

THE RHETORIC OF SOUTHERN IDENTITY:  
DEBATING THE SHIFT FROM DIVISION TO IDENTIFICATION  
IN THE TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY SOUTH

A Dissertation

by

REBECCA BRIDGES WATTS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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December 2003

Major Subject: Speech Communication

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## ABSTRACT

The Rhetoric of Southern Identity: Debating the Shift from Division to Identification in the Turn-of-the-Century South. (December 2003)

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Recent debates as to the place of Old South symbols and institutions in the South of the new millennium are evidence of a changing order in the South. I examine -- from a rhetorical perspective informed by Kenneth Burke's theory of identification and division -- four debates that have taken place in the South and/or about the South over roughly the past decade, 1995 to the present. In this decade, Southerners and interested others have debated such issues as 1) admitting women to the Virginia Military Institute and the Citadel; 2) integrating displays of public art in Richmond to feature Confederates and African Americans side by side; 3) continuing to fly the Confederate battle flag in public spaces such as the South Carolina Capitol or including it in the designs of state flags such as those of Georgia and Mississippi; and 4) allowing Mississippi Senator Trent Lott, who seemed to speak out in support of the South's segregated past, to continue in his position of Senate leadership. Looking at each of these debates, it is clear that at issue in each is whether the ruling order of the South should continue to be one of division or whether that order should be supplanted by identification. Judging from the outcomes of the four debates analyzed here, the order of division seems to be

waning just as the order of identification seems to be waxing in influence over the turn-of-the-millennium South.

But a changing South is no less a distinctive, continuing South. I argue that a distinctive Southern culture based on a sense of order has existed and continues to exist amidst the larger American culture. If some form of "Southernism" is to continue as a distinctive mindset and way of life in the twenty-first century, Southerners will need to learn to strike a balance between their past, with its ruling order of division, and the present, with its ruling order of identification.

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## INTRODUCTION

"The past is never dead. It's not even past."

--Gavin Stevens on the past, Act I Scene III of William Faulkner's *Requiem for a Nun*<sup>1</sup>

W. J. Cash, in *The Mind of the South*, describes the South as "a tree with many age rings, with its limbs and trunk bent and twisted by all the winds of the years, but with its tap root in the Old South. . . . The mind of the section, that is, is continuous with the past. . . . So far from being modernized, in many ways it has actually always marched away, as to this day it continues to do, from the present toward the past."<sup>2</sup> This concern with history, with conserving the ways of the past, resulted in Southerners<sup>3</sup> having a distinctive mindset, a different way of life from the rest of the nation. And while Cash recognizes that there are there are "many Souths," that there exists valuable geographical and cultural diversity within the region, he nonetheless argues that, "the fact remains that there is also one South. . . . it is easy to trace throughout the region . . . a fairly definite mental pattern, associated with a fairly definite social pattern -- a complex of established relationships."<sup>4</sup> This distinctive "mind of the South" is one characterized by a tendency to conserve its past social hierarchy or "complex of established relationships." This sentiment is evidenced in the Southern conservative rhetorician Richard Weaver's argument that "Distinctions of many kinds will have to be

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This dissertation follows the style of *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*.

restored" if the contemporary world is to recapture the sense of order that he believed was one of the admirable traits of "old school" Southerners.<sup>5</sup>

But while Weaver wanted the South and the nation to return to some of the more clear-cut social divisions of the past, at the same time he advised workers of this old yet "new order" to remember that "Considerations of strategy and tactics forbid the use of symbols of lost causes. There cannot be a return to the Middle Ages or the Old South under slogans identified with them. The principles must be studied and used, but in such presentation that mankind will feel the march is forward. And so it will be, to all effects."<sup>6</sup> Weaver likely would be disappointed in contemporary Southern conservatives, for they have largely ignored his rhetorical counsel. Many of those who most vocally declared themselves Southerners at the turn from the twentieth to the twenty-first century have made it their mission to defend Lost Cause symbols and institutions -- and with such vigor that they seem to be fighting the Civil War all over again. In so doing, these past-oriented Southerners risk repeating a mistake C. Vann Woodward saw Southerners committing in the 1950s and 1960s: "If Southernism is allowed to become identified with a last ditch defense of segregation, it will increasingly lose its appeal among the younger generation. Many will be tempted to reject their entire regional identification, even the name 'Southern,' in order to dissociate themselves from the one discredited aspect."<sup>7</sup>

The more recent debates as to the place of Old South symbols and institutions in the South in the new millennium are evidence of a changing order in the South. But a changing South is no less a distinctive, continuing South. I argue that a distinctive

Southern culture based on a sense of order has existed and continues to exist amidst the larger American culture. If some form of "Southernism" is to continue as a distinctive mindset and way of life in the twenty-first century, Southerners will need to learn to strike a balance between their past, with its ruling order of division, and the present, with its ruling order of identification. If Southerners can do this-- find unity in their division and distinctiveness in their identification -- they may even be able to serve as a model for the increasingly divided United States.

### A Distinctive South

Has a South distinctive from the rest of the United States, while remaining a vital part of it, ever really existed? And if so, does such a distinctive South exist still today? Such questions are foundational to any consideration of Southern identity, including this consideration of the contemporary rhetoric of Southern identity. Some scholars would answer these two questions in the negative, making the argument, as Cash describes, that the South "is all a figment of the imagination, that the South really exists only as a geographical region of the United States." To such claims, Cash responds, "Nobody, however, has ever taken them seriously. And rightly."<sup>8</sup> Obviously, those who place themselves in the interdisciplinary field of Southern studies share the basic assumption that yes, the South does exist as a distinctive cultural entity. Scholars of Southern history, literature, and culture have, over the years, developed a number of theories to explain *why* the South is distinctive. Here I will survey the theories that shaped my thinking and led me to the thesis that the source of Southern distinctiveness has been

Southerners' concern, throughout their history, with order.

