama as a unique place that helps to define their business and their lives. When designing a luge sled made for the mud, Lil Bit's cousin Ashley remarks that an old furniture dolly with duct tape has "a little bit of Alabama twang to it."[8] She delivers the line with a smile, but if there is any humor involved, it comes from an association between Alabama people and cheapness and

[7] See for example, "The Weddin' Bog," aired August 26, 2013, on Animal Planet.
[8] *Mud Lovin' Rednecks*, "Big Sexy's Mud Games," aired September 1, 2014, on Animal Planet.

perhaps even poverty. Underneath the innocent delivery of the line is the implication that Alabama people are not good enough to own or build a real luge sled, and so they must improvise with inferior parts.

When deciding whether or not to take on a client's challenge of building a dance floor in the mud, Bo claims, "I will get it done. If I have to find every redneck in Alabama."[9] In this statement, he chooses neither to say "every redneck" in general, nor "every person in Alabama," implying that he believes in an association between "redneck" and Alabama. He plans to drive an old school bus into his mud bog and use it as a dance floor, and he speculates that, "in Alabama, there's abandoned cars, old scrap cars everywhere, laying in people's front yards, back yards, side yards. They everywhere." Here, Bo provides a more specific essentialism, one that evokes historically negative associations for Alabama. The sight of junked cars on one's property has become a cliché in mediated images of the South, suggesting poverty, excess, misplaced priorities, a lack of pride in décor, and a disregard for good taste. To close the deal to host the high school reunion, Lil Bit says to the client, "Around here in Alabama, we shake hands and it's final." Even this seemingly innocent mention of a state or region can contribute to cumulative audience effects. In this case, Lil Bit expresses her belief in an essential Alabama. Whether or not shaking hands means more to the people of Alabama than it does in other states, the significant point here is that Alabama is more likely than other non-southern states to be easily essentialized.

My Big Redneck Vacation

CMT's *My Big Redneck Vacation* (2012-2013) is a spinoff of an earlier series called *My Big Redneck Wedding* (2008-2011), which featured an alternating cast every episode. Both series are hosted by comedian Tom Arnold and produced by Pink Sneakers Productions, but in

[9] "High School Reunion."

My Big Redneck Vacation, the series sticks with the same extended family for several seasons. The family later formed the basis for another spinoff, *My Big Redneck Family* (2015-). The premise of *My Big Redneck Vacation* is following the extended Clampet family, hailing from Shreveport, Louisiana, to a different vacation destination each season. In season one, they visit the Hamptons in New York for several weeks. In season two, they visit the United Kingdom and other parts of Europe. In season three, the family takes an extended road trip in a motorhome across the United States, stopping at various cities. As the host, Arnold does not interact with the family but instead speaks directly to the audience, setting up scenes and interjecting humorous commentary.

The series has an undeniable southern consciousness, and its own references range from prideful to self-deprecating, mostly all of which are in attempt at humor. In the opening for the first episode, Arnold says, "Meet the Clampets. That's right, the Clampets," knowing most American audiences will recognize the name from the sitcom, *The Beverly Hillbillies*.[10] "They're an all-American family rooted in deep southern traditions and values." Along with this explicit declaration of the family's association with the South, we see video of the family participating in four-wheeling, fishing, archery, and mud wrestling. Arnold then explains, "We here at CMT are plucking this group from the only home they've ever known and planting them for the summer in one of the richest, most exclusive vacation destinations on the planet: the Hamptons in New York." The music bed of banjos and guitars transitions to more refined classical music featuring violins, and we see shots of swans, peaceful streams, yachts, windmills, and other iconography that connote a contrast to the Clampet's culture. Arnold laughs to himself, almost sheepishly, implying that "we"—the producers, and perhaps even the audience—are intentionally setting up a culture clash and are privy to a kind of social experiment. "It's the

[10] *My Big Redneck Vacation*, "I Like to Move It, Move It," aired January 21, 2012, on CMT.

ultimate culture collision," says Arnold, choosing a word that infers violence and discomfort. "We introduce the North to some good old southern charm." Here, with words, visuals, and music, the show is setting up a reality series based as much on geography and culture as on individual personality, with the Clampet family used as representatives for the entire South.

Later episodes feature a slightly abbreviated opening. Arnold says, "CMT has taken the Clampet family from the Deep South and sent them on an all-expense paid vacation to the Hamptons of New York. Fun-filled southern values meets healthy hoity-toity northern lifestyle in the ultimate culture collision."[11] During this description, we hear a car horn playing "Dixie," and we see a series of visual clashes. For example, as the Clampets drink wine in an upscale location, Hamptonites look on with aghast faces. Arnold is essentializing a "northern lifestyle" here as well, but the clear implication is that the visiting southerners represent the "other" in comparison with this wealthy and "healthy" ideal.

Throughout the series, Arnold supplies many more specific geographic references that reinforce *Vacation*'s claim as an essentially southern text. When regular cast member Jared is introduced, he says, "I ain't never uh really been around Yankee country…they hard to understand," to which Arnold interjects, "Don't worry, we'll give you a Yankee-to-Redneck dictionary."[12] Subtly, Arnold is giving a southern geographical direction to "redneck" by contrasting it with "Yankee," normally interpreted to be non-southern. Furthermore, Arnold's delivery suggests that the joke is on Jared in that he is the one who will be difficult to understand, not the Yankees.

Even in a promotional appearance on the late-night show, *Conan*, soon after the series debut, Arnold frames the series as essentially southern. He explains the family's name is

[11] *My Big Redneck Vacation*, "Too Legit to Etiquette," aired January 28, 2012, on CMT.
[12] "I Like to Move It, Move It."

"Clampet," and immediately acknowledges the laughter from the audience who presumably believe the name is staged to refer to the sitcom, *The Beverly Hillbillies*. "It's not a fake thing…" They are "real rednecks, a whole big family of, like, twelve from Arkansas, or no, Louisiana, whatever."[13] By confusing the two southern states, Arnold comes across as dismissive and equates any southern state as representative of one monolithic culture.

Like Arnold, the main cast members acknowledge a preoccupation with geography and its association with culture. Jared's fiancé Michelle hails from Arkansas, and Jared's sister-in-law, Aimee, refers to her as the "Yankee of the family."[14] Aimee's husband, Chris, reveals his trepidation about the trip, saying, "I don't think we're going to fit in that well with that kind of people up there." His use of the phrase "up there" demonstrates his association of region with culture.[15] As with Jared's mention of "Yankee country" and Aimee's description of "the Yankee of the family," Chris is demonstrating here how the family members actively and unabashedly essentialize themselves and people from other geographic parts of the country. Likewise, when Michelle and Jared decide to get married in the Hamptons, Michelle wants to include "some of the southern style, the country, like the sunflowers and everything." Here, she not only makes an explicit reference to the South, but she associates it with "country."[16]

When the women visit a butcher shop run by a man with a strong New York accent, his dialect may seem as othered as the southerners' speech. When they first begin to converse, he says, "You're not from around here, are you?" One of the ladies says, "We're from the South," and the butcher nods and says, "Cool."[17] Similarly, in season three, while touring celebrity

[13] Tom Arnold, interview by Conan O'Brien, "Luck Be a Man Dressed as a Lady Tonight," *Conan*, aired February 15, 2012, on TBS.
[14] "I Like to Move It, Move It."
[15] Ibid.
[16] "Too Legit to Etiquette."
[17] "I Like to Move It, Move It."

homes in Beverly Hills, California, Tommy speaks into an intercom at a gated driveway and says they are looking for "the party at the 'gravato.'" A stuffy voice on the other end of the intercom replies, "There is a grotto, but not a gravato," to which Tommy says, "There you go. Sorry. Mispronunciation. We're from the South."[18] The description, "We're from the South," in these cases and others, seems to be a universally understood catchall that excuses or explains the cultural differences involved in this series.

In another episode, the men are challenged to a game of polo, a sport that is implied to be refined and clearly foreign to the "rednecks." One of the Louisiana men says, "Let's go whup some Hampton ass," and "we know how to ride a horse; they forget we're from the South."[19] In this case, he is referencing his assumption that all southerners ride horses, and he is specifically making the claim that this polo match represents a challenge to the entire southern people. During their polo training, Arnold interjects to the audience, "The South's gonna do it again…whatever it was they did the first time." Here, Arnold jokes that he does not know what that common phrase means—a reference to the Civil War. Therefore, in this context, we are left with the notion that the entire South is still somehow against the rest of country in some way. Before the episode ends, Arnold and the cast make many other jokes about "the South" winning and beating the "Yankees." Similar storylines occur in later episodes, for example when the Clampets take on locals in Michigan in a lumberjack competition.[20] Even though this family is from a very specific part of Louisiana, they rarely refer to themselves as "Louisianans" or "Shreveportians," but instead associate themselves with something that will likely earn them higher ratings, a broader "southern" culture that has been fed to mass audience through decades of repetition.

[18] *My Big Redneck Vacation*, "Beverly Hills, CA," aired April 21, 2013, on CMT.
[19] *My Big Redneck Vacation*, "Hans Polo," aired February 28, 2012 on CMT.
[20] *My Big Redneck Vacation*, "Dearborn, Michigan," aired February 16, 2013, on CMT.

Explicit southern essentialisms occur less frequently as *My Big Redneck Vacation* progresses, supporting my theory that producers like to frame a series based on recognizable or comfortable tropes to gain an initial audience. Situations in the second season in Britain, for example, are likely to frame the comedic conflict as more generally high-culture versus low-culture, although the cast does make an occasional reference to the South. Additionally, Brantley Gilbert's theme song for the entire series proclaims that "country must be country wide," presenting the notion of "country" as an American phenomenon rather than specific to the South. Nevertheless, throughout the entire series, and the spinoff that followed, the show's writers can always fall back to timeless jokes about the South when in need of an easy laugh. Furthermore, the inclusion of numerous southern references by cast members in the first episodes and the reduction in frequency in later episodes indicates to me the southern consciousness of the cast members themselves is at least partially built up by the show's writers and producers as they craft their product for mass consumption.

Here Comes Honey Boo Boo

When compared with other shows in this study, the highly successful TLC series *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* (2012-2014) actually contains very few direct allusions to its own southernness. The show is a spinoff of TLC's *Toddlers and Tiaras* (2009-2013) and features Alana "Honey Boo Boo" Thompson (age 6 during the first season) and her family in McIntyre, Georgia. The show's premise is presumably to watch Alana train and compete in child beauty pageants, but most of the on-screen action documents various family activities unrelated to pageant competition. By far, the most references to the South occur in the pilot episode, particularly when the family goes to the "Redneck Games" in East Dublin, Georgia. The screen is filled with an abundance of Confederate flags, including an African-American man waiving

one, and Alana's mother, Mama June, describes the annual event as "all about southern pride, similar to the Olympics but with a lot of missing teeth and a lot of butt cracks showing."[21] As one of the first real events in the opening episode, the association of "southern pride" with "redneck" characteristics is a telling example of southern essentialization. Besides "missing teeth" and "butt cracks," the games are primarily associated with events in the mud, another southern convention.

Allusions to the South occur very rarely in later episodes, including occasional transitional images of Confederate flags or miniature sculptures of Confederate generals for sale at stores. In one episode, Mama June says, "It's hot as hell in the South," but this statement is not much of a cultural expression.[22] Despite the lack of direct affiliation with the South and with working-class white southern culture, the show has been interpreted as a southern text. In one recent scholarly article, May Friedman claims "the show profiles a southern US family as emblematic 'rednecks' and invites viewers to watch, laugh, and judge."[23] A review in *Forbes* magazine describes TLC as "trying its hardest to portray Alana's family as a horde of lice-picking, lard-eating, nose-thumbing hooligans south of the Mason-Dixon line, but it's not working."[24] It is interesting on several levels that this television critic identifies many positive attributes in the series, but most notable is that she interprets southernness as one of the show's defining characteristics. Perhaps the timing of the show's release, during the critical year of 2012 when so many other essentially southern reality shows appeared, encouraged audiences and critics to associate *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* with them. More likely, however, based on my

[21] *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo,* "This Is My Crazy Family," aired August 8, 2012, on TLC.
[22] *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo,* "She Oooo'd Herself," aired August 15, 2012, on TLC.
[23] May Friedman, "Here Comes a Lot of Judgment: Honey Boo Boo as a Site of Reclamation and Resistance," *Journal of Popular Television* 2, no. 1 (April 2014): 77-95.
[24] Julia Bricklin, "TLC's 'Here Comes Honey Boo Boo' Isn't All That Bad," *Forbes*, August 12 2012, accessed December 13, 2015, http://www.forbes.com/sites/juliabricklin/2012/08/12/tlcs-here-comes-honey-boo-boo-isnt-all-that-bad/.

experience studying nonfiction media from the past three centuries, I feel that any rural southern white family, even one as peculiar as Alana's, will often be stripped of individuality in mass consciousness and interpreted as essentially southern.

SPECIFIC NEOCOLONIAL CHARACTERISTICS

In the previous section, I discussed several examples in which characters and producers of southern reality television make explicit and direct statements associating their shows with "the South." Importantly, many characters and narrators imply quite clearly that their actions and values are representative of all southerners. While I personally do not believe that one monolithic southern culture exists, I acknowledge the possibility that many audience members may consciously or subconsciously subscribe to the mediated South as reinforced by the multitude of reality shows in recent years. In this section, I further analyze characters and actions and consider how these shows specifically reinforce negative stereotypes of the South and working-class southern whites, which in turn deepen the media's neocolonial grip on southern culture. These stereotypes include, among others, obesity, lack of sophistication, conventional gender roles, drinking, anti-intellectualism, close-mindedness, and close association with dirt and mud.

Mud Lovin' Rednecks

The regular cast members of *Mud Lovin' Rednecks*, along with their clients, generally have a good time, and the approach in most of the episodes is to provide carefree, fun-loving entertainment suitable for family viewing. Unpacking the material, however, reveals many troubling essentialisms that contribute to the hicksploitation trend of reality television. One common theme in this series is the contrast between ingenuity and laziness of working-class southern men. On one hand, Bo and other men express a similar fascination with cars found in

prior nonfiction and fiction media texts, and they sometimes demonstrate a propensity for building and repairing the many types of automobiles that operate in the mud bog. On the other hand, the men allow themselves to be the butt of many insults by their female counterparts based on their supposed lack of ambition and expectation that the women should do certain jobs. In the pilot, for example, the men are supposed to make improvements in the mud bog while the women go to town to promote their next event. The narrator sets up the scene: "Free from the girls' supervision, Bo doesn't see any reason why they shouldn't have a little fun while they work." Bubba neglects to show up for work at all, while Bo and his friends use big machinery to smash things in the mud and tow each other around in circles. In a confessional interview, Lil Bit expresses her anger at their lack of productivity. When Fat Legs yells at them, Bo ignores her and asks his friend for another beer, and Bubba offers no remorse for skipping work.[25] Similarly, in season two, Big Sexy watches as Lil Bit's cousin Ashley finishes work on a luge slide. Ashley asks, "Hey, you want to bring your happy self down here and help?" to which Big Sexy replies, "Hey, you doing a good job right now." In a confessional interview, Big Sexy jokes that he would like to put duct tape over Ashley's mouth.[26] The sequence is more lighthearted than the previous one with Fat Legs, but in both cases, it seems the men truly have embodied the conventional lazy southern male that travel writers had claimed to document for centuries.

However, during the course of the series, Bo and the other male characters succeed in delivering many impressive machines and other client requests, including a rollercoaster, a Ferris wheel, and a mobile dance floor. In the episode titled "Big Sexy's Mud Games," the men are charged with building ramps and other obstacles in the mud. In a confessional interview, Lil Bit

[25] "Pilot."
[26] "Big Sexy's Mud Games."

says, "Usually when I go and check on the guys, they're either sleeping, or they're up to no good."[27] Despite the fact that the men have made much progress, they appear to be having a difficult time when Lil Bit enters the scene. In the moment, they indeed seem averse to hard work, or at least ineffective, yet in the scenes prior to and following this scene, they are quite industrious. The lazy joke is therefore one of convenience; structurally, the episode's plot needed some conflict, otherwise the task is too easy. The lazy southern male archetype is consequently revived and reinforced in mass consciousness.

Lack of sophistication is another element found in many southern-themed reality shows, *Mud Lovin' Rednecks* being no exception. Belching out loud, embracing obesity, and mocking intellectualism, for example, would likely be considered backward or grotesque behavior according to the norms of many audience members. The narrator's earliest introductions of both Bo and Fat Legs are accompanied by belches. When Lil Bit considers different categories for the Miss Mountain Creek competition, she proposes burping. To show off her own talent, she burps herself, and Fat Legs follows with a burp as well. Later in the pilot, we hear multiple burps, both on and off screen, as the women continue to brainstorm for ideas. The clear implication is that they belch out loud and often, whether or not they are aware of the camera's presence. Finally, at the actual Miss Mountain Creek competition, each contestant does indeed show off her burping prowess.[28]

Later episodes do not contain quite as much burping as the pilot, but the characters, particularly Lil Bit, never seem above belching out loud. In "The Muddy Obstacle Course," Lil Bit and Butterball try to get in shape by visiting a fitness trainer, one of the few times we see any of our characters outside of their own property. One of the exercises is called a "burpie," and Lil

[27] Ibid.
[28] "Pilot."

Bit says, "I like burping." The trainer has to clarify, "It's not the bodily function." After a tough workout, Lil Bit says in a confessional interview, "Literally, my sweat is sweating. I was sweating in places I didn't even know I had."[29] Although this segment does not present anything overly grotesque, the open discussion of belching and perspiring contribute to a running theme of unsophisticated behavior, not unlike other southern-based reality series.

Obesity is another common attribute often associated with the South, and *Mud Lovin' Rednecks* has innumerable direct and indirect references to the potentially problematic condition. With the exception of Lil Bit, every principal character is overweight, including Bo, Bubba, Fat Legs, Butterball, and Big Sexy. Many of the extras and unnamed customers are obese as well. The most direct reference to weight in the first season is the nickname of "Fat Legs." During her introduction in the pilot—after she burps—she pulls down her pants and tells Lil Bit to "Kiss my ass!" to which Lil Bit responds, "That's a big ass!" The intended humor is derived from the notion that being fat is funny, and while this humor convention is not limited to southern characters, the possibility exists for cultural exploitation given the real statistics concerning obesity in the South.

The show's second season includes a new level of tolerance and even admiration for obesity with the introduction of Butterball and Big Sexy. In the season's first episode, both are applicants to take over the vacancies left by Fat Legs and Bubba; all the applicants, in fact, are overweight. Big Sexy in particular becomes the convenient object of ridicule whenever a laugh is needed, and his trademark slogan of "Big Sexy approved" implies a new machine or ride is strong enough to hold even the heaviest of customers.[30] Another scene involving Big Sexy's size adds a complication to the issue of weight. When Big Sexy proposes the creation of Olympic-

[29] *Mud Lovin' Rednecks,* "The Muddy Obstacle Course," aired December 15, 2014, on Animal Planet.
[30] *Mud Lovin' Rednecks,* "Muddy Redneck Rodeo," aired September 1, 2014, on Animal Planet.

style games in the mud, he notes that the customers need to "work their self up, you know, get in shape, kinda like me," and he rubs his belly to punctuate the point and draw a laugh from the other characters—and presumably the audience.[31] By using a self-deprecation tactic, Big Sexy is acknowledging that obesity is not desirable, yet the lightheartedness of the moment and the entire series indicates a lack of concern about the association between working-class southerners and health problems caused by being overweight.

Anti-intellectualism has long been associated with "the mind of the South," and it provides a source for many jokes in *Mud Lovin' Rednecks*.[32] Similarly to "fat" jokes, anti-intellectualism often comes in the form of self-deprecation. In "Rollercoaster Bog," Lil Bit must find an expert to help them but is hesitant to "get on the Interweb." Bo corrects her by saying, "Internet." At the computer, she seems ready to begin her research, but then asks Fat Legs, "How do you spell rollercoaster?"[33] In another episode, she claims in a confessional interview, "We might be rednecks, but we're ente-penurial rednecks…empi-tenurial? I cannot say that word, empi-nurial," and she laughs at her own mistakes.[34] Both of these scenes earn laughs from her colleagues, and the music cues and facial expressions on screen imply the producers expect a laugh from the audience. Although Lil Bit typically demonstrates intelligence, in these cases she is allowing herself to be ridiculed by seeming uneducated.

