

ABSTRACT

FULGHUM, EMILY WILKERSON. Selling the South to Itself: Rhetoric, Mythology, and the Making of *Southern Living*. (Under the direction of Dr. Carolyn R. Miller.)

In an effort to examine the “commodification” of Southern culture - using the stereotypes, sensibilities, traditions, and values of the typical Southern household to appeal to a target audience of consumers - I plan to explore the early history of *Southern Living* magazine (*SL*) during its transition from a socially conservative farmer’s trade magazine to a vibrant leisure and recreation guide for southern suburban housewives. A dynamic publishing transition from *Progressive Farmer* magazine concurrently mirrored the significant cultural phenomenon of the rural-to-urban/suburban shift occurring in many southern communities, which heralded a new era of recreational travel, community development, and cultural enhancement. By first exploring the regional identity mythology during this period of time and then identifying methods utilized by the magazine’s early contributors to establish their own identity, we are given a rare and important opportunity to observe a clear reciprocity between fundamental rhetorical elements *mythos* and *logos* (shared stories and story/argument structure). But unlike the often brief, general citations regarding *SL*’s cultural impact offered in most 20th century surveys of the South, this study comprehensively presents and explores this reciprocity within the context of the considerable cultural understanding and rhetorical achievements that contributed to the early and sustained success of one of the most influential regional publications in the nation.

When *Southern Living* magazine was first published in 1966, much of the South continued to hold fast to the traditions, values, and stereotypes of a system that was crumbling under the weight of the social, political, and economic pressures of a nation in transition. In 1950, the top-ranking publications in the South were farming magazines such as *Farm Journal*, *Country Farmer*, *Country Gentleman*, *Successful Farming*, *Southern Agriculturalist*, and *Progressive Farmer*. *Progressive Farmer* stood out among these publications as it took a decidedly “progressive” direction from its conception. This “feisty start”, as former *Southern Living* editor Gary McCalla puts it, developed into a resolute focus and thematic consistency which enabled *Progressive Farmer* to promote itself as a sort of Southern supplement to national magazines such as *Life* to advertisers looking to fill the significant gap of magazine publication coverage in the South.

As the editorial staff and advertising department began to struggle with the financial effects of a declining farming population and the resulting diminishing audience in the early 1960s, a decision was made to evolve the Homes Department of *Progressive Farmer* into *Southern Living*, a new magazine that would feature home and general interest articles. The environment out of which *Southern Living* was created, and the issues to which it endeavored to respond are clearly stated by its co-founder, Emory Cunningham: “Everybody was running down the South...I felt that keenly, and a lot of other Southern people did too, people with their hardships going all the way back to the Civil War... Everybody up North thought that racial unrest was an Alabama or George Wallace problem only. It hadn’t hit Watts in Los Angeles or Chicago [yet]. Southern people were thirsting for something to make them feel good about themselves, along with giving them good, practical information” (Logue, 34). In this project, I explore this image

the South had of itself when *SL* was created, along with the extent to which and rhetorical methods by which the primary regional publication addressed and attempted to shape these perspectives about southerners' cities, their homes, their families – in short, their regional identity.

**SELLING THE SOUTH TO ITSELF: RHETORIC,
MYTHOLOGY, AND THE MAKING OF *SOUTHERN LIVING***

by
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BIOGRAPHY

Emily Wilkerson Fulghum is a Raleigh native, having grown up about two miles from N.C. State University. She attended Meredith College, where she obtained a B.A. in English in 1998. Having had career experience in primarily political jobs – campaign work and lobbying – she decided to return to her first love, writing, and pursue a Master’s degree in English with a concentration in Rhetoric and Composition. After marrying her high school sweetheart, now a dentist, Emily and her husband moved to Southern Pines, N.C., where she completed her thesis work. Now a freelance writer and advertising executive for a local broadcasting company, she and her husband, Patrick, reside happily with their pets, and plan to return to their hometown eventually.

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Introduction

Before the turn of the last century, a gentleman farmer from North Carolina began publishing the small agricultural magazine *Progressive Farmer*, whose mission was to improve the livelihood of farm families throughout the South. His commitment to raise the standard of living in the South and to put family above all else has resonated with each generation that followed him. That determination for a better quality of life led to the birth of one of the most successful magazines published in America today. *Southern Living (SL)* came to life in 1966 specifically designed as a companion guide for a rapidly emerging demographic: young Southerners opting out of the family farm and into cul-de-sacs and station wagons who, between 1950 and 1968, contributed to a 64% decrease in farm-dwellers, a loss of 12.5 million people (Johnson, 201). This new generation was coming of age at a time when the region's past was no longer offering constructive templates for the current social and economic instability, a situation that invited a modern reconstruction of the region's identity and economic viability.

After experiencing and enduring regional mythic continuity since before the Civil War, the South in the late 1960s and 1970s was compelled to seek a new mythology to interpret and explain the new social and cultural realities of the contemporary South. The mind of the South, as described by W.J. Cash and others, finally yielded to change when it could no longer serve effectively, or even marginally, as a guide to understanding reality in the post-Civil Rights Act South. As Southern scholar Stephen W. Smith states about this tumultuous era: "Initiated by the United States Supreme Court in 1954, demanded by Southern blacks from Montgomery to Little Rock to Greensboro and back

to Montgomery via Selma, and codified by the Congress with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, the transformation of Southern society so rearranged the essential ‘realities’ of the past that the power of the old mythology was destroyed” (59). The events of the previous three decades toppled “so many foundations of the old order that we now live in a post-New South that nobody has yet given a name,” said George B. Tindall, speaking at a symposium at the University of Alabama in 1976 (12). Scholar David Matthews, during the same program, joined in that assessment. “By 1970,” he said, “it was clear that the South had to get on with its future and that neither the antebellum past nor the era of the old New South was a completely adequate guide. Indeed, for Southerners in the 1970s, the search for a new blueprint is of paramount importance” (96).

It is important to note here that there are many different names tossed about by scholars and historians in reference to the same post-Civil War eras in the South – “post-New South,” “old New South,” just to quote the two above. This often contributes to some degree of confusion when searching for definitive chronological points simply marking the “Old” and the “New” South, especially regarding the socially and politically disordered era I explore in this study, as these labels carry with them loaded meanings subject to individual historical, literary or social interpretation that have and will continue to necessitate completely separate studies. Therefore, I will attempt to eschew vague references to Old and New, leaning upon the words of longtime *SL* publisher Emory Cunningham: “As a region, the South has long thought about itself and has at various times proclaimed a New South, sometimes stretching the point. But the process is valid: to consider where you are and where you want to be” (2).

The mythologies that have shaped the identity of the South are still evident in large and small ways within the fabric of the culture still today, yet when simply categorized as “old” and “new”, they lose their context within the very history that must be acknowledged to understand mythologies at hand in this study. For example, the “oldest” regional myth came into being during the early colonial period, as the South was first settled by the British, when the physical landscape is characterized as a “garden paradise, rooted in the perception of a bountiful environment” (Wilson and Ferris, 1098), which has distinct ties to a modern regional myth utilized to welcome tourists to a warm, sunny South, as seen an *SL* advertising strategy I explore in Chapter 3. To be sure, there were many successors to the pastoral early colonial myth: the Civil War “Lost Cause” myth in which confederates were noble, virtuous Christian warriors fighting against an evil aggressor; the Populist movement (also called the “New South” movement), which made poor white Southern farmers into mythical heroes; and finally, regional self-perceptions that were derived from more sinister and destructive ideas promoted about the South’s identity such as the “Savage South” myth portrayed by intellectual influences such as Thomas Wolfe and William Faulkner, which scarred the South’s image of its own people and their morality.