Ulrich B. Phillips, in his 1928 article "The Central Theme of Southern History," attributed Southern distinctiveness to its omnipresent race consciousness: "until an issue shall arise predominant over the lingering one of race, political solidarity at the price of provincial status is maintained to keep assured doubly, trebly sure that the South shall remain 'a white man's country.'"<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, in their 1930 collection *I'll Take My Stand*, the Twelve Southerners argued that what made the South not only distinctive but also superior was its agrarian lifestyle and economy in contrast to the urban, industrial lifestyle and economy of other regions. Though each of the twelve focused on different aspects of Southern culture, all agree in their support for "a Southern way of life against what may be called the American or prevailing way; and all as much agree that the best terms in which to represent the distinction are contained in the phrase, *Agrarian versus Industrial*."<sup>10</sup> Both Phillips' and the Twelve Southerners' theories of Southern distinctiveness are rooted in the "peculiar institution" of plantation slavery, as it is what initially made the South distinctive in terms of its racial makeup and relations as well as in its patterns of agricultural development.

Just as slavery is at the root of the centrality of race and agriculture in the Southern identity, so too is it at the root of another central element of the Southern identity: its loss of the Civil War and its bid to secede from the Union. In the 1940s and 1950s, first Richard Weaver and then C. Vann Woodward propounded the thesis that what has made the Southern experience distinctive from the American experience has been the region's firsthand knowledge of tragedy and loss, first through the Civil War

and then through Reconstruction. As Weaver argued in *The Southern Tradition at Bay: A History of Postbellum Thought*, "One might hesitate that the South, with such weaknesses, has anything to offer our age. But there is something in its heritage, half lost, half derided, betrayed by its own sons, which continues to fascinate the world. . . . It is this refuge of sentiments and values, of spirituality, of belief in the word, of reverence for symbolism, whose existence haunts the nation."<sup>11</sup> This acquaintance with loss, derision, and betrayal resulted in Southern distinctiveness through "the Southerner's discipline in tragedy," because "Belief in tragedy is essentially un-American . . . If we are in for a time of darkness and trouble, the Southern philosophy, because it is not based upon optimism, will have better power to console than the national dogmas."<sup>12</sup>

In a similar vein, Woodward, in his essay, "The Search for Southern Identity," contrasted five aspects of American and Southern history to prove his contention that the experience of the South has been different from that of mainstream America in large part because of slavery and the War lost to protect states' rights to uphold it. Whereas America has experienced "economic abundance," the South has been better acquainted with "poverty" and "[g]enerations of scarcity and want."<sup>13</sup> While America boasts a tradition of "success and invincibility," the South has tasted the cup of "frustration, failure, and defeat."<sup>14</sup> Though America has embraced a belief in "innocence," "moral superiority," and "human perfectibility," the South has had to deal with a "tortured conscience," a "preoccupation . . . with guilt, with the reality of evil," and "tragedy."<sup>15</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville observed that while Americans are "born free," many in the South were born into slavery.<sup>16</sup> Finally, Woodward echoed author Thornton Wilder's

contention that Americans are by nature "abstract" and "disconnected,"<sup>17</sup> in contrast to the centrality of "place" in Southern culture, especially in the literature of such Southern authors as Eudora Welty and William Faulkner. Overall, Woodward argued that the South's distinctive experience of loss and tragedy is "a dimension of historical experience that America very much needs, a heritage that is far more closely in line with the common lot of mankind than the national legends of opulence and success and innocence."<sup>18</sup>

Later, in 1977, Carl Degler argued in *Place over Time: The Continuity of Southern Distinctiveness* that it is the very continuity of certain aspects of Southern culture -- including race consciousness (a la Phillips) and agriculture (a la the Twelve Southerners) -- from colonial times through the present that has made the people of the South distinctive:

The South's distinctiveness presents a problem to those who would talk about national character, for southerners indubitably live in America; but equally indubitably, they are not like other Americans. They are more conservative, more nationalistic, more self-identified, more defensive, and more romantic than other Americans -- or so the polls and subjective studies tell us. Their differences can be measured rather objectively and precisely, too. Southerners are less rich, less urban, less diverse demographically and religiously, and more likely to be black than the rest of Americans.<sup>19</sup>

Degler argued that the "individualism and lack of social discipline" that caused the South to lose the Civil War "surely can be traced in large degree to the agricultural nature of



the antebellum South, with its enduring frontier, its widespread violence, its lack of urbanization. All of these can be traced back to slavery."<sup>20</sup> This defeat, in turn, "enhanced the distinctiveness of the South. . . . No other Americans have experienced directly an army of occupation."<sup>21</sup> In the years following Reconstruction, "The fundamental difference between the sections in regard to race was the institutionalization of white supremacy in the South through legal segregation and disenfranchisement."<sup>22</sup> Degler embraced and connected the theories of those scholars who came before him by integrating the elements of race, agriculture, and the Lost Cause of the Confederacy within his theory of Southern distinctiveness.

While Degler emphasized continuity in his theory of Southern distinctiveness, Louis D. Rubin, Jr. stressed change. But like Degler, Rubin also saw in Southern history the quality of continuity -- but a continuity that is distinctive in its ability to weather change. Rubin, in his 1980 volume *The American South: Portrait of a Culture*, hypothesized that the South is distinctive in its very ability to retain its identity through the many changes of time. The South, Rubin observed, "has changed a great deal -- it is always changing, and in recent decades the change has been especially dramatic. But there is little conclusive evidence that it is changing into something that is less markedly southern than in the past."<sup>23</sup> Instead, Rubin argued that, "the South has long had a habit of incorporating seemingly disruptive change within itself, and continuing to be the South. . . . Each juncture in the region's history . . . has been proclaimed as signaling [sic] the end of the line, so far as the preservation of regional identity and distinctiveness are concerned. Yet an identifiable and visible South remain."<sup>24</sup> The ability of the South

to endure not in spite of but *because of* the countless changes in its social order, Rubin emphasized, is what has given the South its distinctive identity.