Eager to fulfill his role as comic relief, Big Sexy offers multiple self-deprecating remarks about his intellect. After Bo designs a simple barrel racecourse, Big Sexy looks at the sketch and remarks, "Purty smart. I woulda never thunk about it."[35] Here, the mispronunciations seem

[31] "Big Sexy's Mud Games."
[32] For more on anti-intellectualism, see my sections on H. L. Mencken and W. J. Cash, for example, in Chapter Three.
[33] *Mud Lovin' Rednecks,* "Rollercoaster Bog," aired August 26, 2013, on Animal Planet.
[34] "Muddy Redneck Rodeo."
[35] Ibid.

almost too obvious to be authentic, and Bo's race design is hardly complex, so why does Big Sexy intentionally set himself up for ridicule? In another episode, while the others are brainstorming for ideas, Big Sexy jokes that he can't help them brainstorm because his brain is "messed up," having been drop on his head as a baby. He later intentionally mispronounces the word "knight," joking that he was a "ka-night" back in a past life.[36]

To set up another episode, the narrator notes, "Bog owner Bo and his right-hand man Big Sexy usually leave the thinking to the girls." Here, both Bo and Big Sexy attempt to play dumb and avoid having to think too much. Bo points to his head: "I just got a hamster wheel up there. The hamster has died but the wheel still rolling." Big Sexy, not to be outdone, replies, "I ain't got the wheel man."[37] Both men laugh, seemingly proud to mock the use of one's intellect. Whether or not they are conscious of it, they are continuing a tradition that began long ago in nonfiction and fiction media. Authors and producers have rarely allowed working-class southern whites to be intellectual, and those that have tried to better themselves through education are often ridiculed for getting "above your raisin'."[38] For Bo and Big Sexy and their presumed audience, playing dumb may indeed be a source of pride, but if there were any validity to the belief that southern working-class whites are indeed anti-intellectual, its perpetuation on national television by supposedly real people who identify quite explicitly as southern certainly makes it difficult to ever break the cycle.

In addition to self-deprecation and direct references to intelligence, the characters' own actions in *Mud Lovin' Rednecks* call into question their ability to reason through dilemmas. In the pilot, Bo and Bubba roll a car into a pond so they can stand on top of it to fish, not

[36] "Mudieval Times."
[37] "Big Sexy's Mud Games."
[38] "Don't Get Above Your Raisin'" is the title of a country song recorded by many artists, including Ricky Skaggs (1981). It also forms part of the title of historian Bill C. Malone's book, *Don't Get Above Your Raisin': Country Music and the Southern Working Class.*

calculating that it would completely submerge. They then try to reason to the women that maybe the fish will swim inside the car and be easy to catch when they tow it out. Fat Legs scolds them, "Why didn't you just fish like regular people fish? Dumbasses!"[39] In "Wedding Bog," to collect mistletoe growing on a tree high out of reach, Bubba decides to fire multiple shotgun blasts into the tree until some of the branches fall down.[40] While other characters in other reality shows have certainly used questionable judgment, the presentation of buffoonery in shows like *Mud Lovin' Rednecks* is directly linked to their characters' southernness, giving audiences yet another justification to see the media South, in Jack Temple Kirby's words, as "an elsewhere for the American majority's amusement or negative example."[41]

Finally, the most obvious convention that this show incorporates is the affiliation between southerners and dirt. When documenting "clay-eaters" and dirty living conditions, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century travel writers and twentieth-century photojournalists were making direct social commentary, often about grotesque southern whites. Although the show's producers might not have had a similarly blunt agenda, the white southerners in *Mud Lovin' Rednecks* have fully embraced their close association with the earth, evidenced not only in the show's title but also in the storylines of each episode, the actions of the characters, and the sheer number of exterior shots with mud and dirt. The confessional interviews, for example, are all conducted in front of or near dirt and mud. The opening song lyrics are all about mud, and the on-screen titles and text contain splattered mud graphics and sound effects. Even in more subtle moments during the show, mud and dirt are part of everyday life. In the pilot, for example, while sunbathing in the mud, Fat Legs asks for suntan lotion, and Lil Bit complies by spreading mud

[39] "Pilot."
[40] "The Weddin' Bog."
[41] Jack Temple Kirby, *Media-Made Dixie: The South in the American Imagination* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 162.

on her arms.[42] In another episode, after getting particularly muddy, Big Sexy enjoys a "redneck shower," which consists of a bulldozer pouring dirty water on him. He philosophically remarks, "Mud is the thang that makes the world stick together," and adds, "That the first shower I had in about a month."[43]

The episodes are further littered with non-sequiturs that typify the characters' love of mud. In opening montages in the pilot and in later episodes, quotes from unnamed clients include a young boy with a Mohawk haircut, covered in mud, saying, "Let's go mud boggin'!" A young woman says, "If you ain't muddy when you leave here, then you didn't have fun." A woman dubbed "Double Ds" wins the Miss Mountain Creek pageant, and when she gets her one-hundred-dollar prize, she tells the camera, "I love the mud and the mud loves me." One young man proudly claims bogging is "a lot of mud slingin', beer drinkin', hell raisin'," and another man explains it is a place to "get nasty." One man literally embodies the term "clay-eater" when he stands up in front of the camera, smiles, and sticks out his tongue, revealing mud in his mouth.[44]

Other moments and sound bites more blatantly demonstrate the omnipresent relationship between mud and southern culture. A girl in a Jeep proudly tells the camera, "It's mud, there's rednecks, and there's four-wheel drives and four-wheelers." She spits, then continues, "'Bout time to get dirty." Her mentioning of rednecks affirms her mindset that mud bogging is a cultural expression. One muddy woman exclaims, "We don't do that high-class (bleep). We like to get dirty!" A man with a shaved head and a beer in hand seems quite philosophical when he claims, "This is not some happy bull (bleep) preppy thing that you come out and you do. This is

[42] "Pilot."
[43] "Mudieval Times."
[44] "Pilot."

a lifestyle."[45] This client actively contrasts his love for the mud with other entertainment options in mainstream American culture. "High-class" and "preppy" descriptors imply a feeling of inferiority on his part, and while playing in the mud may seem like a relatively harmless activity, the show's premise is an example of hegemonic misattribution in that these working-class white southerners' close association with dirt is connected historically with poverty and lack of alternative recreation options, yet they claim to fully embrace it.

My Big Redneck Vacation

As with many other reality series involving working-class white southerners, *My Big Redneck Vacation* contains countless examples of neocolonial representations of the media South that reinforce negative stereotypes, including excessive drinking, obesity, indecency, and cultural insensitivity. Unlike *Mud Lovin' Rednecks*, however, this series seemingly makes attempts to acknowledge the faults of its characters, foster some positive universal values, and show people of different cultures making honest attempts to foster understanding.

Beer is part of every episode in *My Big Redneck Vacation*—including images of drinking in the introductory montage—and the men in particular discuss often the importance of alcohol in their daily lives. One episode in season one is even titled, "Beerly Beloved," demonstrating the need for alcohol to help them get through Jared and Michelle's wedding. In season two, the family plays "drunk cricket" with their British friends at Tammy and Tommy's wedding, claiming drunkenness is a requirement if the British people want to experience redneck culture.[46] At a celebrity party in Beverly Hills, the Clampet men introduce their guests to a beer keg, which none of them have apparently seen before. When Doug performs a "keg stand," Playboy

[45] Ibid.
[46] *My Big Redneck Vacation,* "The Non-Royal Wedding," aired September 1, 2012, on CMT.

Playmates and a gay fashion designer are indeed amazed.[47] In the show's finale, the Clampet men pressure all of their guests from other parts of the country to "shotgun" beers with them, implying that excessive drinking is part of their culture.[48] In Davenport, Iowa, the men are most excited when they get to tour a brewery and even swim in a beer vat, and at a cattle drive in Colorado, Chris' main concern is whether or not they can bring a beer cooler. "Hell yeah," he says when given approval, and he and Doug and Tommy spend a considerable amount of time rigging their horses' saddlebags to hold more beer.[49]

During their time in Area 51 in Nevada, the family meets some unusual people who have expertise, or at least infatuation, with UFOs and extraterrestrial encounters. After their host, Wilbur, tells them about a special guest speaker who will talk about his abduction by aliens, Chris breaks an awkward silence by uttering a phrase he uses in many episodes: "I'm going to need another beer."[50] When invited to see interesting sites at Area 51, he and Tommy and Doug seem only concerned with bringing beer on the excursion. The dialogue about beer is often delivered as a comedic conclusion to a scene or to transition to another scene. The joke is that the Clampet men either do not care about or are uncomfortable with the people they meet on their trip, and alcohol provides consolation, a familiar staple that can help them cope. Host Tom Arnold helps to confirm this interpretation later in the third season when he finally comes face-to-face with the family. They visit his house in Beverly Hills, California, and Arnold's wife Ashley asks what their favorite part of their trip has been. Chris' first response: "We got to swim in a vat of beer." Arnold has an incredulous stare, and he can only utter a doubtful, "Yeah." The cartoonish music score helps to accentuate the point as well, clearly implying that, of all the

[47] "Beverly Hills, CA."
[48] *Mud Lovin' Rednecks,* "Shreveport, LA," aired April 28, 2013, on CMT.
[49] *Mud Lovin' Rednecks,* "Davenport, Iowa," aired March 3, 2013, on CMT; "Dude Ranch, CO," aired March 9, 2013, on CMT.
[50] *Mud Lovin' Rednecks,* "Area 51," aired March 20, 2013, on CMT.

activities the family has experienced on their trip, swimming in a vat of beer is a mundane undertaking to call your favorite.

Perhaps one of the most interesting episodes in the entire series is "Dearborn, Michigan," in which the family encounters the "Islamic Center of America," a city with a high proportion of Muslims.[51] Among many important themes to examine in this episode, the alcohol question seems the most important to the Clampet men. During the episode's opening, when Tammy informs them it is against the Muslim religion to drink alcohol, we see a series of close-ups of Michelle, Doug, and Jared with shocked faces and hear a horror music score. Jared flatly proclaims, "I'm out," emphasizing the joke just before the show transitions to the standard episode introduction with Arnold.

The alcohol theme is then reiterated multiple times in this episode. In a restaurant, for example, Jared asks for Bud Light, but the waiter says they do not serve alcohol. Jared looks like a lost puppy, and Doug delivers an expletive. Later, when Aimee and Tammy have a conversation with a local Muslim woman named Nawal who says alcohol is forbidden in their faith, the Clampet women nod politely, but a sudden cartoonish music cue, combined with a few cutaway glances and awkward pauses, makes this information seem like a shock. Whether or not Aimee and Tammy are indeed shocked at this moment, clearly the producers want the audience to consider again how foreign this concept is for "rednecks" to grasp. The joke resurfaces once again when the family dines at Nawal's house. She offers them non-alcoholic beer, and the show freezes on Chris' face as a pop-up graphic of Arnold enters on the screen and utters, "What the f-(bleep)?!" Here, even the show's host is confirming that alcohol is an integral part of redneck culture, thus aligning with a common southern stereotype.

[51] "Dearborn, Michigan."

Another running joke in this series is obesity, disregard for healthy food, and their assumed associations with redneck culture. Three out of the four men—Chris, Jared, and Doug—would likely be considered clinically obese, and even Tommy and some of the women in the family often joke about their own weight. In the polo episode, Arnold questions the wisdom of getting on a horse and makes fun of their diet, implying they all eat too much sugar and fat.[52] When they take a helicopter tour of the Hoover Dam, each person must be weighed, and they all mock each other about being overweight.[53] In their lumberjack competition, the guide advises the Clampets to do warm-up exercises before they begin, but his advice is unheeded as Jared sips a Mountain Dew, Wendy eats a mouthful of Nerds candy, and Doug swats a bug. Later, as Jared climbs a tree with a rope, his family yells, "Keep your toes out!" Arnold interjects a fat joke: "Toes out? He hasn't seen his toes since 1977!"[54] On the road in their motorhome, Doug eats Doritos for breakfast and mumbles something incomprehensible. Subtitles interpret his mumbling: "I used to eat chips and hot sauce for breakfast." In another scene at a Middle Eastern restaurant in Dearborn, Michigan, Doug sees falafel on the menu, badly mispronounces it, and scoffs, "that's what them vegetarian people eat," demonstrating his lack of open-mindedness for trying healthy alternatives in his diet.[55]

The men are primed for more mockery when they visit Venice Beach in California. As we see shots of the men swimming in the ocean, Arnold says to the audience, "The whale watching is going to be good today," alluding to Chris, Doug, and Tommy in contrast to the fit people populating Venice Beach.[56] Later, the music score helps to contrast the Clampet men with the California locals. Throbbing, intense music plays as local bodybuilders lift weights,

[52] "Hans Polo."
[53] "Area 51."
[54] "Dearborn, Michigan."
[55] Ibid.
[56] "Beverly Hills, CA."

whereas silly, comical music accompanies the Clampets as they clumsily try to figure out how to operate the weight machines. As a clincher for this running joke, Chris gives up and suggests they all get funnel cakes. In the next segment, they rent surfboards and wetsuits, and Chris asks, "You got any fat ones?" Once they all have their wetsuits on, the three men do indeed look overweight as they pose for the camera. The multiple weight jokes clearly insinuate that a disproportionate number of southern working-class whites are unhealthy and overweight, and the constant self-deprecating jokes imply a widespread insecurity when comparing themselves with people in other parts of the United States.

Like characters in other southern reality series, the Clampet family is often associated with the outdoors, specifically mud and dirt. The opening images of the first episode in season one, for example, show them frog hunting in a swamp in Louisiana, as Arnold delivers his introductory comments about the Clampets being "rooted in deep southern traditions and values." Arnold elaborates by saying their normal idea of a vacation is simply "hunting and fishing and, oh, yeah, muddin'!" and we see family members jumping in mud holes and smearing mud on each other, images very similar to those in *Mud Lovin' Rednecks*.

Throughout the series, the family and the people they meet make many references to camouflage clothing and apparel, a fashion statement that ties the family with the outdoors. When asked by their polo instructor why they all wear camouflage, Chris says it helps them "know our people," in contrast to the tight white pants and polo shirts of the Hamptons locals.[57] Many in the family have camouflage smart phone cases, and back home in Shreveport, Jared prepares for the arrival of his new baby by packing a "daddy-to-go" bag with all camouflage

[57] "Hans Polo."

clothing for himself and his new baby.[58] Later, when baby Lily finally arrives, the family indeed puts a baby camouflage hat and booties on her.[59]

In other scenes, Arnold plays up the characters' relationship with dirt with one-off jokes. On the cattle drive in Colorado, for example, the family is concerned about sleeping on the ground. Chris tries to raise his kids' morale by saying, "This is going to be like a Posturepedic; it's gonna form right to you." Arnold pops up and says to the audience, "His sleep number is dirt."[60] His deadpan delivery seems to imply a common assumption that rednecks are associated with dirt and filth, a joke that further reinforces this centuries-old stereotype. Chris later exacerbates the notion when he asks Arnold to introduce him to the actor, David Spade, his favorite celebrity simply because he once played a character named "Joe Dirt."[61]

Because the premise of this series is a road trip, however, away from their normal lifestyle and activities, we do not see the Clampets in the elements as much as people in shows like *Mud Lovin' Rednecks*. Instead, the show's producers give them occasional opportunities to express their love of the outdoors by contrasting them with non-southerners that they meet on their voyages. In the Hamptons, for example, the men visit an exclusive golf course and decide to fish in one of the ponds.[62] In Nevada, they are excited to ride dune buggies, displaying a combined love of dirt and mud with the love of cars and speed, another southern media convention.[63] With their road trip complete in season three, they prepare a redneck shindig for their out-of-town guests, and one necessity seems to be a mud bogging area, so they use a bulldozer to dig up a large area for mud mattress surfing.[64] Like the shotgunning of beer,

[58] "Area 51."
[59] "Shreveport, LA."
[60] "Dude Ranch, CO."
[61] "Beverly Hills, CA."
[62] "Too Legit to Etiquette."
[63] *Mud Lovin' Rednecks,* "Las Vegas," aired March 16, 2013, on CMT.
[64] "Shreveport, LA."

playing in the mud is a cultural expression for these characters, and they seem compelled to share it with other people.

Probably the most frequent running joke in *My Big Redneck Vacation* is pervasive indecent or grotesque behavior. The men, women, and children are all quite comfortable discussing excretory functions and body parts in front of each other and on camera. In Arnold's introductory montage in the first episode, for example, interview clips suggest they are a close family, and to exemplify their closeness, Jared farts loudly, clearly condoned by the rest of the family. In the motorhome, Chris repeatedly talks about their dog farting. Shortly after arriving in the Hamptons, Jared again farts very loudly, totaling three fart jokes in less than twenty minutes of screen time.[65] Similar gags occur so frequently throughout the three seasons that they become difficult to count. While touring the Hoover Dam, for example, they sit in tight quarters in a helicopter, and they joke about farting.[66]

The humor extends to other excretory functions as well, including a peculiar interest in toilets and feces. In many episodes, one of the first things they do when they arrive at a hotel or rental house is to inspect the bathrooms. In a luxury suite in Las Vegas, Doug yells excitedly, "it's got one of them butt crack washer things!"[67] At their rental house in San Francisco, Chris is curious about handles to help lift the toilet lid, something he has never seen before. He tests the flushing capacity and gives his approval. Arnold pops up and jokes to the audience that this toilet will have to go on a diet after Chris leaves.[68] Touring Arnold's house in Beverly Hills, the producers play up this joke even further. The first thing Doug asks Arnold upon arrival is to use the bathroom. Once inside, Doug is impressed by the size and notes "one of those funny-looking

[65] "I Like to Move It, Move It."
[66] "Area 51."
[67] "Las Vegas."
[68] *My Big Redneck Vacation,* "San Francisco, CA," aired April 14, 2013 on CMT.

toilets." The musical score sounds like fart noises, and Doug finds some air freshener spray, saying, "We're gonna need that." After cutting away to another scene, the show cuts back to Doug, still in the bathroom. He calls home to Jared, back in Louisiana, and jokes that he is about to "redecorate old Tom Arnold's bathroom." Jared laughs, "I bet he's got all them commodes that squirt you in the ass when you flush it," recycling Doug's previous joke about a bidet in the Las Vegas bathroom.[69] In many households, it might be normal to snicker at someone passing gas or using the bathroom, but what I find curious is the family's and the producers' choice to include so many incidents of it.

Discussion of toilets and other bathroom humor is topped, occasionally, when family members actually take action to remove waste in what they describe as "redneck" ways. Doug, the family member who seems most comfortable on camera with the subject, announces on the bus that he needs to use the bathroom. Instead of simply using the bus' onboard facility and potentially clogging the system, he collects his stool in a brown paper bag. The rest of the family is disgusted, yet they laugh along with him. They stop the bus and let Doug drop the bag on the side of the road, described as the "first hot bag of the vacation!"[70] This term "hot bag" is apparently familiar to all family members, and the joke is recycled a few more times in this episode. Back at home in Louisiana, Jared plots to build a diaper slingshot to dispose of dirty diapers for the new baby. He names it the "turd slinger," and tests it out by urinating in a diaper and then slinging it far into the woods.[71] Actions like these may draw easy laughs from some

[69] "Beverly Hills, CA."
[70] "Dude Ranch, CO."
[71] "Las Vegas."

audiences, but they represent a disturbing association between working-class southern whites and indecency and filth that has existed for centuries in nonfiction entertainment.[72]

While indecency jokes within the family represent a form of lowbrow humor, the *Vacation* series as framed in its introduction presents opportunities for more important social and cultural commentary.[73] When the "rednecks" are put into social settings with people of other cultures, their actions show us their values, as well as their ability to adapt and grow. I will discuss this further in my discussion about episode and season structure in the next section, but here I will first examine several scenes that demonstrate anti-intellectualism and a lack of sophistication that are associated with southern whites. One of the first actions of the family upon arriving in the Hamptons is blowing a car horn with the tune of "Dixie" and yelling "Rednecks in the Hamptons!" out their windows.[74] In this case, they seem to be intentionally embracing the culture conflict, looking for a reaction among the locals. During dinner at a five-star restaurant, the men seem to intentionally use poor etiquette by uttering profanity, embarrassing the women in their family who had previously taken etiquette training. Jared asks the harp player if she knows any country music, and he later urinates in the parking lot next to their limousine.[75] The episodes set in England during season two are rife with similar etiquette breaches, which, unless the Clampet men are actually of low intelligence, are possibly staged for the camera.