However, just as the South was beginning to redefine itself, sifting through the existing and emerging stereotypes and themes at hand, the national media had become fascinated with the South. The “real” South had been generally ignored except for an occasional movie featuring a fat Southern sheriff or news coverage of George Wallace’s frantic campaigns in 1968 or 1972. Southern image-makers, however, wanted to define their own distinctiveness. The mythology of the contemporary South was not entirely the

product of carefully planned persuasive strategy by a formal alliance of modern mythmakers, but neither was it merely an unintended consequence of the vigorous social debate that increasingly characterized the efforts of public rhetoricians during this time. Many of those responsible for the development of the contemporary mythology were well aware of the potential power of collective cultural myths. As they described their scenarios for the future of the South, they often revealed their hopes as well as their strategies. The future, said Emory Cunningham, is “not a destination but rather a process, a becoming. The future never really arrives, but it is always there on the mind. A way of thinking, really” (2).

Consequently, I believe that in exploring these collectively significant cultural events from a rhetorical perspective by shedding light upon the effort to create a cultural publication during a period of shifting cultural mythology, it is possible to establish the extent to which this evolving mythology influenced the rhetorical posture fundamentally responsible for the successful evolution of a regional farm magazine into a burgeoning cultural icon. Scholar Leslie Stephen noted that “the doctrines which men ostensibly hold do not become operative upon their conduct until they have generated an imaginative symbolism” (Schorer 355).

To that end, the following exploration of this period of transitioning mythology and the resulting cultural manifestations, as well as the case-in-point use of the iconic *SL* to illustrate an instance in which emerging mythology affected and/or created continuing themes within Southern culture is vital to the understanding of the region then and now. Not only is it uniquely enriching in the opportunity it creates to observe a clear reciprocity between fundamental rhetorical elements *mythos* and *logos* (shared stories and

story/argument structure), but unlike the often brief, general citations regarding *SL*'s cultural impact offered in most 20th century surveys of the South, this study comprehensively presents and explores this reciprocity within the context of the considerable cultural understanding and rhetorical achievements that contributed to the early and sustained success of one of the most influential regional publications in the nation. The success of the incorporation of myth within rhetorical influence is undeniable, as myth scholar Raphael Patai notes, "As I see it, myth not only validates or authorizes customs, rites, institutions, beliefs, and so forth, but frequently is directly responsible for creating them" (Wilson and Ferris, 1097).

When *Southern Living* magazine was first published in 1966, much of the South continued to hold fast to the traditions, values, and stereotypes of a system that was crumbling under the weight of the social, political, and economic pressures of a nation in transition. In 1950, the top-ranking publications in the South were farming magazines such as *Farm Journal*, *Country Farmer*, *Country Gentleman*, *Successful Farming*, *Southern Agriculturalist*, and *Progressive Farmer*. *Progressive Farmer* stood out among these publications as it took a decidedly "progressive" direction from its conception by Colonel Leonidas Polk, who wrote in its first issue of February 10, 1886: "The Industrial and Educational Interests of our People paramount to All Other Considerations of State Policy is the motto of *Progressive Farmer*, and upon this platform shall rise or fall. Serving no master, ruled by no faction, circumscribed by no selfish or narrow policy, its aim will be to foster and promote the best interests of the whole people of the state [of North Carolina]." This "feisty start," as former *SL* editor Gary McCalla puts it, developed into a consistently socially-oriented publication, not only identifying issues of interest to

its locally-based audience of farmers, agriculture advocates, and community leaders, but also drawing national attention, as mentioned, for its crusade to bring better schools, better roads, rural electricity, and better lives to farm families. This resolute focus and thematic consistency enabled *Progressive Farmer* to promote itself as a sort of Southern supplement to national magazines such as *Life* to advertisers looking to fill the significant gap of magazine publication coverage in the South.

As the editorial staff and advertising department began to struggle with the financial effects of a diminishing audience resulting from the declining farming population in the early 1960s, a decision was made to evolve the Homes Department of *Progressive Farmer* into *Southern Living*, a new magazine that would feature home and general interest articles. The environment out of which *Southern Living* was created, and the issues to which it endeavored to respond are clearly stated by Emory Cunningham: “Everybody was running down the South. In every movie, if they had a pot-bellied sheriff, he had a Southern accent. I felt that keenly, and a lot of other Southern people did too, people with their hardships going all the way back to the Civil War. The Depression hit us harder. Everybody up North thought that racial unrest was an Alabama or George Wallace problem only. It hadn’t hit Watts in Los Angeles or Chicago [yet]. Southern people were thirsting for something to make them feel good about themselves, along with giving them good, practical information” (Logue and McCalla, 34).

In the following chapters, I explore the materialization of new mythologies that, as they emerged through various rhetorical channels, not only helped temper the rigidity of this painful past, but also shaped the regional mentality that continues to sustain the South’s fluid cultural and physical development. In the first chapter, I discuss various

methodologies of mythological analysis within the context of contemporary rhetorical theory and previous critical studies, in an effort to establish the scholarly parameters of and definitions within this study. In the next two chapters, I undertake the analysis of the Southern myth as it pertains to the transition of *Progressive Farmer* to *SL*. First, I establish the origins of the surfacing mythology, how scholars and other public rhetoricians viewed their role in the expansion and dissemination of its two primary internal themes, and the significant degree of its overall public influence from a communication science perspective. And finally, I examine the role that the evolving myths and mentalities had in shaping content and marketing strategy in the early years of *SL* in order to illustrate a uniquely successful strategic relationship between the myth and the message of the era, largely drawing from a definitive history of *Progressive Farmer*, *SL*, and today's parent company, the Southern Progress Corporation, by *SL*'s first editorial team, John Logue and Gary McCalla.

Methodologies for the Analysis of Myth

Combining and employing various perspectives of myth and rhetoric, and drawing from related approaches and disciplines, the rhetorical critic can fashion an appropriate approach to the analysis of myths and their function in contemporary rhetoric. This perspective on mythological analysis seems particularly appropriate for application to the study of rhetoric, myth, and culture in the contemporary South. The goal of this study, as it is in any analysis of myth within a rhetorical situation, is to illuminate the interaction of the myth(s) with the rhetorical argument – how is myth persuasive and to what degree is it utilized effectively toward that end? And the goal of this chapter is to highlight rhetorical theory surrounding this form of analysis and examine the methods and tools employed in similar studies.

Rhetorical scholar James Jasinski discusses the characteristic types of myth based on their different functions in his seminal work on the origins and components of contemporary rhetoric, Sourcebook on Rhetoric. The most salient category and definition of myth for this study is the *identity myth*, put forth by scholar R. P. Hart, which “provides members of a community with a story that serves as the basis for their sense of who they are as a collectivity” (383). This myth, like any myth, he states, “when incorporated into public discourse, can produce *instrumental* as well as *constitutive* effects” (384). This rhetorical perspective on myth is significant because, Jasinski notes, “scholars have begun to explore the cognitive and judgment-inducing power of discursive forms such as narrative, myth, and metaphor” in contemporary rhetorical studies, using an analytical perspective suggested by 20th century scholars such as Toulmin, Perelman and

Olbrechts-Tyteca (“warrants” and “claims,” establishing rhetorical “presence,” audience “adherence”) instead of merely the classic “mode of proof” text management structure (ethos, pathos, logos) suggested by Aristotle or Cicero (192). Jasinski argues that myth as a rhetorical practice can accomplish an *instrumental* function as it “helps to resolve situational exigencies and to produce judgments about public issues,” and can fulfill a *constitutive* role as it “not only helps to produce judgments about specific issues, [but] it also helps to produce or constitute a social world.” He explains that “through all of our different language practices, and especially through that set of practices (however we might draw the boundaries) thought of as rhetorical, we continually create, recreate, and transform our social world – the customs, traditions, values, concepts, shared beliefs, roles, institutions, memories, languages that are our ‘second’ nature” (192).