### There Is Nothing New under the Sun: Division and the South

While scholars of the South such as Phillips, the Fugitive Agrarians, Weaver, Woodward, Degler, and Rubin have all articulated their various theories of what has created and maintains a distinctive Southern identity, I have formulated my own theory. Rooted in the work of these and other scholars, my theory seeks both to account for the maintenance of a distinctive Southern identity thus far as well as to offer a potential new direction for the continuation of a distinctive Southern identity. Considering the four debates analyzed rhetorically in the sections that follow, as well as the theories of Southern distinctiveness discussed earlier, what stands out to me as the unifying theme thus far in the quest for Southern identity is a concern with order. Weaver also discerned in Southern distinctiveness a concern with order: "Civilization is measured by its power to create and enforce distinctions. . . . To the extent that the South has preserved social structure and avoided the creation of the masses, it has maintained the only kind of world in which values can long survive."<sup>25</sup> Through these debates as to the propriety of continuing to venerate Old South symbols and institutions in the changed rhetorical situation of the contemporary or New South, the common thread of order -- in particular, the order of division -- runs through the issues of slavery, secession, states' rights, and segregation.

What made the South distinctive through the many years in which slavery,

secession, states' rights, and segregation were the rule is that those who led the South -- those endowed with the power to determine how it would be ordered -- chose to order Southern life by keeping its people divided. First through slavery and then through segregation, Southern leaders sought order by creating and maintaining divisions amongst the South's people -- principally according to race, but also according to gender and socioeconomic status, and often through some combination of these factors. And through their quest for states' rights through secession and other means, Southern leaders sought order through creating and maintaining divisions between the states -- principally between the South and the other regions of the United States. By keeping its own people divided in these ways both from one another and from the rest of the nation, those who led the South created and maintained a distinctive Southern identity or way of life from the earliest days of the Republic through to the middle of the twentieth century.

At the time of the Constitutional Convention, tensions already existed between the slaveholding and nonslaveholding states. These factions differed in their view as to whether slaves should be counted toward a state's population for the purposes of legislative apportionment. The slaveholding states -- ironically, considering that slaves were in other matters considered non-persons -- wanted slaves to count toward their states' populations, while the nonslaveholding states did not. A compromise between the two positions was reached. This compromise, known as the three-fifths rule, allowed each slave to be counted as three-fifths of a person toward a state's population for the purposes of determining how many representatives that state could send to the House. Another aspect of the compromise between the two camps, as well as between large and

small states, dictated that the number of senators be the same for every state, while the number of representatives would be proportional according to population.

While this early conflict over how to count slaves in the population was ameliorated through such compromises, by the early 1800s new tensions flared between the Northern, more industrial states and the Southern, more agricultural states. Southern political leaders such as John C. Calhoun believed the North was taking advantage of the South through the imposition of unfair tariffs, which impacted Southern businessmen more than their Northern counterparts. In 1828, Calhoun, though writing anonymously, proposed via the *South Carolina Exposition and Protest* a system of compromise known as the concurrent majority or nullification. This compromise would have allowed a state that was dissatisfied with a particular piece of legislation the option of nullifying it, which is to say that said state would have been able to opt out of particular laws which it found to go against its interests as a state. Such a compromise, Calhoun believed, would allow for majority rule but with greater protections of minority rights. However appealing this proposal may have been in Calhoun's abstract, philosophical mind, not even his fellow Southerners accepted this potential compromise in practice, and so relations between the two factions -- the nonslaveholding, industrial North and the slaveholding, agricultural South -- continued to deteriorate.

Tensions between the Northern, nonslaveholding states and the Southern, slaveholding states continued to increase as the nation dealt with the question of whether or not to expand slavery into the new territories. The Senate debate amongst the Great Triumvirate -- John C. Calhoun, Daniel Webster, and Henry Clay -- led to the

Compromise of 1850.<sup>26</sup> Championed by Clay, this compromise admitted the newly acquired California as a free state, stopped slavery in the District of Columbia, divided the rest of the newly acquired Mexican land into the territories of New Mexico and Utah without declaring them slave or free, and required strict enforcement of the fugitive slave law.<sup>27</sup> However, as history was to bear out, this compromise would not last. The Southern, slaveholding states continued to grow dissatisfied. With the secession of South Carolina and Lincoln's stance that the Union remain intact, the Civil War ensued.

Though the Union won the War and the Confederate States were forced to return to (or remain in) the Union, a spirit of having fought honorably for their Lost Cause came to the fore amongst many Southerners as they struggled under the rigors of Reconstruction. Once the South was free of the yoke of federally enforced Reconstruction, it did not take long for states and municipalities to cement the spirit of white supremacy through institutionalized segregation, despite the seeming freedoms promised to former slaves and their descendants through the Emancipation Proclamation and Reconstruction.

However, with the rise of the civil rights movement after World War II, this order of division was brought into question in the South and elsewhere. White Southerners stubbornly sought to maintain this order through the efforts of political leaders such as George Wallace and Strom Thurmond and through the grassroots efforts of White Citizens' Councils and the Ku Klux Klan. But the combination of efforts by civil rights leaders such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and organizations such as the Southern Christian Leadership Conference with Supreme Court rulings such as *Brown v.*

*Board of Education* meant that a new order was coming to the fore in the South and throughout the United States -- the order of unification or identification. By federally mandating that people of different races could no longer be kept separate in public institutions such as schools, both aspects of the South's previous identity-maintaining order of division were struck down by the courts: No longer could the South's people be divided amongst themselves according to race (at least not legally), and no longer could the South call upon their sacred states' rights to maintain their division in this respect from the rest of the nation. Not surprisingly, such sweeping changes would not be accepted readily by white Southerners -- it would take decades for the integration mandated by the courts to be accepted in a majority of Southern hearts and minds. In the interim, those self-identifying themselves as Southerners took actions to maintain their preferred order of division.

