

Making Place, Making Race: Performances of Whiteness in the Jim Crow South

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This article examines the process of racialization as an essential aspect of how everyday geographies are made, understood, and challenged. It begins from the premise that a primary root of modern American race relations can be found in the southern past, especially in how that past was imagined, articulated, and performed during a crucial period: the post-Reconstruction era known as “Jim Crow.” More than just a reaction to a turbulent world where Civil War defeat destabilized categories of power and authority, white cultural memory there became an active ingredient in defining life in the New South. The culture of segregation that mobilized such memories, and the forgetting that inevitably accompanied them, relied on performance, ritualized choreographies of race and place, and gender and class, in which participants knew their roles and acted them out for each other and for visitors. Among the displays of white southern memory most active during Jim Crow, the Natchez Pilgrimage stands out. Elite white women served as the principal actors in making an imaginative geography that became a bedrock of cultural hegemony based on white supremacy. In order to reconstruct the performances of whiteness in Natchez, Mississippi, and to disentangle the constitutive relationship between race and place, this article makes use of qualitative methods that rely on previously unused archival materials and on ethnographic fieldnotes. *Key Words:* *cultural memory, imaginative geographies, Natchez, Mississippi, racialization, segregation, whiteness.*

The discovery of personal whiteness among the world’s peoples is a very modern thing—a nineteenth- and twentieth-century matter, indeed . . . This assumption that of all the hues of God whiteness alone is inherently and obviously better than brownness or tan leads to curious acts. (W. E. B. Du Bois [1921] 1996, 497–98)

Memories! Hallowed Memories of the past! There is no spot on earth so sweet in sentiment and so romantic and glamorous as the South; there is no spot where all the essence of that glorious past is so fully concentrated as in Natchez—storied Natchez! (*Clarksdale Register* 1937, 1)

The past is never dead. It’s not even past. (William Faulkner 1951, 92)

In 1940, Richard Wright returned to his boyhood home of Natchez, Mississippi. Like those of tens of thousands of other visitors to Natchez that year, the novelist’s stay was brief and circumscribed by an itinerary—he was just passing through. As a traveler in the Deep South during the height of Jim Crow, however, Wright differed from the others, and not just because he was black. Where the white visitors toured the city’s celebrated antebellum mansions, snapped photographs of docents in Confederate-era hoopskirts, and took in a performance of the historical pageant at the refurbished municipal auditorium, Wright’s Natchez visit was more personal. The author of that year’s best-selling *Native Son*

was there to see his father, Nathan Wright, who had deserted the young Richard and his family over two decades earlier. Wright scarcely recognized the old man “standing alone upon the red clay of a Mississippi plantation, a sharecropper, clad in ragged overalls, holding a muddy hoe in his gnarled, veined hands . . . his eyes glazed with dim recollection” ([1945] 1998, 34–35). Calling his father “a black peasant” and “a creature of the earth,” Wright remembered that “the white landowners above him” had systematically denied his father “a chance to learn the meaning of loyalty, of sentiment, of tradition. Joy was as unknown to him as was despair.”¹

This description, though intensely personal, represents a key geographical moment in Wright’s autobiography, *Black Boy* ([1945] 1998). On one level, it recounts the experiences of a successful southern migrant who was “overwhelmed” to realize that his father “could never understand me or the scalding experience that had swept me beyond his life and into an area of living that he could never know” (Wright [1945] 1998, 34). More broadly, however, the encounter is a scathing indictment of the place he left and of memories that he could not extinguish. “This was the culture from which I sprang,” Wright famously concludes his book; “this was the terror from which I fled.” Wright’s South, he ([1945] 1998, 257) remembered all too clearly, was a “white South.”²

Those Natchez residents who welcomed the many visitors to their city that year would agree with Wright’s

racial definition of the South—its unspoken “color,” its pervasive whiteness—if not with his particular memory of it (Figure 1). The small, Mississippi River city’s fame had increased substantially in the years since Wright had lived there as a child, and the promise of reliving “hallowed memories” of the Deep South’s “glorious past” drew throngs of tourists each spring (*Clarksdale Register* 1937, 1) (Figure 2). Without a trace of irony, its boosters proclaimed that in Natchez, “[E]very detail of life in the Old South is authentically re-enacted at this time” (Roane Byrnes, *A Modernized Fairy Tale*, n.d., BC-UM, Box 34, Folder 36, 1). The centerpiece of this performance of memory—the Natchez Pilgrimage—focused on touring the homes of the wealthy planters who “employed” people like Nathan Wright and on watching a colorful pageant in which several hundred costumed residents presented



Visit
the
Deep
South

PILGRIMS TO THE DEEP SOUTH will discover a unique and interesting section of their native land.

Romance and color of the Old South blended with the progress of the New South, a profusion of natural beauty and charming hospitality will make their visit one of the most eventful adventures of a lifetime.

Figure 1. “Visit the Deep South.” Beginning in 1932, leading white citizens of Natchez, Mississippi, have welcomed tourists with the promise that “every detail of life in the Old South is authentically re-created” during the city’s annual Pilgrimage. *Source:* unnamed, undated newspaper clipping, ca. 1940, KMP-HNF.

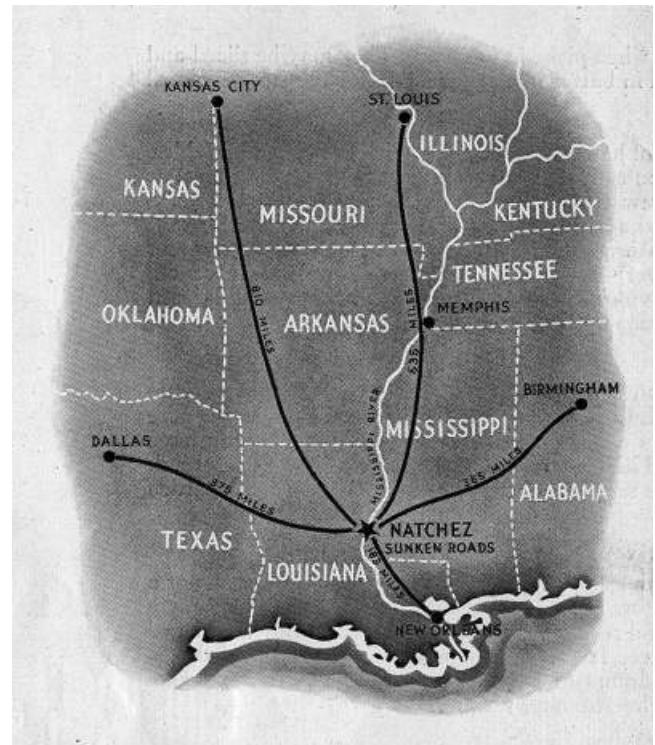


Figure 2. All roads lead to Natchez. Attracting tourists to this small, out-of-the-way Mississippi city in the depth of the Great Depression was no easy feat, but the Natchez Garden Club accomplished it with success. They were helped by an avalanche of publicity from the national press, including publications like *Better Homes and Gardens*, which produced this tourist map to accompany its article entitled “The Old South Lives Again.” *Source:* Peterson 1938, 24. Reprinted courtesy of *Better Homes and Gardens*.

regional culture “as a series of living pictures from our treasured past” (Thelma Conerly, “The Confederate Ball: 9th Annual Pageant of the Original Natchez Garden Club,” 1940, NGC-MDAH, microfilm roll 1). The so-called Confederate Pageant “reproduced life in the Old South” with faithfulness and a seriousness that its originator proudly compared to the “vivid portrayals of the Oberammergau Passion Play” (Miller 1938, 48).

Several months after Wright’s Natchez visit, the garden-club women who organized the tourist spectacle added a new scene to the historical pageant. Silent tableaux of “Spanish Dons with flashing swords and dashing uniforms,” of the early English planters’ “cultured pastoral life,” of the “sportsmanship and fine art” of fox hunting, of the “young blades and fair damsels tripping lightly to the Virginia Reel”—to these blissful scenes of innocent and romantic memory was added a tableau simply titled “Cotton Pickers.” Edith Wyatt Moore described the scene vividly:

The fleecy staple of the Southland is so inseparably woven with the negro that we have framed a plantation scene for

your delight. Mellow voices lend reality to this picture that is as much a part of our heritage as the liquid notes of the mocking bird. Fields still whiten and darkies still sing in this land of laughter, love and song, but the old plantation system is passing into oblivion. ("The Confederate Pageant and Ball: Tenth Annual Pageant of the Original Natchez Garden Club," pageant dates 22 March–4 April 1941, NGC-MDAH, Box 1)³

The new tableau scene became an instant success and remained a staple of the Confederate Pageant for the next thirty years.

Today, with more than a half century of hindsight and a growing historical-geographical literature on the brutal, racist regime of the Jim Crow South, it is tempting to dismiss the Confederate Pageant tableau as absurd and to hold up Wright's remembrance of sharecropping as the only account worthy of mention. And, of course, such an interpretation would be largely correct. What could be more ludicrous than the pageant's depiction of the antebellum past as a time when "[a] planter looked after the welfare of his slaves and was loved by them, for they were carefree and happy and sang at their work" (Katherine Miller, "The Confederate Tableaux," 1941, PGC-SH)? And what could be more compelling than Wright's memory that, as an African American from the Jim Crow South, "[T]he pressure of southern living kept me from being the kind of person I might have been?" ([1945] 1998, 414).⁴

And yet, I wish to argue that these two contrasting memories of the South are flip sides of the same powerful dynamic, a dialectic that unites "race" and "place" through their mutual construction. I am hardly the first to make the argument, so well documented by David Delaney (1998), that legal segregation is central to the historical constitution of race in the United States. And I take it as a given that, as Don Mitchell (2000, 258) has claimed, "[C]ontrol over the production of space—the ability to create space in particular ways—also lends to powerful groups the ability to actively *create* race" (emphasis in original; see also Jackson and Penrose [1993]). Modern American segregation, or the geographical separation of people as a way of making and fixing absolute racial difference, offers the preeminent example of the interdependence between race and place.⁵

In the case of the Jim Crow South, however, knowing one's "place" had as much to do with culture as with propinquity and absolute location (Cresswell 1996). Indeed, Mississippi—the most racially restrictive and oppressive state during the entire segregation period—seems to have had *fewer* Jim Crow laws than most southern states. Before the 1950s and the rise of "massive

resistance" to racial integration, municipal laws there generally ignored the color line (Bartley 1999; see also Williamson 1984; McMillen 1990; Litwack 1998). As C. Vann Woodward wrote during the aftermath of the 1954 *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* decision, "[T]here is more to Jim Crowism practiced in the South than there are Jim Crow laws on the books" ([1955] 1974, 102).

This is not to suggest that the laws were of little consequence—far from it—only that a full examination of American racial segregation must take into account the cultural productions that articulated it, reinforced it, and made it deeply embedded in daily life. To be sure, states like Mississippi systematically mandated "equal but separate accommodations" in sleeping cars (1888) and trolleys (1904); Mississippi made biracial education unconstitutional (1890) and closed polling places to blacks by ostensibly legal means (1891); and, of course, the state made it unlawful for the two races to intermarry or simply live together. Outside the boundaries of these formal provisions for the recognition of caste, however, racial segregation in Mississippi was largely based on custom. Only with the massive resistance to federal civil rights law in 1956 did service establishments—places of amusement and public accommodation such as lodging houses, restaurants, theaters, and saloons, as well as barber shops and beauty parlors—become authorized to "choose or select" their patrons. And in Mississippi's towns and cities, pre-civil-rights-era ordinances generally did not address racial issues, leaving matters of territorial control to deeply ingrained social habit (McMillen 1990, 8; see also Delaney 1998, 93–116; Bartley 1999).

Put somewhat differently, any critical, geographical study of race and place in the Jim Crow South—and, by implication, in other locales where exclusionary practices are codified by custom and taken-for-granted norms—needs to examine how those habits and memories are communicated and reproduced. Such a study should, as Raymond Williams (1977, 109) notes, go "beyond 'ideology'" and investigate "not only the conscious system of ideas and beliefs, but the whole lived social process as practically organized by specific and dominant meanings and values." Such a study must foreground cultural hegemony (see also Anderson 1988; Lears 1985).

This article investigates a central theme in the historical geography of the American South and other places marked by geographies of exclusion: how a dominant group was able to create a culture of segregation that extended well beyond the boundaries of its legal apparatus. More broadly, it examines in detail the process of racialization as an essential aspect of how everyday geographies are made, understood, and challenged.⁶ White supremacy informed all aspects of post-Civil War

southern life, but its power was never monolithic or complete; Jim Crow constantly had to remake itself in response to African-American (and occasionally white) defiance and resistance (Daily, Gilmore, and Simon 2000; Chafe, Gavins, and Korstad 2001, esp. 268–303). This is where the Natchez Pilgrimage becomes central. As a performance “of great cultural and educational value” intended to “re-awaken interest in the history and achievements of the past,” the Natchez Pilgrimage emerged as a key site of cultural hegemony in the constructions of race and place in the Jim Crow South (Roane Byrnes, *The Natchez Pilgrimage*, n.d., BC-UM, Box 34, Folder 12, 1). It served to remind African Americans such as Nathan Wright of their proper, historical place as sharecroppers, while reassuring whites—both those from inside the community and those drawn from beyond its borders—that such a station in life was not only natural but also romantic and even desirable. By examining this important display of regional memory, I hope to shed light on whom Natchez whites imagined themselves to be and on the memories and performances that helped them make their collectiveness—their whiteness—authoritative, all-encompassing, and real.⁷

Performing Geographies of Memory

In recent years, a good deal of academic attention has been drawn to the shared and contested dimensions of remembering, and to their very real political and material consequences. Once the sole preserve of psychology, the study of memory now extends to anthropology, sociology, cultural studies, literary studies, communication, history, and—increasingly—geography. Beginning with the work of French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs ([1951] 1992), many scholars, including geographers, have come to see memory as a social activity, as both an expression and an active binding force of group identity (Crang and Travlou 2001). Whether one refers to “collective memory,” “social memory,” “public memory,” “historical memory,” “popular memory,” or “cultural memory,” most would agree that such shared remembrances help identify “a group, giving it a sense of its past, and defining its aspirations for the future” (Fentress and Wickham 1992, 3).