The lack of intellectual thought or sophistication appears in other ways besides etiquette. Arnold, for example, jokes that Jared would not understand what "an app" is, or even what a

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[72] Jim Goad, for example, used the term "shit-strewn" to describe a stereotype for poor southerners in his book, *Redneck Manifesto: How Hillbillies, Hicks, and White Trash Became America's Scapegoats* (New York: Touchstone, 1997).

[73] As Arnold says in every episode introduction, the show is a "collision" of cultures, framed as a social experiment.

[74] "I Like to Move It, Move It."

[75] "Too Legit to Etiquette."

computer is, as we see a shot of Jared's blank stare.[76] In Beverly Hills, Tommy uses a clichéd joke when he mispronounces "Rodeo Drive."[77] And in San Francisco, Doug seems sure that the city is located on the Atlantic Ocean and that they are on the East Coast. The family debates and someone suggests they should "internet it."[78] Based on their delivery of the dialogue and facial expressions, it appears they are purposefully feigning ignorance, not only of geography but of the proper terminology for using the Internet for information. In many scenes, intellectualism and education seem to be intentionally devalued, especially by the men, but regardless if it is intentional, it nevertheless reads as a "redneck" characteristic.

Related to intellectualism is cultural sophistication and tolerance for other people's customs and values. It is not surprising to me that working-class southern white people in this series are framed as politically conservative and uninterested in learning new ways of life. Two broad issues that the Clampets explore are sexuality and religion. Although they never explicitly state it, the pride they have in "southern traditions and values" equates to heterosexuality and Christianity. The men use an occasional gay joke seemingly just for cheap humor, such as when discussing aliens in Area 51 and Doug jokes he would rather be the "prober" and not the "probee" if he were abducted.[79] In the first season, the show makes very few references to gay people, despite the likelihood that many of the locals in the Hamptons may be gay. In the final episode, for example, a lady discusses her "unusual" friend, but the only time we hear her say the word "gay," she is off-screen, and only audiences who are paying close attention will catch the reference. We have to remember the show's CMT audience and the hesitation that the cast and producers might feel to address anything potentially controversial. In season three, however, we

[76] "I Like to Move It, Move It."
[77] "Beverly Hills, CA."
[78] "San Francisco, CA."
[79] "Area 51."

see a more in-depth discussion of homosexuality in the San Francisco episode which I will address further in the next section.

Discussion of religious tolerance, particularly involving Muslims, is potentially problematic for conservative Christian audiences as well, and the episode set in Dearborn, Michigan, provides what seems to be an intentional clash between cultures. As previously mentioned, Dearborn has a high percentage of Islamic people, and the Clampets, including the women, express immediate disdain when they arrive in their bus. Wendy proclaims, "You ain't taking me to no temple," and Michelle says, "I'm not doing any of that crap."[80] Jared essentializes all Muslims as "Iraqis" with statements like, "Look at that Iraqi shit" and "What the heck happened? We went to bed last night and woke up in Iraq." Even one of the Clampet children expresses fear after seeing a local person with a head covering. "They're terrorists…I'm scared!" Multiple family members question whether or not they are still in America.

I previously discussed the Clampets displeasure with the alcohol policy in Dearborn establishments, but they also openly disparage the local people by insulting the food offerings. At a restaurant, for example, a waiter brings out an entrée of raw beef. Jared says it looks like "the bottom of the gut bucket once you dump it," and one of the women remarks, "Looks like dog meat." Tommy later says, "that Iraqi food had me emptying it all out." No one, not even host Tom Arnold, points out the potential problem of labeling all Muslim people as "Iraqi." Personally, as I watch, I find the Clampets so culturally insensitive that I wonder what humor a CMT audience might find in these situations. Are we supposed to sympathize with the Clampets and therefore fear or laugh at the local Muslim people? Or are the Clampets themselves the butt of the joke because of their backwardness and ignorance? Either way, they are expressing

[80] "Dearborn, Michigan."

themselves as "rednecks," and by their own statements, they are speaking for all white southerners.

Here Comes Honey Boo Boo

Criticism for *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* appeared immediately upon its release, at least partially because of the perceived possibility of child exploitation. Yet some critics, as previously noted, associated it with southern stereotypes, while others more broadly described it in terms of rednecks or hicksploitation. Tim Goodman of *The Hollywood Reporter*, for example, described watching it as "soul-crushing…the green light to laugh at rednecks and fat people."[81] Because the thesis of my analysis is the perpetuation of southern stereotypes, I will attempt to keep my criticism focused as such, interpreting what I believe are actions that reflect the southernness of the show and its characters rather than other subcultures.

The term "redneck," as I have discussed in Chapter Three and in this chapter, has been closely associated with southern working-class whites, and although characters in *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* rarely refer to themselves as southern, they do embrace redneck culture. In an early scene in the first episode, the family is gathered together for a group interview, and Alana blurts out, seemingly unprovoked, "Yes, we are rednecks."[82] This starts a debate, with her father Sugar Bear agreeing that they are indeed rednecks since they like to ride four-wheelers and play in the mud. Alana's older sisters loudly disagree, simply because they all have all their teeth. The assumptions by various family members do reinforce some negative stereotypes of rural whites, but the discussion is reflexive enough to possibly generate debate among audience

[81] Tim Goodman, "Honey Boo Boo: That Joke Isn't Funny Anymore," *The Hollywood Reporter*, August 22, 2012, accessed December 13, 2015, http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/bastard-machine/here-comes-honey-boo-boo-alana-mama-364933.

[82] "This Is My Crazy Family."

members, which I find preferable to blindly labeling all working-class southern whites as rednecks.

As mentioned previously, the family attends the annual "Redneck Games," an event associated not only with rural culture but with grotesque behavior and poor health. One of the events is making the loudest armpit noise, and another is belly flopping in a mud puddle. Mama June, who is extremely obese herself, gawks at other obese people dancing and playing in the mud, describing them as "broke down" and criticizing them for wearing bikinis that do not fit their bodies well.[83] In her judgment, these people are the definition of "redneck." Yet Mama June refers to her own family as redneck occasionally in later episodes. For example, when she and her daughters attempt to assemble a portable crib for their new pet pig, she jokes, "How many rednecks does it take to put a bed together?"[84] In another episode, the family tries to beat the heat by building a "redneck waterslide," which consists simply of spraying a water hose on a tarp.[85] It is an easy joke and perhaps a common phrase among certain people, similar to the "redneck shower" from *Mud Lovin' Rednecks*. In a season two episode, the girls put down butter and grease on their kitchen floor and create a "redneck slip-n-slide." A yodeling musical score accompanies as they slide around and have fun.[86] Despite the intended innocuousness of the term "redneck," the comedy is based on misattribution and superiority, invoking the tradition of poor southern whites historically living in poverty, filth, and excess. In these situations, Mama June and her daughters casually embrace redneck culture, yet we see the family visit an actual water park and then rent a more professional inflatable water slide in later episodes. This

[83] Ibid.
[84] *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo,* "Gonna Be a Glitz Pig," aired August 8, 2012, on TLC.
[85] "She Oooo'd Herself."
[86] *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo,* "Mo Butter Mo Better" aired July 17, 2013, on TLC.

suggests they only use the term "redneck" when it is convenient for the sake of comedy, a classic neocolonialist strategy.

When the family goes four-wheeling with their friend, Crazy Tony, Alana yells in a confessional interview, "You better redneckonize!" and "I like to get down and dirty, redneck style!"[87] The scene contains dozens of four-wheelers, mud riding, people falling in mud, and playing in mud, which Alana describes as "mud boggin'," all accompanied by up-tempo country, bluesy music. As I expressed in Chapter Three, poor southern whites have been associated with dirt and mud in nonfiction for centuries, and today mud boggin' in reality television seems almost obligatory to me. When viewed in the context of the family debate in episode one, these potentially damaging references to redneck culture are perhaps mitigated, depending on how closely an individual audience member follows the series. Isolated promotional material showing Confederate flags and people playing in the mud may evoke completely different reactions if one is not aware of characters' reflexivity.

Apart from direct associations with redneck culture in *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*, we see a multitude of situations that involve grotesque and indecent humor. As with the Clampet family in *My Big Redneck Vacation*, Alana's family is quite comfortable discussing bodily functions in front of each other and on camera. For example, the show introduction for every episode in the first two seasons involves a staged family portrait, with the camera floating down delicately, accompanied by a musical score of gentle guitar strumming, only to be interrupted by a fart sound. In the first season, they all blame Mama June, and in the second season they blame Sugar Bear, but all in good humor. Passing gas and discussing body parts is further established as a common occurrence in multiple scenes. When Alana's sister, Jessica, a.k.a. "Chubbs," age 15, is concerned about getting too fat, her theory is that she can still eat but can lose weight by

[87] *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo,* "What Is a Door Nut?" aired August 22, 2012, on TLC.

farting. "I'm gonna fart a lot," she says as she munches on junk food.[88] Sister Lauryn, a.k.a. "Pumpkin," age 12, when joking that she hopes to one day weigh 250 pounds, says her primary goal is "my butthole piercing."[89]

Alana herself is given full liberty to discuss excretory functions and body parts on camera, saying, for example, that her new pet pig "just farted on me," and drawing laughter from Mama June.[90] When practicing for her upcoming beauty pageant, she claims she feels like a champion, then farts out loud. When her mother complains about the smell, Alana says she has "gotta go poo poo." Later, during a confessional interview, she says, "This is my fart face. This is really nasty. And it stiiiinks!" Alana also feels free to talk about body parts, referring to vaginas as "biscuits" or "vajiggle jaggle."[91] When the family plays "guess whose breath," a blindfolded Alana says someone's breath "smells like A-S-S!" and garners much laughter.[92] Although Mama June is the butt of many jokes about obesity, Alana herself turns out to be the most grotesque character in the series, and it is easy to understand why so many critics denounce this show as exploitative.

Aside from humor about body parts and excretory functions, we see the family members conducting other actions that one may associate with a general lack of sophistication—finding and eating "road kill," for example, or oldest sister Anna being pregnant at age 17 and not knowing who the father is.[93] For the purposes of this study, I cannot find as much evidence of direct associations between grotesque or unsophisticated behavior and southern essentialisms that I find in other reality series, but I can understand how one may connect them subconsciously

[88] "This Is My Crazy Family."
[89] *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo,* "A Bunch of Wedgies," aired August 29, 2012, on TLC.
[90] "Gonna Be a Glitz Pig."
[91] "A Bunch of Wedgies."
[92] *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo,* "Time for a Sketti!" aired October 12, 2012, on TLC.
[93] For references to road kill, see episodes "I'm Sassified!," aired August 15, 2012, on TLC; "Time for a Sketti!;" and "Mo Butter Mo Better." For a discussion of Anna's pregnancy, see "Gonna Be a Glitz Pig."

with poor education, which in turn is associated with poor southern whites. In a later section, I will elaborate on this possibility in a more detailed character analysis.

Obesity and health are likely the most controversial issues in *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*, with Mama June being the face of the problem. She weighs more than 300 pounds, and the series exploits her obesity for countless jokes and scenarios. She ironically enters Alana in beauty pageants and claims to teach all of her daughters to take pride in the way they look, yet she embraces "my fatness," grinning at the camera as she rubs her multiple chins in the first episode.[94] Her own self-deprecating delivery confirms her awareness that others judge her negatively, yet she allows herself to be the butt of many jokes. At an auction, for example, someone is selling Bundt cakes, and June tells Alana they are no good for their diet. Yet June looks hungrily at the cakes, and we hear a *Jaws*-type suspenseful musical score, as if June's inner urges are sharks that she cannot control. Even as she talks about saving money and eating more healthily, she bids on the cakes and ends up buying two of each, plus chips and boxes of cookies.[95]

June's daughters further encourage her disparagement on camera. Pumpkin, age 12, tells June she should use rust remover to treat "neck crust." We then see a slow-motion extreme close-up of June's neck, revealing dirty buildup under the folds of her chins. Later, Alana jokes that Mama June may want to eat her pet pig, Glitzy, or may want to eat the pig feces they find on the table. "She eats everything else."[96] Mama June merely laughs at the teasing, seemingly unashamed. When the family goes tubing in the mud, one of the daughters says, "You need a doggone crane to life that big thing up," referring to her mother.[97] At a water park, Mama June's

[94] "This Is My Crazy Family."
[95] "Gonna Be a Glitz Pig."
[96] "She Oooo'd Herself."
[97] "What Is a Door Nut?"

difficulty is a source of much amusement. A camera operator zooms in on a close-up of June's backside as she struggles to get on a tube, and later she struggles to get out of the tube due to her girth. Going down a big slide, she has a wide lens camera attached to her, and someone yells "tidal wave" as she splashes other patrons during her landing.[98] At a trampoline center in season four, Alana says if Mama June jumped on one it would create a black hole and everything would get sucked into it.[99] Even Sugar Bear, who is normally quite shy and rarely says anything intentionally disparaging, says he could not feel his feet when June sits on his lap.[100] As long as June allows herself to be the butt of fat jokes, the series seems to always have something to show to its audience, regardless of Alana's pageant career.

Mama June's embracing of her own obesity seems to be inherited by her daughters as well. The girls often weigh themselves on a scale as part of a weight-loss competition, yet Pumpkin is not ashamed that she has gained weight and jokes that she hopes to weigh 250 pounds one day. Even as Mama June claims all the girls deserve a reward for their weight loss efforts, we see Pumpkin sticking her fingers in cream cheese and eating it.[101] By season four, which is only about two years after the first season, Pumpkin has visibly gained weight, and so has Alana, the center of the series. From the opening episode, we see Alana eating cheeseballs for breakfast and squeezing her belly, trying to make herself look fatter for her upcoming pageant.[102] When expressing how much she loves her pet pig, Alana pulls up her shirt and grabs her own belly, pretending to be a pig.[103]

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[98] "A Bunch of Wedgies."
[99] *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo,* "3 Generations & 1 Pork Rind," aired June 19, 2014, on TLC.
[100] "What Is a Door Nut?"
[101] "A Bunch of Wedgies."
[102] "This Is My Crazy Family."
[103] "What Is a Door Nut?"

As with other topics of analysis, it is difficult to unpack the complex relationships between obesity, poverty, southernness, and other variables. The aforementioned segment at the "Redneck Games," for example, features many close-ups and camera zooms on overweight men and women, yet in the background of these same shots, we see dozens of thin and otherwise healthy-looking people.[104] Fat jokes may conceivably be used in a reality show set in other parts of the country, but I am not aware of any that use them so often. Series such as *Heavy* (A&E, 2011) and *The Biggest Loser* (NBC, 2004-) indeed feature overweight people from diverse geographic and socio-economic backgrounds, but obesity itself is rarely a source of humor as it is in *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*, *Mud Lovin' Rednecks*, and other southern-based reality shows. While admitting my sensitivity as a white southerner, described in the reflexivity statement in the introduction to this dissertation, I interpret the countless obesity jokes in *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* as at least partially attributed to the southernness of the characters.

BROADER CONCLUSIONS: CHARACTER, STORY, AND EPISODE STRUCTURE

Having established how the reality television shows in this study present themselves as essentially southern and how they perpetuate specific negative stereotypes of working-class southern whites, I further analyze character types and story structures that may contribute to the continued neocolonial subjugation of the media South. Specifically, I discuss cumulative character actions and the creation of archetypes for comic relief, the contrast between southern and non-southern characters, the lack of diversity in the casts, the evolution of episodic structures, and indications of producers manipulating character and narrative. I also address further how producers play up traditional southern conventions in early episodes and in promotional material in attempts to frame their series as inherently southern and to find dependable audiences.

[104] "This Is My Crazy Family."

Mud Lovin' Rednecks

Many southern reality programs begin to shed their dependence on obvious conventions and stereotypes as their seasons progress. When series such as *Duck Dynasty* and *Party Down South* become popular and last for multiple seasons, producers and participants seem to grow weary of exploiting the same hackneyed redneck jokes and instead hope that audiences have become emotionally invested in the real characters and their personal situations. The short run of *Mud Lovin' Rednecks* perhaps did not allow for enough character development for this evolution to occur. Still, changes between the pilot episode and the later episodes demonstrate a shift in the show's approach to find and maintain an audience. Additionally, *Mud Lovin' Redneck*'s contrasting of characters with varying degrees of sophistication—or southernness—is a convention found even in longer running reality series.

The pilot episode of *Mud Lovin' Rednecks* stands apart from later incarnations in two major ways: form and character. Most later episodes consist of a standard formula in which a new client challenges the team to deliver a specific mud bog request. The pilot, on the other hand, has yet to find that formula and instead lets the characters' actions dictate the plot. Getting the business off the ground is the goal, and since the mud bog is new, the team has to solicit customers and promote new ideas. The pilot, therefore, is more like an authentic documentary, not beholden to a concocted episodic situation.

Perhaps associated with the revision in form is the reshaping of the show's onscreen character personas. Generally, most of the characters speak with a more pronounced southern or country accent in the pilot than they do in later episodes, and the specific things they say and do are noticeably more outrageous.[105] Lil Bit tells her team that they can make some money and then go get drunk, and indeed they all do go to a club and get in fights in the pilot. Fat Legs

[105] "Pilot."

describes herself as "not someone people should mess with. I have a very short fuse." She backs up her own characterization many times in the pilot. Even Bo's elderly mother, "Mama Bear," has a brief scene in which she describes herself as a "bitch" and a "witch," and having a "violent temper." Video shows her shooting a gas can, and she expresses disgust at the entire mud bog operation. In every other episode, however, Mama Bear's character is relegated to an occasional reaction shot, never displaying any such attitude. In fact, all of the female characters lose most of their feistiness after the pilot episode. The men, likewise, have more abrasive, "country," personas in the pilot. Their speech is often mumbled, and the producers use subtitles, as if the characters are speaking a foreign language. Bo later emerges as the clear leader among the male characters, demonstrated not only by his role as bog owner but by his speech, actions, and reactions to other characters, especially in all the episodes after the pilot.

Despite the series evolution, many episodes share in common the use of some classic storytelling conventions with legacies dating back to prior centuries of southern nonfiction entertainment. One such convention is the contrast of character types, ranging from intelligent and sophisticated to buffoonish and one-dimensional, that helps advance storylines. These lowly figures on the character spectrum represent what I call "uber-rednecks," and the trend in *Mud Lovin' Rednecks* begins in the pilot episode with a friend of Bo and Bubba's named "Knothead," who is recruited to help them catch catfish. The music score used when Knothead is on screen implies he lacks intelligence. When he looks at the camera, he appears to have missing teeth, and the narrator sets up the scene with a sarcastic tone in his voice: "Knothead is known for his radical ideas." Knothead's plan is to use jumper cables to send an electrical current into the water, flushing the fish to one end of the pond. The plan fails, and Bo assigns Knothead the job of catching worms. Knothead says, "You know you can eat worm," and he appears to pull

something out of the mud and eat it. The other characters are disgusted.[106] On the surface, the obvious role for the Knothead character in this scene is that of comic relief, but his failures also raise the stakes for Bo and Bubba who are depending on having catfish transported to their mud bog. The convenient use of Knothead deflects some of the ridicule away from Bo, who must remain more relatable for the audience. Knothead's role, however, may have an additional effect of reinforcing the stereotype of the unsophisticated redneck.