While the courts could mandate a change in the ordering of institutions, Southerners sought to maintain their Southern identity of division on an emotional or spiritual level through symbols, especially symbols of the Lost Cause of the Confederacy. The religion or myth of the Lost Cause is the belief that though the Confederate States of America lost the Civil War and thus their bid to secede, the South still won in the sense that Southerners believed that they (or their forebears) had fought on behalf of what was right, and consequently could maintain their sense of honor. The idea of the Lost Cause, as Gaines Foster explained in the *Encyclopedia of the South*, "acknowledges the defeat of the Confederacy" while "suggest[ing] the South had fought less for independence than for philosophical principles that might yet triumph." The

Lost Cause is viewed as having "help[ed] southerners assimilate defeat" and as having "unif[ied] southern society."<sup>28</sup> Thus, when the civil rights movement swept across America, especially across the South, those white Southerners who were averse to the changes advocated by the movement resurrected Lost Cause symbols, such as the Confederate battle flag, to rally others to the defense of segregation as the Southern way of life. Calling upon such symbols provided them with a way of conveying that though they were losing their battle against integration, they remained in the revered tradition of the Lost Cause -- losing, but maintaining their belief in what they felt was the superior order. By the turn from the twentieth to the twenty-first century, legalized integration had been well established and the voices of various identity groups, including many previously silenced through the order of division, became more influential. At this time, though unification or identification was the legally established order, division was still the ruling symbolic or spiritual order amongst many "unreconstructed," self-identifying Southerners.

#### Burke on Order: Identification and Division

Kenneth Burke, in his definition of man, observed that we are "goaded by the spirit of hierarchy (or moved by the sense of order)/and rotten with perfection."<sup>29</sup> This statement certainly is true of the particular group of men and women under study here. Southerners, especially, seem "moved by the sense of order," which includes "the incentives of organization and status."<sup>30</sup> They often have been driven to pursue their particular brand of order -- division -- to such lengths that they make the seemingly

innocuous idea of order "rotten with perfection." Burke described how order can become rotten: "For, despite any cult of good manners and humility, to the extent that a social structure becomes differentiated, with privileges to some that are denied to others, there are the conditions for a kind of 'built in' pride. King and peasant are 'mysteries' to one another. Those 'Up' are guilty of not being 'Down,' those 'Down' are certainly guilty of not being 'Up.'"<sup>31</sup> Burke classified these differentiated privileges of rotten order as the "secular analogues of 'original sin.'"<sup>32</sup> Disguised by the veneer of Southern gentility and civility (as apt an example as any of a "cult of good manners and humility"), the white South's desire to maintain its strictly enforced social hierarchy devolved into its staunch defense of segregation's system of giving "privileges to some that are denied to others." And so it is that the men and women of the South have wrestled with their sins -- sins that have sprung from their yielding to the temptation to take their distinctive order of division too far, past any possibility of perfection and into the realm of rottenness and pride. As Burke elaborated in his explication of entelechy, or the principle of perfection, within the "drive to make one's life 'perfect,'" lies the potential "that such efforts at perfection might cause the unconscious striver great suffering."<sup>33</sup>

Two basic types of order are discussed throughout Burke's body of work: identification and division. At first thought, these two orders seem quite opposite of one another: Identification entails the joining or reconciling of people and their interests, while division involves keeping people and their interests separated or segregated. However, Burke believed that "identification implies division,"<sup>34</sup> arguing that "Identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division.



Identification is compensatory to division. If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity. If men were wholly and truly of one substance, absolute communication would be of man's very essence."<sup>35</sup> Without division, there would be no aspiration to attain identification or consubstantiality. Further, Burke also allowed for the possibility of simultaneous identification and division, as seen in the following scenario:

A is not identical with his colleague, B. But insofar as their interests are joined, A is identified with B. Or he may identify himself with B even when their interests are not joined, if he assumes that they are, or is persuaded to believe so. . . . two persons may be identified in terms of some principle they share in common, an 'identification' that does not deny their distinctness.<sup>36</sup>

In other words, just because two entities are identified or consubstantial in one respect does not require that they lose their other distinctiveness or differentiation in other respects. Two entities may determine that their interests are joined in one or more respects, but they nonetheless remain two distinct entities.

Another avenue in which Burke discussed order is in terms of pieties, which codify society's "*sense of what properly goes with what*."<sup>37</sup> Designating which ideas or people belong together and which apart is bound up with Burke's overarching ideas about identification and division. In his explication of the concept of perspective by incongruity, Burke advocated that "we deliberately cultivate the use of contradictory concepts."<sup>38</sup> Such purposeful identification of entities formerly divided "should be deliberately cultivated for the purpose of experimentally wrenching apart all those

molecular combinations of adjective and noun, substantive and verb, which still remain with us."<sup>39</sup> The resulting "new perspective," which Burke discerned in Marx's theory of class consciousness, "realigns something so profoundly ethical as our categories of allegiance" in such a way that "members of the same race or nation who had formerly thought of themselves as allies become enemies, and members of different races or nations who had formerly thought of themselves as enemies become allies."<sup>40</sup> In this spirit, Burke believed (or hoped) that "The segregational, or dissociative state cannot endure -- and must make way for an associative, or congregational state."<sup>41</sup> By bringing side by side people or ideas typically considered discordant through a "comic frame" such as perspective by incongruity, the "symbol-using" and "symbol-misusing" man of Burke's definition has the *potential* of overcoming his propensities for being "separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making," for being "goaded by the spirit of hierarchy," and for being "rotten with perfection."<sup>42</sup>

### The Issue of Order in Recent Debates over Southern Identity

In the four sections that comprise the body of this dissertation, I examine -- from a rhetorical perspective informed by the theory of Kenneth Burke -- four debates that have taken place in the South and/or about the South over roughly the past decade, 1995 to the present. In this decade, Southerners and interested others have debated such issues as 1) admitting women to the Virginia Military Institute and the Citadel; 2) integrating displays of public art in Richmond to feature Confederates and African Americans side by side; 3) continuing to fly the Confederate battle flag in public spaces

such as the South Carolina Capitol or including it in the designs of state flags such as Georgia's; and 4) allowing Mississippi Senator Trent Lott, who seemed to speak out in support of the South's segregated past, to continue holding a position of Senate leadership. Looking at each of these debates, it is clear that at issue in each is whether the ruling order of the South should continue to be one of division or whether that order should be supplanted by identification. Judging from the outcomes of the four debates analyzed here, the order of division seems to be waning just as the order of identification seems to be waxing in influence over the turn-of-the-millennium South.