By definition, cultural memory involves sharing, discussion, negotiation, and frequently conflict. It is focused inevitably on concerns of the present, and those who sustain a cultural memory often mobilize it for partisan purposes, commercialize it for the sake of tourism, or invoke it as a way to resist change (Charlesworth 1994; Turnbridge and Ashworth 1996; DeLyser 1999). Ralph Ellison (1986, 124) was speaking of all Americans—

northerners and southerners alike—when he observed, quite correctly, that we are “notoriously selective in the exercise of historical memory.” Some, like Michael Kammen (1991), have suggested that Americans are more amnesiac than other populations. Regardless of such invocations of American exceptionalism, it is also the case that forgetting or amnesia is fundamental to cultural memory more generally. Forgetting, Natalie Davis and Randolph Starn (1989, 2) have written, is “the substitution of one memory for another,” and is not therefore a defect, but a valued activity that is as strategic and central a practice as remembering itself.

Forgetting, in other words, is a “given of domination,” for memory consistently attempts to silence the voices of those who seek to interpret the past in contradictory ways (Boyarin 1992, 2; see also Anderson 1991; Trouillot 1995; Sturken 1997). Determining which version of the past becomes accepted as true and universal carries considerable cultural and political authority, a point given classic articulation by the Party in George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: “[W]ho controls the past controls the future; who controls the present controls the past” ([1949] 1981, 31). Beginning with Michel Foucault (1993), recent scholars of memory have proved Orwell correct; the interpretation of the past is a salient form of power, and its control carries heavy consequences. As David Lowenthal (1996) has observed, “spoils” exist in the contest over the past. No wonder that in times of tension and in the consolidation of power, so many people have turned to cultural memory or heritage, the means by which the past is domesticated, made familiar, and translated into contemporary language (see, e.g., Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Nora 1989; Boyer 1994; Gillis 1994; Lowenthal 1996; Hoelscher 1998; Gruffudd, Herbert, and Piccini 1999).

Displays of Memory

The selectivity and inherent politics—at both the broadest and narrowest levels—of cultural memory are direct outcomes of its processual nature. Remembering is no longer seen as a finite activity with a clear beginning and end; rather, it is better conceptualized as a process that is constantly unfolding and changing (Assman 1995; Zelizer 1995). Two important aspects of cultural memory follow from this basic observation. First, debates about the past always take place within a larger historical-geographical framework. It matters a great deal when and where a cultural memory is established, just as the forces that shape it are spatially and temporally contingent (Massey 1995). Thus, Abraham Lincoln has been remembered differently by successive generations of

Americans: earlier images of a folksy Lincoln have given way to a portrait of a remote and dignified individual (Schwartz 2000). Likewise, whether a heritage museum is operated by an official government agency or by an individual trust can distinctly shape how the past is interpreted, as can changing academic paradigms (Handler and Gable 1997; Johnson 1999). Ethnic groups in different regions of the country commemorate ancestors in radically different ways, and, even in one locale, varying access to political power and capital profoundly shapes collective remembering (Bodnar 1992; Hayden 1995; Ray 2001). Finally, statues and monuments everywhere reflect changing divisions in the country at the time that they were commissioned, thereby marking successive phases of cultural memory (Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991; Peet 1996; Savage 1997; Levinson 1998; Forest and Johnson 2002).

A second key aspect of cultural memory derives from this last point. Since the original experiences of the past are irretrievable and forever unstable, we can only grasp them through their remains—through objects, images, events, and representations. “The past is not simply there in memory,” Andreas Huyssen (1995, 2–3) notes, “but it must be *articulated* to become memory” (emphasis in original). Such articulations of the past are what I call the “displays of memory.” They are not passive containers, but are active vehicles in producing, shaping, and giving meaning to cultural memory and heritage.⁸ This is especially true when the past being recalled stretches beyond the lifetime and experience of the individual to encompass an imagined community such as a nation-state or region.

Although the range of memory displays is vast and can encompass everything from public art, memorials, and television images to photographs, pageants, and yellow ribbons, it strikes me that two articulations are of unusual importance: cultural performances and landscape. By “cultural performance,” I refer to the sorts of nonordinary, framed public events that require participation by a sizable group and that, as planned-for public occasions, invest their participants with meaning. They are reflexive instruments of cultural expression and power in which a group creates its identity by telling a story about itself (Schechner 1985; Turner 1986; Jackson 1988; Marston 1988; Bauman 1992; Smith 1998; Woods 1999). Through bodily repetition and the intensification of everyday acts that otherwise remain submerged in the mundane order of things, performances such as rituals, festivals, pageants, public dramas, and civic ceremonies serve as a chief way in which societies remember (Connerton 1989). “Where memory is,” Herbert Blau (1990, 382) notes, “theatre is.”

As Nigel Thrift and John-David Dewsbury (2000, 420) argue, performance is “a means of carrying out

a cultural practice—such as memory—thoroughly.” Marked by a higher-than-usual degree of reflexivity, performance genres play an essential—and often essentializing—role in the mediation and creation of social communities, including those organized around class, gender, sexuality, and race. They provide an intricate counterpoint to the unconscious practices of everyday life, as they are stylistically marked expressions of “otherness” and identity. The relationship between display and the quotidian is not merely, however, one-way; performances also *inform* the everyday by providing models for behavior and cultural understanding (Handelman 1990; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1998). Finally, and importantly, cultural performances invest individuals and social groups with the rhetorical tools necessary to make strategic use of those divisions for their own, political ends. This kind of staged theatrical activity, Frank Manning (1983, 29) suggests, “not only represents, but also promotes, dynamic political processes, including the realignment of forces and interests within the body politic” (see also Wallis 1994). As a principal display of identity and as an exquisite producer of hierarchies of exclusion, cultural performances are especially powerful expressions of memory (Falassi 1987; Glassberg 1990, 2001; Lipsitz 1990, 233–53; Kapchen 1995; Roach 1996).⁹

In order to be believable—what good is cultural memory if it is seen as contrived?—selective versions of the past are often made concrete through material objects. The ephemeral and processual nature of memories means that their architects and guardians frequently ground them in physical form—in landscapes. A landscape, Fred Inglis (1977, 489) has noted, provides “the most solid appearance in which a history can declare itself.” Precisely because landscape is “a concrete, three-dimensional shared reality,” its ability to display heritage and memory is unparalleled (Jackson 1984, 5). But this solidity melts away upon further reflection. Landscape’s power—and its duplicity—lie in its ability to project a sense of timelessness and coherency when, as recent work in cultural geography affirms with unanimity, a landscape is anything but timeless and coherent (e.g., Daniels 1989; Mitchell 1996; Schein 1997; Cosgrove 1998; Driver and Gilbert 1998; Matless 1998; Duncan and Duncan 2001).

Pushing this argument further, Pierre Nora (1989, 13) contends that memory “relies on the materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image.” Landscapes and material artifacts of place—monuments, memorials, and museums—anchor memory and make it “user-friendly.” Such places, or “theatres of memory,” provide a spatial context within which “stories and rituals of citizenship are performed, enacted, understood, and contested” (Till 2001, 273; see also Johnson

1995; Samuel 1994; Withers 1996; Edensor 1997; Foote 1997; Savage 1997). No less than a public event or celebration, landscape should be viewed as a process, as a cultural practice that represents and enacts popular ideas about the past—in short, as a performative display of memory.

Enacting Geographies of Whiteness

The importance of memory to geographers is magnified by its acknowledged social nature, the political and material consequences of which are everywhere evident. “The stakes in debates over social memories are quite real,” David Blight (1994, 68) notes: “[M]aterial resources, political power, and life chances may all be at stake.” Among those stakes, few stand out more starkly and carry higher voltage than those surrounding race and the process of racialization, especially the formation of white identities.

Toni Morrison (1993) was among the first to cast a critical light on the apparent invisibility of a racial category that lies at the center of American public culture. “Whiteness,” Morrison believes, has for too long remained the privileged, naturalized, and tacitly understood marker of American literature and of identity more generally. Denying white as a racial category, neglecting to see that whiteness has a history and geography—as Americans have long done—allows whiteness to stand as the norm. “Whiteness never has to speak its name,” George Lipsitz (1998, 1) writes, “never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations.” Such an erasure allows many people to merge their perceived absence of racial being with the nation, enabling whiteness to become their unspoken but most profound sense of what it means to be an American, and, by necessity, making all other racialized identities an Other (e.g., Fishkin 1995; Winant 1997; Hale 1998; Kobayashi and Peake 2000).

This is a significant argument in critical race studies, and one that has triggered much scholarly discussion during the past decade. It is also one that many African-American writers and activists have long made. Frederick Douglass ([1893] 2000, 193–194) long ago contended that talk of a “Negro problem is a southern devise to mislead and deceive,” while Richard Wright made it clear in 1946 that “[T]here is not a black problem in the United States, but a white problem” (quoted in Nadeau [1946] 1993, 88). And Ralph Ellison ([1964] 1986, 94) anticipated much recent scholarship when he noted during the height of the civil rights movement that “[S]ome people must feel superior on any ground whatsoever, and I’m afraid that for far too many, ‘whiteness’ is the last desperate

possibility.” Douglass, Wright, and Ellison, as well as writers like James Baldwin, bell hooks, and others, have all insisted that white identity is shaped by the exercise of power.

Unfortunately, recent theoretical and empirical investigations of whiteness confirm not only the unequal power relations suggested by Ellison, but also that, far from being a “last desperate possibility,” whiteness occupies center stage for many Americans and British people alike. Performances of whiteness take place on a variety of scales—from the nation-state to the region to the city to the neighborhood to the factory floor—and engage actors from across the social spectrum. There are also many forms of whiteness; the best scholarship describes, not the origins of an undifferentiated white identity, but “the ways in which specific strata of the population came to think that they are white” (Roediger 2002, 21; see also Jacobson 1998; Bonnett 2000). Common to each, however, is an epistemology that relies on a shared, nonrelational way of understanding of the world (Dwyer and Jones 2000; see also, e.g., Frankenberg 1993; Delgado and Stefancic 1997; Dyer 1997; Goldberg 1997; Jackson 1998; Roediger 2002).

Like all social constructions, then, whiteness is both a geographic phenomenon and, as Peter Jackson (1999, 294) notes, “an historically specific social formation.” Put somewhat differently, what we today identify as whiteness has a temporal trajectory and a spatial context that can be—and desperately needs to be—investigated. Indeed, unmasking the processes by which whiteness is enacted and identifying the material consequences of such a construction is the first step toward formulating workable antiracist politics. David Roediger (1994, 75) believes—correctly, I think—that “[M]aking whiteness, rather than simply white racism, the focus of study has had the effect of throwing into sharp relief the impact that the dominant racial identity in the U.S. has had not only on the treatment of racial ‘others,’ but also on the ways that whites think of themselves, of power, of pleasure, of gender.”

The South, though not unique in its struggle with racial injustice, has provided the main stage on which Americans have played out this fundamental performance of race construction. Whiteness’s contradictory, simultaneous need for race to be both recognized (blackness) and unacknowledged (whiteness) has been more apparent and well defined in the South than in any other American region. Precisely because its “color line” has been drawn so clearly, because its dramas have been so violent and so graphic, and because—ultimately and tragically—it has profoundly shaped national conceptions of cultural difference, it is the place where one must look to understand the historical geography of this most modern

and deeply entrenched aspect of racialization. This is not to suggest, of course, that the South holds a monopoly on either racism or racialization; both can be found in every corner of the United States, where today tense race relations frequently dominate news from Los Angeles to Cincinnati to Boston. Rather, a confluence of powerful events that have shaped modern American identity and its understanding of race—from slavery and the Civil War to Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the civil-rights movement—has occurred in the South. As such, the region has become America's "crucible of race," the key site for the ways in which such profound historical-geographical moments are remembered and rearticulated (Williamson 1984; Ayers 1995; Hale 1998; Litwack 1998; Brundage 2000a).

Memory's Twilight Zone: Natchez and the "Old South"

In the American South, the struggle over memory—always a fundamental issue during moments of rapid political, social, and economic change¹⁰—crystallized during the age of Jim Crow. By the 1880s, political conflicts over the meaning of freedom for blacks, as well as economic-geographic trends toward centralization, standardization, urbanization, and mechanization, meant that American collective identity itself was anything but clear. White southerners, like Americans in other regions, sought to make sense of the apparent fragmentation of their world. They did so, Grace Hale (1998, 6) argues, by elaborating "spatial mediations of modernity," or "ways of attaching identities to physical moorings, from bodies to buildings to larger geographies like region and nation" (see also Berman 1988). Such identity anchors for white southerners seeking social order were invariably geographical, with the imagined history of the region offering the prime source material; they were also inevitably political, with the fiction of absolute racial difference becoming the region's governing principle. Cataclysmic disruptions triggered by the Civil War, Reconstruction, and their aftermath produced the need to envision new foundations of identity (Williamson 1984; Foner 1988; Ayers 1992; O'Leary 1999; Blight 2001).