Other uber-rednecks appear in later episodes and perform similar functions as Knothead. When brainstorming for ideas for a mud rollercoaster, Bo's friend Blake volunteers to take a test ride in an old car bumper being towed in the mud. Bo challenges him, "This is your bronco. Think you can ride?" Blake responds, "Hell yeah, if you can make it buck, I can ride it." With no helmet or padding, a fish-eye lens mounted on the car distorts Blake's face during the ride, and his buddies laugh at him as he struggles to stay on board. Blake survives, but within seconds of the ride ending, he is never seen on screen again, and the experiment turns out to be pointless because Bo has no intention of using this as a model for the eventual rollercoaster. Later in the same episode, Bubba asks a shirtless, middle-aged man to try another mud sledding experiment, and the man responds, "I'll do it for a beer." This interstitial scene, coming out of commercial, has no narrative purpose, except perhaps to contribute to the general theme of mud bogging. Like Blake and Knothead before him, this man is not a central character and does not make any appearances later.[107]

Similar one-off characters include Buzzard from the episode, "High School Reunion," and Crazy Walter from the episode, "The Muddy Obstacle Course." These men do not have much to say and are established by the narrator and by other characters as more redneck and

[106] Ibid.
[107] "Rollercoaster Bog."

therefore inferior to the principle characters. Operating at one status level higher than these role players are the sidekick men, Bubba in season one and Big Sexy in season two. Although Bubba knows how to build things and operate heavy machinery, and he rarely does anything as foolish as a character like Knothead, the producers often use shots of his obese body and blank stares, along with many subtitles with his speech, to convey a strangeness about him. Big Sexy, as previously discussed, seems glad to set himself up as the inferior team member. Even "Little Bo," (Lil Bit and Bo's young son) yells at Big Sexy to get to work, establishing a hierarchy at the bog based on Big Sexy's status as more redneck than the Granthams.[108] By TV-narrative convention, a two-dimensional, subordinate character like Big Sexy, while often stealing the show, simply does not serve in a lead role.

At the other end of the character spectrum are the many clients who approach the bog owners about specific jobs. The people are often not locals, speak with less abrasive accents, and seem to delight in their small participation with the exotic enterprise of mud bogging. Nikki, the bride in "The Weddin' Bog," asks for an elaborate wedding and reception in the bog. Although she is from Alabama, the bog team does not seem to consider her a true redneck. The wedding theme certainly revolves around mud and other redneck conventions—camouflage cake, toilet lid horseshoe game, mud-riding limousine—yet Nikki wears a traditional white dress and keeps it out of the mud as long as possible.[109] In "Rollercoaster Bog," the client is Doug, who comes from Illinois. He wears a hipster shirt and seems to employ reverse psychology with the bog team when he asks them to build a mud rollercoaster. "You saying you can't do it?" Lil Bit and Bo, of course, both step up to the challenge. In "High School Reunion," Beverly wants a "classy" event for her friends. She negotiates a fee and leaves the bog team to get the job done.

[108] *Mud Lovin' Rednecks,* "Muddy Marriage Proposal," aired September 15, 2014, on Animal Planet.
[109] "The Weddin' Bog."

By the end of the episode, she returns driving a camouflage truck, seeming to embrace—at least temporarily—redneck culture, to the delight of Lil Bit and Fat Legs. As the guests play in the mud, Lil Bit exclaims, "The classy reunion just got dirty."

Later episodes—"Muddy Redneck Rodeo," "Mudieval Times," "Muddy Marriage Proposal," and "The Muddy Obstacle Course"—all contain non-redneck clients who visit the bog for a brief encounter. Like the crafty writers of Old Southwest fiction or travel tales from the likes of Carl Carmer, the producers of this series draw in their viewer by providing proxies in the form of more sophisticated characters. The clients give the audience a reason to glimpse at this redneck world, but the extreme redneck personalities are the hook which we are most likely to remember. This contrast creates a clear form of superiority that often serves as the basis for comedy, and in this case, despite the attempts to provide lighthearted entertainment, likely reinforces the lowly status of the program's working-class whites.

My character analysis thus far further reveals another broad exploitive attribute of *Mud Lovin' Rednecks*—the element of voyeurism involved in the audience's experience. The use of so many unnamed characters, i.e., the patrons, prevents viewers from getting to know the individuals on screen. Even the recurring characters all go by nicknames, and very rarely do the producers allow access to intimate or personal details in their lives. The vast majority of the action consists of creating new mud bog games and challenges and then letting clients enjoy themselves. This scarcity of character development creates two-dimensional people, a common problem in many television series, and in this case the people of Mountain Creek Mud Bog have only one driving force. Like silent documentaries purporting to show primitive people of the rural South, this reality show presents passive versions of its subjects, contained in one geographic location, and only allowed to engage in one activity. One might wonder why the

series was aired on Animal Planet instead of one of Discovery's other affiliated channels, and indeed the voyeuristic nature of the show could be likened to observing animals in their natural habitat. The episodes encourage audiences to look upon the subjects in the mud bog and see what they want to see, bringing their own previous notions of southern whites to the viewing experience.

After identifying the formulas and conventions employed in so many episodes, and additionally comparing the pilot episode with later episodes, I cannot help but question the integrity of this entire "reality" series. After the pilot, how could the characters' personalities evolve so starkly in a short period of time? And how do storylines fall so easily into place for every subsequent episode? As a former producer myself for Discovery Networks programming, I do not believe that Animal Planet is an ideal outlet for the outrageous behavior, foul language, and meandering plot featured in the pilot. Just as fictional sitcom and drama episodes often evolve in their early episodes before finding their ideal form, I detect heavy manipulation in the case of *Mud Lovin' Rednecks*. Without further research, I cannot know for sure, but my assumption is that series producers and executives, consciously or not, were struggling to understand and join the current redneck reality trend. Regardless of their reasoning, the problem I have with such manipulation is the hollow claim that this program represents the reality of all working-class southern whites.

My Big Redneck Vacation

Although most reality television shows depend on a sense of voyeurism, *My Big Redneck Vacation* forces its characters outside their normal areas of comfort and therefore allows us, or at least purports to allow us, the ability to get to know them more intimately than characters in *Mud Lovin' Rednecks* because they must react to unexpected stimuli. A character like Jared may be

portrayed as slightly "more redneck" than the others in his family, but the show does not depend on an archetypical redneck like Knothead or Crazy Walter to fill out storylines. Instead, each of the Clampet characters, particularly the men, rotate as the butt of jokes.

The series nevertheless depends on the traditional technique of contrasting characters in order to build conflict and keep the audience engaged through its many episodes. Many characters in the Hamptons, in Britain, and across the United States seem tailor-made to clash with the visiting southerners—host Tom Arnold uses the term "hoity-toity"—a technique which strongly resembles that used in the pseudo-documentary travel writing which I described in my previous chapter. Even Arnold is complicit in creating a voyeuristic relationship between the audience and the family members. Just as Carl Carmer and Clarence Cason described their working-class subjects with simultaneous disdain and sympathy, Arnold's presence creates a sense of superiority. As the omniscient narrator, he often describes the family as one unit, rather than a collection of individuals, and by calling them "the rednecks" or "our rednecks," or by framing them as generally "southern," he further fosters an essentialist interpretation for the audience. His presumed sense of superiority is confirmed when the family visits his house in Beverly Hills. The running joke for several scenes is that Arnold is extremely uncomfortable that the family wants to stay at his house and meet his celebrity friends.[110] While perhaps not directly reinforcing stereotypes in the same way that fart jokes and other shenanigans do, the examination of subtle character relationships reveals further problematic neocolonial qualities of reality television.

Like many other forms of mass media entertainment, *My Big Redneck Vacation* depends heavily on formula to organize each episode—and each season as a whole—and by analyzing its

[110] "Beverly Hills, CA." Personally, I assume Arnold's discomfort is staged for comic effect since he is not only the show's host but also one of the producers.

structure I see attempts to communicate at least some progressive values that have the potential to reshape the way mass audiences think about working-class southern whites. In many episodes, the Clampets are placed into challenging situations so that the cameras can document how they react. These situations sometimes occur organically, such as when the family members help the Hamptonites prepare for the coming Hurricane Irene.[111] But most situations are set up by unseen producers, and Arnold sometimes speaks for the producers when he says "we"—such as in the show introduction when he says, "We here at CMT are plucking this group from the only home they've ever known…"[112] Regardless of the situation or the people they meet, almost every episode ends with some kind of moral lesson, recapping the discomfort the family members feel followed by the understanding that they learn. I will closely examine two episodes that stand out.

As stated previously, the series rarely challenges its audience with controversial issues in the first two seasons. But in season three, we see serious discussions of homosexuality and religious tolerance. Arnold specifically sets up the San Francisco episode as a showdown between cultures, calling San Francisco "the city of brotherly love" and asking, "Will the free-thinking citizens prove too much for our rednecks?"[113] As the family heads out of their rental house, Chris gives an obligatory charge, "Time to get a beer." They end up in the Castro district at a bar called "The Café" with a sign saying "Boy Bar." The scenario plays out as if the Clampets do not realize it is a gay bar, with suspenseful music and confused stares as they see the patrons are all male. A man tries to dance with Doug, who squirms away. Aimee steps in to shield him and diffuse the situation before the episode goes to commercial break. Later that night, they recap the events, with Chris twice saying he felt uncomfortable. Aimee and Wendy,

[111] *My Big Redneck Vacation,* "Come On Irene," aired February 11, 2012, on CMT.
[112] "I Like to Move It, Move It."
[113] "San Francisco, CA."

however, say that none of it bothered them, demonstrating that the men are clearly less likely to be accepting of gay culture. Perhaps not coincidentally, the next segment shows Jared and Michelle back in Shreveport and attending a baby shower. Jared is the only male and is clearly uncomfortable. Insert shots show an abundance of pink and frills, along with Jared's awkward facial expressions, and he soon leaves, seemingly before his manhood is questioned.

Back in San Francisco, while deep-sea fishing, the family realizes most of the ship's crew is gay. While the Clampet women have an earnest discussion with the crew, Doug and Chris sit alone and mumble to each other, still quite uncomfortable addressing sexuality. Chris jokes about Doug's fishing "pole," and Doug defensively claims, "they had their hands nowhere near my pole." Later at a racetrack, the Clampet women surmise that their guide, Evan, is gay. When they ask the men if they knew Evan is gay, the music score grows quiet and the men give awkward stares. Chris stammers, "I…I…he didn't show it." Eventually, the men laugh and seem to grow more comfortable, the music turns more upbeat and positive, and Arnold confirms that "we found out that camo and rainbows can go together." Yet I still question the authenticity of this development, based on the way it is presented on screen. Chris and Doug shake hands eagerly with another racetrack employee, saying this was their favorite activity all summer, but neither is on screen with Evan for very long, and they only offer a quick handshake. There is further evidence in the final episode back home in Shreveport when Aimee makes a speech about the joys of meeting so many diverse people on their vacation.[114] When invoking their friends from San Francisco, Doug gives only a half-hearted clap, swallows, and averts his eyes from the camera and the crowd. Chris offers a joke about encouraging his wife, Aimee, to bring home a lesbian lover, but this is more a sexist joke than an acceptance of gay people. On the surface, the show presents the Clampets as open and accepting of other cultures after their trip, with Arnold

[114] "Shreveport, LA."

proclaiming as the final episode wraps up that, "we broke through stereotypes, whether they be Muslim, hippies, gay folks, and even for the rednecks themselves." However, this bold statement seems rather disingenuous.

The Dearborn, Michigan, episode likewise makes the claim that the Clampets can undergo change, this time regarding religious tolerance. As described in the previous section, the entire family is clearly afraid of the large Muslim population in Dearborn.[115] But when Aimee and Tammy meet a local woman named Nawal, they have an enlightening conversation. When Tammy refers to herself as a "redneck," Nawal is confused, assuming it is an offensive term. Tammy says being redneck is "a way of life. Redneck is all about family." Nawal agrees that family is important in her culture as well. Later, the Clampets are invited to dinner at Nawal's and eventually they all seem to agree that they have much in common. Nawal's husband, Nader, for example, says he likes *The Dukes of Hazzard* television series, and as the Clampets leave, they let Nader blow the bus horn that plays "Dixie," similar to the car from *The Dukes of Hazzard*. To wrap up the episode, the family members all seem to have undergone a change in attitude, and Arnold confirms to the audience, saying "maybe there's a little redneck in all of us."

For a variety of reasons, however, this episode is still quite lacking of any progressive portraiture of working-class southern whites. As with the San Francisco episode, it is unconvincing that the Clampet men, particularly Jared, were moved at all by their experiences, despite the inspiring music, close-ups of smiling faces, and other techniques. The lack of an appearance by Nawal and Nader at the season finale, when many other new friends converge for a party in Louisiana, only weakens Arnold's claim of progressiveness.

[115] "Dearborn, Michigan."

Furthermore, even if we are to trust the producers to depict the scenes faithfully, the characters continue to essentialize redneck and southern culture. In the initial conversation between Nawal, Aimee, and Tammy, for example, Nawal equates Tammy's description of "having fun, grilling, mud riding, hunting" with "the South." Individually, nothing is expressly negative about any of those activities, but this conversation further assumes and reinforces stereotyped southerners. Likewise, at the later dinner conversation when Nawal says, "I would love to go to the South," her husband responds with, "Yeah, I grew up watching *The Dukes of Hazzard*," to which everyone nods and seems to agree that *The Dukes of Hazzard* represents the South, not just "rednecks" or a certain subculture in South. Later, when discussing the evening with the family, Chris simplifies the issue by implying anyone who likes *The Dukes of Hazzard* must be able to understand his culture. One can understand the need for small talk and dependence on supposedly innocuous conventions in order to break the tension in an awkward scenario like this one. But once again, this reality show fails to acknowledge its own use of critical stereotypes that affect the way people think of working-class southern whites. Despite good intentions, I question whether people who watch this series will remember it more for the closing lessons of each episode or the innumerable acts of redneckery that pervade the rest of each episode as well as promotional material.

Here Comes Honey Boo Boo

I discussed some of the more blatant redneck humor conventions—grotesque language or obesity, for example—in the previous section, but here I will continue my analysis of more subtle storytelling techniques in *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* that also contribute to the continued neocolonization of working-class southern whites. One such technique is the use of the uber-redneck, with very little narrative purpose except comic relief. In *Mud Lovin'*

Rednecks, we can look at Knothead or Crazy Walter to fulfill this role, and in *Honey Boo Boo*, we have Sugar Bear and Crazy Tony. Crazy Tony is a family friend, sometimes referred to as "cousin," who apparently owns several four-wheelers. In Alana's words, "He's just crazy. There's nothin' to say."[116] In a visual montage, we see Crazy Tony riding in the mud, performing dangerous stunts, rolling a vehicle over on himself, laughing, and seemingly mugging intentionally for the camera. He is overweight, has a thick country accent, and is generally portrayed as more "crazy" than the other characters simply because his entire existence in the show centers on mud activities.

Sugar Bear, in contrast, rarely performs any outrageous redneck shenanigans, but his apparent slow-wit and simple pleasures offer stark contrast to the main characters in the series—the females. Mama June describes Sugar Bear as a good father who works seven days a week, perhaps explaining why he is rarely featured on screen in the first two seasons. Yet when we do see him, he mumbles, often with tobacco in his mouth, and his speech is almost always spelled out with subtitles, which may contribute to his "otherness." He rarely warrants his own confessional interviews, but when producers do interview him, he only has short quips. During one interview he says, seemingly as a non sequitur, that he likes to eat road kill.[117] The randomness of the comment only serves to make him appear strange—despite the fact that Mama June herself later confirms that the whole family values road kill.

Other times, he simply remains quietly in the background. When Mama June decides the family must give up their pet pig, Sugar Bear meekly says he wants to keep him but must defer to June's judgment.[118] When he takes Alana to a "fun factory" for some father-daughter time, he says very little and is hardly on camera, though he is not above uttering some expletives in front

[116] "What Is a Door Nut?"
[117] "I'm Sassified."
[118] "What Is a Door Nut?"

of her.[119] Later in the same episode, Sugar Bear sleeps on the couch, in the middle of the day, despite an array of activity around the house. A similar moment occurs in season two when Mama June yells at her daughters to do their chores, and Sugar Bear simply dozes in a chair.[120] Thus, Sugar Bear's character harkens back to the lazy white trash trope in nonfiction literature, and it reinforces negative stereotypes of working-class southern white men.

Contrasting with Sugar Bear and Crazy Tony are the people who represent less "othered" characters in the *Honey Boo Boo* world. When Alana gets to meet the current Miss Georgia, Michaela Lackey, they go shopping and then get a dessert together.[121] Alana orders two desserts and utters several silly or grotesque remarks. When the elegant Lackey tries to explain that a beauty queen needs "refining," she is visibly embarrassed when Alana announces, "I farted." A similar scenario occurs when Mama June takes Alana and Pumpkin to the Etiquette School of Atlanta, run by Barbara Hickey.[122] Unlike most of the dialogue from Alana and her family, Barbara's dialogue needs no subtitles and, as with situations in *Mud Lovin' Rednecks* and *My Big Redneck Vacation*, the culture clash seems tailor-made for reality television. At the table, Pumpkin blows her nose with a dinner napkin and later asks if she can fart at the table. Barbara sternly says bodily functions are not to be discussed. In a confessional interview, Pumpkin says, "I'll stop passing gas when I'm dead." Alana presses the issue, asking, "Do you hold it in? How, what if you need to fart somewhere?" Ultimately, the family seems to dismiss Barbara's training, with Mama June describing her as "kind of like a square, and we're kind of like a lopsided, obtuse, triangle oval all put together. Like a deformed triangle." Her line is delivered in a self-deprecating way, with a smile, acknowledging her family's otherness in comparison

[119] "Time for a Sketti!"
[120] "Mo Butter Mo Better."
[121] *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo,* "Ah-Choo!" aired October 19, 2012, on TLC.
[122] "Gonna Be a Glitz Pig."

with mainstream America. Alana confirms her contempt for Barbara, saying, "In etiquette class, I learned nothing. 'Cause it wasn't fun! Etiquette classes are for stupid people!"

Although the appearance of Miss Georgia and Barbara Hickey offer occasional socio-economic diversity in *Honey Boo Boo*, the lack of racial diversity in most southern reality television series is quite stark. A few rare appearances by African Americans in the first season stand out as exceptions that demonstrate the rule. An unnamed black man, for example, proudly displays a Confederate flag at the "Redneck Games" in episode one, but he is only on screen for a couple of seconds.[123] In another episode, when Sugar Bear dresses as Santa Claus, two unnamed African-American girls are among the line of children waiting to sit in his lap.[124] As with the man at the Redneck Games, these characters are presented as simply part of the crowd, as if the camera is colorblind, and many audience members may not even notice their presence. For me, however, seeing them reminds me how infrequently reality television shows include black and white people together in rural, southern settings.

In another episode, Alana and Pumpkin walk to a local store to buy some junk food.[125] The employees in the store are African American, and in an on-camera interview, they joke that their store would go out of business without the "country girls," saying Alana and her family add "flavor" to the city of McIntyre, Georgia. A hasty examination of the town of McIntyre shows that it has a diverse population, with a slight majority being African American.[126] Yet the cast of *Honey Boo Boo* is almost exclusively white. Whether or not race is a topic of conversation in Alana's household or in the town of McIntyre in general, and regardless of the intentions of

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[123] "This Is My Crazy Family."
[124] "What Is a Door Nut?"
[125] "Time for a Sketti!"
[126] Demographic data shows McIntyre households are over 60% black, and archival photographs demonstrate that people of different races mingle in at least some civic events. See "McIntyre, Georgia," *City-Data.com,* accessed December 17, 2015, http://www.city-data.com/city/McIntyre-Georgia.html; "Photos," *City of McIntyre*, accessed December 17, 2015, http://www.mcintyrega.com/photos.

Honey Boo Boo's producers, the result is a predominantly whitewashed landscape. By failing to acknowledge racial diversity in the rural South, reality television continues to reinforce the presumption of racial division in the "real" South.