Having established a workable set of definitions and goals regarding contemporary rhetorical theory pertaining to myths – what they can and should achieve successfully in a rhetorical situation – we can explore some different methods of analysis from scholars as they examine the function of myth in a variety of rhetorical situations. From policy to politics to scholarship to media, the utilization of myth within rhetorical situations abounds and is accessible for analysis.

Myth is employed with great frequency within the realm of politics; campaigners and office-holders alike seek the uniquely familiar and universal connections a myth can provide in the myriad of rhetorical situations in which they participate. Speech Communication scholar Walter R. Fisher, in his article “Reaffirmation and Subversion of the American Dream,” explored the success with which the 1972 Presidential candidates, incumbent Richard Nixon and Senator George McGovern, employed and shaped the

myth of the American Dream during their campaigns. He begins with a sort of disclaimer for those who might read his election study expecting a more typical, statistical analysis accounting for the outcome through the examination of “such traditional factors as party membership, organization, or funding.” Instead, he argues for the equally significant and edifying opportunity he takes in this project to “observe the larger rhetorical meaning, the symbolic message of the election and its foreshadowing of the future” (160). Fisher states that the American Dream, or Myth, is comprised of two internal myths, “which, when taken together characterize America as a culture” (160). The “materialistic myth,” he explains, is grounded in the history of America’s puritan work ethic, just as the “moralistic myth” is rooted in the historically compassionate and tolerant tenets of the Declaration of Independence, both myths clearly falling under Hart’s general designation of the identity myth in their attempts to establish a collective communal identity, specifically fulfilling a constitutive role in their foundations within accessible facets of the nation’s history, building upon a sense of tradition, shared cultural experiences and values. Exploring the origin of each myth, Fisher also imbues each with sufficient credibility by tracing its development through its effect upon Americans. He then examines each myth’s potential weaknesses and the manner in which the weaknesses are exposed when used against each other. In conceding their respective weaknesses, Fisher implies that each myth has particular rhetorical strengths over the other when employed within one of the most illuminating models of opposing rhetorical situations: the American political campaign. This is particularly significant as it decisively shows their respective instrumental functions when used in situations warranting the judgments or resolutions so frequently encountered on the campaign trail. He closes his analysis by

returning to his original question regarding the larger rhetorical meaning and symbolic messages that could be gleaned from the election at that time and in the future. Fisher concludes that an election is a ritual that citizens participate in to “warrant its messages” and to endorse certain myths it so deliberately circulates in the public arena (167).

Regarding civic involvement, Jasinski notes that myth in public communication can play a distinct role in representing the “collectivity” of a community, especially in a rhetorical situation in which the reciprocity of ideas and the understanding of cultural myths are the primary factors in the efficient resolution of a dispute. Scholars Tarla Peterson and Cristi Horton, in their 1995 study for the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, “Rooted in the Soil: How Understanding the Perspectives of Landowners Can Enhance the Management of Environmental Disputes” use mythic criticism to examine missed opportunities for identifying with landowners in ways that would enhance the constructive management of environmental disputes. In this more formal, almost scientific analysis, they focus on the communicative implications of a policy for managing endangered species that fails to consider existing cultural practices, and then offer an alternative mythic understanding of the American West that is drawn from the discourse of its central characters. Peterson and Horton then explain the five steps of interpretive analysis they implement in their study of regional mythology: identify and develop individual themes, determine the most significant themes, examine significant themes for mythic dimensions, and search for relationships between themes identified as significant. They note that this method is derived from Ivie’s procedure in a 1987 study in *Communication Monographs* for identifying metaphor clusters, and from Peterson’s previous analysis of mythic structures in farmers’ discourse in which she “incorporates

interpretive interviews into rhetorical criticism to explain how farmers' relationship with their land influences interactions with outsiders, claiming that an understanding of the myths influencing farmers' interactions with governmental and private conservation agencies can enhance the quality of these interactions" (147).

While Peterson and Horton's study is primarily concerned with identifying and analyzing myth within the context of oral discourse and interviews, as opposed to written or visual scenarios, they nonetheless provide valuable insight regarding the significant and unique utility of mythical analysis in any rhetorical situation. Using a well-established view of myth from rhetoric scholar Slotkin, they explain that myth "represents the world vision and historical sense of a people or culture, reducing centuries of experience into a constellation of compelling metaphors" and that "by specifying the boundaries of correct behavior it helps people distinguish insiders from outsiders and order their own behaviors as to remain an insider," thus providing "the mediation needed between the self and others, even those who share the same mythology, by allowing for individual variations within sanctioned ways of being human" (147). Their view of mythic criticism recalls Kenneth Boulding's view of the regenerative power successful, meaningful messages can have over image: "Myth provides flexibility by encompassing general perceptions with which participants can identify. It sets up an image with a set of values, beliefs, and attitudes imprecise enough that members of a community can tap into them, identify with each other through them, and adequately interpret their situations" And, most significantly, they note that, "critical analysis of myth illuminates the particularities of a community's meaning system by unraveling intertwined values and drawing them apart for closer examination" (147-48). This perspective seems especially

pertinent given the role of myth and the search for meaning in the collective communities of the South I have explored thus far and will establish further in the next chapter.

But perhaps most applicable to the ensuing exploration of the creation of *SL*, is a 1998 study by Alan D. DeSantis for the *Western Journal of Communication* entitled “Selling the American Dream Myth to Black Southerners: The *Chicago Defender* and the Great Migration of 1915-1919.” DeSantis examines the role of rhetorical discourse in constructing social reality by showing that the *Chicago Defender*, a nationally-distributed black newspaper, sought to persuade discontented Southern blacks to migrate to the North by waging a migration campaign that utilized the recurring themes found in the American Dream myth. He begins by stating that in an effort to understand how blacks obtained the information that fueled their motivation to migrate, and how these motivations were actualized, he offers “a rhetorical explanation which illuminates the ways in which specific rhetorical texts engage audiences to produce practical effects . . . in order to identify the rhetorical strategies and techniques used by the paper to stimulate northern migration within the framework of the ‘American Dream’ myth” (475). DeSantis discusses the different interpretations of the American Dream myth as they appear in a number of references from scholars, politicians, and popular writers in an effort to draw these perspectives into a cohesive mythical image. He concludes from these sources that the prevalent eight themes are freedom, equality, democracy, religious independence, wealth, Puritan work ethic, new beginnings, and consumption and leisure. By identifying these significant themes, he is able to contend that they “constitute a framework whereby the *Defender*’s migration campaign can be perceived and understood,” and then employ the themes in his subsequent analysis of the *Defender*’s editorial and advertising content.

DeSantis then examines the *Defender's* rhetorical campaign in three stages, as it moved from intensifying and highlighting those elements of black Southern life that fostered discontent among black communities, to depictions of the North – especially Chicago – as a place of increased opportunity, to an explicit call for action through actual migration. As he explores these stages through the lens of each of the eight established mythic themes, he argues that “these may be best viewed as cognitive stages through which readers were invited to pass, rather than as narrow chronological patterns of development in the rhetorical messages themselves” (478). From a strategic perspective, this observation is notable as it implies that a firmly and fully conceived rhetorical strategy was in motion from the inception of the *Defender's* publication; and, indeed, DeSantis goes on to effectively illustrate the newspaper’s systematic use of the themes within the American Dream myth to methodically build a case for their cause. He concludes that the *Defender's* strategic efforts to create discontentment among blacks, then focus on opportunity in the “Promised Land” of the North, and finally connect the first two stages in an aggressive appeal to migrate, all utilized themes within the American Dream myth effectively as history shows it to be a strong rhetorical force for blacks during this era.