At bottom, those foundations—or imagined communities—were constructed, not wholly out of new cloth, but from the hazy boundary separating experience from myth. Nearly a half century ago, Woodward ([1955] 1974, xvi) put it cogently: "The twilight zone that lies between living memory and written history is one of the favorite breeding places of mythology. This particular twilight zone [of the Jim Crow South] has been especially prolific in the

breeding of legend." More than just a reaction to a turbulent world in which Civil War defeat destabilized categories of power and authority, memory's twilight zone became an *active ingredient* in defining life in the New South. The name given to that surreal space was "the Old South," and for many Americans—northerners and southerners alike—Natchez became its cultural hearth (Buck 1940; Sansing 1989).¹¹

The historical geography of memory in Natchez, as in other southern cities, followed a distinct—if at times overlapping—periodicity. Immediately following the Civil War, defeated but unrepentant southern whites memorialized "the cause that could never be lost." Women, in particular and in defiance of northern troops, took a leading role in decorating the graves of Confederate dead. After Reconstruction, this partisan band of white southerners grew into a regionwide movement that aimed to keep alive the "Lost Cause" of the Confederacy. Memorial associations, led by the United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Sons of Confederate Veterans, created the South's own Memorial Day and built the monuments that today can be found at the center of southern towns and cities. This founding phase of southern memory made strategic use of both ritualized performance and memorial landscapes to solidify an awareness of the Confederate past (e.g., Wilson 1980; Winberry 1983; Foster 1987; Gulley 1993; Kubassek 1992; Savage 1997; Sims 1997; Blight 2001).

As important as the Lost Cause was in constructing white memory in the South, after 1920, it lost much of its influence. Beginning in the 1880s and gathering momentum during the decades surrounding the Great Depression, a second phase pushed memory backward in time to life before "the War of Northern Aggression," to a time of blissful economic, political, and racial relations (Wilson 1993; Hale 1999). "Perpetually suspended in the great haze of memory," Wilbur Cash (1941, 124) wrote, the image of the Old South "hung, as it were, poised, somewhere between earth and sky, colossal, shining, and incomparably lovely—a Cloud-Cuckoo-Land." Cash himself blamed a good portion of the South's Jim Crow-era dysfunction on its version of southern memory (Cobb 1999).

While Cash's *The Mind of the South* may be justly criticized for its hyperbolic prose and wooden caricatures, his (1941, 125–26) central observation that "glorification of the Southern heritage . . . had certain considerable consequences" remains salient. Cash clearly saw what was happening around him. Popular writers such as Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Nelson Page, historical preservationists in Savannah and Charleston, disaffected intellectuals such as Allen Tate and Donald Davidson,

novelists such as Margaret Mitchell, and filmmakers such as David O. Selznick ransacked the southern past to create a new version of the South as a place with a special tradition rooted in memory (Gaston 1970; Gray 1986; Datal 1990; Pyron 1992). The Old South, as Allen Tate ([1930] 1991, 174) wrote approvingly, provided “a vast body of concrete fact to which [white] southerners must be loyal.” Nowhere was that “concrete fact”—the raw material out of which white southerners forged a powerful and racially charged cultural memory—made more explicit, tangible, and real than in Natchez, Mississippi.

“A Vast Body of Concrete Fact”: Natchez’s New Primary Resource

Natchez in the early years of the Great Depression stood at once a part of and apart from other southern cities. Though seemingly small in size, with a population of roughly 13,000 Natchez was one of the largest Mississippi cities in 1930. It was the only incorporated municipality in Adams County, where blacks accounted for 65 percent of the population (compared to 53 percent in Natchez, the county seat), and long served as the region’s principal political-economic-cultural center (U. S. Bureau of the Census 1932, 1310). On the eve of the Civil War, more people lived in Natchez than in any other Mississippi city, and the booming cotton trade generated immense wealth for the members of its elite planter class. Their famed antebellum mansions, with colossal white pillars and ornate gardens, dotted the Natchez suburbs (Figure 3). While cotton offered means to that wealth, slaves provided the labor; Natchez, not coincidentally, ranked second only to New Orleans as the most important slave-trading site on the Mississippi River (James 1968; Polk 1989; Kaye 1999).

In the early 1930s, cotton remained the backbone of Natchez’s economy, but its relative importance had declined dramatically. The rich soil of the Yazoo Delta to the north supplanted Natchez as the state’s most important agriculture center, and postbellum railroads siphoned away much of the commercial activity that had helped sustain the city’s earlier wealth. Together with the Delta, the Natchez district was among the first areas of the central South to be ravaged by the boll weevil, but unlike that in its northern neighbor, agribusiness in Natchez never fully recovered. Cotton production in Adams County declined from 20,455 bales in 1907 to 1,592 in 1909; production remained below 2,500 bales until the end of World War I, and never again did the county produce more than 8,000 bales in a year. And it was not Adams County alone that experienced dramatic change: from 1899 to 1929, cotton-producing acreage decreased in



Figure 3. Dunleith, photographed by Marion Post Wolcott, ca. 1940. One of the Farm Security Administration (FSA) photographers who documented Natchez, Wolcott photographed Dunleith—one of the city’s grandest antebellum mansions—in August 1940. The picturesque photograph is unusual for Wolcott, whose work, like that of most FSA photographers, emphasized Depression-era social conditions; it is more typical of the tourist-oriented scenic views of landscapes such as Dunleith, a home that at one time counted future U.S. Representative John R. Lynch as one of its slaves. Source: Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, #LC-USF346-054827-C-A.

the Natchez district’s six counties from 255,000 acres to 86,000 (Aiken 1998, 92).

Planters themselves facilitated the demise of the agribusiness infrastructure. The Natchez district was marked by extreme concentration of land ownership, with absentee owners holding a significant proportion of that land and displaying a remarkable degree of indifference toward their holdings. Charles Aiken (1998, 92–93) found that thirty-six families owned or controlled nearly half of the total farmland in Adams County during the 1930s and, of those thirty-six, seven controlled a fourth of the acreage in production. One planter alone controlled more than 30,000 acres. Half the district’s planters lived in Natchez and “paid little attention to their properties.” Not that “well-managed” plantations were any better for their laborers; there, sharecroppers “worked by the bell” and were examined daily by the owner or manager. It was a life that seemed to offer no alternative for those caught in its web. One Natchez sharecropper put it this way: “My father raised cotton, an’ his father raised cotton, an’ I’m jus’ bawn an’ bred to it . . . Can’t break away from it” (Davis, Gardner, and Gardner 1941, 275; see also Davis 1982, 1993; Wayne 1983). One option, of course, was to “vote with one’s feet,” as Du Bois put it, and tens of thousands of Natchez African Americans joined Richard Wright’s family and departed from the region.¹²

Natchez and its surrounding hinterland, then, followed a trajectory similar to other plantation regions such as the Georgia Piedmont and the Alabama Black Belt, regions that did not complete the transition to modern mechanized cotton production. And, as in these other southern regions, its white business leaders pursued a path of modest industrialization. First timber-processing, then, in 1939, a tire and rubber factory, and by the 1950s, nearly twenty new manufacturing plants diversified the local economy and provided hundreds of new union jobs for both blacks and whites (Davis 2001).¹³ But where Natchez's white men sought to emulate Henry W. Grady, the influential editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, and his vision of an industrial "New South" divorced from its antebellum past, Natchez's elite white women mined a different resource, one based on Tate's "vast body of concrete fact": a cultural memory of the Old South (*Natchez Democrat*, 22 March 1949, MDAH, Roll 30135; Roane Byrnes, *Culture of the Ante-Bellum South as Exemplified in Historic Natchez*, n.d., BC-UM, Box 34, Folder 38).

To "Re-create the Days of the Old South": Inventing a Tradition

The landscape and cultural performances that displayed white memory were shaped by a number of influential women in the years surrounding the Great Depression (Figure 4). Their primary aim, its principle mythmaker once wrote, was to "re-create the Days of the Old South." Re-create they did, as Katherine Miller, a self-described "romantic" who wrote "a thousand romances" in her mind, successfully authored one—the Natchez Pilgrimage—that became transformed into a seventy-year-old tradition (Miller 1938, 34; Barber 1955). Today, guides to the city's mansions still recall with great reverence "Katherine Miller and the remarkable ladies who did so much so keep alive our heritage" (Stanton Hall Tour, Natchez, MS, April 2000). At the same time that most Pilgrimage docents acknowledge the role of important civic leaders such as Miller in establishing the tradition, much of the work of creating and maintaining memory is hidden behind a legend that rivals the moonlight-and-magnolia version of the past blanket-ing Natchez.

Thanks in part to early capitulation during the Civil War, Natchez is home to more extant pre-Civil War homes than any other U.S. city except Williamsburg, Virginia. Its early founding, staggering planter wealth, and unique urban concentration combined with early twentieth-century economic stagnation to preserve the structures



Figure 4. Leaders of the Natchez Garden Club, ca. 1933. From the late 1920s to today, the Natchez Garden Club has been extremely influential in restoring the city's antebellum homes and making them "must-see" tourist destinations. Katherine Miller, the woman most city residents credit for inventing the Natchez Pilgrimage, is second from left. Source: Miller (1938).

that in other cities were destroyed (Miller and Miller 1986). Elite white women—not nameless social forces or timeless tradition—were the active agents in restoring the antebellum homes that have become the economic linchpin of a tourism industry that draws over 100,000 visitors and generates an estimated U.S.\$1.5 million during a three-week period every spring (*The Economist* 1990, 25).¹⁴ Although they were denied formal avenues to power, these women—like their equivalents in cities such as Charleston, South Carolina, Nashville, Tennessee, and San Antonio, Texas—played a fundamental role in shaping the memory that would instruct and bolster southern politics during the middle decades of the twentieth century (Hosmer 1965, 69–72; Datal 1990; Howe 1990; Brundage 2000b; Yuhl 2000; Flores 2002).

In Natchez, as elsewhere, elite white women's highly political memory work began with the most seemingly benign of environments, the home, where they expanded the boundaries of volunteerism to include history and geography, to domesticate historical change, and to provide a concrete setting for its portrayal. The principal "guardians of tradition" grew out of the Women's Club of Natchez and called themselves the Natchez Garden Club. Their 1927 charter spelled out the new civic improvement club's three-part mission: "To promote and foster the beautification of the City of Natchez, its houses, gardens, public buildings . . . To foster and promote a love of the beautiful in architecture, interior decorating and landscaping. [And] to perpetuate the history of the Natchez Territory and to keep alive the memory of the lives, traditions and accomplishments of the people who made

that history” (Natchez Garden Club, “Eighth Annual Natchez Pilgrimage,” tourist brochure, 1939, HMSCL; Blankenstein 1995).

From the late 1920s to today, the Natchez Garden Club and its at times not-so-friendly competitor, the Pilgrimage Garden Club, have been extremely influential in restoring the city’s antebellum homes and making them “must-see” tourist destinations.¹⁵ While horticulture may have provided the initial reason for the garden clubs’ existence, the city’s suburban mansions, not its azaleas and camellias, make Natchez distinct and connect it to the antebellum past (Byrnes, *The Natchez Pilgrimage*, n.d.; Roane Byrnes, *The Past Lives on in Natchez*, n.d., BC-UM, Box 34, Folder 30; Miller n.d.). Homes with romantic names such as Magnolia Vale, Gloucester, Monmouth, Arlington, and Stanton Hall, mansions constructed in a wide array of architectural styles, estates stuffed with antique furniture and tea sets from England—these “facts and artifacts of history and gracious living that existed prior to the War Between the States” are what have captured the tourist gaze (Miller 1938, 24).

Shortly after its founding, the Natchez Garden Club created, in 1932, the Spring Pilgrimage, an annual event that was to become the club’s *raison d’être*. Attracting tourists to this small, out-of-the-way Mississippi city in the depth of the Great Depression was no easy feat, but the club accomplished it with success. Some 1,500 visitors from thirty-seven states came for that first Pilgrimage, which highlighted touring twenty-two of Natchez’s “old homes.” The event also included entertainment: a parade with an “Azalea Queen” and a “Japonica King,” a barbeque, a cotillion at the Natchez Hotel, and a “Historical Pageant.” Quickly renamed the “Confederate Pageant,” the cultural performance presented the “refinement, exclusiveness, and prestige” of white Natchez society as well as “a series of folk dances and plantation songs . . . rendered by colored entertainers” (*Natchez Democrat* 1932, 1–2; Natchez Garden Club, “Come to Natchez, Where the Old South Still Lives and Where Shaded Highways and Antebellum Homes Greet New and Old Friends,” poster, 1932, KMP-HNF). As early as 1932, the basic structure of the Pilgrimage was in place.