I begin my rhetorical analysis of these debates with the section, "Social Mystery in the Virginia Military Institute Gender Integration Debate," in which I examine the 1995-96 debate as to the propriety of admitting women to the previously all-male yet state-funded VMI. Around the time of the VMI debate, a parallel debate was taking place concerning the admission of women to South Carolina's Citadel as well. Here I choose to focus on the VMI debate as it was more focused on principles, whereas the Citadel debate was more ad hominem, focused as it was on the efforts of a particular young woman, Shannon Faulkner, to be admitted to that school. At VMI (as well as the Citadel), identification was and is inculcated amongst "Institute men" or "citizen-soldiers" through a highly structured class system of discipline and governance. However, the all-male tradition of VMI created a wall of division, separating those within VMI's system of social mystery (men) from those outside of it (women) on three levels: gendered social mystery, martial social mystery, and Southern social mystery. With the Supreme Court ruling of June 1996, VMI was required to admit women into

the walls of its fortress-like campus steeped in Southern martial tradition. By 2000, a female cadet held a leadership position, and in 2001 VMI marked the first graduation of female "Institute men."

Next, in the section, "When Richmond Gained Perspective by Incongruity: Juxtaposing Symbols of Old South Tradition and New South Change in the Confederate Capital," I analyze two closely related debates over public art that gripped Richmond, Virginia, in 1995-96 and 1999 respectively. The 1995-96 debate was focused on the propriety of permanently placing a statue of Richmond native Arthur Ashe -- a tennis champion, social activist, and author -- on the city's famed Monument Avenue, which up until then featured only the likenesses of Confederate luminaries. Within this controversy two strands of debate can be traced. In one strand, the propriety of placing a statue of a contemporary, non-Confederate figure on Monument Avenue was the focus of the debate. In the other strand, the propriety of placing a statue of smaller scale and more contemporary design amidst the older, "grander" existing statues was at issue. Eventually, identification came from the division -- Ashe was included on the Avenue. A few years later, the 1999 debate centered on the propriety of featuring a likeness of Confederate General Robert E. Lee in a collection of murals to be displayed on the city's floodwall, which was part of Richmond's riverfront redevelopment project. While the purpose of the floodwall murals was ostensibly to unify previously divided elements of the city through the common bond of Richmond's shared history, division ensued as to the propriety of including Lee's image. In the end identification in the form of compromise prevailed, when a civilian-attired image of Lee was displayed amidst a

more diversified collection of images from the city's past. In both of these debates, at issue was Richmonders' differing "sense[s] of what properly goes with what." When symbols and images previously considered incongruous were brought together, Richmonders reidentified with one another through the perspective gained by such seeming incongruity.

In the next section, "Heritage vs. Hate: The Narratives of the Confederate Flag Controversy in South Carolina (and Beyond)," I analyze the 2000 debate as to the propriety of continuing to display the Confederate battle flag atop the South Carolina Capitol and within its legislative chambers. This debate serves as a case study representative of similar debates that have taken place in the South throughout the decade, notably in Mississippi and Georgia where debates raged as to whether or not to retain state flags that feature prominently the "stars and bars" in their designs. Looking at the debate as it played out in South Carolina, I analyze the various narratives used by flag proponents, opponents, and middlegrounders to further their respective positions regarding the place of the Confederate battle flag in the twenty-first century South. Those in each of the basic camps in the debate told stories to explain why the South seceded and the War fought, and why the flag was hoisted atop the Capitol to begin with in 1962. The Confederate flag has been used to identify contemporary "unreconstructed" Southerners with their Lost Cause forebears, but that same flag divides them from their African American contemporaries. When the South Carolina debate was closed, the Confederate battle flag was removed from atop and inside the South Carolina Capitol to a Confederate memorial on the statehouse grounds. But this

compromise was less than satisfactory to some, who found it offensive to have the "Rebel flag," which evokes for many the old order of division, literally staring them in the face at street level. With the resolution of this debate, at least in South Carolina, narratives of how and why the flag was removed from the Capitol will be added to the collections of stories opponents in the larger debate over Southern identity use to defend their respective causes of identification and division.

In the final body section, "Senator Trent Lott: Southern Sinner, Scapegoat, and Sacrifice," I examine the December 2002 debate as to the propriety of Lott's remarks about retiring South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond on the occasion of his 100th birthday. Speaking at a Senate party honoring Thurmond, Mississippi Senator Trent Lott commented, "I want to say this about my state: When Strom Thurmond ran for president we voted for him. We're proud of it. And if the rest of the country had followed our lead we wouldn't of had all these problems over all these years." The now-deceased Thurmond ran for president as a States' Rights Democrat (or Dixiecrat) in 1948 on a platform centered in the order of division, specifically the states' right to maintain segregation; but by the time of his 100th birthday, Thurmond apparently had been won over to the order of identification. Nonetheless, Lott's evocation of the Thurmond of 1948 caused him to be identified with the old order of division in an age in which the legally established and (crucial to Lott's fate) politically correct order is that of identification. Lott's identification with the Thurmond of division caused Lott, who had been the Senate Majority Leader-Elect, to be cast aside in the wake of this controversy as little more than an artifact of the old Southern order.

### A New Rhetoric of Southern Identity

After considering each of these debates, I will draw conclusions and offer the possibility of a new rhetoric of Southern identity. One possible resolution to the continuing debate over Southern identity is a shift from the old order of division to a new order of identification. Such a shift would entail Southerners of differing perspectives and backgrounds emphasizing their commonalities as Southerners, while continuing to recognize the value of one another's differences. Such simultaneous consubstantiality and differentiation is possible, for as Kenneth Burke noted, "two persons may be identified in terms of some principle they share in common, an 'identification' that does not deny their distinctness."<sup>43</sup> As I will discuss in more depth in my conclusion, there are many potential sources for common ground amongst Southerners of all backgrounds and perspectives. Carl Degler has articulated a very eloquent catalog of some of the elements of a shared Southern identity:

the South's powerful appeal to its own people -- black and white -- as well as to other Americans, has surely been the alternative it embodies and offers: in its landscape of wooded mountains, red clay hills, harsh sand barrens, lush forest, and watery wastes; in the humid feel of its hot climate; in the sweet, exotic tastes of its foods; in the soft, liquid sound and careless elisions of its speech; in its rurally rooted conservatism and provincialism; in the violence and conformity of its social order; in the human warmth and security of its commitment to family and kin; and, above all, in its enduring sense of personal and regional identity born from a history no other American shares.<sup>44</sup>