The three examples of mythical analysis in this chapter have all illustrated the previously stated goal of mythological criticism to establish relationships between myth and message in their astute explorations of widely differing, yet equally powerful rhetorical situations, and their utilization of methodologies representative of contemporary rhetorical theory. DeSantis’ study is especially relevant to this project as it explores the almost-exact mirror image of the rhetorical strategy employed by *SL* when,

playing upon Smith's mythical theme of distinctiveness, it presented the *South* as a sort of "Promised Land" full of physical beauty, a rich, friendly culture, and undeveloped resources. DeSantis uses a large myth broken down into its most integral and accessible themes to explore the impact of rhetorical strategy by first establishing the origin of the myth and its themes, and then seeking relationships among the various themes and their sources to build a more complete vision of mythic influence. He finally uses this established set of facts to evaluate content and other editorial components to show the influence of myth within the publication.

In the next two chapters, and especially within my Chapter 3 study of the transition from *Progressive Farmer* to *SL*, I also hope to establish a level of reciprocity by concluding to some degree the subsequent effect of the publication upon the ongoing evolution of the myth utilizing the definitions established in this chapter, focusing on Jasinski's constitutive role of myth, Peterson and Horton's notion of community "collectivity" and identity, and DeSantis' idea of the compartmentalization and categorization of an established cultural myth. This categorization method is utilized in the next chapter as I attempt to explore the origins of the surfacing mythology and how scholars and rhetoricians expanded and disseminated its two primary internal themes, the theme of distinctiveness and the theme of place and community.

The Origins of Contemporary Southern Mythology

Rhetorical critic David Sutton, in an essay about mythic criticism, used the South and its rhetorically appealing struggle to regain its vitality after the Civil War to illuminate the significance of myth to a society in need of direction:

Judging from the experience of the American South, one may conclude that mythos provides a means of healing the psychological wounds of war. A people who have experienced a military defeat have seen their most cherished attitudes, values, and beliefs, their core assumptions about themselves and their way of life, put in doubt. They had always been told that their hearts were pure and their aim straight, but still they met with defeat. One can see how this disparity between objective and subjective reality would cause an inner tension that needs to be relieved. A defeated people find such relief in their long-treasured stories. Out of their corpus of sacred and secular narratives comes the raw material from which a people may construct new subjective interpretations of objective events. Through public discourse, e.g. sermons, speeches, editorials, novels, plays, films, etc. , the newly constructed narratives are molded, disseminated, reworked, and ultimately accepted as true by those who have need of them (212).

Sutton's perspective is merely one example of a myriad of plausible and intriguing interpretations of Southern mentality and mythology, and one that he goes on to use effectively in his exploration of the large degree to which various war myths permeate our cultural fiber. So it is not difficult to grasp why anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, philosophers, historians, political scientists, rhetoricians, and communication scholars so frequently explore cultural myths as a means to understand the "collective imagination" of a society. In this chapter, I analyze the modern Southern myth confronting public rhetoricians of the era, a myth that emerged from the events occurring between 1954 and 1965 and was notably different than the more negative mythologies that had sustained, instructed, and shaped the South since the Civil War. Therefore, I will explore this modern (peri- and post- Civil Rights Act) Southern myth as it shaped and became integrated into popular culture and media of the South within two primary internal myths: the myth of continuing regional distinctiveness found in the

popular media of the region, and the myth of place and community that persists in the face of dramatic demographic and technological changes in the South.

We find Hart's characterization of the identity myth at the heart of these two internal themes, as they are both fundamental to many of the essential and enduring regional self-perceptions that contributed to the success with which the South began to "rebuild" its image during the period examined in this study. Within the identity myth structure, the mythical themes of regional distinctiveness and place and community fulfill both instrumental and constitutive roles as they were employed within the various media of the era explored in this chapter, and, more specifically, within the early ad campaigns and editorial decisions of *SL* explored in the next chapter. The importance of the idea of regional identity to the South cannot be understated, according to scholar Peter Appelbome, who argues that the South "has a regional identity far stronger than...elsewhere in the United States. Whoever heard of a Northern Studies program?" (290). He quotes Charles Reagan Wilson, one of the leading scholars for the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at Ole Miss, who says:

Southerners in the past always talked about being the most American of Americans from the early national period to Thomas Jefferson, when they were so involved with creating the nation. Then came the late troubles of the late nineteenth century to side track that. A major theme of the twentieth century, however, is Southerners as Americans, and it's come to fruition since World War Two. The country has always had an ambivalent attitude toward that. At times when race relations in the South were the most turbulent, the country didn't want to see itself in the South and didn't want to listen to Southerners making that claim. But since the sixties, the nation has been able to accept those claims again (291).

Regional Distinctiveness

Charles P. Roland noted in 1982 that "this state of mind, the South's perception of itself and the nation's perception of the South, has always been an important element in the actual distinctiveness of the region." Moreover, he said, "the ultimate distinctiveness

of the South may lie, not in empirical dissimilarities from other regions, but in its unique mythology: those images of the region that give philosophical meaning to ordinary life” (189). Indeed within the rhetoric of the contemporary South, the theme of distinctiveness is quite prominent, and it differs in subtle yet important ways from the old myth; therefore, an examination of the symbols and rituals present in this new mythic vision of distinctiveness could offer an unusual and insightful understanding of the cultural mythology of the contemporary South.

In order to preserve the image of distinctiveness and express regional values, both the South and the nation as a whole have relied upon communication of certain stereotypes that simplify perception and distill experiences, operating in much the same manner that heroic characters in a mythic drama symbolize desirable cultural traits and values. The planter, the belle, the confederate veteran, the obsequious house servant, and other mythic figures have been used to communicate the essence of certain perceptions and beliefs about Southern society and to establish the distinctive features of the culture. Through the communication of stereotypes, the nation has come to “understand” the South and Southerners (consider the enduring fame of and images from the cinematic epic “Gone with the Wind”).

With the explosion in communication technology, the images have become more complex, and they have often been consciously and rhetorically manipulated to achieve certain purposes. The editors of the regional public policy-focused *Southern Exposure* journal complained in their first editorial, “Facing the South,” in 1973, that, “throughout the country, and even in this region, people view the South through myth and stereotype. It’s not surprising. If they turn to newspapers, to television and radio, to popular films and

magazines, to most history books and folklore, they encounter these distortions.” Their objection was not so much to the practice of image communication as it was to the effect that the old stereotypes were having upon the South, given the publication’s grassroots activism for racial and political equality in a post-Civil Rights Act South. “As long as we allow our past and present to be defined by debilitating stereotypes and comparisons, then we likewise restrict our future. We limit our imagination and ask the wrong questions.” Claiming that national publications saw only the obvious and missed “the seemingly small but tremendously significant events now taking place in the South,” this editorial concluded that “it takes a publication of the South to present the region as it really is . . . and as it still can become.”

So too did *SL* assert its role in building the contemporary vision of a distinctive South, albeit in a less-politically charged manner and, instead, one that primarily promoted economic and geographical development. “*Southern Living* is about people,” said editor Gary McCalla. “We are dedicated to the premise that there are certain regional differences in the climate, in geography, in the way Southerners live and work, in history, progress, challenges, and opportunities that make the South unique” (Logue and McCalla, 45).