The Southern Lady Empowered by an Image of Weakness

Offstage from Natchez’s performance of memory lurked a fundamental paradox: elite white women of the garden clubs might be the central actors in cultivating the city’s important tourist industry, but their efforts were veiled behind a screen of feminine passivity. Katherine Miller, with her “slight dash of P.T. Barnum,” was especially said to

have possessed “the easy charm of the old time Southern belle” (Kane 1947, 337; see also Barber 1936). No less a New South fiction than the myth of the Old South, the “Southern Lady” was a construct that depended on passivity, male protection, and a life on a pedestal. The Southern Lady, empowered by an image of weakness, became a key trope in the creation of a memory display made to appear part of the natural course of the past (e.g., Scott 1970; Faust 1990; Clinton 1995; Hale 1998; Boyd 2000). As John Cell (1982) argues, segregation as the new southern order utterly depended on the representation of continuity between old and new. By constructing the white home as the central symbolic site of the New South, elite southern women became key makers of that new racial order.¹⁶

Publicity photographs of the Natchez Pilgrimage and written descriptions that appeared in both guidebooks and such popular magazines as *Country Life* (Mahoney 1935), *Better Homes and Gardens* (Peterson 1938), *House and Garden* (1939a, b), *The Atlantic Monthly* (Cohn 1940), *Independent Woman* (Buck 1940), *Ladies Home Journal* (Burt 1947), and *National Geographic* (Hildebrand 1937; Nicholas 1949) consistently depict the Southern Lady in almost architectural terms. Hovering motionlessly amid a field of spring flowers, sitting in quiet repose in a room stuffed with antiques, or standing between the Corinthian columns of an antebellum mansion, the Southern Lady functions as an Old South prop to remind visitors of the memory performance before them (Figure 5). Eventually, she metamorphoses from stage set to actor, functioning as the principal contact between hosts and guests. During the week that “Natchez reënacts its romantic past,” one guidebook notes, “high-bred dames and damsels in hoopskirts and ringlets give each guest a gracious welcome” (Moore 1935, 18; see also Mahoney 1935).

Behind this appearance of docility, however, stood powerful actors in the region’s political economy. Both the Natchez Garden Club and Pilgrimage Garden Club have exerted significant influence in the political life of Natchez over the years. Particularly in municipal elections, garden-club support or opposition to a candidate has often meant the difference between victory and loss (Anne McNeil, interview, Natchez, MS, October 1999; Mimi Miller, interview, Natchez, MS, April 2000). More broadly, women like Mrs. William Kendall, who was the Democratic National Committeewoman from Mississippi in 1937, and Katherine Miller played instrumental roles in statewide political movements (Marshall 1937, 19). As the Mississippi chairman of Women for Eisenhower in 1952, Miller ran the “first Republican Headquarters ever to be in Mississippi.” Then, four years later and as the “national Committeewoman of the Lily White Mississippi



Figure 5. The Southern Lady. National media and promotional materials created by Natchez's two garden clubs complemented each other's depiction of the Southern Lady. Invariably, she was portrayed as a living embodiment of Old South refinement, not as the important agent in the region's political economy that elite white women of Natchez had in fact become. *Source:* Marshall and Evans (1946, frontpiece).

Republican Party," she helped wrest the party from its nearly one-hundred-year association with southern African Americans and its "Black and Tan" leadership (*Natchez Democrat* 1954, 1; Harold Foreman, "Ex-State Democrats Leading GOP Party," *Daily News Jackson* 1956 (exact date unknown), Katherine Miller scrapbook, KMP-HNF).¹⁷ National race relations were also on the minds of the Pilgrimage Garden Club leaders during their 1964 support of Barry Goldwater, when a number hoped that a victory by the Arizona senator would help ease the sting of the recently enacted Civil Rights Law (Pilgrimage Garden Club, meeting minutes, 16 October 1964, PGC-SH).¹⁸

A good deal of the political capital enjoyed by leaders of both garden clubs derived from their polished business

savvy. Tourism—including the Pilgrimage—is the acknowledged economic staple of Natchez, a point long recognized by the city's male business leaders. After an initial hesitation about the idea of opening their antebellum homes for strangers, Natchez's bankers and planters acknowledged this to be "big business, not a feminine foible." "Commercial beauty. Yes, that's the term," editorialized the *Natchez Democrat* (1938, 4). "Not beauty for its own sake; not beauty as its own excuse for being, but beauty because beauty pays. Beauty because it is good business." For their part, the garden-club women clearly recognized the beauty-equals-money calculus of their event, but they were much more reticent about putting the matter so baldly. When Katherine Miller, dressed in a hoop skirt, took her illustrated lecture on the road, she conjured images of a lost Eden where economics took second place to matters of culture and refinement. She usually began by entreating her audiences to "Take yourself back from these days of modern homes and gardens and go with us in imagination and memory to the glory and grandeur of the Old South as we re-create for you the atmosphere of the antebellum mansions and the beautiful natural gardens of Old Natchez" (Barber 1955, 5; Pilgrimage Garden Club, "Natchez, Where the Old South Still Lives': Announcement for an Illustrated Talk by Mrs. Balfour Miller, Originator of the Natchez Pilgrimage," brochure, n.d., KMP-HNF).

Such marketing strategies were typical in a time before professional advertising campaigns, as was the personal correspondence between garden-club women and regional newspaper editors and chambers of commerce. Soon, Natchez found itself benefiting from an avalanche of free publicity in the form of articles in national magazines and licensing agreements with furniture manufacturers, English china makers, playing cards producers, paint manufacturers, glassmakers, and sterling flatware manufacturers (Natchez Garden Club 1941).¹⁹ And both the novel and the celluloid versions of *Gone with the Wind*, far from competing with the Natchez Pilgrimage, enhanced its national reputation enormously (*House and Garden* 1939a, b). The small city had become, in the *Natchez Democrat's* (1936b, 4) words, "the 'Mecca of charm' for the nation." The elite white women who comprised the city's two garden clubs—hardly the passive beneficiaries of accidental success—made strategic use of hard-working memberships and organizational savoir-faire that relied on a tightly guarded boundary of inclusion. The clubs' officers recognized the economic importance of "Mississippi's annual 'tourist crop'"; their image of gendered passivity served as a neat cover story for their "masculine" public success (Roane Byrnes, *Mississippi's Annual "Tourist Crop"*, n.d., BC-UM, Box 34, Folder 32).²⁰

“Substituting the Past for the Present”

Old Home Tours: Telling the Past

Typically, during a visit to Natchez during Pilgrimage season, one first encountered the Southern Lady at her home. The center of the Natchez Pilgrimage memory display, then and today, focused on the restored antebellum landscapes that grace the small city. Originally, members of either the Natchez Garden Club or the Pilgrimage Garden Club owned all the “old homes” on tour, but not all were open at once; three or four different homes were grouped together to comprise one of a half dozen separate tours (*Natchez Democrat* 1931, 1; Natchez Garden Club, “Garden Club Pilgrimage Week,” 1932 tourist brochure, HMSCL, Box 1, MS 2108). Exactly what qualified a home for inclusion on tour—as an “old home”—was unclear. Certainly, the age of the original dwelling was important, and a tangible link to the time before the Civil War was vital. But simple possession of an antebellum dwelling was not enough. Rather, the most important qualification was membership in one of the two garden clubs, both of which maintained—and continue to maintain—exclusive control over the memory display (Miller, interview, 2000).

A great deal of local cultural capital was bestowed upon those fortunate few who owned a dwelling on the Pilgrimage tour. Indeed, there was no surer way to advance through the city’s social class ranks than by acquiring an “old home.” This crucial aspect of Natchez culture was first noticed by Allison Davis, Burleigh Gardner, and Mary Gardner (1941, 191) who found that upward social mobility for Natchez whites depended on one’s professed enthusiasm for “substituting the past for the present.” Since joining the “Historical Club”—the authors’ veiled term for Natchez Garden Club—was a “hard nut to crack” for most women, purchasing one of the city’s antebellum mansions became the most direct route to fellowship with the vaunted “old aristocracy.” Indeed, such was Katherine Miller’s own story. After years of one unsuccessful venture after another, from operating a dance studio and working as a stenographer to selling cars, her fortunes changed when she married a prominent local businessman and convinced him to purchase Hope Farm, one of the area’s oldest homes. The next year, in 1930, she was invited to join the Natchez Garden Club, and she soon became its president (Kane 1947, 338; Miller n.d.).²¹

Such cachet remains important in Natchez even today, although the fluidity of financial capital in the current global economy has altered the iron-like rigidity of Natchez’s class system. As early as the 1930s, less than half of the “old homes” were still owned by members of the original families, or even by members of what the authors

of *Deep South* (1941, 193) called the “old aristocracy”—the upper-class families who, as a group, felt that they had “a certain claim upon all of the ‘old homes’” (see also Daniels 1940, 219). Connecting to previous owners and descendents was one extremely important way to display a collective memory that was recognizable and authentic. In the case of houses such as Lansdowne, the Elms, or Green Leaves, such a link was easy to make: it was the first thing a visitor heard when entering these homes (Alma Carpenter, interview, Natchez, MS, October 1999; William Slatter, interview, Natchez, MS, March 2000). Even “old home” owners who could not claim direct lineage to the “old aristocracy,” however, made great pains to list previous owners and their importance to Natchez society. And when an “old home” such as “The Briars” was fortunate enough to count, among its early residents, the woman who eventually married Jefferson Davis, lineage trumped all other stories told on the grounds (van Court 1937; Marshall and Evans 1946; Burt 1947; Marshall 1947).

Closely related to stories of patrician families were those that described the women of the Old South home. Inevitably depicted as “a great beauty” cultivated in the finer skills of entertaining European guests and choosing the right color scheme for each room, the Natchez lady was also said to possess great fortitude in the face of adversity. Often, she was said to have saved the home single-handedly from marauding Yankees during the War of Northern Aggression.²² At Rosalie, for example, tourists heard that the lady of the house was so unfailing in her support of the Confederacy during the occupation of Natchez that she was forcefully banished to Atlanta; while at Montaigne, she was not so lucky, as “newly freed slaves and white scalawags” together nearly destroyed the home and much of its “beautiful furnishings.” Fortunately, a “number of handsome pieces were saved,” because at Montaigne—and at every museum/house—antique furniture reigned supreme (*Natchez Democrat* 1999, 41, 43). No “old home” tour was complete without a detailed presentation about dozens of unique, historical items. Every Baltimore desk, Philadelphia Pembroke table, and Sheraton sofa was one of a kind; every Waterford chandelier, set of Old Paris china, and Empire bookcase was priceless (Natchez Garden Club, “Eighth Annual Natchez Pilgrimage,” 1939 HMSCL; Cohn 1940; Oliver 1940; Marshall 1947). Such stories—connecting to an aristocratic lineage, turning every woman into a hometown Scarlett O’Hara, and detailing antique furniture—became central plots in Natchez’s performances of whiteness; and, to a remarkable extent, they are the narratives one hears during Pilgrimage tours today.

Crucial to these stories were the gaps in them: African Americans were present in nearly all “old home” tours,

playing the roles of “mammy” and the “butler,” but, as I detail below, were never heard from.²³ While some visitors voiced surprise at not hearing anything about African Americans during their Natchez “old home” tour—writer John Gunther (1947, 803) was “literally howled and shouted down” when he raised the issue—most seemed to register satisfaction with the stories they heard. And if visitors were compelled to consider the “economic inequalities found in the aristocratic regime,” such notions were quickly and efficiently expelled. For, as one journalist (Peterson 1938, 72) noted, “[T]ime has softened the picture and we see it in different perspective, now to admire the beauty without thinking so much of the grim economic implications. It took wealth and good taste to achieve such a culture, but time has somehow leveled it into a democratic, common heritage.” And a “common heritage”—it went without saying, but was visible for all to see—was a white heritage. The logic of southern white memory contained very little room for the experiences of black southerners, and none for their own stories. This is not surprising, of course, for remembrance always implies forgetting, especially when the political stakes are so high. Benedict Anderson (1991, 204) observes that “[A]ll profound changes in consciousness, by their very nature, bring with them characteristic amnesias. Out of such oblivions, in specific historical circumstances, spring narratives” (see also Roach 1996, 3; Sturken 1997, 7). The making of whiteness during Jim Crow—so profound a change in consciousness that it often seems as timeless and as taken for granted as the American Republic itself—relied on such stories and oblivions.

Confederate Pageant: Staging the Past

A fundamental part of the Pilgrimage’s success as both an effective articulation of whiteness and an increasingly important national tourist attraction hinged on its performative nature. More extraordinary than the architecture of the “old homes” to Gunther (1947, 803) were the actions, gestures, and words of the homeowners themselves, which seemed to condense “in their extreme form the basic issues of the white–black conflict.” As performances, however, the “old home” tours were limited. Their stiff, story-telling structure made it difficult to convey the contradictions and oppositions that lie at the heart of whiteness: white racial supremacy, white racial innocence, and white dependency. Hale (1998, 8; see also Lott 1993; Holt 1995) makes the important point that “[The] desire to mark racial difference as mass identity, as white versus ‘colored,’ converged with the means to create and circulate the spectacle.” Performances of whiteness in Natchez and throughout the Jim Crow

South thus depended as much on spectacle, on the power of looking, as they did on narrative, on the power of telling.²⁴ If mass tourism and national media provided the means to circulate the Pilgrimage drama, its centerpiece performance took the form of the Confederate Pageant.

The garden-club women knew well the power of spectacle and, from the Pilgrimage’s earliest years, it included pageantry. The public drama owed part of its initial inception to the need for more tourist-oriented events, but it quickly assumed much greater importance. Roane Byrnes, one of the early garden-club members most directly involved with both publicity and the Pageant, believed that

[I]t is not in our power to re-live our own lives, but we can, in some instances, *project ourselves into the past*. This may be done vicariously: by reading about the glories that are past, or hearing of them from one who has experienced that which we missed. However, a trip to Natchez offers anyone the opportunity of stepping into the Old South. (*Satisfy Your Yearning for Yesterday—Go to Natchez*, n.d., BC-UM, Box 31, Folder 10; emphasis in original)

For Byrnes, Katherine Miller, and almost all of the two garden clubs’ other elite white women, the Confederate Pageant provided a direct vehicle for its participants to project themselves into the roles of cultured men and women who inhabited the Old South, and for audiences to witness those roles.