These potential elements of a shared Southern identity have either been factors in shaping the South's unique history or are direct products of it. When C. Vann Woodward sought to answer the question, "Is there nothing about the South that is immune from the disintegrating effect of nationalism and the pressure for conformity?" he found that the "only thing [he] could think of . . . is its history." By "history" he meant not "the worship of ancestors" or "written history and its interpretation," but "rather the collective experience of the Southern people. It is in just this respect that the South remains the most distinctive region of the country. In their unique historic heritage as Americans the Southerners should not only be able to find the basis for their heritage but also make contributions that balance and complement the experience of the rest of the nation."<sup>45</sup> As the following rhetorical criticism of recent debates regarding Southern identity reveals, those on all sides of these debates share a common concern with history and its consequences for the region's present and future. Recognizing their shared experience of Southern history, though from differing vantage points, is a first step toward identifying Southerners with one another while respecting the richness of the distinctions that continue to exist amongst them.



## Notes

1. William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (New York: Random House, 1951).
2. W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Vintage, 1991), 1-li.
3. Unless specified otherwise, throughout this dissertation “Southerners” will refer to white Southerners, specifically those white Southerners who proudly self-identify themselves as such. Lewis M. Killian, in *White Southerners* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), argues that white Southerners “constitute a group, not just an aggregate of discrete individuals who happen to have been born in the same geographical portion of a nation of nations” (xii). Specifically, Killian argues white Southerners constitute “a sociological minority group in the over-all context of American society,” as reflected in both “the attitudes and actions of others in the larger society” and their perception of themselves as “the object of prejudice and discrimination” (3). Members of this “minority group” hail largely from “a southeastern region corresponding roughly to the Old South” (10). Killian defines the white Southerner as being either “a white person who has been born and raised at least until young adulthood in the South and who thinks of himself as a southerner or . . . a white person who, no matter where he was born and raised, lives in the South and identifies himself as a southerner” (11).
4. Cash, *The Mind of the South*, xlvi.
5. Richard M. Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay: A History of Postbellum Thought*, ed. George Core and M. E. Bradford (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1968), 394.

6. Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay*, 394-95.
7. C. Vann Woodward, "The Search for Southern Identity," in *The Burden of Southern History*, Revised Edition (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968), 12.
8. Cash, *The Mind of the South*, xlvii.
9. Ulrich B. Phillips, "The Central Theme of Southern History," *American Historical Review* 34.1 (October 1928): 43.
10. Twelve Southerners, *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1976), xix.
11. Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay*, 391.
12. Richard M. Weaver, *The Southern Essays of Richard M. Weaver*, ed. George M. Curtis, III, and James J. Thompson, Jr. (Indianapolis: Liberty, 1987), 208.
13. Woodward, "The Search," 17.
14. Woodward, "The Search," 18, 19.
15. Woodward, "The Search," 19-21, 20-21.
16. Woodward, "The Search," 21, 22.
17. Woodward, "The Search," 22-23.
18. Woodward, "The Search," 25.
19. Carl N. Degler, *Place Over Time: The Continuity of Southern Distinctiveness* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), 127.
20. Degler, *Place Over Time*, 104.
21. Degler, *Place Over Time*, 104-105.
22. Degler, *Place Over Time*, 125.

23. Louis D. Rubin, Jr., "The Boll Weevil, the Iron Horse, and the End of the Line: Thoughts on the South," in *The American South: Portrait of a Culture* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 366.
24. Rubin, "The Boll Weevil," 367.
25. Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay*, 36.
26. Merrill D. Peterson, *The Great Triumvirate: Webster, Clay, and Calhoun* (New York: Oxford, 1987), 449-476.
27. William J. Cooper and Thomas E. Terrill, *The American South: A History*, Second Edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996), 294.
28. Gaines Foster, "The Lost Cause," in Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 1134.
29. Kenneth Burke, *On Symbols and Society*, ed. Joseph R. Gusfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 70.
30. Burke, *On Symbols and Society*, 69.
31. Burke, *On Symbols and Society*, 69.
32. Burke, *On Symbols and Society*, 69.
33. Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), 18.
34. Burke, *On Symbols and Society*, 190.
35. Burke, *On Symbols and Society*, 181-182.
36. Burke, *On Symbols and Society*, 180.

37. Kenneth Burke, *Permanence & Change: An Anatomy of Purpose* (Los Altos: Hermes, 1954), 74.
38. Burke, *Permanence and Change*, 94.
39. Burke, *Permanence and Change*, 119.
40. Burke, *Permanence and Change*, 112-13.
41. Burke, *Permanence and Change*, 163.
42. Burke, *On Symbols and Society*, 70.
43. Burke, *On Symbols and Society*, 180.
44. Degler, *Place Over Time*, 131.
45. Woodward, "The Search," 15-16.

PUTTING ON UNIFORMS, TEARING DOWN WALLS, AND OPENING DOORS:  
SOCIAL MYSTERY IN THE VIRGINIA MILITARY INSTITUTE  
GENDER INTEGRATION DEBATE

If ever a Southern institution embodied the Southern fixation with order, it is the Virginia Military Institute. The Institute's highly regimented system of discipline, based on a strict system of classes and rules, has since its inception in 1839 served to instill a sense of order in its cadets. VMI's particular set of traditions, rituals, and rules -- its system of social mystery -- have served both to identify those within VMI as well as to set apart or divide VMI from those outside of it. Within VMI, cadets wear the same uniform as one another as well as generations of cadets before them; they go through the same harsh "Rat Line" of discipline during their first year; they participate in the same time-honored traditions such as the New Market Ceremony each May; and they swear to uphold the same gentleman's code not to lie, cheat, or steal. And while a strict class-system serves, on one level, to divide VMI cadets according to year entered, it also serves cadets to identify with one another, knowing that the upperclassmen disciplining them on the Rat Line at one time were the rats being disciplined. As a result, all cadets identify with one another as "Brother Rats."