There is most certainly a strong theme of distinctiveness in the rhetorical mythology of the contemporary South, and it was enhanced, rather than diminished by the new media of communication. In fact, the advent of radio and television allowed the stereotypes and images to become more real and to reach a much larger audience than had read the antebellum novels of plantation life. Possibly because there was no real middle class in much of the old South, the old mythologies internally revered the symbols of the

aristocracy, and the outside image was that created by H.L. Mencken and aided by the Southern Gothic school of novelists. However, in examining the popular culture of the region, it becomes evident that the contemporary South has actively redefined many of the old symbols of the past and developed several new media rituals to reconstruct its myth of regional distinctiveness. The symbols may not be obvious, yet regional distinctiveness can be discovered, as Clement Eaton said, in “the nuances of the civilization. These little differences, such as accent in speech, different food, different ways of building houses, different styles of men’s hats, are not to be discounted, for the sum total serves to identify regions in America” (Dorsen, 78). Few regions, and, for that matter, few publications, have worked as hard as the South and *SL* to stress those differences. As I will show in subsequent chapters, the rhetorical posture of *SL* attempted to participate in a regional vision of distinctiveness that offered positive and attainable status for the people of the region, one with heroes, symbols, and rituals of the common folks rather than the planter aristocracy who dominated the myths of the past.

Place and Community

In much the same way that the mythic theme of distinctiveness leads Southerners to feel that their culture and society are unique, the mythic theme of place and community posits a vision of the South as “sacred ground,” creating special relationships among inhabitants and between people and place. Former Florida Governor Reubin Askew elevated this theme when he said, “We have, in the South, a place where people want to live, a place where they want to work, a place where they want to raise their children. We have, in the South, a place that people can call home” (Askew, 11). Stephen Smith

defines this Southern sense of place and community as “the symbolic relationship between people and the land which remains important in the contemporary South, even in the urban South” noting that, “it has survived changing systems of settlement, transportation, and communication, and though somewhat less provincial than the past, it remains important in the South’s perception of reality” (131).

One of the most effective ways of developing a cultural myth is through public discussions of the nature of the future, and that has been a characteristic of modern Southern mythmakers that is almost as strong as their tendency toward discussion of the past. Former North Carolina Governor Terry Sanford, as a founder of the L.Q.C. Lamar Society, advocated a formalized compact among Southern states to deal with the problems of the future and the consequences of burgeoning growth in the region, an organization that could help the South avoid repeating “Northern mistakes in a Southern setting” – a crusading spirit reminiscent of famed and feisty *Progressive Farmer* editor Clarence Poe who garnered national attention for his farm magazine when his relentless editorials for better schools, better roads, rural electricity, and better lives for the farm families in the South captivated progressive-minded president Theodore Roosevelt. In December 1971, nine Southern states formally organized the Southern Growth Policies Board, with a staff located in Research Triangle Park to assist the region in anticipating and dealing with common problems. Composed of the governor, one state senator, one state representative, and two public members from each state, the early leadership came from Governors Sanford, Dale Bumpers, Jimmy Carter, and Reubin Askew.

The goals and hopes during the early years of the Board were summed up by Askew in 1972. “The South,” he said, “is an unfinished frontier. While cities and states of

the North are confined by the consequences of their past mistakes, we have an opportunity in the South to fashion our frontier into whatever we want to make it” (14). The idea that the South was experiencing rapid growth and urbanization, and that because it had been so late in developing there was an opportunity to guide growth, quickly became a popular theme throughout the region, infecting Chamber of Commerce executives and public officials alike.

The vision of place and community that emerged from these discussions was more complex than those of the past. Recognizing the need for new jobs and higher incomes for the region, the Southern Growth Board debated whether the South, much of it still struggling to catch up with the level of development and standard of living of the rest of the nation, could take a long range view toward its growth. Revealing a vision that understood the human impact of change and regional development, they also discussed the ability of Southern planners to enhance to overall public welfare and quality of life of the region. This realization that changing the “place” could affect the “sense of place” permeates the mythic vision of the contemporary South. The South was saying, both to itself and to the nation, that it held a specific vision of growth, development, urbanization, and industrialization.

Emphasis on the importance of the Southern sense of place in the face of change became a topic of discussion beyond the offices of the Lamar Society, the Southern Growth Policies Board, and on the pages of regional publications. At least one group, with the assistance of the National Endowment for the Humanities, continued to focus upon the questions and expand the range of audience. A diverse group of scholars, activists, community leaders, and elected officials met in Nashville in May 1976 to

consider the future of the region from a humanistic perspective. In a discussion of growth and values in the context of Southern mythology, the participants were divided in their conclusions. Some members acknowledged that “regardless of the validity of the myth of Southern unity and regional identity, the accidents of time and geography have conspired to direct growth into this historically defined region” (Gagliano, 146). Others, more aware of the role of mythology in controlling and directing human behavior and production, felt that “the Southern myths of unity and agrarianism could in themselves be organizing principles to direct and manage the growth of urban problems in more creative ways than the rest of the nation” (Gagliano, 147).

A discussion of the Southern myth of place and community would be incomplete without noting the significant role that land lore has played in shaping it. Regional publications certainly contributed to the development of the vision of place and community, both editorially and through selected feature articles. *Southern Exposure*, in a special issue entitled “Our Promised Land,” dedicated to the land as a “foundation of Southern Culture,” acknowledged the importance of the vision, saying that “in the South, identity is still bound up with the land” (2). The editors also confirmed their belief in the utility of the mythology as an active agency for shaping the future of the South. “We view ‘Our Promised Land’ as a beginning, not as a definitive statement... We encourage our readers to use this issue in creative ways: to preserve the beauty and power of our Southern land and to change the methods of control of our primary resources” (2).

The symbolic relationship between the people and their community – their land, neighborhoods, or cities - remained important in the contemporary South. It survived changing systems of settlement, transportation, and communication, and, though

somewhat less provincial than the past, it remained important in the South's perception of itself. All in all, the cumulative effect of this theme upon the region during this era was expressed quite perfectly as the editors for *Southern Exposure* continued: "We have learned much about the limitations and potentials of using our roots and region as a point of reference for grasping larger realities. We have come to take the South almost as a metaphor for everybody's home – for a place that possesses a peculiar, yet imperfect, integrity stemming from a rich history – and we see Southerners as archetypes of people who move into the future while affirming their connections to the past" (2).

Meaning of the Myth

David Matthews, during his 1976 symposium address "Coming to Terms with Another South", sounded a hopeful note about the South and this long and varied mythological process I have just distilled into two primary themes: "Our efforts to describe a 'New South' can never be complete. This time we must choose causes that are just and have a future. We must choose them deliberately and realistically. We must ... create our future not by abandoning our past but by realizing that all our traditions are two-sided coins and that the very tendencies that have made Southerners reactionary could, indeed, have at times made them progressive" (95). This rhetorical stance, redefining the past and reorienting the visionary process to the future, acted to significantly strengthen the effectiveness of the emerging mythology.

Unlike the New South proponents of the 19th century, the Southern mythmakers tackling the emergence of a truly new paradigm in the 1960s and 70s seemed to be aware that the ultimate goals of the myth and the realities of their present lives were not

necessarily identical and that the influence of the mythology must be active and continuing if it were to remain relevant. As humanities scholar Willard B. Gatewood, Jr. suggested, “We in the South...have abundant reason to subject all regional images, including the latest ones, to close and critical scrutiny. Our past demonstrates only too graphically how images lend themselves to manipulation and how often we have been seduced and catastrophically misled by those at greatest variance with reality” (12). A contemporary awareness of the tragic Southern past may, however, “well serve as a useful antidote to some of the extravagances of the ahistorical mythmakers, adept at convincing themselves and others that what ought to be is what actually exists” (12).

An understanding of contemporary mythology is important for reasons other than merely being able to appreciate the artistic technique employed in describing particular visions of reality. Recent developments in communication theory have helped to explicate the rhetorical nature and persuasive consequences of public myths. Melvin DeFleur and Sandra Ball-Rokeach offer a model of mass media persuasion, drawing upon George Gabner’s cultivation theory as well as their own work, which has explanatory value for understanding how cultural myths are developed through public communication and how they function as persuasive strategies.