The basic form of the Confederate Pageant has remained surprisingly unchanged during its sixty-year run: a series of wordless but colorful tableaux depict chapters from Natchez’s Old South past. Although the historic-tableaux format often seems stilted to today’s contemporary viewers, the theatrical format achieved great popularity at the turn of the twentieth century; vestiges of the drama style lingered into the 1930s (Glassberg 1990). The tableaux—the “gay houseparties” of the Virginia Reel; the wedding of Jefferson Davis and his “Natchez bride”; “ladies in hoopskirts” at a sewing bee; hunters of quail, panthers, and bear in “an untouched virgin land”; the croquet party, “an unsurpassed medium for courtship”; and the singing of the cotton pickers, one of the “sweetest memories of the Old South”—added up to a singular vision of race and place (Natchez Garden Club, Confederate Ball, brochure, 27 March–3 April 1936, NGC-MDAH; Pilgrimage Garden Club, The Confederate Pageant, brochure, 1948, PGC-SH; Pilgrimage Garden Club, The Confederate Pageant, brochure, 1952, PGC-SH) (Figure 6).²⁵ Thomas Dixon, whose best-selling novel *The Clansman* (1905) became the model for D. W. Griffith’s movie *Birth of a Nation* (1915), could not have produced a more thematically tight rendition of the Old



Figure 6. “An Unsurpassed Medium for Courtship.” Confederate Pageant performers pose for *National Geographic* in front of Montaigne in 1949. A series of wordless but colorful tableaux, the Confederate Pageant depicted chapters from Natchez’s Old South past. It quickly became an ingrained, fundamental thread of the town’s social fabric—at least, its middle- to upper-class white component—to such an extent that it became almost impossible for some to grow up in Natchez without taking part in the memory display. Photograph by Willard R. Culver. Source: Nicholas 1949. Courtesy of the National Geographic Society.

South. Taking in a performance of the Confederate Pageant was intended to be a “return to the garden,” to “a contented little world” where “the happy hours were whiled away in the many celebrations of a tranquil country life” (Natchez Garden Club, Pilgrimage brochure, 1947, microfilm roll 8, NGC-MDAH). The Pageant always ended—and still does today—with a farewell ball to the young soldiers of the Confederacy, unfurling the Confederate battle flag, and a grand appearance of the Pageant’s royal couple.

Being selected to be a member of the royal couple, especially the queen, has always been the most eminent and sought-after prize of the Pageant. These roles were chosen through an imperfect marriage of meritocracy and lineage—what Davis, Gardner, and Gardner (1941, 195) called “the accident of birth.” Beyond the most basic requirement that one had to be related to a garden-club

member, the system rested on the merits, not of the young women or men, but of their mothers and grandmothers. Each garden club kept a score sheet that tallied points for different kinds of service, reflecting a member’s length and depth of involvement; the woman with the most points each year ended up with considerable influence over the most important Pageant roles. With such a system, it was commonplace for the daughter or granddaughter of a Pageant official to become crowned Confederate Queen (Carpenter, interview, 1999; McNeil 1999; Devereaux Slatter, interview, Natchez, MS, March 2000).

Part of what has made the Pageant so powerful a performance is its resonance with an influential section of the community. It quickly became an ingrained, fundamental thread of the town’s social fabric—at least its middle- to upper-class white component—to such an extent that it became almost impossible for some to grow up in Natchez without taking part in the memory display. Very young children—all of whom were children or grandchildren of Garden Club members—would perform in dance scenes and progress to increasingly more complex tableaux until, at the end of adolescence, they participated in what became a veritable rite of passage into adulthood. At that time, college-bound—and eminently marriageable—women and men were presented to local society both formally, at the Pageant, and behind the tourist stage, during the several elaborate parties that took place every week during Pilgrimage season (Katherine Blankenstein, interview, Natchez, MS, October 1999; D. Slatter, interview, 2000).

The Confederate Pageant was, and still is, performed as much for local audiences as for tourist consumption. While the economic function is clearly important, so is the “opportunity to participate in a ceremonial showing reverence for the past” (Davis, Gardner, and Gardner 1941, 195). Garden club women structured and maintained their class position by controlling participation in the Pageant’s different roles, by designing exclusive activities for children, and by making the performance a necessary component of Natchez’s upper-class life. As an embodied performance of whiteness, the Pageant displayed—indeed, seemed to prove—what the *Natchez Democrat* (6 August 1948, MDAH, Roll 30131) could only assert: that “history shows conclusively that certain individuals and certain races are superior to others.”

The Spatiality of Whiteness: Constructing the Symbols and Rituals of Derogation

Far from being merely a curious if inconsequential tourist attraction, the Natchez Pilgrimage went hand in

hand with material changes taking place in the city. Together, cultural and spatial control performed the important task of fixing racial difference and “demonstrating” the superiority of one race over the other. The city’s increasing residential segregation during the early years of the Pilgrimage was one especially important bridge between race and place.

In Jim Crow Natchez, as elsewhere in the region, white and black residential areas were segregated less by law than by white social pressure and black poverty (Davis, Gardner, and Gardner 1941, 21–22; McMillen 1990, 12).²⁶ “Niggertown” sections and “Darktown” slums, as black housing districts were known locally, became fundamental landscape elements in nearly all Mississippi towns and cities after Reconstruction. They were the first things that most white visitors, such as Hortense Powdermaker (1939, 14), noticed when they arrived in a new city: “The most striking physical feature of the community is the segregation of the Negro and white dwellings, and the contrast between the two sections.” Powdermaker’s description of Indianola, Mississippi, though specific to that town, could be applied throughout the state. Black homes were usually found across or along railroad tracks, in low-lying areas prone to flooding, and abutting industrial districts, cemeteries, and jails. As Davis, Gardner, and Gardner (1941, 22) described Natchez in the early years of Pilgrimage, “Many of the Negro districts have no sewerage system; the streets are poorly drained and maintained; and street lights are few or absent. In essence, this means that all the Negroes generally occupy the least desirable residential areas and receive only a minimum of public service and improvements.”

Despite this general observation, important differences in the spatiality of residential segregation between Mississippi cities could be observed, differences that diminished as racial sentiment hardened during the first two decades of Natchez’s Pilgrimage. Examining Mississippi’s dynamic urban spatiality discloses two basic models of residential segregation. The first, exemplified by antebellum cities such as Natchez and Vicksburg that developed under a cotton and slave economy, reveal patterns of widely scattered black housing. Identified by such pioneering scholars as Charles S. Johnson (1943) and E. Franklin Frazier (1957) as having a “backyard pattern,” these older river communities found African Americans living in most residential areas, including some of the “better districts.” Blacks often lived in the same blocks as whites, sometimes in houses on or near the property of their white employers. Such spatial proximity in these racially mixed areas must not be confused with integration, however, as a mutual recognition of separate spheres meant that everyone knew their “place”: streets or vacant

lots charged with the voltage of unbridgeable taboo territorialized the city at an extremely fine scale. Everyone—white and black, young and old—tacitly understood what Lillian Smith ([1948] 1978, 95) called “the twisting turning dance of segregation.” The second pattern, present in more recently settled places such as Hattiesburg or Meridian, existed in cities without antebellum customs of free blacks or house slaves living close to white masters. In these postbellum railroad and lumber centers, black housing typically concentrated in one or more racially separate areas far from the “respectable” white neighborhoods (McKee 1972; Kellogg 1977; Rabinowitz 1978, 97–124; Goldfield 1989).

A closer look at Natchez shows the relative decline of that city’s historic “backyard pattern” and a growing approximation of the more recent and sharply divided segregation configuration of cities such as Hattiesburg (Figure 7). White demands for black exclusion intensified during Jim Crow, and cities throughout the state—and the region more generally—produced ever more discretely separate residential areas. Between 1912 and 1950, Natchez neighborhoods that were once racially mixed became either more black, as in the area surrounding St. Catherine Street, or more white, with the displacement of African Americans from the South Wall-South Canal, North Canal-North Wall, and Homochitto neighborhoods. In the North Pine neighborhood—the city’s least racially mixed area—the number and density of blacks increased dramatically, from 574 black residents in 1912 to 1,045 in 1950, even if its areal extent remained relatively constant. And in areas throughout the city with only modest concentrations of African Americans, whites displaced blacks repeatedly. Indeed, “displacement” blocks, on which blacks decreased in number, outnumbered “consolidated” blocks, on which the number of blacks increased, by a margin of two to one.²⁷

At the most general level, then, between 1912 and 1950 Natchez was becoming a more racially segregated city. Its pattern of African-American residents was still spatially scattered—five different black neighborhoods existed—but the spatial pattern was tightening up. Whites were displacing blacks—not the other way around—and holding them in their own residential areas. Formerly mixed areas such as St. Catherine became whiter, and the heavy concentration of blacks in North Pine increased in population, if not areal extent. In other words, Natchez was catching up to more recently established Mississippi cities in which high degrees of measurable segregation were the rule.

Many of the African Americans displaced from their homes came from the city’s working-class population. The group most vulnerable to the expansion desires of local

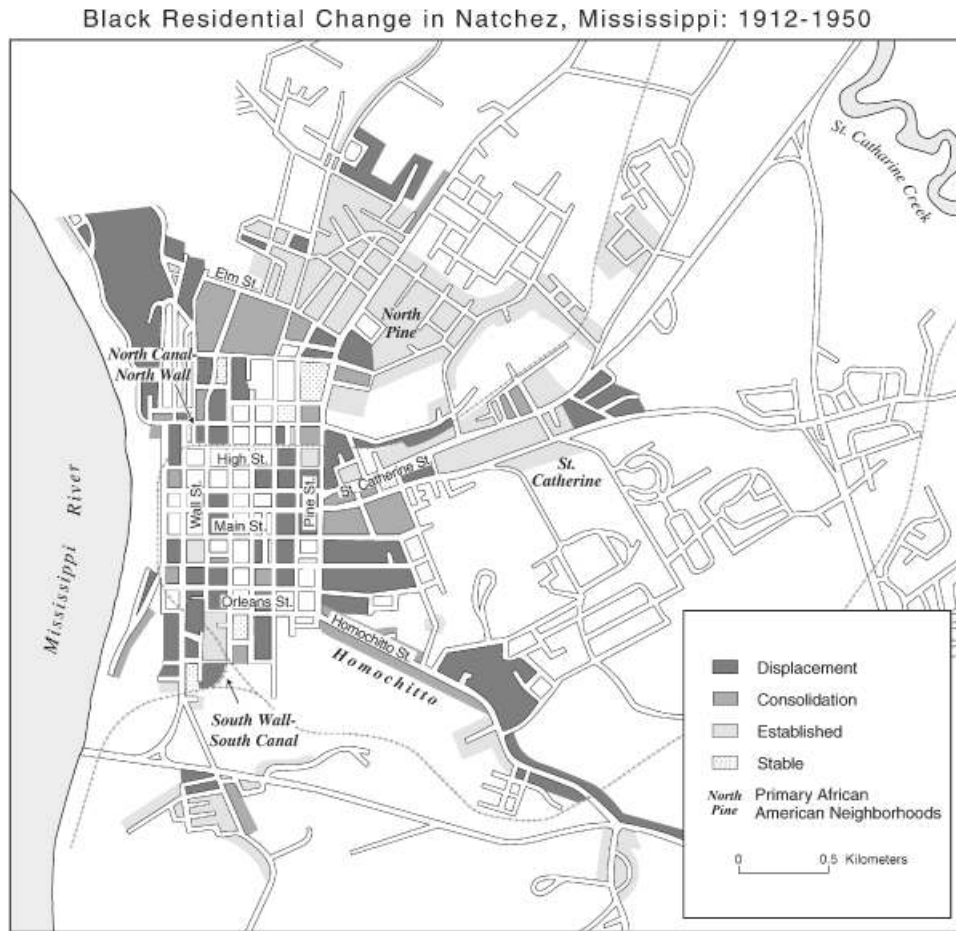


Figure 7. Black residential change in Natchez, MS, 1912–1950. This map is based on several from McKee (1972) and makes use of the classification scheme developed by Taeuber and Taeuber (1965, 106) that measures residential change by city block. “Established” areas are city blocks in which African Americans made up 80 percent of the total residences in both 1912 and 1950. “Consolidation” areas are city blocks in which the number of African Americans increased by more than 10 percent between 1912 and 1950. “Stable” areas are city blocks in which the ratio between African American and white residences changed by less than 10 percent between 1912 and 1950. “Displacement” areas are city blocks in which the number of African Americans decreased between 1912 and 1950.

whites, working-class blacks, who were invariably renters, found themselves increasingly relocated to the city’s margins. “During the past three years,” the *New Orleans Times Picayune* (1950) reported, “many of the tenant houses [African Americans] have occupied have been torn down to be replaced with white residences and commercial buildings.” That same reporter went on to reassure the paper’s white readers that, while new housing units—both rental and owner-occupied—were being built, “[B]oth of the Negro communities will be segregated as they lie some distance from the nearest white residential section.” Yet displacement was not an experience limited to the poor or working class; in Jim Crow Natchez, where race trumped class in the hierarchy of power, many of the city’s established black elite were also left in an evermore-marginalized position. Davis, Gardner, and Gardner (1941, 466) recount the story of an “upper-class” African

American family that bought a house during the Depression in a “middle-class white neighborhood [and was] forced to move from it.” It was a story repeated countless times.