A television show's exclusion or inclusion of certain elements, such as racial diversity, is dictated by editing and the way the show's producers package their product. One technique that editors sometimes employ to advance a narrative is the use of transition shots between segments. Coming out of commercial breaks or dividing two sequences in the same segment, *Honey Boo Boo* often shows scenes of mundane, rural life that have no bearing on the storylines. The producers frequently use passing trains as a transitional tool, likely because the family house is very close to a railroad, yet we also see shots of dead armadillos, rusted cars parked in people's yards, Confederate flags waiving limply in the wind—all in the first episode.[127] These images are accompanied by constant banjo music and other simple "country" sounds. In other episodes, we see trash in yards, stray cats, a dung beetle crawling, an old toilet in someone's yard full of weeds, and southern iconography like Dale Earnhardt toys, images of Confederate officers, and a toy "General Lee" car from *The Dukes of Hazzard* television show. Intercut with these images, the producers sometimes include photographs of Alana in full beauty pageant wardrobe.

These transitional shots in *Honey Boo Boo* are curious at least, and sometimes quite suggestive, but it is difficult to know what exactly they are suggesting. The family members never discuss Dale Earnhardt, Confederate flags, the Civil War, or *The Dukes of Hazzard* in any episode I have seen; they do not have any junked cars or toilets in their yard; and they do not own any cats or dung beetles. In my viewings, they never express any predilection for banjo music. By including images of Alana in these montages of southern iconography, the producers

[127] "This Is My Crazy Family."

suggest she herself is a fixture in southern culture, and her family is associated with decadence, poverty, and a mundane existence that some of these images have come to represent.

As a television producer myself, I have interviewed countless people, so I am quite familiar with potentially awkward moments, such as pausing for technical reasons during emotional responses, letting a subject rephrase or repeat a line more clearly, or the difficulty in attaching lapel microphones to a subject's shirt. These awkward moments rarely become part of the finished product, although we may sometimes see them in "blooper" reels, outtakes, or "behind-the-scenes" documentaries. In *Honey Boo Boo*, however, these awkward moments have an important role in the final edited package. In one confessional interview, for example, Mama June says, "I gotta blow my nose." Normally, a camera crew would pause the recording, or at least the editor would cut out this piece of video. Instead, the camera zooms in on her face as she blows and wipes her nose.[128] In another interview later in the same episode, June pauses to sneeze. The editor cuts to a tight shot of her sneezing, the music bed stops, and we see June awkwardly trying to compose herself to continue the interview. Very similar moments occur in many later episodes.[129]

Unlike previous jokes that I have discussed about bodily functions, these moments are perhaps more uncomfortable because the subject—Mama June—appears more vulnerable, and I approach this as an attempt at superiority humor by the producers. Audiences of reality television, documentaries, or news rarely see unflattering interview moments like this, as it may reflect poorly on the overall product or the producer's professionalism. There is typically a trust or unspoken agreement between interviewer and interviewee to help each other look good, but

[128] "Gonna Be a Glitz Pig."
[129] For example, "I'm Sassified," "Ah-Choo!" and "A Bunch of Wedgies."

June's lowly status makes her fair game for such treatment, and bodily function jokes continue the tradition of unsophisticated characters populating southern nonfiction entertainment.

An interesting moment in "What Is a Door Nut?" further raises suspicion that the producers of *Honey Boo Boo* intentionally manipulate at least some of the dialogue and action for the purposes of developing character and helping storylines progress. In one confessional interview, Alana is being silly, saying some gibberish in both Spanish and English, and then utters the phrase, "Oh, my door nuts." A producer off-screen asks, "What is a door nut, Alana?" Alana focuses her eyes on him and repeats the line back to him, word for word, "What is a door nut, Alana?" and continues to look at him, as if seeking approval.[130]

As discussed briefly in the Literature Review, a confessional interview stands apart from other raw "reality" scenes in that an off-screen producer can ask questions of the reality subjects and help shape the narratives in each episode. From my own experience, these confessional interviews can sometimes be highly manipulative, with producers literally feeding lines for the subject to repeat. In my judgment, this interview with Alana is one such incident and demonstrates the possibility that many of Alana's most outrageous lines are fed to her by producers. Previous lines from Alana in this same episode include, "You better redneckonize" and "I like to get down and dirty, redneck style!" Do Alana and her family actually use these phrases in "real" life, or is this show simply feeding its audience the same redneck conventions that entertainment media has used for centuries? Without conducting any field research or follow-up interviews with the producers or the characters, we cannot be certain either way. Simply based on my analysis of the content on-screen, in context with the reality television trend that has proven so successful in recent years, and combined with my own experiences as a television producer, I am highly skeptical that *Honey Boo Boo* and other southern-themed reality

[130] "What Is a Door Nut?"

shows portray an accurate representation of any "real" contemporary working-class southern white people, and I will offer further evidence to support my skepticism in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHAT WE WANT TO DO IS MAKE IT REALLY REAL: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY ON A REALITY TELEVISION SET

By 2014, southern-based reality television shows were firmly entrenched in prime-time programming. More than a dozen cable networks had aired southern-based reality television content (see Table 4.1) and, as I briefly described in Chapter One, I helped produce a pilot for a series on a national cable network. This chapter is an ethnographic case study involving my experiences in that production. Before sharing my findings, I will briefly describe the approach to my analysis and the production itself.

I examine the culture on the set of a reality television show in order to understand the ways in which producers and characters continue to use southern stereotypes and conventions. The complete study design and protocol can be found in the Appendix, but here I want to reiterate important concepts from my literature review of production culture studies.[1] John Caldwell's industrial auteur theory is applicable here because of the complicated nature of authorship in reality programming.[2] The creative process includes early sketches and drafts, pitches, script notes, meetings with executives and potential distributors, and early meetings between cast and crew, all of which take place before any actual video is produced. These actions constitute what Caldwell labels "industrial" activities, and they potentially place

[1] Field research methods and terms informed by Tracy L. Tuten, "Case Studies and Field Observations," in *Research Methods in Communication*, ed. Shuhua Zhou & Wm. David Sloan (Northport, AL: Vision Press, 2009), 265-271.

[2] John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 197-231.

constraints on creativity and challenge our conventional notions of authorship. Activities on the set, in post-production, and in marketing/distributing the show further complicate the creative process. Variables such as running out of time, improvisations, and disagreements between crew members and/or cast members all may force new creative decisions, the "author" of which is difficult to determine.

Reality programming purports that the people on the screen are the authors of their own actions and words, but by examining the culture in a reality television production, we can better understand how these actions and words are actually authored and delivered to their audiences. Related to authorship is Caldwell's notion of self-reflexivity and self-ethnography that he described as critical industrial practices.[3] My ethnographic case study pertains only to a small and self-contained culture, but even within this scope, the crew and cast members constantly theorize and examine their own beliefs, envisioning their work and product in terms of how they will be received by someone else. This theorizing may sometimes be internal, i.e., in someone's mind, and other times external, depending on the culture of the production. What questions do people ask of themselves and of each other about the reality scenarios they are presenting? How self-conscious are the on-screen subjects about their own image? How might they use prior conventions of southern-themed narratives and how concerned are they about reinforcing stereotypes? My observations of the producers and cast helps us understand how formal and informal relationships on the set can contribute to the manifestation of repeated conventional media portrayals of working-class southerners.

For confidentiality purposes, I will withhold names of the people, locations, and companies involved, but I will use aliases that convey enough details to construct a comprehensible narrative. The principal production took place over the course of three days, in a

[3] Caldwell, 5-7.

southeastern state, in a small city and in rural surrounding areas, with a cast predominantly from that state, and a production crew based in New York City. The working title of the series contained the word "Southern," and the premise featured civil arbitrations with a regular cast including a "Judge," a plaintiff attorney "Pete," a defense attorney "Dave," and the Judge's secretary "Susan." The clients, who were not regular cast members, brought unusual cases for the Judge to hear, and each side was represented by one of the attorneys. Instead of using a traditional court room, the trials would always take place in organic locations that best represented the space in which the dispute occurred. In the two cases that we produced for the pilot episode, for example, one trial took place at the defendant's barn at a petting zoo, and the other trial took place at a hunting lodge co-owned by both the plaintiff and defendant. The pertinent crew consisted of a director who I will call "Daphne," and a producer who I will call "Phillip," both based out of New York—although Phillip spent some childhood years in a large southern city. In addition, there were multiple camera operators and myself, working as the on-location sound recordist.

As the sound person, I was completely embedded in the culture, never revealing my scholarly ambitions, and rarely expressing any judgment or opinion on character, narrative, humor, or other creative decisions by the cast and crew except where my professional duties required it. I was responsible for recording all dialogue, which usually required placing a wireless microphone on each speaking cast member and also using a boom microphone to record extras on the set and general ambience. During normal recording, I was able to pick up many "off-camera" conversations involving the cast and crew. The access to these recordings during my research has obviously been quite important, giving me material that can be repeatedly played back and scrutinized, an advantage that other ethnographers do not always have when

studying their subjects. Along with these files, I was also able to write down observations in a journal during production, and I have scripts and a collection of preliminary audition videos prepared in pre-production that the producers used to pitch the concept of the show to the network.

In contrast to my analysis in the previous chapter of television shows that have already aired, here I am able to observe a much greater context that informs my understanding for what reality-TV producers and participants intend and how they define concepts such as "the South" and "southern." As previously stated, the production used the word "Southern" in its title, so the intention to claim at least some cultural association should be quite apparent. Other stereotypes and subtle narrative conventions will surface as I work through the chronological order of events.

Prior to the first day of shooting, I was not aware of how staged each scenario was, but without asking, it became clear that the clients and their legal cases were completely fictional, with the clients being played by local actors. The main cast, however, played themselves, using their real names and real occupations and sometimes harkening back to true stories from childhood or their professional experiences. Deciphering fact from fiction has therefore presented a constant challenge in my analysis, but I will keep my conclusions focused on how the show presents "reality" to its audience and how it uses and potentially exploits southern culture.

PRE-PRODUCTION MATERIALS

In the cast's early audition interviews, I detected no overt southern consciousness. The interviews were Internet-based video chats (via Skype or similar software) in which the participants simply discussed themselves, showing off their personalities and sharing some anecdotes from their careers. The Judge, for example, said he has arbitrated thousands of cases,

with claims ranging from small personal or family items, expensive property and land rights, and even celebrity memorabilia. Other cast members gave similarly humorous quips, but no one forwarded the idea that their character or experiences were "southern," "redneck," or "country." Because I was not present during these interviews, and because they had been edited down to the sound bites I witnessed, I cannot feel confident I understand the intentions of the cast members.

In contrast to the cast members, the production team was more transparent in their approach to "southernness" in early drafts of the series pilot episode. Before shooting anything, they prepared scripts that dictated two scenarios for the pilot episode and even contained some sample lines of dialogue for the cast to say. In the first case, a family sues a local zoo for failing to display a specific exotic animal that it had advertised; in the second case, two family members argue about which one should own a stuffed, trophy animal from their hunting exploits. To start each scenario, the scripts use the exact same wording—Susan shows the Judge "the latest, quirkiest, most southern fried case" filed in county court. Later in each script, the Judge must close each case by imparting "some Southern wisdom," presumably something that he will improvise. Although a prospective audience would never see this wording in the script, it does reveal to me that the producers approached these cases as if they are somehow essentially "southern." Furthermore, the writer had scripted a line that Susan must say regarding the exotic animal case: "Only in the South." As I will demonstrate below, from my experience working with Susan, I do not believe this is a phrase she would normally utter or even think, yet clearly the producers wanted to frame the case as a distinctively southern phenomenon.

DAY ONE – JUDGE'S OFFICE

As with many film and television productions, a layperson might be surprised at the amount of shooting required for a relatively short amount of screen time. Reality television is

often no different, and the pilot of this series called for multiple cameras shooting several hours each, over three days, for an estimated 30-minute episode. Shooting for each of the two cases in this episode began in the Judge's office with Susan introducing the "southern fried" disputes with the Judge and plaintiff attorney Pete. The two scenes required wardrobe changes and almost two hours of shooting for what would amount to approximately three minutes on screen.

In between takes of each scene, Daphne, the director, encouraged each person to improvise the dialogue, yet we all noticed an awkwardness. The cast members, of course, were not trained actors. In their real lives, they are friends and colleagues and have conversations every day. Yet here, the forced, on-camera scenario did not translate into casual conversation. Pete, for example, often tried to improvise humorous quips about the exotic animal case, but the Judge or Susan accidentally interrupted him, so he had to deliver the lines again. When the lines fell flat, they offered patronizing laughter, but it did not read as authentic. Finally, just to insure the editor had a comic way to end the scene, the director asked them to say the lines as scripted. Susan looked at her script and delivered her line, "Only in the South," to which Pete responded, "It's on like Donkey Kong." It is important for me to note that during their supposedly improvised banter, neither Susan nor the others ever uttered any line about "the South."

In between shot setups, in my casual conversations with Susan and in overhearing her speak with the Judge and other colleagues, I never heard her mention anything about "the South" or the idea that her own culture was unique or strange or special. As we prepared for the next scene, Susan asked me if everything was "okay." As the sound person, it is not my job to give her any creative input, especially on the first day of shooting when we have not yet established a sense of teamwork. So I answered strictly in terms of sound recording, saying that she sounded "fine." Of course, I would never ask her if she was indeed uncomfortable saying the line, "Only

in the South," or what she thought the line actually meant, so I can only interpret what I observed, and I believe she and the other cast members desperately wanted to please the director and producer, hoping that this series would get picked up for more episodes. Rather than question a scripted line of dialogue, Susan was ready to read the line multiple times if necessary.

As Caldwell's industrial auteur theory contends, while a reality show audience may assume Susan to be the author of this line of dialogue, actual authorship originated not only from writers days or weeks prior, but it was also necessitated by the awkwardness on the set. The three people in the scene could not generate any natural chemistry or a coherent narrative for the audience to follow as the cameras rolled, and the director needed to resort to the scripted line in order to deliver humor. This is one of many examples I will discuss that undermines the integrity of the "reality" in this series.

I also want to unpack the line itself and interpret it as if I were an audience member, assuming an editor chooses to use it if this series were to air on television, and assuming it is conveyed as if Susan were the author of the line. Why would Susan or the other characters believe this dispute about false advertising is unique to the South? And why would they laugh about it? The animal in question is not native to the South or even the United States, and they had not met the clients yet, having only read a short description of the complaint. But by labeling the situation as unique to the South, they have embraced the hegemonic relationship between a mainstream audience and the media South. In this case, Susan interprets the case as a petty feud between petty people, and she takes pleasure in maintaining her superiority over them. The humor, furthermore, takes the form of misattribution in that southern working-class whites have long been associated with poverty, excess, or even grotesque behavior. Without even

meeting the clients, the audience may already have an image of them based on prior experiences with entertainment media involving working-class whites from the South.

DAY ONE – SUSAN'S CONFESSIONAL INTERVIEW

After completing this introductory scenes, the crew moved on to Susan's confessional interview in another part of the law office. As stated in Chapter Two, confessionals offer a producer or director the ability to manipulate character and storylines because they are free to interrupt the subject and feed short sound bites without disrupting the flow of a supposedly organic conversation. With Susan's interview, she quickly became indoctrinated with the protocol of "reality" television, something I do not believe she understood at the beginning of the day. After delivering a few humorous lines about Pete constantly flirting with her or being worked too hard by the Judge, Daphne fed her lines that she needed to say verbatim. The first one was that the Judge "is the most trusted judge in the South. When he speaks, people listen." Susan said the line many times, sometimes improvising with alternate phrasing, sometimes inflecting on different syllables.

Another line was supposed to be, "[Pete] is a bit of showboat, but I ain't fallin' for it." When Daphne fed these lines, she adopted an extremely rural dialect and used the word "ain't," even though Susan never uses such a word. Instead of saying "I ain't fallin' for it," Susan said, "…I'm not falling for it." Another phrase that Susan was supposed to say included "something don't smell right," but Susan said the more grammatically correct phrase, "something doesn't smell right." Daphne quite clearly envisioned Susan saying the lines differently, what I assume is a more rural or "country" way, yet this was simply not Susan's way of talking. I could see the frustration on Daphne's face, knowing that the lines alone, without the right delivery, would not be very funny.

Sensing the problem but not addressing it out loud, Phillip, the producer, suggested that Susan improvise a couple of generalities about "the South," reminding her that "Southern" is in the title of the show. "Maybe just talk about, you know, uh, justice in the South. You know, is it, uh…just your opinion…things that happen down here, you wouldn't come across…anywhere else?" Susan seemed eager to comply, but nothing came naturally to her. She offered several versions in succession, hoping one would sound acceptable: "The cases that you see in [this state] are like no other. These are the craziest cases in the world. Nothing like what happens in the South…There's nothing like what happens in the South…There's no other case than those that happen in the South…There's no other cases than those that happen in the South…" She then broke character and admitted, "That doesn't make any sense." The crew laughed, understanding that she was improvising about something that she simply had never said or would not naturally say.

Phillip fed her the line, "You won't see this kind of craziness anywhere else!" Susan nodded and seemed more confident, saying "The cases down here, you won't see them anywhere else in any other part of the world. The South is one of the craziest places for the law to be…In the South, we have the craziest cases you could ever imagine. There is no other place in the United States or in the world where you'll find anything like this. The South has the craziest cases ever." She looked to Daphne and Phillip for approval, and they nodded to each other, sensing that they should be able to use at least some part of Susan's dialogue.

Daphne then wanted something more specific and asked Susan to elaborate. "So, what is…like describe the South and [state name], like, what's different about, like, what's unique about …?" Susan nodded and said some differences included southern accents and southern food. As Daphne nodded, Susan seemed to search for something more specific, and perhaps less

clichéd. "And we also have a lot of crazy people down here?" She shrugged and said, "I don't really know what else. What else is southern?" She looked around the room, including at me, and seemed to be in agony, desperately trying to please the director. Phillip again gave a suggestion, asking specifically about arguments they might see in court. "Say, 'when people get in an argument about something in the South…'" And Daphne added, "'There's nothing like a good southern tussle' or something like..." Susan complied and said Daphne's phrase verbatim. Daphne then added, "in the South, um, people will bring anything to court, like, just the most ridiculous things." Susan slightly improvised with "In the South, people will bring absolutely anything to court. The crazier, the better."

After an awkward silence, Daphne said, "I'm trying to think of something…I don't know. What do you think?" But Susan just laughed nervously and shook her head, embarrassed that she could not seem to help them find a humorous line. At this point, it was clear that no one thought any of these lines would draw a laugh from the audience, and a distressed Susan offered something more significant when she said, "I think of inbred whenever I think of people down here, like the crazies…" Awkward chuckles from the crew ensued, and Daphne laughed as she said "We won't go that far." Susan agreed that that would be offensive and was relieved that she did not have to say anything like that. Phillip then had an idea that excited him and asked Susan to say, "'People down here love their, love their cars, they love their, their guns, and they love to fight.' It could be any combination of that, but you should end on 'fight.'" Susan said, "People down here, they love to hunt, fish, and fight," and then she repeated it two more times, waiting for a reaction from Daphne or Phillip. Daphne added, "So say it, 'People in the *South*…" Susan repeated, "People in the South, they love to hunt, fish, and fight." Finally, Phillip said, "Give

me, 'Southern people have heart, so when tempers fly, it could get nasty.'" Susan complied verbatim.

This entire confessional interview lasted more than twenty-three minutes, and afterwards Susan was visibly nervous, perhaps wondering if she had blown it for the future of the production. This was a clear contrast to her normally confident and cheerful personality. I found it especially painful when she timidly offered to discuss people being "inbred," and I have to wonder what she meant by it. As she struggled with her own definition of what it meant to be southern, I propose that she was undertaking a process of self-reflexivity. Here, she was not necessarily seeking to define herself as a southerner, but she was cycling through images of "southern" people from prior media that she thought might satisfy Daphne's and Phillip's questioning. I am admittedly using some speculation here, as I was not inside Susan's head, but I draw conclusions based on my observations of body language and facial expressions. Regardless of how conscious Susan was of the implications of her words, the production as a whole was depending heavily on prior stereotypes, mostly undesirable, of white southerners.