The communication process is essential to the construction of cultural myths and a shared social reality. In an effort to illuminate the process by which public communication contributes to creating and supporting public world views, DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach suggest that “as people communicate intensively over the years, selected assertions become regarded as true or correct metasymbolic representations of specific aspects of reality. Because of this process, our interpretations of reality, as well as

folkways and other social norms, are constructed as by-products of the biosocial process of communication.” From this perspective, the process by which cultural myths are generated and constructed becomes clearer. Feature articles in trusted publications, for example, as well as exposure to and repetition of other value-laden symbols and rituals, contribute to the Southerner’s construction of social reality. Social participation and a feeling of group membership are strengthened as members of society “imprint and recall socially constructed cultural beliefs about the factual nature of reality and the evaluation of that reality. . . . Such beliefs also make it possible for the people to form groups with complex organizational rules and ultimately to develop the social institutions of society itself” (139-40, 207).

When the cathartic events between 1954 and 1965 transformed the social and institutional structures of the South, the ensuing social and cultural chaos was due, at least in part, to the anxieties of participants in a threatened and obsolete cultural myth, frustrated by the inability of the familiar mythology to adequately explain the changes and determined to somehow make it work once again. Within the epistemological void left by an inadequate mythology and in the face of new social and institutional arrangements mandated by Congress and the Supreme Court, the contemporary mythmakers found it easier than had their predecessors to fashion a new mythology. Rather than reviving the old symbols or crudely transforming them from an agricultural to an industrial setting as had been done in an earlier New South, this new generation of communicators chose new symbols to redefine the past and project the future as guides for comprehending reality in the present. The new symbols and the values that they represented helped to construct a new mythology and a new definition of reality. The new

myth provided a workable and acceptable definition of the new institutional realities and allowed Southerners to accept and adapt to the dramatic social and cultural changes that had taken place in their region.

Having explored how public communication is essential in the construction of reality and a society's controlling mythology, and having examined how a group of contemporary Southerners constructed a new explanatory mythology for the post-*Brown vs. Board of Education* and post-Civil Rights Act South, we must also understand how such cultural myths function rhetorically and persuasively to gain new participants and influence attitudes, values, and behavior of other members of society. Once again, the model developed by DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach is instructive. They suggest that "mass communicated messages can be used to provide individuals with new and seemingly group-supported interpretations – social constructions of reality – regarding some phenomenon toward which they are acting. By doing so, it may be possible to mediate the conduct of individuals as they derive definitions of appropriate behavior and belief from suggested interpretations communicated to them" (138).

Thus when Reubin Askew, Terry Sanford, Emory Cunningham, or some other credible figure with access to a public forum and the channels of mass media provides a public vision of reality in the South, the receivers of the message may assume that the message is a reflection of "the Southern way of life." DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach explain that "persuasive messages presented via the mass media may provide the appearance of consensus regarding orientation and action with respect to a given object or goal of persuasion. That is, such messages can present definitions to audiences in such a way that listeners are led to believe that these are *socially sanctioned modes of orientation* [my

emphasis] their groups hold toward given objects or situations. The communicator thus provides social constructions of reality shortcutting the process of consensual validation, particularly with respect to objects or practices concerning which groups do not have fully institutionalized cultural interpretations” (226). Such a perspective also helps explain why the contemporary mythology, being presented in a mythic vacuum, became more successfully established than previous competing myths that had tried to challenge the old myth while it was functional and secure.

The power of a cultural myth, then, is demonstrated by its ability to define a reality. Since individuals usually form their self-perceptions and pattern their behavior with a social context, the generally held perceptions of social reality become instructive in determining the individual’s attitudes about events and institutions, the values they hold, the terms on which they interact with and respond to other members of the society, and the social and political discourse in which they engage and to which they respond. The mythic narrative presents normative roles that serve as models for appropriate behavior by demonstrating approved group values, maximizing individual rewards, and achieving group integration (DeFeur/Ball-Rokeach, 227). The new Southern mythmakers thus gained new adherents and supporters while simultaneously discrediting their opponents who clung to the old vision by suggesting that disciples of the old order were simply antiquated nonconformists.

In evaluating the rhetorical impact of the cultural mythology of the contemporary South, it is also important to understand, as Kenneth Boulding advised, that “the meaning of a message is the change which it produces in an image” (7). This image – or “socially sanctioned mode of orientation” – can, thus be affected by rhetorical arguments or

messages in ways that, according to Joseph Campbell, “cannot be judged as true or false, but as effective or ineffective, maturative or pathogenic” (qtd. in Polk, 63). By this standard, the rhetorical mythology of the contemporary South must be judged to have been effective in constructing a new and different social reality for the region. While the old mythology, in its manifestations as the myth of both the Old South and the pre-Civil Rights Act South, was decidedly elitist, the contemporary mythology is clearly egalitarian. The mythic theme of regional distinctiveness offered new middle- and lower-class heroes and rituals to demonstrate the uniqueness of Southern culture, while the mythic theme of place and community stresses the need for broad and active community involvement in future development decisions.

The prevailing rhetorical mythology that was formed in the late 1960s and early 70s is unquestionably different from the mythology that reigned in the first half of the 20th century, as the former posits a past and a future that can appeal to a much larger audience, it offers both a greater opportunity for participation and tangible symbols of a new reality, and it stresses more egalitarian values than did the myth that dominates the past. As a result of these accomplishments, the new mythology yielded significant results in action. Just as the old myths dictated defensive and reactionary behavior in the past, the contemporary cultural mythology serves to guide action in directions compatible with the values of a new social reality. As a result, blacks and progressive whites were being elected and appointed to public office, and all Southerners were gaining a greater opportunity to participate in the myth and enjoy the benefits of society, and both rural and urban development were being influenced to retain and encourage a sense of place and community. The contemporary mythology can be judged effective in constructing a new,

viable, and widely shared sociocultural reality, in gaining access to and becoming the dominant world view in the contemporary media, in recruiting new participants in the vision, and in rhetorically fostering new behavioral responses to contemporary problems and social affairs.

It is here that we are brought again to the basic focus of this study: the reciprocity of logos and mythos. Instead of establishing the cultural impact of media by providing and examining statistical information such as circulation numbers, audience demographics, etc., rhetorical scholar Leon Mayhew suggests exploring simply the effect of the language used (logos) upon the cultural development of the idea(s) in question (mythos). From a rhetorical theory perspective, Mayhew argues that “language, like other tools, can shape the user, channeling creative efforts into well-worn modes of argument, even when expressing novel ideas” (13). It is my intention in the next chapter to establish this relationship from first-hand accounts of the actual rhetorical process out of which definitive aspects of southern culture were crafted.

The Effective Functions of Myth in *Southern Living's* Early Rhetorical Strategy

Most of the new mythmakers of the transitional 1960s were from a younger generation than the guardians of the old myth and most were upper-middle class professionals with some degree of access to the public forum and the prevailing media of mass communication, as Stephen Smith explains in his exploration of the origins of modern Southern mythology. In his work, he discusses the shift in perception of historically accepted social constructs of heroes, community/family rituals, and the preservation of their agrarian lifestyle that occurred as the South struggled to create a new mythic structure. This contributes to a succinct explanation of the foundation upon which the mythic themes gained their utility within different media: The mythic theme of distinctiveness substituted new heroes and rituals that were much more egalitarian than those of old mythology, emphasizing new values and allowing a much larger segment of Southern society to confirm the reality of the myth. The mythic theme of place and community redefined the ancient struggle between rural agrarianism and urban industrialism, suggesting that the sense of place and the ties of community so important to Southerners can coexist with the forces of demographic change and economic development being experienced by the region. These were the values and symbols offered by the new mythmakers, and their access to the media allowed them to share their newly constructed reality with others across the South.