Such landscapes of racial segregation, the authors of *Deep South* observed, fulfilled a very important function within whiteness’s worldview: they were seen by most whites as direct evidence of the separate and subordinate status of Natchez’s African Americans. If “‘Blackness’ is the master symbol of derogation in the society,” it followed that its unspoken opposite—whiteness—was the master symbol of virtue (Davis, Gardner, and Gardner 1941, 20). What better proof of this perverse dialectic could there be than to juxtapose, as Pilgrimage guidebooks sometimes did, a grand antebellum mansion such as Melrose, “where the Old South reached its peak,” with areas of “violence and sin” in one of the city’s unpaved, sewerless “Dark-town” slums (Pishel 1955, 67, 124)?

At the same time, Natchez's memory entrepreneurs recognized that too many landscape comparisons between black and white could potentially turn off tourists and make a visit to the Old South unsettling. The leaders of the Pilgrimage, such as Katherine Miller and Roane Byrnes, frequently "encouraged the Negroes living in and about Natchez in the beautification of their natural surroundings" with regular distributions of flowers—especially during Pilgrimage season so that "favorable impressions of Natchez will be enhanced" (Barber 1955, 3; see also *Natchez Democrat* 1933a, b; Prevost 1974, 98). Miller, in particular, "felt that our first work was with the colored people" about "the beautification of the grounds around there [sic] homes." The garden-club president took her landscape crusade to the city's black high school and churches, where she preached "to them that 'Cleanliness is next to godliness.'" Well aware that "since we have no zoning laws and since our colored people live side by side with some of our loveliest homes," Miller found it imperative to clean up the "untidy and unsightful [sic]" homes during each Pilgrimage season (Katherine Miller, handwritten notes, Katherine Miller Scrapbook, KMP-HNF).

Similarly, Pilgrimage guidebooks described a long-observed custom in Natchez in which city merchants would place "coins in a box for old darky beggars"; this "thoughtful, good-natured gesture to the needy Negro from his 'white folks'" both demonstrated the good will of the city's business class, and served "as a time saver . . . to avoid interruption of the store's business" (Oliver 1940, 4; see also Ownby 1999). Such landscape acts of noblesse oblige not only confirmed the inferior position of blacks in Natchez, but did nothing to address such real social problems as substandard educational and health facilities. In 1930, for instance, 81 percent of African-American children in Natchez's three schools were reported to have some health defect, and only 1 percent showed any evidence of having had dental work (*Natchez Democrat*, 18 March 1930, MDAH, Roll 21370). Increasingly segregated landscapes, even those "beautified" with flowers, thus became central "symbols of derogation" that reinforced the rituals and performance during the annual Pilgrimage season.

Performing Blackness

In pre-civil-rights Natchez, tourist-based performances of living in the Old South magnified the everyday life of Jim Crow-era segregation. As an act of race and place as well as of gender and class, segregation in the South relied on performances that helped produce those very categories. African Americans, no less than their white

neighbors, played roles choreographed for them by leaders of both garden clubs. But, unlike the parts of "old home" hostess and tour guide or Pageant King and Queen, the roles set out for blacks held little room for improvisation or empowerment.

Some of those roles were "backstage," as black Natchezians performed countless tasks—from cleaning and cooking to building a modern tourist infrastructure replete with hotels and restaurants—in preparation for the Pilgrimage. Other roles were more directly performative and visual in nature. One early description suggests what tourists might expect to find during an "old home" visit:

Perhaps a grizzled, bent, old ex-slave stands to bow you in, or a strapping, courteous young Negro will direct the parking of your car and reply if you question him . . . that his people have been here since "befo' de' War" in the service of the same family. At another place as you step up onto the gallery, a little colored boy stoops and wipes your shoes . . . Awaiting inside to receive you with gracious courtesy, stands the hostess with a group of her friends. (Newell and Compton 1935, 24–25)

Added to the scene were "old Negro mammies of civil war days," who also greeted visitors at antebellum mansions and served dinners at barbecues, while "pickaninnies" danced for afternoon entertainment (*Natchez Democrat*, 1934, 1935, 1936a). Of utmost importance was the juxtaposition of and implicit hierarchy between white and black, between master and servant, between gracious "old home" hostess in "quaintly beautiful clothes" and subservient "mammies" with "white aprons over plaid dresses" and their "pickaninnies dancing and jiggling to colorful tunes of Negro bands" (Mahoney 1935, 13) (Figure 8; cf. Figure 4).²⁸

Such white-defined black characters made their way onto the performance stages as well. During the first two decades of the Pilgrimage, different African-American choirs performed musicals at local churches that went by names like "Straight and Narrow Path," "Heaven Bound," "The Glory Road," and "Negro Spirituals." The Natchez Garden Club found that "the old Negro 'mammy' . . . carried strong appeal" for locals and tourists alike during the Heaven Bound presentation and decided to make the character a regular part of Pilgrimage (Marshall 1937, 27; *Natchez Democrat* 1933c). But it was during the Confederate Pageant that idealized depictions of southern race relations reached their apogee (Figure 9). According to the logic of the early Confederate Pageants, "[S]teamboats, cotton pickers and pickaninnies . . . formed a triumvirate lending enchantment to old plantation days. The rich, barbaric strains of the colored singer mingled



Figure 8. “Natchez Pickaninnies.” These four unnamed boys from Katherine Miller’s (1938) self-congratulatory history of the Pilgrimage were pictured opposite a photograph of a smiling young white woman, Mrs. Joseph Kellogg, “an enthusiastic worker for the Natchez Pilgrimage since the inauguration of this event.” Of utmost importance was the juxtaposition of and implicit hierarchy between white and black, between master and servant, between gracious “old home” hostess and subservient “mammies” and “pickaninnies.” *Source:* Miller (1938).

strangely with the clamor of field activities and often drowned its raucous sounds” (Edith Wyatt Moore, “The Confederate Pageant and Ball: Eleventh Annual Pageant of the Original Natchez Garden Club,” 7 March–7 April 1942, NGC-MDAH, Box 1). While blacks often made use of such white-crafted representations of slave identity for



Figure 9. “Cotton Pickers” tableau from undated Confederate Pageant, ca. 1950s. African Americans, no less than their white neighbors, played roles choreographed for them by leaders of both garden clubs. While blacks often made use of such white-crafted representations of slave identity for their self-preservation—not to appear “willingly and cheerfully” humble invited potential violence—southern whites all too often missed the performance and confused black masks with black selves. *Source:* Historic Natchez Foundation.

their self-preservation—not to appear “willingly and cheerfully” humble invited potential violence²⁹—all too often southern whites missed the performance and confused black masks with black selves (Davis 1945, 10).

It hardly needs to be said that such tableaux grossly misrepresented the black experience during slavery; all the tableaux, after all, were equally “bad history.” I find it more useful to acknowledge the strategic role of such memory displays in hardening the racial categories that at one time were much more fluid in Natchez. Like mixed-race business leaders of Charleston, Nashville, New Orleans, or Savannah, at the turn of the twentieth century, more than thirty families of planters, shopkeepers, and artisans in Natchez occupied an intermediate status between “black” and “white.” As a group, these “blue-veins” enjoyed high economic status and positions of leadership in the black community. Not only did Natchez have a significant free black population before the Civil War and a vibrant black middle class after it, it also had higher rates of miscegenation than in any other Mississippi city. Arguably, its most significant national-level politicians came from the city’s black community. Hiram Revels, a free black before the war, became the first African American to serve in the U.S. Senate when he was chosen to fulfill Jefferson Davis’s unexpired term. And John R. Lynch made the transition from former slave at Dunleith (see Figure 3) to Justice of the Peace in Natchez and was elected at the age of twenty-four to be the Speaker of the Mississippi House of Representatives and, two years later, to the U.S. House of Representatives (Franklin 1982; Historic Natchez Foundation n.d.). None of this, of course, made it into the Pilgrimage. At exactly the same time that the rich and multifaceted history of Natchez’s black community was reduced to memory displays of cotton pickers and mammies, the once permeable borders between black and white were sealed tight, and the possibility of moving into a black middle class was eliminated (Davis, Gardner, and Gardner 1941, 29–44; McMillen 1990, 21; Davis 1993; Davis 2001, 83–114).

The Spectacle and Memories of Lynching

The ever-present threat and powerful memories of lynchings underscored precisely how nonvoluntary Pilgrimage roles were for Natchez blacks. Between 1889 and 1945—the half-century that Roy Wilkins (1982, 35) called America’s “lynching era”—Mississippi led the nation in total lynchings, number per capita, number of female victims, number of victims taken from police custody, and amount of public support for vigilantism (McMillen 1990, 224–53; see also Dray 2002). In response to such gruesome acts—and to vows by Governor James

Vardaman that “[E]very Negro in the state will be lynched; it will be done to maintain white supremacy” (quoted in Baker [1908] 1964, 246)—the *Chicago Defender* (1932b, 14) described the state, six months after Natchez’s first Pilgrimage, as “the most brutal community in history.”³⁰

Racially charged mob violence was distributed widely, if unevenly, in Mississippi, and lynchings occurred in the state’s largest population centers, including Natchez. Indeed, one historian has characterized the rural counties surrounding the old river city as “Mississippi’s second worst lynching district,” trailing only the more recently settled Yazoo Delta region to the north. Terence Finnegan (1993, 44–46) found that, during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the Natchez District experienced more lynching incidents than any other region in either Mississippi or South Carolina. Lynching activity in the rural region surrounding Natchez reached its peak in the 1890s—the decade most historians date as the nadir of race relations because lynching reached its highest point ever. The region’s profound socioeconomic distress, described earlier, had a major impact on the Natchez district’s leadership role in lynching, just as the mass exodus of African Americans contributed to lynching’s decline. By 1910, lethal mob violence had declined dramatically in the area around Natchez, and for the next thirty years, blacks faced greater risks in Mississippi’s newer settled towns and regions (Finnegan 1993; see also Woods 1998).

Not that African Americans in Natchez would have felt any safer there than anywhere else in the state. Indeed, a “legal lynching” in the early 1930s (graphically described in *Deep South* [Davis, Gardner, and Gardner 1941, 26–27])—in which an attempted lynching, a trial, a conviction, and “legal” hanging all took place in a few days, despite widespread disbelief in the accused’s guilt—conjured memories of four decades earlier. It also brought home to many Natchez blacks stories they had heard from other parts of the region (Wright 1990). Crucially, lynchings affected the entire black community, not only those families who lost loved ones. The young Richard Wright described the ever-present fear of lynching as the “white death,” which “hung over every black male in the South.” When he was only ten years old, Wright ([1945] 1998, 83–84) later remembered, “a dread of white people . . . came to live permanently in my imagination.” Just miles away in Indianola, white psychologist John Dollard ([1937] 1988, 331, 359) found that, although that city had not had a lynching in many years, “[T]he threatening atmosphere in which Negroes live was one of the major facts of life of any Negro.” Dollard’s shocking discovery was, of course, no surprise to African Americans, as he acknowledged: “Every Negro in the South knows that

he is under a kind of sentence of death; he does not know when his turn will come, it may never come, but it may also be at any time.”

Though hardly a new phenomenon—mob executions had served as a means of extralegal justice in the West for many decades, and had mostly claimed whites as its victims—lynching took on a different character in the 1890s, when it became an exclusive public ritual of the South, with black men and women its primary victims. No longer were ordinary methods of capital punishment sufficient. Simply to kill a victim was not enough: “[T]he execution needed to be turned into a public ritual, a collective experience,” in which victims had to be subjected to extreme torture and, frequently, mutilation (Litwack 1998, 285). Such voyeuristic spectacles often involved large crowds, specially chartered excursion trains, publicly sold photographs, picnics, and “souvenirs.” As public performances that brutally resolved the ambiguities surrounding race and gender in the Jim Crow South, “lynch carnivals” brought unmistakable clarity to the messages of the Pilgrimage: black and white were meant, by the force of nature, to be separate. Wright knew very well that one did not have to experience the violence directly to feel its effects: southerners—black and white, young and old—remembered them for generations (Hale 1998, 199–239; Baker 2000; Chafe, Gavins, and Korstad 2001). The spectacle of lynchings seemed a perfect and necessary complement to the spectacle of the Pilgrimage tour, performed on the one hand by the dutiful “Negro,” and on the other by the passive but powerful southern woman (Tolnay and Beck 1995; Brundage 1997; Dray 2002).³¹

Massive White Resistance: “Under Our Traditions, People of Negroid Blood Are Not Welcome”

From its inception in the early 1930s and for the next three decades, during the height of the Jim Crow period, the Natchez Pilgrimage remained astonishingly consistent in structure and in narrative detail. It continued to attract large audiences and national media attention, which lavished praise on the memory display. By the early 1960s, however, increasing national and local pressure to integrate public schools, to register black voters, and to desegregate public facilities finally reached Natchez’s most economically and culturally significant venue.

Ora Frazier was one of the first African Americans to attend the Confederate Pageant as an audience member, in the early 1960s. She described the Pageant vividly:

What I saw made me sick to my stomach. Absolutely sick. Black people were shown to be cotton pickers and that is all. Of course, working in the fields was part of our heritage—and we

can't deny that—but there was so much else that black people did. By depicting blacks only in this way, the whole thing was degrading. (Ora Frazier, interview, Natchez, MS, February 2001).

Frazier's attendance at the Confederate Pageant, along with that of several other local African Americans and white Freedom workers, triggered anxieties throughout the Pilgrimage organizational structure. The majority of the Pilgrimage Garden Club board members understood such open defiance of whiteness's principal memory display—a black person simply attending the spectacle—as a profound threat. One local lawyer advised the club: “If you let in a few, they won't stop but their attendance will snowball” (Pilgrimage Garden Club, meeting minutes, 21 August 1964, PGC-SH).