But just as VMI's system of social mystery serves to identify those within it with one another, so too does it serve to divide them from all those who remain outside of it. Until 1968, African Americans were not admitted to VMI. In 1989, women still remained outside of VMI's system of social mystery, not permitted even to apply for

admission. After a long series of court cases begun that year, the question of whether or not women could be admitted to VMI reached the U.S. Supreme Court in 1996. The debate that ensued, both in the Court itself and in the court of public opinion, revolved around whether or not VMI should remain divided from half of its state's population -- women-- by not affording them opportunity of pursuing an education there. That VMI still remained closed to women at the end of the twentieth century reflected its identity as a Southern institution. Southern conservative Richard Weaver argued that the order of division between the sexes should be maintained:

Distinctions of many kinds will have to be restored, and I would mention especially one whose loss has added immeasurably to the malaise of our civilization -- the fruitful distinction between the sexes, with the recognition of respective spheres of influence. The re-establishment of woman as the cohesive force of the family, the end of the era of 'long-haired men and short-haired women,' should bring a renewal of well-being to the whole of society. On this point Southerners of the old school were adamant, and even today, with our power of discrimination at its lowest point in history, there arises a feeling that the roles of the sexes must again be made explicit.<sup>1</sup>

If women were to enter VMI, as well as its South Carolina "sister school" the Citadel (also the subject of a gender integration debate in the mid-1990s) there would be, from the perspective of Weaver and his ideological progeny, further deterioration of the division of the sexes into distinct "spheres of influence." If women as well as men could be VMI cadets -- short hair and all -- the South's traditional order of division would be

imperiled. But from the perspective of those lobbying for women's admission to these schools, women's entrance to VMI would serve to further the ascendance of identification as the ruling order in the South and the rest of the nation. Whether it was better to keep people divided by limiting the pool of those eligible for admission into VMI, or to open the possibility of a wider group of people who could identify with one another within VMI, was the central issue in this debate. Both sides, for and against an all-male VMI, valued VMI's distinctive system of social mystery and the benefits to be had by entering into it. But they found themselves divided as to whether that system of social mystery could continue to exist and remain valuable if women were allowed to put on the VMI uniform, enter its barracks, and attempt to survive the rigors of the Rat Line.

In this section I will consider, from a rhetorical perspective informed by the theory of Kenneth Burke, the arguments and means of persuasion used by advocates on both sides of the controversy, in the time leading up to the Supreme Court's decision through the time following it when the decision and how it would affect VMI were still up for public debate. I will analyze various arguments put forth in the public forum via press releases and media outlets, rather than those put forth in the courts; the ways in which "the public" negotiates such controversies is at the heart of participation in our democratic American society and is thus deserving of our scholarly attention. It is appropriate to look at these communications in terms of Burke's conception of social mystery, his idea that "*mystery is equated with class distinctions*,"<sup>2</sup> in this case class being determined by gender, involvement in militaristic activity, and regional identity.

Looking at texts generated by "the people" is also germane in that, as members of the various classes involved in the dispute -- men and women, military and non-military, Southerners and non-Southerners -- they have a direct stake in the negotiation of class distinctions inherent in the social mystery that is VMI.

### VMI's History of Social Mystery

The Virginia Military Institute, located in Lexington, Virginia, was founded in 1839. In its history, the Institute has had Stonewall Jackson as a physics professor, its cadets sent into the Battle of New Market during the Civil War, its campus destroyed during that same conflict, and George Marshall as a graduate. VMI's mission statement reveals how it characterizes itself:

The Virginia Military Institute . . . is a state college supported by the Commonwealth of Virginia, for the purpose of offering higher education in the fields of the liberal arts, sciences, and engineering. In addition to being a college it is and will remain a military institute with its entire undergraduate student body organized as a military unit. In the words of one of its founders, Col. J.T.L. Preston, 'The military feature' is 'essential to its discipline' although 'not primary in the Institute's scheme of education.' The basic purpose, then, of the Institute is to provide academic study of the highest possible quality conducted in, and facilitated by, a rigorous system of military discipline.<sup>3</sup>

And while the "rigorous system of military discipline" is but one aspect of the VMI experience, it is the one that most distinguishes a VMI education from one to be had at a



typical college or even at another military academy. Within this system are "three elements that cadets and alumni consider most striking during their years at the Institute, so different from other colleges, are the honor system, the rat line, and an outgrowth of it, the class system."<sup>4</sup> At the heart of the honor system is, of course, the honor code, which is that each cadet will "conduct himself according to the code of a gentleman, who does not LIE, CHEAT, or STEAL."<sup>5</sup> The code is enforced by fellow cadets reporting violators to an elected Honor Court of fellow cadets. The "Rat Line" is the system by which freshman cadets, or rats, are taught "personal habits and traits that will serve [them] well throughout [their] cadetship and afterwards," habits and traits which include "soldierly bearing, responsibility, self-control, respect for authority, neatness, orderliness, and consideration for others."<sup>6</sup> They are taught these principles through such tactics as "running . . . for an hour or more in military formation, in fatigue uniforms, carrying rifles -- double time," doing chores for their mentors or "dykes," and attending so-called sweat parties in which cadets are awakened in the middle of the night and herded en masse into a dark, steam-filled shower room.<sup>7</sup> Relationships built within the "Rat System" are considered sacred and a chief benefit of the VMI experience; fellow class members are called "brother rats," and each rat is assigned an older cadet or "dyke," a mentor whom the rat is supposed to emulate.<sup>8</sup> Finally, the VMI class system provides leadership and organization for the military aspect of VMI life. According to VMI historian Henry Wise, "much greater stress is placed on class organization than at other colleges. Each class is a tightly knit organization; its members are . . . jealous of their class privileges. As seniority increases, responsibility and authority over the lower

classes increase."<sup>9</sup>

Inscribed on an archway through which cadets enter and exit their gothic barracks are words from Stonewall Jackson that VMI hopes will be inscribed in cadets' hearts when they graduate: "You may be whatever you resolve to be." These words reflect the ideal of self-determination and self-discipline to be gained through four years as a student of the Institute. It is said that when cadets enter the Institute and are put through the "Rat Line," everyone is made equal, no matter who they are in the world outside the Institute; they make it through the system and progress through the class system and into positions of leadership through their efforts as individuals, and as class members helping one another. Thus, Jackson's words reflect the ethic of character attained through hard work, which is the essence of what VMI hopes will be learned by all who pass through that arch.