However, to fully understand the significant rhetorical opportunities these mythic themes offered the eager generation of mythmakers involved in *SL's* creation and early survival, we must briefly examine the purposeful work of their predecessors at

Progressive Farmer. The success of their truly progressive vision and rhetorically instrumental utilization of myth generated an environment of understanding, responding to, and often shaping the Southern perception of reality, clearly facilitating *SL*'s subsequent employment of myth in a significantly effective constitutive role, which ultimately distinguished *SL* among other regional and national publications of the era.

Founder Leonidas Polk died in 1892, not long after he had named *Progressive Farmer* writer and Raleigh native Clarence Poe editor. Under Poe's 67-year leadership, *Progressive Farmer* bought out fifteen other farm magazines, received national acclaim from five U.S. presidents, and introduced the concept of regional editions to American publishing. In a move that suggested a keen enterprising spirit and an earnest sense of the beginnings of a regional renaissance, the magazine relocated its headquarters from Raleigh to Birmingham, Alabama, which, at that time, was a transportation center intersected by seven railroads. Concerning itself with family life and farm life, *Progressive Farmer*'s influence in the early part of the 20th century is widely noted. Emory Cunningham, reflecting upon the foundations of *SL* said, "I think the greatest thing *Progressive Farmer* did was give farmers something to read" (Logue and McCalla, 24). No doubt the magazine had much farm, family, and even political influence, with its one million subscribers by 1930 and unique promotion of preservation and progress to farmers. Ever-crusading editor Poe was quick to instill in any new staff member that this influence was not to be taken lightly, and that it was, in effect, the primary mission and duty of the company, as eventual *Progressive Farmer/SL* transitional publisher, Dr. Alexander Nunn recalled Poe's words when he hired him: "Now Alec, you can never expect to make more than four thousand dollars in a year if you work for *Progressive*

Farmer. But you can influence for the better the lives of thousands of families” (Logue and McCalla, 25). Indeed, the entire staff was firmly convinced of Poe’s vision that *Progressive Farmer* could herald a new day for the South through continuing to address subscribers’ collective connection to the land and self-sustaining lifestyle in its technical trade articles on seed, fertilizer, water and soil charts, etc., while using editorial pages to promote the very new idea that the region’s best resource was its people, who deserved better than they were getting from the government, especially regarding education. Smith Moseley, who joined *Progressive Farmer* as an entry-level classified ad salesman, recalls that when asked not long after beginning his job about the company’s belief that the magazine shaped the very lives of its readers that he said, “I sponsor the hypothesis myself, maybe defensively.” He also notes that he wrote in a speech at the time that “*Progressive Farmer* is greater than the sum total of all human effort that has gone into its production. It has made a greater contribution to the education of the Southern farmer than many of the great universities, and, in truth, has been the University of the South” (Logue and McCalla, 27). So we can see evidence of the deliberate construction of the message that is demonstrated in the editorial posture of *Progressive Farmer* as its staff clearly relied upon Smith’s mythic theme of regional distinctiveness – promoting the unique ability of Southerners to achieve and embrace progress - to fulfill an instrumental role, steering the magazine’s rhetoric towards inducing judgment and action towards the public issues of community involvement and personal enrichment.

As the drastic decline in the farm population became evident in the late 1950s and early 1960s, members of *Progressive Farmer*’s marketing staff also began to notice a consumer trend that had the potential to create a significant opportunity for the publishing

industry. *This Week* magazine, a national supplement in Sunday editions of newspapers, published a map showing that the coverage of national magazines was especially weak in the South, a weakness that coincided with not only the decline in farm populations, but also the increase in suburban/city-dwellers across the region, and, as a result, the increased potential for economic opportunity and development for both individuals and communities. Then-*Progressive Farmer* advertising executive, Emory Cunningham, presented a report to the company's board of directors, which he recalls preparing, saying that he really wanted to ask, "Does the Old Guard intend to publish only a farm magazine, as it has since 1886? Or will we roll the dice on a new magazine for the newly prosperous South?" Hoping for matched enthusiasm from the board, he formally recommended that the magazine, "effective with October, 1963, issue, change the name of 'The Progressive Home' [section] to 'Southern Living' and begin to position as many as possible of our general and home type advertisements in this section," ostensibly preparing the Homes Department of *Progressive Farmer* to become a free-standing magazine called *Southern Living*. His idea was that the new magazine would include the *SL* pages from *Progressive Farmer* plus "additional editorial pages to make *Southern Living* acceptable to subscribers and advertisers," and he expressed his fervent hope that the staff of the new magazine be "mentally ready to produce the different editorial concept required to serve the audience we visualize for *Southern Living*" (Logue and McCalla, 31-2). These events, and especially Cunningham's communication of his optimistic sense of the ability of *SL* to meet the needs of a "newly prosperous" audience at that crucial time, brought about subsequent editorial decisions establishing the role that certain mythic themes would take in the new magazine's editorial content.

Logue and McCalla point out that Cunningham, in 1963, “imagined articles on positive aspects of the South,” and was so sure that a magazine for the South would be successful because, quite simply, they say, “the South was *different*. Its climate. Its history. Its long struggle after losing the Civil War.” In addition, they note that “the same sense of place, of home, of the land, of family, of dispossession, of lost promise that gave distinctive literary voices to Faulkner and Wolfe and Welty and Agee and O’Connor and Penn Warren and Ellison could be found in the lives of Southerners, rich and poor, black and white” (33). Of tailoring this sense of the South to a target audience, McCalla notes, “*Southern Living* is about people. We are dedicated to the premise that there are certain regional differences in the climate, in geography, in the way Southerners live and work, in history, progress, challenges, and opportunities that make the South unique” (Logue and McCalla, 45). In these statements, we see the emergence of the constitutive role that Smith’s primary mythical themes of place and community and distinctiveness were to take through the rhetoric of *SL*, in its editors’ holistic view of the unique facets comprising Southern culture that must be authentically communicated to readers in a publication primarily about their lives.

Utilization of mythic themes was often particularly evident in the collaboration between the editors and advertising staff, as they devised early marketing strategy with the same sense of purpose and awareness as many editorial content decisions. *SL*’s first marketing director, Jim Devira, reflected, “We were almost too early with *Southern Living*. We were close on the heels of the Civil Rights Movement in the South and a lot of awful publicity. But in 1965 the South had just begun to grow, and that was our story. Of course, the differences in the South, the many ways *Southern Living* serves those

differences, was our main story. The South became the biggest, fastest-growing market in America. Advertisers couldn't ignore it. And no other magazine was addressing it" (Logue and McCalla, 71). During the magazine's early years, a substantial component of the advertising sales budget went towards garnering advertising profits from the travel industry. During a sales meeting in 1965, Georgia's director of tourism, Bill Hardman, told *Southern Living* sales associates, "You better get out and sell the South." Hardman, recalling the meeting, said, "I used the old Southern Railroad slogan: 'The last half of the twentieth century belongs to the South.' And I tell you what, it has" (Logue and McCalla, 47). More than anything, however, marketing strategy in the early days of *SL* revolved around different utilizations of mythic theme of distinctiveness, especially as the advertising associates were called upon to sell the South to national advertisers in other regions. Of course, two of the most distinctive (and marketable) features of the South are its appealing climate and vibrant physical beauty, which Logue and McCalla recall were used to great effect in a multiple-projector slide show prepared by the magazine's marketing staff for a particularly memorable sales trip to New York: "Manhattan. Dead of winter. Cold. Rainy. Nasty. The [slide] show went on at presentations all over the city. And the good gray *New York Times* came out [the next day] and across the top of the business page was the headline: 'Cruel and Unusual Punishment' - that a small Southern magazine would inflict the beauty of spring and flowers and birds and mindless happiness on a freezing, winter-bound city of ruthless advertisers. It was a smash hit, of course. The magazine's first big-time publicity in the big city" (65).