Strengthened by the 1964 Civil Rights Law (dubbed, ignominiously, “Civil Wrongs” by the *Natchez Democrat*, 3 December 1963, MDAH, Roll 30295), Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) workers and the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) joined with local black high school students to desegregate a score of Natchez's public facilities. Their successful protests opened up lunch counters, coffee shops, hotels, the public library, and the city park to nonwhite patrons; unhappy whites and police could only look on with distaste (*Natchez Democrat*, 8 November and 3 December 1964, MDAH, Rolls 30265 and 30295; see also Davis 2001, 148–77). The Pilgrimage, however, proved more resilient to pressures from what the *Natchez Democrat* (11 August 1965, MDAH, Roll 30788) called “disreputable,” “disgusting,” and “anti-American” forces. Not only were the stakes higher, but also the elite white women of the garden clubs brought their formidable organizational prowess and political influence to bear on the problem of maintaining one of the Old South's primary memory displays. During the summer and fall of 1964, the Pilgrimage Garden Club held a number of emergency meetings “for the purpose of discussing problems brought about by the Civil Rights bill” (Pilgrimage Garden Club, meeting minutes, 5 August 1964, PGC-SH). A time of great unrest in Natchez and Mississippi more generally, that summer saw the Freedom Summer Project blanket the state with SNCC students (Belfrage 1965; McAdam 1988; Davis 2001, 166–74). While some members believed that, since rooms were not rented and meals not served, the Pilgrimage would not come under the “public accommodations” ruling, others felt that they should “forget the Pilgrimage for this year” (Pilgrimage Garden Club, meeting minutes, 5 August 1964, PGC-SH).

In order to settle the question and to devise a strategy that could effectively resist the Pilgrimage's potential

desegregation, the club sought the council of five local attorneys. One summed the position of all: “[I]f you back off and decide not to have a Pilgrimage now, we are surrendering to them.” Nonetheless, the new law remained, and it was clear that “problems will arise,” including “the risk of litigation” (Pilgrimage Garden Club, meeting minutes, 21 August 1964, PGC-SH). The Pageant, it seemed, would be most easy to keep “white.” While there had been several “racial incidents” when blacks had attended the Pageant, and although there “could be the possibility of integration,” the consulting attorneys felt that the threat could be contained. Unlike a movie theatre, “which imports films from outside of the state,” the Pageant was “Natchez produced.” The “obvious hazard” was the location of the Pageant—since it was produced in the city auditorium, one could make the case that it should be open to the public, despite its “non-professional” club status (Pilgrimage Garden Club, meeting minutes, 16 October 1964, PGC-SH). The solution would be to find a “privately-owned building.”

Since the houses on tour were already privately owned, the attorneys believed that “exhibition of homes would not be covered by the Civil Rights act.” The club was advised “against enlisting the aid of police, firemen, or any city or government official.” Instead, they were told that “[E]ach home owner must employ a man to be at her house.” The attorneys further advised that “[A]ll cashiers and ladies at the information desks [should] specify that all tours are segregated, for white people only, when giving information and selling tickets.” The exact wording for such exclusionary measures, all agreed, should be precise and matter-of-fact. One lawyer came up with the shared response if an “undesirable” showed up to tour a home: “[U]nder our customs and traditions people of the Negroid blood are not welcome.” Finally, the lawyers made it clear that no one could deviate from this path of perfect racial exclusion. A motion suggested by one woman, that “each home have a man at the gate or door, and that all stand together not to accept Negroes,” was carried unanimously (Pilgrimage Garden Club, meeting minutes, 21 August 1964, PGC-SH).

Such tactics of massive white resistance were put to the test during the following Pilgrimage season, in 1965. Homeowners effectively denied Freedom workers access to home tours, alleging that the white students were “agitators.” One white Freedom worker who tried to purchase a ticket to the Confederate Pageant was turned away because she “was not a legitimate tourist,” and police arrested six demonstrators who tried to picket the Confederate Pageant that same evening (*Natchez Democrat* 6 May, 8 May 1965, MDAH, Roll 30788). While the civil-rights protestors were unsuccessful in dislodging

the Pilgrimage from its central position in white Natchez's civic life, however, African Americans soon withdrew from participation in the Pageant tableaux that many found so objectionable, bringing one era to an end and ushering in another (Mary Toles, interview, October 1999; Martha Colson, interview, Natchez, MS, 18 March 2000).

White supremacy during Jim Crow depended at its very core on the separation and superiority of white spaces and peoples. In a city with a long historical geography of spatial proximity and racial interaction, if not harmony, between white and black, the Pilgrimage offered a reassuring display of a worldview achieved only imperfectly in reality. That is why protesting the performances of whiteness on "old home" tours and at the Confederate Pageant was so crucial to the civil-rights project: these protests unhinged the memory displays' unambiguous portrayal of racial hierarchies and opened the doors to alternative interpretations of the Natchez past. If the Pageant was performed precisely to make whiteness visible, the town's elites now had to do so without black participation.

Conclusion

"Part of the agenda for the new millennium," Kobayashi and Peake (2000, 399) argue, "must be the pressing need to make considerations of racialization a fundamental aspect of geographical understanding, in much the same way that more and more geographers have recognized that no human geography is complete without a consideration of gender" (see also Schein 2002). This article has sought to provide a geographic window into this world of racialization, as it demonstrates how white privilege and black oppression have gone hand in hand (Dwyer 1997). In particular, it has aimed to understand, not simply racism, but the construction, reconstruction, and the manipulation of race itself through the mutual construction of place. It has examined how whiteness—a racial identity and a cultural phenomenon grounded in the historical-geographical context of the Jim Crow South—became a defining element of pre-civil-rights cultural memory. Finally, it has addressed this fundamental component of American human geography from the premise that a primary root of modern race relations can be found in the southern past, especially in how that past was imagined, articulated, and performed during the crucial Jim Crow period. The culture of segregation that mobilized such memories, and the forgetting that inevitably accompanied them, relied on performance—ritualized choreographies of race and place, and gender and class, in which participants knew their roles and acted them out for each other and for visitors.

In Jim Crow Natchez, Mississippi, legal coercion proved largely unnecessary, because the performances of whiteness—backed by the ever-present threat of violence and a profoundly debilitating political economy that retarded upward black mobility—were so persuasive and powerful. Southern whites, like many circum-Atlantic societies, "invented themselves by performing their pasts in the presence of others" (Roach 1996, 3). Crucially, however, they could not "perform themselves unless they also performed what and who they thought they were not." An unspoken whiteness always depended on a visible, subservient blackness for self-definition. If whites needed reassurance of their position atop the racial hierarchy, and if blacks had to be reminded of their place at its bottom, the Pilgrimage provided an exemplary model.

That increasing residential segregation and declining racial hybridity occurred simultaneously with the growing influence and cultural hegemony of the Pilgrimage points to their similar project: to solidify and make concrete the fiction of racial essentialism. This suggests that such performances of heritage and memory have real consequences. Creating images of place, Stephen Hanna (1996, 641) has shown, can play an important role in "recreat[ing] the places being represented." It also suggests that in the Jim Crow South, one found less an upholding, or "mirroring," of the dominant social values that were at work in the American West (DeLyser 1999) than the construction of an alternative that nonetheless resonates with mass society. Whiteness *became* that alternative, a marker of identity simultaneously unacknowledged and widely pervasive. Displays of memory in "old home" tours and at the Confederate Pageant were successful in articulating whiteness precisely because they were performative, because they served as an experiential form of knowledge. Like other successful displays of memory, the Pilgrimage enabled both participants and visitors "to experience history in a personal, bodily way—to make 'history' into a 'personal memory'" (Landsberg 1997, 74).

Today, in another New South—a multicultural South—Natchez, Mississippi, retains its central position as a repository of the Old South. What enchanted a *New York Times* (25 February 2001) correspondent in the twenty-first century sounds eerily like what Katherine Miller herself would have boosted more than a half century earlier: Natchez's "fairy-tale quality of having been suspended in time," where "dressed in period costumes, guides are sure to give visitors plenty of 'y'alls' as well as history" (Moses 2001, 14). The Confederate Pageant—recently renamed "Historical Pageant"—still invites audiences to "step into the past" and experience a place of "romance, grandeur, chivalry, wealth"; it still concludes with a high-school-aged "rebel" unfurling the

Confederate battle flag, and audience members still become performers, as they join cast members in a rousing rendition of “Dixie.” Garden-club women continue to welcome visitors from across the country and from around the world, and to tell them about the golden days before the War of Northern Aggression. There have been some changes, as well. Black Natchezians no longer perform either in the Pageant, where a heavy police presence is often the rule, or on “old home” tours as “mammy” or the “butler.” Some African Americans have recently returned to the Pilgrimage, but—significantly—in the form of a gospel performance under the exclusive control of a black Catholic Church choir and staged on alternate nights from the Pageant.³²

Denying the racism of the past thwarts the connection between past and present—and the ongoing legacy of racialization today. “Heritage” is touted as a harmless treasuring of an emotional past and used to justify the “curious acts” that have long defined white southern memory, that so alarmed early critics such as Du Bois ([1921] 1996, 498), and that continue to find meaningful, if highly contested, expression in the contemporary South (Leib 1995; Horwitz 1998; Alderman 2000; Webster and Leib 2001; Forts 2002). The Natchez Pilgrimage was not merely entertainment, but “educational,” as it tried to show history and geography as they “really were.” Such a claim is neither innocent nor without profound consequences. Invoking the name of the public and historical geography legitimizes a racial hierarchy that continues to dominate life in Natchez and can be found throughout the United States. The memory display provided a means of preserving not only the city’s antebellum homes, but also its racial and class structure, and today we still live with its repercussions. “The white South,” Wright ([1945] 1998, 441) concluded his autobiography, “said that I had a ‘place’ in life.” That “place,” no less than “race,” was constructed and put on stage for the nation to see during the Pilgrimage. It is a place, ironically, where the past still lives.

Acknowledgments

This article is a revised version of two different papers first presented at the 2001 Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers, New York, and at the New Directions in the Study of Regionalism symposium held in Bonn, Germany, in July 2001. I would like to thank members of both conference sessions, as well as several people who commented critically on earlier drafts, especially Derek Alderman, Mona Domosh, Owen Dwyer, Felix Driver, Gaines Foster, David Goldfield, Shelley

Fisher Fishkin, Lothar Hönnighausen, Anne Knowles, David Montejano, Bob Ostergren Jim Peacock, Noel Polk, Celeste Ray, Mark Smith, Shirley Thompson, Yi-Fu Tuan, and William Wyckoff. I am indebted to Rob Brown, Andrew Gallagher, David Lowenthal, Carl Seiler, and Jennifer Speights-Binet for their keen insight and interviewing help during research trips to Natchez, to Jessie O. McKee for graciously sharing unpublished work on Mississippi segregation, and to Sarah Mullen for archival assistance. The research for this article has received generous support from the German American Academic Council and from the University of Texas at Austin Office of Vice President for Research, which I gratefully acknowledge, and its writing has benefited from the comments of the five anonymous reviewers and John Paul Jones. Finally, I wish to thank my informants in Natchez, especially Mimi Miller, and Kathleen Kennedy in Baton Rouge, for their insights into southern memory.

Notes

1. This encounter is further described in Wright (1947). That African Americans, like Wright, could not even *conceive* of visiting Natchez as a tourist is seen in the fact that, in 1938, only five cities in Mississippi had black-operated hotels—the only option for black travelers, aside from those who could stay with friends and family. Natchez, the most important tourist destination in the state, was not among these cities (U.S. Department of Commerce 1938, 6). Wright’s description might be compared with that written by another son of black Mississippi migrants, Anthony Walton (1997, 20–28, 47), who offers a revealing, contemporary travel account of Natchez, “theme park of slavery and the old ways.”
2. The reception of *Black Boy* among white and African-American intellectuals was by no means uniformly positive and caused discomfort especially among white liberals—a key point described nicely in Ralph Ellison’s ([1945] 1992, 74) review. While Ellison himself was disturbed by Wright’s often-harsh depiction of black cultural life and “refusal to offer solutions,” he also believed that in the book, “thousands of Negroes will for the first time see their destiny in public print.” More directly, Ellison ([1945] 1992, 61, 73) not so gently chides white critics of the book, the so-called

“friends of the Negro people” [who] attempted to strangle the work in a noose of newsprint . . . But far from implying that Negroes have no capacity for culture, as one critic interprets it, this is the strongest affirmation that they have. Wright is pointing out what should be obvious, especially to his Marxist critics: that Negro sensibility is socially and historically conditioned.

See also Fabre (1985), Gilroy (1993, 146–86), and Rowley (2001).

3. Here and elsewhere, I have preserved the original punctuation and spelling and therefore use “[sic]” only when meaning is unclear. Hence, I have left “negro”—in lower case—uncorrected.