DAY ONE – DAVE'S CONFESSIONAL INTERVIEW

Defense attorney Dave's first confessional interview—like all confessionals in this series—was conducted standing up, giving it an impromptu feel, as if he were hastily pulled aside during a case and asked a few questions by the news media. We conducted this interview in a room that was meant to represent Dave's personal office, although it was actually in a room next to the Judge's office. The first ten minutes, however, did not relate to any specific case but consisted of biographical information about his career and his relationships with the other members of the cast. He is a charming man, successful and confident in his abilities as a lawyer, and funny both on- and off-camera.

About fourteen minutes into the interview, Daphne asked him about "southern" court cases and how they compare to other cases. Until this point, Dave had not mentioned geography or culture at all in describing his work or his relationships, except to say specific city names involved in past cases. Dave seemed to understand the question and improvised, "Southern court rooms are real. Nameless, faceless corporations, while they do pay good money, are not the same as defending people who you live with and work with." Here, Dave was making a distinction between corporate cases and personal cases. The premise of the show, of course, involves personal cases, and although personal civil cases and arbitrations occur throughout the United States, Dave, being coached by Daphne, was asserting that these cases were inherently "southern."

Daphne, understanding that they had not made a specific connection to the South, tried to pry more from Dave. "So, are a lot of the cases that involve…are they family members, fighting family members, like, what are some of the, like, crazy, southern cases?" She was unsure of the proper wording, and she read from Dave's facial expression that he did not understand what she was asking. She then described the two scripted cases for this episode. "So, it's like a little bit ridiculous, but for these people, it's heartfelt, so, I don't know if you can put that…" Dave nodded sympathetically but could not find any words. "I don't know if I…but…" After a few moments of thought, Dave said, "I can put it this way. A lot of the cases, they're all different in that they're all family members against each other, neighbors against neighbors…" He elaborated about neighbors feuding over silly cases, and he invoked the Hatfields and McCoys as examples.

Daphne liked that analogy and asked Phillip, "Are you good, or do you want more?" Phillip indeed wanted more; he wanted Dave to use the word "southern" or "South" more in his

answers. "Are things, are disputes, are they crazier, are they more, uh, you know, uh, combusted down here? You know, is the heat getting to people in a way that—?" Dave and the crew all laughed at this image. Dave nodded, "Right. Let me think for a second real quick how I can put this." After a few seconds of thought, Dave expounded about the South being relatively poor, which meant that even potentially petty cases were important to these clients who do not have much. It was a lengthy monologue, and quite eloquent, but Phillip needed something shorter and funnier, what he called a "summary bite." Dave changed his tone from sympathetic to sarcastic and said, "Every verdict rendered in these type of cases is equivalent to the lottery to these people. It's that important." The summary seemed sufficient to me at the time, but with more time to reflect on the progression of that interview, I realized that the line about the lottery might be the embodiment of misattribution humor, a funny bit of jokework that masks the real source of humor—poverty.

Regardless, Phillip was still not completely satisfied with Dave's interview, and he asked Dave generally about the process of arbitration and mediation. Settlements outside of court occur frequently across the country, not just the South, but Phillip was trying to verbalize the process in such a way to make it seem essentially southern. "Within this piece it's really hard to dive too deep into the layers and legalese and stuff. Is there a way to say that, you know, to, to, you know, 'disputes in the South here are often better settled out of court…' You know, or something along those lines?" Dave and Daphne began to think out loud about resolving cases "at the scene" or at "the point of origin." They finally settled on a phrase they liked, and Dave said, "It is true southern justice to resolve these type of disputes in the arena where they occurred. In people's backyards, on the roadways where it happened, in the areas where it

occurred." Everyone seemed satisfied with the line, and the camera finally cut after more than twenty-two minutes of interviewing Dave.

The construction of that last sound bite was a process that required about eight minutes—from 14:05 to 22:35—and "writing by committee," to use Caldwell's phrase.[4] It began when Daphne first broached the idea of "southern" courtrooms, and it finally concluded with a line that was conveyed as Dave's own thought but was actually authored by a collaboration between Daphne and Phillip, using Dave as the mouthpiece. As with Susan's interview, Dave has contributed to the same hegemony that maintains the media South's neocolonial status, simultaneously claiming superiority over lower-class southern whites and, perhaps unconsciously, essentializing all southerners as one monolithic culture. Dave's behavior on camera, in this interview and in later scenes which I will discuss, demonstrated how a person can be moved to sell out his own culture for self-gain, perhaps unaware of the lasting ramifications of his actions.

DAY ONE – PETE'S CONFESSIONAL INTERVIEW

Plaintiff attorney Pete was probably more eager to please the production crew than the rest of the cast. He approached each scene with great energy, yet he often melted into insecurity, constantly looking for guidance and affirmation. Similar to Dave's interview, we conducted this interview in a generic office in the same building as the Judge's office, and Pete discussed his personal and professional background for the first several minutes. After almost ten minutes, Phillip finally asked him to "talk about what southern justice means to you…like, backyard sort of, just, decisions [the Judge] makes, you know, outside the courtroom like, you know, taking the law into you guys' own hands." Here, Phillip was invoking a classic stereotype about southerners' disregard for the law, and asking Pete to buy into it and regurgitate it back to him on

[4] Caldwell, 216.

camera. Pete enthusiastically said, "Hey, southern justice is…" But then the words escaped him. He looked around at the crew, quite desperate, hoping the words would come. He then rambled with a few analogies, such as "bawling it out, just like Tyson-Holyfield number 2, the ear bite," which were quite funny, but not what Phillip wanted.

At this point, it was clear that Pete did not understand the premise of the show, the idea of taking the court case outside of a traditional courtroom and to the "point of origin." Phillip discussed this with him and wanted him to repeat the line, "Southern justice is taking it out of the courtroom, and into your backyard." Pete enthusiastically began the line but fumbled through it, his eyes darting around the room and down at the floor. Phillip directed him, "Say that one more time. Look at me. Look up at me. Same thing. Same, great energy. Right at me." Pete repeated, "Southern justice is taking it out of the courtroom and in your backyard!" Phillip corrected him, "Southern justice is taking it out of the courtroom and *putting it in* your backyard!" Pete repeated again, this time exactly as Phillip said, "Southern justice is taking it out of the courtroom and putting it in your backyard!" to which Phillip celebrated, "Fucking nice!"

Much of Pete's interview progressed like this, with Pete trying to please the producer but often stumbling or adding an extra word that ruined the sound bite. Some of these lines were not related to "southern" court cases—for example, Pete claimed to be a "ladies' man." Some of these lines were quite humorous, but what is relevant in this study is Phillip's use of a southern accent as he fed lines to Pete. In his mind, Pete should say these words with a thicker accent than he actually has, very similar to Daphne conducting Susan's confessional interview. Pete's natural accent could be described as southern, but I would say it is more like an Old South, "southern gentleman" dialect, whereas Phillip seemed to be fishing for something less genteel,

perhaps "backwoods," "redneck," or "country." As the interview progressed, Pete sometimes did exaggerate his accent, perhaps not knowingly, or perhaps just to appease Phillip and get through his interview more quickly.

DAY ONE – THE JUDGE'S CONFESSIONAL INTERVIEW

As with the previous interviews, I observed and recorded similar instances of southern essentialisms during the Judge's confessional interview. One characteristic of the Judge's interview that was unique was the immediate direction from Daphne to keep his language simple. As he explained the system involving plaintiffs, defendants, and all the procedures they followed during trials, she interrupted and asked him to avoid "super judicial language" and to word it "simply in two sentences"—assuming that audiences will not want elaborate explanations of judicial processes. Yet Daphne may have oversimplified it when she dictated the line for Judge, "I hear from the plaintiff, and I hear from the defendant. Once both sides have said their peace, it's my job to make the final decision and whip up some southern justice." Although the Judge—in real life—is quite experienced and knowledgeable about the judicial system, delivering this line might lead audiences to believe otherwise, contributing to the convention about southerners disrespecting proper legal procedures.

In response to Daphne's direction, the Judge said, "Okay, okay, okay, okay… Um, what was the start, one more time…?" She fed it to him again, and he almost said the entire line, but he drifted away and forgot to say anything about "southern justice." Daphne looked at her notes, seeming to ponder how she could make this interview less painful than the previous ones. "So just say, 'I'll make my final decision and whip up…' so it's like you're make—you're the, you're the enforcer, right? So, 'I'll make my final decision and whip up some southern justice.'" The Judge repeated, "I'll make my final, I'll make my final decision, and then it'll, it'll, it will,

it'll be, it will be my way, not their way—whatever I say goes in my court… [questioning Daphne] Did I get off track a little bit there?" Daphne was frustrated. "Yeah, no, you're great. Do it just one more time. That's perfect." I could see that his delivery was surely not "perfect" in her mind, but complimenting him was probably an instinctive reaction on her part, trying to alleviate the tension and helping him feel more confident. The Judge stumbled through the line a few more times, but each time, he neglected to say anything about "the South" or "southern." I do not believe it was intentional, but the phrase was simply not part of his consciousness, as Daphne assumed. Finally, she dictated this line: "In the South, justice gets served up faster and in more strange ways than anywhere else." After a couple of attempts, he eventually got it.

Later during the interview, the Judge and crew started to loosen up, perhaps due to fatigue, or perhaps because we were getting to know each other. At one point, Daphne fed him a line about being a judge for fifteen years. The Judge said, "Now wait a minute, it hadn't been fifteen years. Do you want me to say it anyway?" The crew giggled, understanding that the Judge was willing to move further into the realm of fiction, despite the claim that this is a reality show. At another point, Daphne fed him short sound bites that might be used as reactions to other scenes. One line was, "That's what I call southern-fried justice!" The Judge laughed and said, "Oh God!" acknowledging that the phrase was perhaps too clichéd. For the Judge, this series was about himself, about his friends, and about how people use the law; it was not necessarily "southern," and he did not see himself as a regional or cultural representative. Yet he was willing to oblige the production team and humor Daphne by saying the line. Although we on the set laughed because we knew it is a southern cliché, the line is now fair game for the producers to use in the actual version that audiences will see. The Judge delivered the line as if it were part of his natural vocabulary, not ironically or sarcastically, so most audiences will likely

interpret it as such. The South remains so peculiar in popular media partly because southerners themselves seem to embrace its peculiarity.

DAY TWO – THE ZOO

Whereas day one was shot mostly in the Judge's office, day two was shot on a farm that included a barn and several corrals that were staged as a petting zoo. The day began with Daphne observing as defense attorney Dave ran lines with his client, Earl, in a corral full of chickens and goats. This was simply a rehearsal, without cameras, to allow the cast members to get into character. Earl's character is a farmer who runs the petting zoo, and in this case a family is suing him because one of the animals advertised was not available for the patrons to see. Earl, in real life, is a professional actor, accustomed to taking direction but also willing to improvise in this "reality" setting. He speaks with a slight accent that I might describe as Cajun or Louisianan, but his speech is clear and his normal vocabulary is eloquent. After running some lines, he looked to Daphne and asked what she thought. Daphne said, "That was good. But can you say it more southern? Like, you know, you're a farmer." Earl grinned and nodded as if he understood. Dave joked, "How southern do you want?" and they both laughed and improvised heavily accented lines, purely for self-amusement, as the camera crew was getting ready.

They both seemed to generally understand the notion that "more southern" equates with "country," "rural," or "unsophisticated." Yet at this moment, I do not believe Dave understood that the direction was meant specifically for Earl, not himself. As I quickly realized, Earl's role was that of "uber-redneck," similar to conventions in other reality shows and in prior nonfiction and fiction entertainment media, which I have identified in previous chapters. For example, he named his goats and chickens and talked to them affectionately; he identified closely with his land; he yelled outbursts in court; and he had little regard for the law. The premise of the show

needed him and other clients to be "more southern" or more working-class to contrast with Dave and the other attorneys. As I argue in the previous chapter, establishing this kind of hierarchy creates more palatable narratives for audiences, providing some relatable characters to introduce the story, contrasted with more outrageous characters that audiences are more likely to remember and associate with "southern" reality. Daphne herself might not have been completely conscious of this hierarchy, but her instincts seemed to guide her direction when working with the clients.

Once the cameras began to roll on the scene between Dave and Earl, they bantered back and forth about their opponents, whether or not Earl could actually prove in court that he has the exotic animal, and how he planned to pay Dave. During one take, Earl handed him a chicken egg as payment. "You have got to be shittin' me," said Dave. Earl responded, "Scuse me? You want more? You hadn't done nothin' yet." After several minutes, Daphne eventually interrupted and gave some direction which I found to be ironic. "Alright guys, we're going to do that again. And, we just need to make sure, like, we don't need to, like what we want to do is make it really real. So don't overact…The big thing is we want to make it seem credible." She then suggested to Earl a line he should say about the plaintiff, "Every time they come around here they're a pain in the ass. They, he always wants sump'n for nothin'." She delivered this line with a heavily exaggerated country accent. The irony is that, despite her direction not to "overact," she was overacting when she coached the lines to Earl. Perhaps she did not know what she really wanted to see, or she did not know how to convey it to her actors. As I interpret the exchange, however, she believed the most "credible" or "really real" performance should include a thick, southern accent, but delivered in an understated tone.

When we finally cut the cameras and ended the scene, Dave laughed insecurely and asked Phillip, "How much bad acting do you have to put up with in one day?" Phillip responded,

"This is what we do for a living. You're going to be amazed when we cut this together. It'll look like Oscar material." Dave joked, "Like Oscar-Meyer material?" and Phillips agreed, "It'll be Oscar-Meyer wiener material!" Dave, who had been uninitiated the previous day about the true nature of reality production, now seemed to understand the ways that producers construct their programming. The use of multiple cameras, multiple takes, reaction shots, off-screen dialogue, and wide establishing shots contrasted with close-ups all would allow the producer and his team to craft any number of narrative versions. And although he is a highly intelligent man, I do not believe Dave was aware of reality programming's potential to exploit and reinforce negative associations with working-class white southerners. Like the producer, director, and other crewmembers—including myself—Dave had been hired for a job and wanted to deliver a successful product for mass consumption, and he entrusted his own image and performance to the producer.

DAY TWO – THE TRIAL

The actual trial for this case took place in a large barn. The Judge toted in a podium and his gavel, but otherwise the barn was furnished only with hay bales and wooden benches for the plaintiff, defendants, witnesses, and lawyers to sit. Like Earl the farmer, the opposition in this case was supposed to be "more southern" than their lawyer, plaintiff attorney Pete. And also like Earl, the actors who played these family members do not speak as Daphne envisioned. As she discussed their characters with them, Daphne fed them lines using a thick rural accent, and they attempted to comply. Like Earl, the father interjected often during the trial, and both parties came across as petty, exactly as their characters were written. Daphne confirmed their inferiority by directing the judge to speak to both parties as if they were ridiculous and infantile. During the trial scene, however, in contrast to the confessional interviews, Daphne had less freedom to

pause the action and give explicit line readings. Perhaps as a result, the cast members lost their thick southern accents and forgot to invoke the notion of southernness in the process.

During a recess, the Judge met with Dave and Pete in his "chambers," which was simply a separate room in the barn. As the three friends bantered about the case, the Judge tried to wrap up the conversation by saying, "Alright guys, let's get this thing done. Let's be professional." Daphne asked him to say it again, but "instead of 'guys,' say 'y'all.' You would never say 'you guys,' would you?" Pete immediately chimed in, "I'm ready y'all," seeming eager to exaggerate the pronunciation. The Judge nodded in agreement and repeated the line using "y'all" instead of "guys." As I interpret this exchange, I believe "guys" is part of his natural way of speaking, but he understood that Daphne wanted to frame the show as "more southern," and he agreed that using "y'all" was supposedly a more true or "real" southern convention. This incident is yet another example of the reinforcing of prior ways of envisioning southerners, leading to continued neocolonialism of the media South.

DAY TWO – CLIENT CONFESSIONAL INTERVIEWS

The interviews with Earl, the zoo owner, were conducted all at the same time outside near his barn, despite being out of chronological order. The first part of the interview was set before the trial as Earl complained about the family that was suing him, and the second part of the interview included his satisfaction with the judge's decision after the trial was over. In the pre-trial interview portion, he eloquently expressed his frustrations about being sued. Daphne then coached him with lines using an exaggerated rural accent, including, "Either they're blind, dumb, or both." However, when Earl repeated them, he did not sound nearly as rural as Daphne wanted, so she gave him more specific direction, "I feel like at the beginning you had a little bit more of a drawl. You know, just add a teeny bit to it." Earl asked, "Southern or Texas or

Cajun?" to which Daphne responded, "Whatever you were doing." Again, by asking Earl to exaggerate his accent, Daphne wanted to frame his character as an uber-redneck. She furthermore demonstrated her own attitude towards her subject—when she said, "whatever…"—by essentializing all working-class southern whites as one monolithic culture and dismissing any distinctiveness. Although an audience would never hear or see her give this direction, it further informs me how a culture is created on set and seeps into the finished product.

The family's confessional interview consisted of all three together—father, mother, and daughter—at an outdoor spot only a few feet from where Earl's interview was conducted. The father especially acted out as a loud, petty, and selfish person, and he evidently saw his role as an "uber-redneck," although he never used that term. Clients like him would likely define the series more than the lawyers because of their outrageous behavior, words, and their incredulity with the justice process. As with Earl's interview, however, Daphne had to repeatedly encourage an exaggerated southern accent. The mother, for example, expressed happiness that she and her daughter may continue to visit the zoo even though they lost the case. Daphne directed, "Do that one more time...and can you add a teeny drawl to your accent, just a teeny, itty bit?" The mother was puzzled and asked, "Like a southern drawl?" Although I never confirmed it by further observation, I believe the actress playing the mother did not want to come across as a rural rube. She eventually delivered the line with an Old South or aristocratic accent, perhaps not what Daphne was seeking but another example of her constant framing attempts. Although not on screen as much as the main cast of characters, the interviews with the clients further demonstrated the need to capitalize on prior conventions of working-class southerners and specifically to portray the clients as part of an inferior culture.

ETHNOGRAPHY CONCLUSIONS

The third and final day of shooting was shorter than the previous days, consisting mostly of covering the second court case. We did not need to repeat any of the confessional interviews from the main cast about the general arbitration process, although Daphne did have a few phrases she wanted the Judge to say that were specific to the new case, such as, "You're not a southerner unless you have something dead and stuffed hanging on your wall." The interviews with the new clients were conducted similarly to the previous client confessionals, with Daphne and Phillip continuing to mold their actors' performances and creating what I believe were more outrageous characters that would supply the bulk of the humor in this segment. The written script in this case, for example, used the term "gran'pappy" which the family members were supposed to say, yet all of the cast members said "grandfather" instead. After several minutes of interviewing, Daphne realized it was too late to go back and tell them to say "gran'pappy" because they had already established that they called him "grandfather." But she did continue to coach a thicker southern accent for several of the actors. When we finally wrapped the last scene in the late afternoon, all of the New York-based crew hurriedly packed up their equipment and departed straight to the airport for a late flight. Because they were in a rush, there never was a period of decompressing and proper goodbyes, and I detected a sense of abandonment and insecurity on the part of the main cast.

It seems indisputable that stereotypes of working-class southern whites abound in many contemporary reality television series. The purpose of the previous chapters has been to understand exactly what these stereotypes are and to interpret how their repeated usage is potentially harmful. This chapter, in contrast, is designed to dig deeper into the source of their usage, to understand how reality producers and participants conceive of and use these potentially

harmful conventions and portray them as "real" to mass audiences. The production process itself creates and fosters a culture, and the individuals within this culture create the media content that we consume.