In another mythic vein, early editorials provide significant perspective regarding the particular utility of the myth of place and community as it aided in the rhetorical

transition of *Progressive Farmer's* more technically-oriented message concerned with improving rural life to one *SL* was attempting to direct towards a more affluent, media-savvy audience, who had a more contemporary interest in the community and economic development of Southern cities. Expressing some of the important early editorial concerns of *SL* in a special section of the magazine entitled, "Introduction to the Future of the South," publisher Cunningham stated: "People in the South are close to the land, whether they make a living directly from it or seek it out for recreation and inspiration. That's not to say Southerners have always treated the land the best way. There have been some hard lessons learned, and there are many more problems today that need attention." Promoting the new idea that growth and place are compatible forces in the cultural mythology of the contemporary South, the editorial advocated "using land well without destroying its goodness" and suggested that "you don't have to be against growth and development if you want to see the landscape protected. The South can have both if we will only exercise land use as an art." He continued, completing the implementation of this mythic theme of place and community in rhetorically instrumental and constitutive functions : "If there is a single purpose to this special inventory of facts and ideas, it is to measure the quality of life offered, and threatened, by the growth and prosperity of today's South. Can we keep our love of place and family and distinctiveness as a people, and our landscape in its beauty and order, and absorb the growth and density of a more concentrated culture?" (Cunningham, 2) Here, Cunningham attempts to induce judgment regarding the public issues of community development as well as the preservation of natural beauty, while attempting to appeal to and shape mainstream thought by introducing the cultural concept of balanced progress.

However, the examination of a “White Paper” in 1968 in response to *SL*’s first extended period of internal disorientation, as a result of a series of setbacks such as declining circulation numbers and key employee exits, provides the most significant insight into editors’ observations of evolving audience sensibilities, identification of important themes at hand, and subsequent construction of the rhetorical strategy that *SL* would abide by for nearly the next four decades; and as significant, it demonstrates the beginnings of reciprocity between the myth and the message. Within the text of the White Paper, young editors Logue and McCalla collaborated to communicate their recommendations for a renewed set of rhetorically effective messages and intentions that could offer the most potential for the magazine and its audience. Weaving the mythic themes of distinctiveness and place and community throughout, Logue and McCalla called for “a magazine that will illustrate those aspects of living which are uniquely Southern,” “extensive use of color photography to capitalize on the South’s scenic beauty,” “general stories from time to time that are so uniquely Southern that the most obvious magazine to publish it would be *Southern Living*,” “major emphasis placed upon travel and its related activities ... capitalizing on the South’s great variety of scenic attractions, historical landmarks, mountains, lakes, rivers, thousands of miles of ocean beaches ... and its temperate climate ... to make it the playground of eastern America,” and “short items of a practical nature to show how Southerners have creatively solved problems and increased the convenience and comfort of their homes” (140-41). Here, we see the editors in an ambitious campaign that not only seeks to more effectively and precisely utilize the very accessible mythic themes that have been employed so frequently *SL* for so many years, but also communicates an intention to begin contributing to the

myth itself with this blitz of definitive strategies for almost any conceivable rhetorical situation.

SL would continue to adhere to this strategy with great success and thematic consistency in the early years, just as it continues to today, only occasionally returning to its crusading roots to lobby within its pages for the preservation of various wilderness habitats and historic homes in locations throughout the South. And, echoing Emory Cunningham's attempt to insert the idea of balanced progress into the Southern mentality, Logue and McCalla note that *SL* "has been a strong but reasonable 'voice in the wilderness,' not to stop thoughtful development but to help protect what is best about the South's unique landscape, both in the wild and in urban and neighborhood settings" (157). The notion that *SL* obtained a "voice" through its response to readers and periodic crusades, implies a definite contribution to and solid position within the collective Southern mentality as well as in the mythic themes that shape it. Indeed, this influence has been noted by a wide range of scholars, writers and fellow publishers. Southern studies scholar Carl Kell has suggested that the "fundamental rhetorical posture of *Southern Living* is to make the South a more desirable place by producing major investigative, persuasive essays and feature stories that demonstrate positive solutions to the knotty personal and public community problems of the South" (2). However, perhaps Southern culture scholar/writer John Shelton Reed said it most clearly when he stated that, "Over the years critics have sniped at *Southern Living* for its unclouded picture of the sunny South. On balance, however, it has helped to make the South a better place, with healthier and more interesting food on its tables, more varied and appropriate plants in its gardens, and more comfortable and attractive homes (most of them, to be sure, in

the style known in-house as ‘Junior League Georgian’). It has also published some good writing about the South, much of it by the magazine’s own staff, and it has honored some admirable people who have done admirable things in their communities. It has even crusaded a little bit, in its [own] way ...” (Minding the South, 178).

Conclusions

It was my intention in this study to examine the effect of the Southern myth upon *SL* during a time of evolution for both Southern culture and myth, highlighting the emerging mythical themes, exploring their origins, demonstrating their appearance within cultural outlets, or media, and finally demonstrating their utility through a study of *SL*, in its creators' formulation of its strategy as a rhetorical entity. Mythological analysis is an incredibly effective tool not only for examining the existence and influence of myth and mythical themes within rhetorical situations, but also for establishing the cultural relevance of both the myth and the rhetorical entity, as it requires the exploration and review of past and current cultural perspectives from a wide range of disciplines. And it is my hope that this study serves to strengthen the understanding of the rhetorical environment, motivations, and disposition that in many ways provided a template for the successful structuring and marketing of community-based and regional publications, as evidenced by the myriad of magazines currently within this genre.

This study is, as stated, vital to the understanding of the region, because of the exposure to the process of creating the region's identity, and that it is not necessarily a single event in history, but one that occurs again and again, sometimes occurring multiple times within a generation. The study of *SL* at this time truly provides a unique opportunity to observe what has become a cultural icon at the beginning of its long tenure during a rebirth and reordering of the culture it responds to and, in many respects, helped define. Contemporary rhetorical theory regarding mythological analysis was especially instructive for this study, and exploring the myth's instrumental and constructive

functions enhanced my ability to explain the significant impact of myth upon *SL*'s editorial and marketing strategies. It became clear that a firm relationship between the evolving cultural myth and *SL*'s intended rhetorical message existed from its beginning, as editors continually expressed an awareness of their audience's perceived reality, and endeavored to construct their editorial posture and overall rhetorical strategy correspondingly. The mythical themes of distinctiveness and place and community are key to understanding *SL* at this time, as they are the primary rhetorical beacons guiding both editorial and marketing strategy to fulfill a constitutive mythical role in their use of such accessible and essential elements of Southern culture, while, at the same time, reworking these themes into a more positive evolution. These mythical themes are still evident and relevant in today's South because, in large part, of the unique reciprocity of the myth and the message that resulted in a new, confident cultural identity so successfully promoted within the pages of *SL*: one that reveres its past, but appreciates with a progressive spirit the unique resources of its land and its people.

Important issues of mythological and social impact remain to be studied regarding the South and its post-Civil Rights Act messages. Other mythical themes such as racial and gender equality would lend important perspectives from the various rhetorical outlets that were initiated during this era. Certainly these themes existed to some extent during the period of *SL* I explored; however, the mythical themes of distinctiveness and place and community lent themselves to a study that could achieve the more focused goals I intended, as I would have felt compelled to explore more definitive sources of racial and gender issues than time and space would allow.

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