4. The Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University has recently published a valuable collection of oral histories among African Americans who lived during the age of Jim Crow (Chafe, Gavins, and Korstad 2001). Their memories complement those of famous writers such as Richard Wright by giving voice to more than a thousand black southerners who remember life “behind the veil.”
5. In this article, I do not place quotation marks around the word “race,” as is often the practice of writers who wish to distance themselves from uncritical uses of the term. (See, for example, Gates [1986] and Kobayashi and Peake [1994]). Nevertheless, I wish to emphasize that “making race,” no less than “making place,” calls attention to the socially constructed nature of the concept.
6. By invoking the term “racialization,” I follow Kobayashi and Peake (2000, 393) who identify it as “the process by which racialized groups are identified, given stereotypical characteristics, and coerced into specific living conditions, often involving social/spatial segregation and always constituting racialized places.” They go on to remind us of the often-forgotten and quite important point that constructions of race are inevitably both material and ideological. This is a central point of my argument that follows.
7. This article relies on two related sets of primary sources. The first are archival materials pertaining to the Natchez Pilgrimage, held at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (Jackson, MS), the Special Collections Library at the University of Mississippi (Oxford, MS), the Natchez Trace Collection at the Center for American History (Austin, TX), the Hill Memorial Special Collections Library at Louisiana State University (Baton Rouge, LA), the Historic Natchez Foundation (Natchez, MS), the Archives Room of the Natchez Garden Club at Magnolia Hall (Natchez, MS), and in the Pilgrimage Garden Club records at Stanton Hall (Natchez, MS). The second set of sources comprises ethnographic notes compiled during four years of fieldwork and based on interviews with Natchez residents, attendance at two “Confederate Pageants” (1999 and 2000), attendance at two performances of “A Southern Road to Freedom” (2000 and 2001), and tours of twenty-three “old homes” during both spring and fall pilgrimages between 1998 and 2001. Finally, any scholar of segregation-era Natchez is blessed with a remarkable ethnographic/sociological study. Conducted by two husband-and-wife teams—one black, the other white—who spent 1934 and a portion of 1935 in Natchez before publishing their findings, it is a classic in early American anthropology: Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, and Mary B. Gardner, *Deep South: A Social Anthropological Study of Caste and Class* (1941). Due to the sensitive nature of their study, the authors used the pseudonyms “Old City” and “Old County” to refer to Natchez and Adams County, respectively. For a recent and useful follow-up to *Deep South*, see Davis (2001).
8. In writing about the display of memory and heritage, I am indebted to Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1998, 6–7), who notes that “[D]isplay not only shows and speaks, it also *does*. Display is an interface and thereby transforms what is shown into heritage” (emphasis in original).
9. I wish to make clear that the framework of performance deployed in this article shares some similarities with the influential work of Judith Butler (1990, 1997), but that it departs in important ways as well. Her explicit rejection of theatrical notions of performance is one obvious difference, as is her reliance on a strictly linguistically derived performativity. Where I find Butler of especial relevance is her insistence on denaturalizing social categories—her focus is on sexuality—by maintaining that identities do not preexist their performance. “Gender does not exist outside its ‘doing,’” Catherine Nash (2000, 655) writes in a recent interpretation of Butler, “but its performance is also a reiteration of previous ‘doings’ that become naturalized as gender norms.” As I hope this article demonstrates, the same might be said of “race.” For a useful description of Butler’s importance for critical human geography, see Gregson and Rose (2000).
10. This is the fundamental insight of the now-canonical *The Invention of Tradition* (1983), by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. For similar arguments about the American South, see Radford (1992) and Brundage (2000a).
11. The slogan “Come to Natchez: Where the Old South Still Lives” made its appearance in 1932 with the first “official” Pilgrimage (Natchez Garden Club 1932, “Come to Natchez, Where the Old South Still Lives and Where Shaded Highways and Ante-Bellum Homes Greet New and Old Friends,” poster, KMP-HNF; see also Miller 1938). Woodward (1951, 154–55) is again prescient here, as he describes the New South’s “cult of archaism . . . its nostalgic vision of the past. One of the most significant inventions of the New South was the ‘Old South’—a new idea in the [eighteen] eighties, and a legend of incalculable potentialities.” Following Woodward, and as used by makers of the Natchez Pilgrimage, “Old South” does not refer to antebellum history. Rather, it is shorthand for how southern whites *imagine* the South to be before the Civil War: it is a paradigmatic example of how cultural memory creates what Edward Said (1995) has called “imaginative geographies” (see also Gregory 1995). It should be added that white northerners joined in constructing this imaginative geography (Silber 1994). Hereafter, I will not use quotes around “Old South,” but this distinct meaning remains.
12. By 1930, the black population of the Natchez district’s six counties had declined by more than a third from its peak of 93,327 in 1900 (Aiken 1998, 92).
13. Of course, the availability and wages offered by these jobs varied tremendously by race (Cobb 1982; Ayers 1992; Davis 2001, especially 115–47).
14. Describing these women as “elite” is not intended to denote only economic status. Many, in fact, were not rich, especially compared to economic elites in other American cities during this period, and a good number struggled with considerable economic hardships in a chronically poor city. Rather, and much like the “elite” white women of Charleston, South Carolina, their status was marked by distinctive local criteria: family name, marriage, and the economic and social status of their Mississippi slave-owning ancestors (see also Yuhl 2000).
15. Disagreements over how revenues from Pilgrimage should be distributed led to an angry dispute within the Natchez Garden Club and to the creation, in 1937, of a rival organization known as the *Pilgrimage* Garden Club (Kane 1947; Nicholas 1949; Blankenstein 1995).
16. For a recent reassessment of the power of home as a cultural symbol, see Domosh and Seager (2001, 1–34). I want also to emphasize that white women, as much as men, were responsible for the gap between the representation of the

- Southern Lady and the white women's activities described below.
17. In a 1952 speech to the Natchez Lions club—"believed to be the first of its kind in the state and to mark the beginning of the Republican drive in Mississippi"—Miller lauded Eisenhower as the "one man who can restore confidence and unity, and can create a united front against Communism" and railed against Stevenson for his "obnoxious" anti-southern views. The Democratic Party was to be jettisoned because of its "trend toward socialism" and its civil-rights plank that is "an insult to the South" (*Memphis Commercial Appeal* 1952; Katherine Miller, letter to Mr. Fred Salmon, 27 August 1952, KMP-HNF). Like the other six "Lily White" delegates from Mississippi, Chairwoman Miller sat in the balcony apart from the Black and Tan wing of the state party at the 1956 Republican National Convention—a spatial maneuver that was seen by admirers as "a fine way to handle an embarrassing situation" (*Memphis Commercial Appeal* 1956, 1; Magruder Dent, letter to Katherine Miller, 24 August 1956, KMP-HNF).
 18. A mock election at the Natchez High School revealed Goldwater taking 95 percent of the vote in Natchez; on Election Day, the Arizona senator carried 84 percent of Adams County (*Natchez Democrat* 1 September and 5 November 1964, MDAH, Rolls 30544 and 30588).
 19. Such publicity was extremely wide-ranging. In addition to the many newspaper and magazine articles and the numerous licensing agreements, the Illinois Central line, for example, sponsored a "Pilgrimage train" from Chicago in 1949 that included sixty Pullman cars. In 1939, radio broadcasts about the Pilgrimage were heard as far from Natchez as Berlin and Honolulu, and the memory display attracted such national figures as First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, Henry Ford, and General Douglas MacArthur. The following year witnessed the release of two Hollywood motion pictures about the Pilgrimage, one of which—James Fitzpatrick's "Old Natchez on the Mississippi"—played in 17,000 theaters across the country (Natchez Garden Club, meeting minutes, 8 December 1938, NGC-MDAH, microfilm roll 1; Natchez Garden Club, meeting minutes, 3 January 1940, NGC-MDAH, microfilm roll 1; *Over the Garden Wall*, 1949, NCG-MDAH, microfilm roll 1). The *Ladies Home Journal* (Burt 1947, 134) claimed that "Most Americans now know of the annual Natchez Pilgrimage."
 20. Eleanor Roosevelt was one of the few commentators on the Pilgrimage to give credit to the garden-club women for their economic savvy: "Never tell me that women are not able in business. Natchez is being built up financially by a woman's idea carried out by women" ("My Day: Impressed by Lovely Natchez Homes," article in unidentified newspaper, 1937, KMP-HNF).
 21. In a 1954 interview, Miller said that "I had never belonged to any club before—I was never a joiner but in 1930, shortly after we purchased Hope Farm, I was asked to join the local garden club" (Harlow 1954, 1).
 22. It is interesting to note, along with Ronald L. F. Davis (1993, 143) that, contrary to the stories told in "old home" tours, Natchez "and its surrounding hinterland had been something of a Unionist stronghold prior to secession, sending Whiggish delegates to the state's secession convention." It was perhaps not surprising, then, that no Union action was necessary to conquer Natchez—a central reason why so many antebellum mansions survived the war.
 23. In this article, "mammy" and the "butler" always refer to the representations created by whites, never to how African-American women and men understood or represented themselves (Thurber 1992; Goings 1994).
 24. Performances of whiteness, it should be noted, were not restricted to the American South. Not coincidentally, during the same decade as the invention of the Confederate Pageant, influential Afrikaners in South Africa made strategic use of performative spectacle in the 1938 Tweede Trek (Second Trek) pageant. Ostensibly designed to celebrate the Centenary of the Boers' Great Trek of 1838, the spectacle attracted considerable popular participation among whites, who donned historic costumes and rode from Cape Town to Pretoria in replicas of *Voortrekker* wagons. The four-month performance, Anne McClintock (1995, 376) writes, "mobilized a sense of white Afrikaner collectivity where none before existed."
 25. My reading of the historic Confederate Pageant tableaux comes from two sources: the archives of the Pilgrimage Garden Club (Confederate Pageant brochures, 1937–1955, PGC-SH) and the Natchez Garden Club (Confederate Pageant brochures, 1933–1950, NGC-MDAH); and field notes based on performances in 1999 and 2000.
 26. This is not to say that there were not efforts to make legal what was de facto segregation (Rice 1968; Silver 1991). The Mississippi state senate, for example, petitioned the U.S. Congress for the acquisition of a territory "to make a suitable, proper, and final home for the American Negro" (Bilbo 1947, 273).
 27. But a racially mixed area (like St. Catherine in 1912) should not be taken as "integration." This area had more white residences within it than in any other area, with only 69 percent residences black. But this was far from racially integrated. Whites and blacks may occupy the same block and the ratio between blacks and whites may appear to be even, but the exact location of the residences within the block usually displayed a tendency toward microscale spatial separation. This is a good example of what many white southerners have looked upon as living "close" to blacks, but certainly not living "with" or "mixing" with them (see Rabinowitz 1978).
 28. That such servant roles were meant to be silent ones was demonstrated to John Gunther (1947, 803) who learned that the man serving him cocktails had read one of his books. The incident "enrage[d] several people present, and puzzle[d] others to the point of consternation," since "it was literally unthinkable to [his white hostess] that this evidence of mild literacy by a black underling could be possible."
 29. Such was the fear among affluent blacks in Natchez that many spread their savings among several banks, including northern establishments, so as not to appear "uppity" and set off alarms among white circles (Litwack 1998, 330). It is important to remember, then, with Robin Kelley (1994), that the unavoidably clandestine nature of black resistance during Jim Crow should not cause us to see the appearance of obedience as representing black realities (see also Chafe, Gavins, and Korstad 2001, esp. 268–303).
 30. The specific event that brought the *Defender's* fury against Mississippi occurred on 28 October 1932, when an especially gruesome lynching claimed the lives of seven family members in the Delta. After an angry white mob proved unable to locate an accused African American, it took its rage out on a

sharecropper named Judge Crawford, his wife, Annie Crawford, their three sons, one daughter, and son-in-law—seven people accused of no crime other than being black. “Each of the seven persons had been shot at least six times. Fingers had been cut from most of the dead, evidently by those who wished to have souvenirs of the lynch hunt” (*Chicago Defender* 1932a). In its editorial response to the heinous crime, the *Defender* (1932b) directed its scorn on Mississippi, but, importantly, scaled the larger problem of racial violence beyond the state: “If the crimes in Mississippi could only be looked upon as crimes in Mississippi, they then could be considered a thing apart from the rest of the nation, but Mississippi, sharing security as well as national honor, all her acts become our national shame. Hence, when she murders and scourges American citizens, her hideous and criminal acts are written in our national tradition.”

31. Ever since the pioneering work of Mississippi-born antilynching crusader Ida B. Wells ([1892] 1997), most scholars of southern lynchings have found that proponents routinely justified their actions in the name of protecting white womanhood from the alleged epidemic of black rape. See, for example, Hall (1974), Bederman (1992), and Nast (2000).
32. In response to increasing negative publicity a decade ago, several liberal whites began urging the two garden clubs to reconsider the city’s African-American community’s noticeable lack of involvement of in the Pilgrimage (Ora Frazier, interview, Natchez, MS, February 2000; Frazier, interview, 2001; Charles Harris, interview, Natchez, MS, April 2001; Selma Mackel Harris, interview, Natchez, MS, April 2001; Miller, interview, 2000). They contacted a teacher with interests in local history about helping draw Natchez blacks into the event; Ora Frazier’s response was a tentative “[Y]es, but only if we could tell our own story from our own perspective.” That meant, in contemporary Natchez, that black involvement had to avoid the Confederate Pageant—a memory display so charged with racial antagonism that any direct reconciliation seemed unlikely. Beginning ten years ago, the Holy Family Catholic Church began performing an alternative pageant called “A Southern Road to Freedom.” African Americans have thus returned to the Natchez Pilgrimage, but under conditions more in step with the tenets of contemporary multiculturalism than with the scourge of white supremacy. “They tell their story and we tell ours” is a sentiment privately expressed by performers of “A Southern Road to Freedom”—one that could also be said, unwittingly, for the Confederate Pageant: these two competing performances of memory dance as separate but unequal partners in a divisive choreography of the southern past. Although a brief description of “A Southern Road to Freedom” appears on Pilgrimage brochures, ticket sellers for Natchez Pilgrimage Tours rarely mention it to tourists unless they are asked about it, and in 2000 the Mississippi tourism bureau failed to include the performance in its official tourist guide to the state.

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