The Production Team

The producer of this series, Phillip, was the major force in dictating the culture on set. He had been a successful television producer for many years, and he was quite confident in his ability to understand audiences and produce shows that would achieve good ratings. Regarding this series, he often reminded people that he was "raised in the South" and could therefore claim some sense of empathy for the characters he was presenting as well as potential audiences for his show. At other times, he would distance himself from the character-types in this series, and indeed the "South" where he was raised was an international, metropolitan city, hundreds of miles away from our rural location. Like the producers in Stephen Zafirau's ethnography, Phillip sometimes represented himself as being a member of his audience, yet he actually reduced his audience into an inferior, monolithic group.[5]

Daphne, the director, certainly did not have any claim to southern roots, so she approached the series content based on the script and the premise handed down to her from the producer. Her use of descriptors like "crazy" and "strange" indicated her attitude toward her subject, and she made no attempt to disguise her framing of this show as "southern." She was open about the fact that the majority of the show's content was fictional, yet she worked hard to create something that her audience would believe was nonfiction. She and Phillip, along with the crew, often huddled together away from the cast, discussing ways to capture the scenes properly. Often they disagreed with each other, and sometimes they would compromise by

[5] Stephen Zafirau, "Audience Knowledge and the Everyday Lives of Cultural Producers in Hollywood," in *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries*, ed. Vicki Mayer, Miranda J. Banks, and John Thornton Caldwell (New York: Routledge, 2009), 190-202.

trying multiple versions of a scene and deciding later which version to use. A common goal that Daphne and Phillip sought involved ending a scene with a clear one-liner—what some writers call a "zinger" or comedic "button"—that would draw a laugh and allow them to progress on to the next scene. On multiple occasions, when no button came about organically, Daphne settled for a simple phrase that depended heavily on southern clichés, assuming the manner with which the line was delivered would evoke laughter. These decisions will in turn affect how an editor edits the episode, how a promotions team will package the series, and how future episodes will be directed.

In my conversations with the production team, it was quite obvious that they were attempting to align their show with the abundance of other southern reality television series that were getting high ratings. Instead of seeking to represent their characters and material as honest, true stories, they were driven by the compulsion to capitalize on conventions that they believed would make their show a hit. And to achieve their goal, they routinely sought the easiest path, went for the most obvious jokes, and refused to search for any truly compelling material. So when Daphne asked Earl to "say it more southern," she wanted to be sure her audience made the connection between this scene and the countless other situations and characters that they already associated with the South based on previous media. In this way, Daphne and Phillip were very much like Karl Brown and his production of *Stark Love* almost ninety years earlier—as discussed in Chapter Three. Brown was dedicated to capitalizing on the recent trend of ethnographic documentaries, yet he had no real knowledge of the culture he was trying to document, and he completely manipulated his audience and even his own cast. A century later, this production team demonstrated a similar desire to exploit a foreign culture for consumption by mainstream audiences.

The Cast Members

My observations and conversations with the cast members revealed some important dichotomies that contributed to the culture on the set and ultimately influenced the content of the show. They all behaved professionally, wanting the series to succeed, and they put their trust into the hands of the experienced production team. On the surface, they were resigned to contributing to the purely fictional narratives they were telling, yet they were continually asked to express themselves as real people. They struggled internally with self-reflexivity, trying to find the right words that would serve both the show's interest and their own public image.

As I examine many of the exchanges between the director and cast members, I see a microcosm of the neocolonial relationship between mainstream media and the South. A supposedly "southern" court system, for example, is a fictional construction, yet it is framed repeatedly as "real." Furthermore, the Judge and other characters have a desire to please the director and embrace the concept, a process that reinforces the ability of the media to maintain a hegemonic relationship with working-class southern whites, fully embraced by southerners themselves. I am reminded of Jack Temple Kirby's initial use of the term "media colony, an elsewhere for the American majority's amusement or negative example. Some southerners have capitalized upon the imagery, reifying at times the most outrageous stereotypes. Yet colonials they remained."[6]

In theory, a true reality series featuring members of any disenfranchised culture could be interpreted as a *de*-colonial text. By offering working-class white southerners a voice that they normally do not have in mainstream media, they may have an opportunity to gain agency. But this series simply is not authentic, and it in fact encourages its cast members to express mostly

[6] Jack Temple Kirby, *Media-Made Dixie: The South in the American Imagination* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 162.

inane aspects of life in the South and then spin them as essentially southern. The Judge and the rest of the cast members are very intelligent people, and in their everyday lives, they may indeed see interesting cases. They constantly engage in humorous banter with each other, which was likely an important selling point that originally inspired the advent of the series. The forced nature of the show's premise, however, ruined the spontaneity and authenticity, leading the characters to resort to the worst of southern clichés while the cameras rolled.

The Cycle of Production Culture and Southern Culture

With any television or film production, uncovering the layers of authorship is complicated, as Caldwell has theorized. Creating truly original "southern" content is difficult, not only because of the corporate and collective nature of production, but because of the deeply entrenched notions held by collective audiences of what "southern" is supposed to be, based on centuries of nonfiction media. The potential to strengthen harmful stereotypes is further amplified by the show's claim to be real. Self-reflexivity occurs when producers examine their own prior experiences with southern themes and want to deliver a product that audiences will accept as authentic, thus creating a cycle that reinforces the use of the media South. In the case of this reality production, the audience to which I am referring includes not only television audiences at home but industry executives that make decisions about the series' future. The production team worked hard to create something their audiences would believe is real while simultaneously creating a product that executives might believe would earn substantial ratings.

I cannot claim to definitively apply my observations in this experience to all southern reality television shows. Based on my research and my own prior observations, however, I do contend that many similar processes in other reality productions can contribute to the overall culture on the set, and I can now better understand the potential ways that reality producers and

participants allow themselves to recreate and deliver clichés and stereotypes to mass audiences. Although this series did not depend on all of the same southern stereotypes that other reality shows use—such as obesity, indecency, or heavy drinking—it did generally approach "the South" as a monolithic culture, primed for continued essentialization for any future production who wants to use it.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

During the Great Depression, President Franklin Roosevelt candidly described the South's economic and social conditions as a dire national problem, and decades later, sociologist Larry J. Griffin clarified that "the region itself—rather than the objective conditions—became commonly understood as the 'real' problem."[1] Griffin was writing in 1995, and he was addressing past problems that plagued the South well before Roosevelt's presidency. By the 2000s, however, when I first endeavored to study media representations of the South and southern people, I discovered an exciting discipline that some scholars labeled "new southern studies" or "post-southernism," and I presumed that society's definition of "the South" was evolving. To a post-southernist, research approaches from prior generations of scholars like C. Vann Woodward and John Shelton Reed, while still interesting, may no longer seem relevant, and by resisting the urge to repeatedly point out southern peculiarities and exceptionalism, scholars themselves can help curb continuing regional divisiveness. As historian James Cobb concluded, "Obsessive insistence on the importance of group distinctiveness can be intellectually constricting."[2] Without the obligation to dwell on the past, we all benefit from new intellectual inquiry in fields like economics, sociology, religion, geography, and literature. Indeed, even

[1] Larry J. Griffin, "Why Was the South a Problem?" in *The South as an American Problem*, ed. Larry J. Griffin and Don H. Doyle (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 14.

[2] James C. Cobb, *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 336.

across the spectrum of entertainment forms, the use of the South as a distinct media colony had begun to taper off by the beginning of the 21st century.

And yet, even as forward-thinking scholars like Cobb, Michael Kreyling, Riché Richardson, and Houston A. Baker advocated new ways to approach southern studies, the old clichés reemerged with the rise of reality television. Reality subjects themselves openly declared their pride in "group distinctiveness," and network producers seemed more than willing to take advantage of the resurrected conventions. The opening title sequence of every episode of *Party Down South* contains the definitive statement: "We are about to show everyone what being from the South is about." As I demonstrated in Chapter Three, these historic conventions date back to colonial America with accounts of disenfranchised whites in the southern region. Scholars have identified and understood the stereotypes—ranging from laziness, dirtiness, and drunkenness to anti-intellectualism, isolationism, and even genetic inferiority—for decades. But I want to remind my contemporary reader that these conventions were not simply used as literary tools by fiction writers. Assumptions about undesirable yet essential characteristics that all southerners shared were pervasive, and in fact originated, in nonfiction writing. Similar tendencies are directly observable in modern forms of nonfiction, particularly reality television. The premise of *Mud Lovin' Rednecks*, for example, centers on the seemingly harmless activity of playing in the mud. Yet the close association between mud and southern culture typifies what I call hegemonic misattribution. Living in mud, even eating mud, was part of derogatory descriptions from observers hundreds of years ago, yet many people appearing in today's southern reality shows claim to fully embrace mud as part of their lives.

With only moderate pushback from southern intellectuals and media critics, society seemed resigned to let Hollywood revisit familiar conventions in order to satisfy reality

television's thirst for new content. By 2012, however, the volumes of series on multiple networks demonstrated that southern reality television was more than simply a fad; it had become an institution, with many series far surpassing ratings expectations from executives and subsequently inspiring new spinoffs and copycat shows. As one review of *Mud Lovin' Rednecks* confirmed, "Reality television continues to explore 'redneck' culture, with Animal Planet jumping on board," while another television listing cleverly noted, "Every cable channel has its own hicksploitation reality show these days. Why can't Animal Planet?"[3] As a genre, southern reality television consists of dozens of texts that represent themselves not only as real, but also as current, and their potential to reinforce the subservient, neo-colonial status of the South is what fuels my scholarly curiosity.

While giving a voice to working-class southern whites could presumably empower a traditionally underrepresented subculture in the national media landscape, the positive contributions of today's reality shows have been negligible. Unlike a handful of written memoirs from working-class southern whites, these shows are not born out a desire to give an authentic voice to their subjects. Much of the programming on Animal Planet, for example, may teach us about animals or ecosystems, but *Mud Lovin' Rednecks* has very little educational ambition. Unlike documentaries of social commentary such as those of the 1930s, most southern reality shows do not actively address anthropological, social or political issues—inquiring, for instance, *why* mud is such a part of the culture for these people. Moreover, the episodes contain almost no real drama and no character arcs—the supposed threat of injury or failure feels as contrived as any other reality show I have studied. The consequence of so much lighthearted

[3] "'Mud Lovin' Rednecks' Premiere: Mud Bog Wedding A Filthy Delight," *Huffington Post*, 27 August 2013, accessed June 15, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/27/mud-lovin-rednecks-premiere-mud-bog-wedding-video_n_3820577.html; Devin D. O'Leary, "Week in Sloth," *Alibi* 23, no. 50 (December 11-17 2014), accessed June 8, 2015, http://alibi.com/film/48232/Week-in-Sloth-The-Santa-Con-The-10-Most-Fascina.html.

fare is the feeling of a glorified promo for the Mountain Creek Mud Bog business rather than exploring the lives of real people, and we must accept at face value the relationship between working-class southerners, mud, and other images presented on screen.

Positive messages in *My Big Redneck Vacation* and *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* are more easily identifiable than in *Mud Lovin' Rednecks*, but the moral lessons that wrap up episodes often feel forced or rushed. Characters might undergo some kind of redemption or change, only to relapse back to their old ways at the beginning of the next episode, and in this way they are similar to many long-running fictional sitcoms. I suspect these contrived narratives allow producers to reinvent characters, themes and storylines, in turn encouraging executives to approve more episodes and seasons. Regardless of whether or not they are "real" lessons, in my opinion, they do not compensate sufficiently for the countless negative messages that bombard audiences. The characters appear to accept historic "redneck" values, expressing pride in their cultural shortcomings and reinforcing the hegemony that nonfiction print media established centuries ago. This acceptance of redneck values, combined with their ability to be molded to fit an episode's storyline, creates what Jim Goad referred to as "cartoon people," and what I deem as two-dimensional objects of voyeurism by mass audiences.[4] As Goad surmised, "the mainstream consistently depicts the redneck not as itself, but as a cultural weirdo. The redneck is the watched, not the watcher."[5] Thus, the redneck is turned into a cultural "other." Importantly, value judgments by "the watcher" do not have to be based on overt dialogue or voiceover narration. Reality television's dependence on facial expressions, reaction shots, and unflattering camera angles allows producers to manipulate the narrative, and these tools can be

[4] Jim Goad, *The Redneck Manifesto: How Hillbillies, Hicks, and White Trash Became America's Scapegoats* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 16.

[5] Ibid., 76.

just as powerful as dialogue because judgment can bypass the subjects and be transmitted directly from producer to audience.

Although I have limited the scope of Chapter Four to the analysis of only three recent reality programs, the majority of the shows in Table 4.1 use comparable means to exploit the historically familiar image of the white working-class southerner. One can see jokes about obesity, the narrative use of the "uber-redneck," the stark lack of racial diversity, and obligatory self-references to "the South" in popular shows like *Duck Dynasty, Party Down South*, and *Hollywood Hillbillies*. Individual images, themes, or lines of dialogue may not directly indict all working-class white southerners as inferior. For example, a specific reference to obesity, to drinking, or to grotesque behavior might simply be momentary comic relief. Yet I maintain that these series and the repeated themes that I have analyzed contribute to the immense volume of texts in the past few years that reinforce the association between "rednecks" and the unsavory characteristics that have traditionally defined them.

Having surveyed a host of other shows not set in South nor featuring southern characters, I furthermore contend that the wave of comedic "hicksploitation" shows is unique to the South—meaning reality television would have us believe that so-called rednecks do not exist in other parts of the United States. This convention is based on the historic assumption that the entire South can be defined, or that it consists of essential or universally accepted values that transcend socio-economic status. In modern reality television, one may hear a multitude of claims about customs or practices that all southerners embrace. Even when considering contradictory stereotypes, this tradition of southern discourse disguises the region's diversity, allowing different audiences at different times to believe that an essential South exists.

A self-deprecating line about one's obesity or lack of intelligence, for example, is normalized as "southern" in *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* or *My Big Redneck Vacation*, yet the same line in a non-southern show might be attributed only to a specific character. These general monolithic claims about southern culture appear most often in promotional spots and early episodes, but the framing of these shows as essentially southern follows them their entire lifespan, including in social media, celebrity interviews, and other cross-promotional material. A person need not even watch an episode of any of these shows to understand that this trend exists, and by reanimating antiquated notions of what it means to be "southern," I fear that these blind associations with all southerners can resurrect resentments from prior generations of Americans.

From a broader perspective, many non-regional reality television series seem to consciously contribute to "the diversification of television culture," with shows like *Survivor* and *The Real World* intentionally casting diverse participants that interact with each other.[6] This tactic may lead to conflict on screen, but it can also stimulate dialogue about cultural differences and encourage growth in audiences. These shows do not posit any specific regional or cultural association, starkly contrasting with the multitude of southern-based reality shows that explicitly claim to be southern and intentionally lack any racial or cultural diversity. Even the few reality shows set in southern cities, such as *The Real Housewives of Atlanta*, refuse to make any essential claims about all people of a culture or location. The "reality" of these shows may still be questionable, but the cast members only claim to represent themselves or at least a small subculture. Producers of rural shows, in contrast, have been resistant to approach their subjects without asserting a relationship with a larger "southern" culture.

[6] Laurie Ouellette and Susan Murray, "Introduction," in *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*, 2nd ed., ed. Murray and Ouellette (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 11.

The sheer number of series and their abundance of southern essentialisms force me to ask why mainstream entertainment media are reluctant to develop any programming set in the rural South but otherwise with no explicit southern framing. In fact, reality television has occasionally attempted such an enterprise. The series *Bama Glama* (Food Network, 2011-2012) features an event and wedding planner working in rural Alabama; *Lizard Lick Towing* (TruTV, 2011-2014) centers on an automobile repossession company in Lizard Lick, North Carolina; and one episode of *It's a Brad Brad World* (Bravo, 2012-2013) sees Los Angeles-based fashion stylist Brad Goreski travel to Alabama to visit fashion designer Billy Reid.[7] These examples do not have any exploitive agenda specifically regarding white southerners, and they do not claim to represent an essential southern culture. Unfortunately they are rare exceptions to the otherwise steadfast rule. Indeed, *Bama Glama* only had a limited 6-episode run, and the locals in *It's a Brad Brad World* were only minor on-screen participants during Goreski's short trip to Alabama.

In contrast to these few examples, most of the programming in the long list of southern-based reality shows represents a major resurgence of the southern media colony. Perhaps the multitude of shows as a whole, more than any individual stereotype portrayed, represents the most damaging neocolonial quality. By contrast, one may justifiably criticize a show like *Jersey Shore* for its portrayal of Italian Americans, but *Jersey Shore* is not part of a large wave of similar shows that claim to represent all Italian Americans. It is important also to note that every television show does not need to reinforce every stereotypes featured in other shows. The light-hearted nature of the reality television genre precludes producers from exploring some of the more heinous southern "white trash" stereotypes—such as racism or detrimental sloth—that prior generations of news producers and nonfiction writers featured so often. The term "inbred,"

[7] *It's a Brad Brad World*, "Sweet Home Alabama," aired January 23, 2012, on Bravo.

for example, was brought up briefly on the set of the reality pilot I helped produce, but it was quickly dismissed as inappropriate.

Even some of the characteristics that modern reality shows do explore are not consistent with each other. For example, drinking alcohol is prevalent in CMT shows like *My Big Redneck Vacation* and *Party Down South*, whereas it is almost non-existent in *Duck Dynasty, Here Comes Honey Boo Boo, Hillbilly Handfishin',* and *Swamp People*. If alcohol were as much a part of true southern culture as the CMT shows imply, then it would be reasonable to assume that alcohol should be present in any program that claimed to be a realistic representation of southern people. Even within *Mud Lovin' Rednecks*, alcohol use in the pilot episode contrasts with every other episode, demonstrating that producers and characters actively shape the reality they present, depending on their target audience. In theory, a series may invent new essentialisms, yet simply claiming any essentialism can be problematic. By repeating the claim that southern culture can be easily summed up and described, the South remains a media colony unlike any other region of the United States, primed for further exploitation and deprived of opportunities to host progressive storytelling.

This vulnerability to exploitation is reinforced by the notion that reality television is nonfiction, and well before the success of the reality television shows in this century, media producers have demonstrated a durable tendency to align southern themes with a claim of realism. First-person accounts, pseudo-documentary tactics, and marketing have been integral in convincing audiences that the outrageous southerners in these tales are real, presumably to boost ratings or sales. In this decade, I have pointed to strong empirical evidence that reality audiences believe in at least some aspect of the characters and actions they experience on screen. Even for audiences who believe reality shows are staged, they still see supposedly real southerners

embracing many classic southern stereotypes, forwarding the notion that southerners themselves believe in southern distinction.

PRODUCERS AND CONSUMERS

Although genre study is an inherent part of my research, the purpose of this dissertation is more than simply seeking out a clear definition of the southern reality television genre. I have ventured to understand the complex relationship between the media South and nonfiction producers, and my experience studying the entire entertainment media landscape leads me to the conclusion that decision-makers in the national media have little interest in telling original nonfiction stories featuring rural or working-class people who live in southern states. Is it because they have no personal interest in developing such a series? Or do they assume there is no market for such a series? Definitive answers to these questions are beyond the scope of this study, but the evidence suggests that market forces are omnipresent. Profit often dictates, or at least influences, the product on the screen, and producers' expectations for audience approval and patronage will influence content. This is an issue that theorists have recognized since the earliest motion-picture criticism, with pioneer documentary filmmaker Dziga Vertov decrying in 1923 that "cinema has been and still is on the wrong track" due to the industry's drive for profits.[8]

As part of their mindset, instead of seeking out new or authentic stories, reality subjects and producers may feel compelled to capitalize on conventions that they believe will reduce audience dissonance. The lack of racial diversity or urban settings in southern reality shows, for example, is likely influenced by the desire to avoid explanation. Reality television, like sitcoms and other genres, relies on shorthand to hook audiences and to gain their trust. Therefore, when I

[8] Dziga Vertov, "On the Significance of Nonacted Cinema (1923)," in *Kino-Eye: The Writings of Dziga Vertov*, ed. Annette Michelson, trans. Kevin O'Brien (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 36.

observed a director asking, "Can you say it more southern?" to one of her subjects, or telling another subject to use the term "y'all" instead of "guys," I interpret her direction as an attempt to help the audience make a familiar connection between the current scene and the countless other situations and characters that they already know from previous media experiences. Rightly or not, she feared her audience would be confused if they heard a southerner use the term, "guys," and she did not have the luxury of screen time to explain or develop the character enough to make his speech seem natural.

Because trends can quickly change, media producers find themselves constantly reevaluating what may sell and what may fail. As John Caldwell described, media companies have perfected the ability to market the margins, convincing audiences that their new product is unique, yet continually feeding them exactly what they expect.[9] Producers may periodically postpone and then revisit certain representations of poor whites, for examples, based on the threat of negotiated or oppositional readings by audiences, but they eventually find ways to return to that well. As recently as 2003, executives at CBS experienced firsthand that a hicksploitation reality show would have difficulty securing an audience, based on their trouble developing the ill-fated *The Real Beverly Hillbillies*. Less than a decade later, however, *My Big Redneck Vacation* and *Hollywood Hillbillies* are almost exactly what *The Real Beverly Hillbillies* proposed to be. The producers of *Party Down South*, ten years after the developers of *The Real Beverly Hillbillies* failed, also received complaints from location owners and municipalities who balked about the series premise, yet they were able to get their series produced and eventually

[9] John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 234-235.

turned it into a hit for CMT.[10] Conversely, humor theorist Brett Mills has noted that television has moved away from stereotypes of race and gender, suggesting that audiences no longer tolerate certain forms of comedy.[11] A show that proposed to essentialize people of other historically disenfranchised cultures—for example, rural African Americans—would likely find difficulty getting approved by national networks. However, this leaves producers with a dilemma concerning who we can joke about. For the past few years, it seems working-class southern whites are fair game.

My own experience and research have affirmed my personal belief that "the southerner" and southern culture are merely discursive formations. The "real" South cannot be defined, despite decades of contentions otherwise by scholars, journalists, novelists, film producers, and television producers, many of whom are themselves from the South. Indeed, southern aristocrats created the original redneck/hillbilly construct centuries ago as a defense mechanism against northern criticism, and in classic hegemonic progression, working-class southern whites consumed and embraced the imagery. A major thesis in my research is that voyeurism involving this discursive construct is not new, but the form has evolved into the latest popular format, reality television.

How long will this trend last? I approach this question in terms of the neocolonial function that the South has served for centuries. A media company or industry finds a resource and exploits it to maximize revenue, similar to a strip mining operation that abandons the land once its natural resources are depleted, or when the market is saturated. In this case, media producers may exploit both the supply—the image of the working-class white southerner—and

[10] Kimberly Blair, "'Party Down South' Producers Pull Out of Pensacola," *USA Today*, March 4, 2014, accessed February 8, 2016, http://www.usatoday.com/story/life/tv/2014/03/04/party-down-south-out-pensacola/6030303/.

[11] Brett Mills, *Television Sitcom* (London: British Film Institute, 2005), 105.

the demand—the audience desire to consume the image. What is the audience presently doing with the material? Just as Edward Said originally approached orientalism, and as David Jansson more specifically identified as "internal orientalism," the South as imagined by reality television is "the repository" for a range of undesirable traits that audiences would prefer not to claim as inherently American.[12] Prior portraits of poor southern whites as racist allowed middle-class and elite whites to ignore their own racism, and today's portraits of working-class southern whites continue to deflect larger problems in the South and in the society at large. To return to the strip mine analogy, reality television is the current means by which companies and consumers are exploiting the media South, and the trend will likely run its course at some point. Perhaps audience demand will fade when enough people protest the imagery or when mass audiences simply become bored with stale material. Nonetheless, the damage is done, and the working-class white southerner is relegated to the inferior class from prior generations, struggling to rehabilitate its image.

From a neocolonial point of view, negative representations of working-class southern whites might merely be social constructs, but they carry the possibility of reinforcing power structures that lead to such problems as lower education levels, increased poverty rates, and higher obesity rates in the South. Even audience members from the South can find a hegemonic use for the constructed media images they consume. A student from Mississippi, for example, wrote in her college newspaper an article titled, "*Honey Boo Boo*: Making Mississippi look better one episode at a time."[13] Here, this student was relieved that another southern state (Honey Boo Boo's home in Georgia) and not her home state of Mississippi was the butt of mass-media jokes, and she perhaps felt a sense of superiority over the southern "others" that *Honey*

[12] David R. Jansson, "Internal Orientalism in America: W.J. Cash's *The Mind of the South* and the Spatial Construction of American National Identity," *Political Geography* 22, no. 3 (March 2003): 293.

[13] Arielle Edwards, *The Student Printz* (University of Southern Mississippi), September 27, 2012, 9.

Boo Boo offered. Shep Rose, himself a participant in the reality series *Southern Charm*, expressed pride that his show is an "answer to the southern stereotype of just a bunch of goobers," an open acknowledgment of the superiority he felt over "uneducated" southern people historically portrayed in the media.[14] Though I may not personally subscribe to the existence of a definable, essential working-class white southerner, I am concerned that current reality television can reinforce in the minds of mass audiences historically negative assumptions about actual people who will continue to be left without a voice.

LOOKING FORWARD

Scholars and critics have limited influence over Hollywood's on-going approach to the southern reality genre. But we have the ability, and perhaps the obligation, to further understand media by using multidisciplinary approaches and then educating producers and audiences of the harmful reinforcements of negative stereotypes. Further textual analysis of reality episodes helps us understand the genre's conventions. Inductive, qualitative research can uncover patterns, and more systematic dissecting of media texts can reveal how they fit in the larger society. More quantitative approaches like content analysis can further our understanding by comparing variables within groups of media texts. Content-analysis variables might include, for example, the number of obesity jokes or the number of alcohol references in a southern reality show compared/contrasted with other television genres. Such a study might confirm my personal theories about the content that I have observed, or perhaps it might reveal surprising results that would force me to reconsider my attitudes about southern reality programming.

Moving beyond the text itself is the highly important research of audience analysis. As I have acknowledged, my distinct interpretations and reactions to southern-based reality shows may contrast with those of people with other backgrounds and experiences. Conducting focus

[14] Shep Rose, interview by Paul Finebaum, *The Paul Finebaum Show*, SEC Network, June 3, 2015.

groups that view and discuss television episodes can help researchers formulate new theories about how consumers use media and what the imagery means to various people. Poll results of media consumers can be useful—for example a *TV Guide* poll once indicated that 57% of audiences believed some aspects of reality television are real.[15] But more sophisticated empirical methods such as blind surveys and experiments can potentially generate illuminating data about audience beliefs. Experimental stimuli, for example, could compare southern and non-regional reality programs. Social scientists have used approaches like social learning theory, social cognitive theory, and cultivation theory to discover a pronounced relationship between media consumption and gender-role and racial stereotypes. Similarly, based on my research so far, a new study might use the hypothesis that exposure to southern reality television might have a detrimental effect on audience attitudes towards working-class southern whites, or possibly towards all southern people.

Our lens can also revert back to the creators of southern reality texts. While I personally consider the working-class white southerner to be a discursive formation, media producers clearly have difficulty letting go of preconceived conventions that they reanimate for today's audiences. As I attempted on a small scale in my own participant observation, more direct observation of industry processes on larger scales can reveal how and why the discursive South continues to reinvent itself. Direct interviews with producers and participants can supplement our knowledge of production culture and its influence over media content. What do producers believe about their subjects and about their audiences? Where do these beliefs come from, and how do they manifest in media productions? Are producers conscious of the potential for cultural exploitation? As long as reality producers continue to use past conventions, mainstream audiences can sustain the self-fulfilling association of white southerners with poverty, violence,

[15] Ouellette and Murray, 8.

racism, anti-intellectualism, and other ills that have plagued prior generations of real people. By unpacking the processes by which producers construct the media South, we can further expose and perhaps dislodge the dominant culture from its position of power over working-class southerners.

The criticism in this dissertation will hopefully not be interpreted as an attack on any specific media producer, just as it should not be read as a defense for any actual people from the past that writers and producers may have featured in nonfiction media. Conveying reality has always presented unique problems for producers who must work within parameters dictated by the intersection of technology and market forces. Oft-quoted post-colonial scholar Homi Bhabha summed up attempts to create authentic narratives of nations and cultures as using "scraps, patches, and rags of daily life."[16] Even theorizing about reality in media has proven a formidable challenge, with film theorists dating back to Vertov, Rudolf Arnheim, John Grierson, André Bazin, and Siegfried Kracauer all forwarding unique contributions to our definitions and uses of realism. As media historian James Carey said, "reality is scarce because of access: so few command the machinery for its determination."[17] In short, we should perhaps not be surprised at the lack of constructive uses for reality television texts.

Moving forward, however, I believe we can find reasons to be optimistic about the future of reality television and, more importantly, the evolving relationships between people of various subcultures. Modern reality television clearly resists exploiting the most heinous of southern stereotypes, but future productions need to make even greater efforts to communicate more diverse imagery of the rural south and working-class white southerners rather than continuing to

[16] Homi K. Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990), 297.

[17] James Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (1989; repr., New York: Routledge, 1992), 87.

portray a rural southern other for entertainment purposes. While we might wish to call for more sophisticated programming or give a media literacy lesson in resistant reading to audiences, these remedies would likely contain an intellectual bias that neglects to consider the perspective of the most vulnerable people.

In fact, the infrastructure that can allow realistic storytelling to evolve already exists in the form of locally owned media production companies and distribution networks. Building on Gayatri Spivak's concept of the new subaltern, I would like to see more locally produced material, but not necessarily marketed for national consumption as essentially southern texts. Spivak denounced simply giving a voice to a group of people in subordinate cultures and having them speak for an entire population, as this process would only reinforce a supposed collective, monolithic identity among what should be considered a heterogeneous, multicultural population.[18] Just as memoirs, travel writing, documentaries, and other forms of nonfiction media were eventually allowed to evolve, authentic voices in reality television can serve as a counterhegemonic force and help us move past the current southern reality trend. Televised reality may always be a scarce resource, but when put in the right hands and framed honestly and transparently, an occasional nonfiction television piece may find a national audience, temporarily satisfying audience curiosity but simultaneously helping mainstream consumers move past the neocolonial urge to exploit.

[18] Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-313.

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APPENDIX

IRB RESEARCH DESCRIPTION
"Southern Reality Show Dissertation"
by Teddy Champion

Purpose, Objectives, Design

1. The purpose of this study is to further the understanding of producers and participants in reality television programs that have a clear "southern" theme. Dozens of southern-based reality television shows have appeared in the past few years, many of which use images of rural southern whites that perpetuate harmful stereotypes. By directly observing and participating in the production of a new southern reality television show, I hope to identify specific images and attitudes that producers (behind the camera) and participants (in front of the camera) use to tell their stories. These observations will supplement my textual analysis of other southern reality shows currently airing on television.

2. My objective is to understand how one specific group of producers and participants approach southern themes in reality television production. I am not approaching this study with any hypothesis or pre-determined research questions. Additionally, I will most likely NOT attempt to claim that the results of my analysis are applicable to other reality television productions. However, I do plan to add this analysis to my analysis of other reality shows and discover potential similarities and commonly used conventions. The results of this analysis might lead to further studies using more scientific methods such as experiments, audience surveys, etc.

3. The approach of the study will be covert, ethnographic participant observation. As a member of the production crew, I will be privy to conversations among the producers and participants. However, in order not to influence their actions, I do not plan to reveal my intentions. In the written analysis, I will keep all names, titles, locations, and corporate entities confidential.

4. Although the genre for this kind of programming is called "reality," in practice much of the action is scripted and often fabricated. The "direction" that producers might give to participants is therefore never revealed in the finished product edited for broadcast. Whereas many audiences may believe the action on the screen to be "true," the people on the screen are often playing characters and directed what to say and do by the producers. Additionally, the cast and crew often perform several takes of the same action and decide later how to edit the footage to maximize comical or dramatic effect. By understanding how reality shows like this are created, I hope to understand specifically how producers and participants create, use, and perpetuate potentially harmful southern clichés and portray them as "real" to mass audiences.

Study Procedures

The procedures regarding the study of human subjects are minimal. I am simply observing the action of people in their own environment, and my own presence will not affect them. Additionally, my research will not affect my own ability to perform my duty as a member of the crew.

The production will take place in a small southern city in winter of 2014. On the set I will take note of the actions and words of the producers and participants, paying special attention to when they do and, importantly, when they do not resort to southern clichés when creating characters and situations. After production has wrapped, I will analyze my notes and include my observations in my dissertation.

The shooting schedule will likely last five to seven days. The exact locations are TBD but will likely include a privately-owned law office, barn, and hunting lodge.

As stated, I will not reveal the nature of my study to the producers and participants.

I will be the sole researcher on this project, although my dissertation committee will review my work. I do not need any additional training aside from my technical and production skills required for the job. I have completed CITI training requirements for investigators involved primarily in social/behavioral research with human subjects.

Study Background

As a film and television producer and a native southerner, my research interests involve the depiction of southern themes in mainstream media. I have previously studied the history of southern-themed films and animation.

My approach uses a postcolonial lens which views the South as a media "colony" for mainstream producers. For various reasons, producers often exploit southern themes for comedic or dramatic effect. Specifically, rural southern whites are often portrayed as unintelligent, unclean, having low morality, unwelcoming of outsiders and change, and overly proud of their culture, to name just a few standard conventions. These repeated portrayals are potentially harmful when considering southern states continually face problems of poverty, obesity, low levels of education, and other social problems.

As I was designing my new study of southern reality television programming, by coincidence, I was hired to work as the sound mixer on a new southern reality television show. My observations on the set will likely supplement my detailed analysis of current reality shows such as *Duck Dynasty, Here Comes Honey Boo-Boo, My Big Redneck Vacation*, and *Southern Fried Stings.*

Study Population/Subject Recruitment Methods

The population of this study will not be actively recruited. I have no need to select a sample population. Instead, I will use an ethnographic approach to study everyone within a specific culture.

I anticipate seven to ten other production personnel, including two or three producers, one writer, two camera operators, a sound assistant, and other production assistants.

The cast includes three lawyers, two or three legal assistants, and dozens of clients and their extended families, witnesses, and legal experts. Although the three lawyers are real lawyers and will be playing "themselves," the rest of the cast is comprised of actors.

None of the population is vulnerable. If any children are present, I will not observe them for the purposes of this study.

Risks/Evaluation of Level of Risk/Special Precautions/Safeguards Against Risk

There will be no physical, psychological, social, economic, or legal risks. As stated, I will not reveal any names of individuals or commercial entities involved.

Benefits

The subjects themselves will not accrue any benefits.

Society will hopefully benefit by further understanding that rural southern whites, like other minorities, are a potentially vulnerable people that are often exploited in mainstream entertainment. Whereas modern cultural sensitivity has drastically improved the way other minorities are depicted in the media, rural southern whites are often overlooked or seen as expendable. The sheer number of new southern-based reality shows is an example of this insensitivity.

Privacy and Confidentiality

The privacy of the subjects will not be an issue. I will be a co-worker, and my observations will not affect their job duties or their personal lives.

Confidentiality could be a potential issue, but I will do everything in my power to keep names out of my notes, papers, and published materials. I will create simple code names such as:
-Producer 1
-Producer 2
-Camera 1

-Sound 1
-Actor 1
-Actor 2

Once the code names are properly associated with the observations, all notes containing actual names will be destroyed.

No original data will be shared.

No waivers of consent will be sought and therefore no identifying names or signatures will exist.

Because the production is a commercial venture, I will be vigilant about not revealing details that might be traced back to the employees, companies, and locations involved. This study is not meant to indict any individual or corporate entity but rather to understand ways that common stereotypes are used.

Incentives and Compensation

No incentives or compensation will be offered.

Costs to Subjects

No costs associated with this study will be incurred by the subjects.

Care for Research-Related Injury

Because no risks are associated with this study, no plans will be made for research-related injury.

Informed Consent Process/Documentation/Assent

No informed consent will be sought or obtained.

Appendixes/Attachments

CITI Human Research Curriculum Completion Report

Office for Research

Institutional Review Board for the
Protection of Human Subjects

THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA
RESEARCH

January 16, 2014

Robert T. Champion
39 The Downs
Tuscaloosa, AL 35401

Re: IRB#: 14-OR-018 "Southern Reality Show Dissertation"

Dear Mr. Champion:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your proposed research.

Your application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. You have also been granted the requested waiver of informed consent. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies

Your application will expire on January 15, 2015. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of the IRB Renewal Application. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. Changes in this study cannot be initiated without IRB approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to participants. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of the IRB Request for Study Closure Form.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely,

Carpantato T. Myles, MSM, CIM, CIP
Director & Research Compliance Officer
Office of Research Compliance
The University of Alabama

358 Rose Administration Building
Box 870127
Tuscaloosa, Alabama 35487-0127
(205) 348-8461
FAX (205) 348-7189
TOLL FREE (877) 820-3066

IRB Project #: 14-02-018

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS
REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

I. Identifying information

	Principal Investigator	Second Investigator	Third Investigator
Names:	Robert T. Champion	Robin Boylorn	
Department:	Graduate Studies	Comm Studies	
College:	Communication & Information Sciences	Communication & Information Sciences	
University:	Alabama	Alabama	
Address:	39 The Downs, Tuscaloosa, AL 35401	Box 870172	
Telephone:		205-348-8078	
FAX:	205-348-6774		
E-mail:	rtmchamp@yahoo.com	robin.boylorn@ua.edu	

Title of Research Project: Southern Reality Show Dissertation

Date Submitted: 12/17/13
Funding Source:

Type of Proposal ☐ New ☐ Revision ☐ Renewal Please attach a renewal application ☐ Completed ☑ Exempt
Please attach a continuing review of studies form
Please enter the original IRB # at the top of the page

UA faculty or staff member signature: _____

II. NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION (to be completed by IRB):

Type of Review: ___ Full board ___X___ Expedited

IRB Action:

___ Rejected Date: _____
___ Tabled Pending Revisions Date: _____
___ Approved Pending Revisions Date: _____
_X_ Approved-this proposal complies with University and federal regulations for the protection of human subjects.

Approval is effective until the following date: 1/15/2015

Items approved:
_X_ Research protocol (dated _____)
___ Informed consent (dated _____)
___ Recruitment materials (dated _____)
_X_ Other waiver of IC (dated _____)

Approval signature _____ Date 2/13/2014

Office for Research

Institutional Review Board for the
Protection of Human Subjects

THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA
RESEARCH

December 17, 2014

Robert T. Champion
Department of Graduate Studies
College of Communication & Information Sciences
The University of Alabama
Box 870172

Re: IRB # 14-OR-018-R1 "Southern Reality Show Dissertation"

Dear Mr. Champion:

The University of Alabama Institutional Review Board has granted approval for your renewal application.

Your renewal application has been given expedited approval according to 45 CFR part 46. Approval has been given under expedited review category 7 as outlined below:

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your application will expire on December 16, 2015. If your research will continue beyond this date, complete the relevant portions of Continuing Review and Closure From. If you wish to modify the application, complete the Modification of an Approved Protocol Form. When the study closes, complete the appropriate portions of FORM: Continuing Review and Closure.

Should you need to submit any further correspondence regarding this proposal, please include the above application number.

Good luck with your research.

Sincerely

Carpantato T. Myles, MSM, CIM, CIP
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IRB Project #: 14-OR-018-R1

UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS
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Telephone:		205-348-8078	
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E-mail:	rtmchamp@yahoo.com	robin.boylorn@ua.edu	

Title of Research Project: Southern Reality Show Dissertation

Date Submitted: 12-12-14
Funding Source: NONE

Type of Proposal ☐ New ☐ Revision ☒ Renewal ☐ Completed ☐ Exempt
Please attach a renewal application
Please attach a continuing review of studies form
Please enter the original IRB # at the top of the page

UA faculty or staff member signature: _____

II. NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION (to be completed by IRB):

Type of Review: ____ Full board ___X___ Expedited

IRB Action:

___ Rejected Date: _____
___ Tabled Pending Revisions Date: _____
___✓___ Approved Pending Revisions Date: _____

Approved-this proposal complies with University and federal regulations for the protection of human subjects.

Approval is effective until the following date: 12-16-15 a.s

Items approved:
___ Research protocol (dated _____)
___ Informed consent (dated _____)
___ Recruitment materials (dated _____)
___✓___ Other (dated _____)

Approval signature _____ Date 12/17/2014