In 1989, a young woman in Northern Virginia, perhaps inspired by Jackson's words, resolved to be a VMI cadet -- but in her case, simply resolving to be a cadet was not enough. She was notified that her admission application would not be considered and she filed a legal complaint.<sup>10</sup> This led to a series of court decisions as to whether or not it was legal for VMI, a state-supported institution of higher education, to deny admission to a segment of the state's population based solely on gender. In 1991, a U.S. District court ruled in favor of VMI, saying that it was not in violation of the Constitution and that it served an important state function. However, the United States Department of Justice appealed the ruling, and in October 1992 the 4th Circuit Court returned the case to the district court and gave VMI four options: admit women, go

private, create an equivalent program for women, or find some other solution. VMI chose the third option, and close to a year later announced plans to create VWIL, the Virginia Women's Institute for Leadership at nearby Mary Baldwin College (a private women's college), a program that would offer female students not an all-female version of VMI's very adversative training program, but that would instead give them leadership training based on more nurturing, positive reinforcement. Meanwhile, in 1993, Shannon Faulkner filed suit against VMI's fellow all-male, publicly-funded Southern military college, South Carolina's The Citadel. She had applied and been admitted to the college, Citadel officials not cognizant of her sex. Once they learned Faulkner was female, they rescinded their offer of admission, and *Faulkner v. Jones* began to make its way through the courts.<sup>11</sup> Back in the VMI case, the district court in May 1994 found the VWIL alternative to VMI an acceptable one -- the Justice Department, however, did not, and appealed. However, in January 1995, a panel of three judges from the 4th Circuit ruled 2-1 in favor of VMI. Again, the Justice Department appealed and the case went to the United States Supreme Court, and in January 1996 the court heard arguments in the case.

On June 26, 1996, the Supreme Court delivered its decision in favor of the Justice Department. Seven justices found that the VWIL program did not provide an equal educational opportunity for women; their decision was delivered by Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Only Justice Antonin Scalia dissented, and Justice Clarence Thomas recused himself from the case due to the fact that his son Jamal was a member of the VMI class of 1996. Once the ruling was announced, the situation was not yet settled. It then fell to VMI's Board of Visitors to decide whether the Institute should remain public

and thus admit women, or whether it should become private and thereby retain its all-male tradition. Exceedingly strong alumni support of VMI, which has given it the largest per capita endowment of any public college, at \$185 million, an endowment which flourished all the more during the court case, meant that going private was at least within the realm of possibility, more so than it would be for other small colleges. (And, it is interesting to note that VMI was receiving \$10 million, a third of its annual operating budget, from the state at the time of the case, and it spent that same amount on its legal defense.) In the final analysis, VMI chose to remain public. But even then the conflict was not over. Once it was decided that women were to be admitted, decisions had to be made as to what accommodations, if any, should be made for them. Today women attend VMI, and its first female cadets graduated in 2001. In fact, a woman, Erin Claunch, was named one of the Corps of Cadets' two battalion commanders in 2000-2001, the first female cadet to hold a senior VMI leadership position.<sup>12</sup> But, as settled as the situation at VMI may seem, it is still up for debate amongst not only VMI alumni, their allies, and their opponents, but also amongst women who fear the case will mean the eventual end of all single-sex education in the United States.

### Overview of Arguments for Maintaining or Dismantling VMI's System of Social

#### Mystery

Before delving into rhetorical analysis of this debate, it is important to understand the basic arguments used by advocates on both sides of the issue. Those in favor of retaining VMI's all-male tradition believed that ending the single-sex

educational opportunity offered by VMI would result eventually in the end of single-sex education altogether, even at private colleges. The point was made that the distinction between public and private colleges and universities is faulty, because public schools tend to receive about 60 percent of their budget from public support and 40 percent from private support, while private schools tend to receive 60 percent from private support and 40 percent from public support.<sup>13</sup> They believed that making VMI coeducational would take away from the diversity of educational opportunities offered by public institutions of higher education in Virginia, and that many students came to VMI precisely because it was all-male. Further, they saw VMI as providing an opportunity not only for male-bonding and male-to-male mentoring, but also for a more focused learning environment in which male students were not distracted by or trying to impress women as they pursued their studies and military training.<sup>14</sup> In addition, they posited that VMI's system of psychological and physical training and disciplining, especially the very difficult first-year experience of the Rat Line, would not remain as rigorous if women were admitted. They saw much of the value and uniqueness of the VMI education as stemming from this adversative approach. If the system were made less adversative, the value and uniqueness of a VMI education would be diminished; even if only adjustments were made, the whole system would suffer in their eyes.<sup>15</sup> Overall, defenders of an all-male VMI argued that the particular combination of traditions and practices at VMI (prior to the case) produced positive results, as evidenced in the success of its graduates -- to change the VMI formula might not make for as positive results.<sup>16</sup> To VMI's defenders, opponents of VMI's all-male tradition were in truth opponents of

the whole institution: They not only wanted women admitted, they also wanted its whole system of traditions changed (allegedly to accommodate women).<sup>17</sup>

On the other side of the debate, those in favor of admitting women to VMI asserted that because VMI is a state institution, funded by the public, the state of Virginia was obligated under the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment to offer an equal educational opportunity to women.<sup>18</sup> They noted that while VMI has students from twelve other countries in its student body, it barred its state's own women from even applying for admission.<sup>19</sup> For those who would open VMI to women, ending single-sex education at VMI did not mean the end of single-sex education across the board, considering the fact that virtually all (except two) women's colleges are private. Addressing the qualifications women would need to meet to attend the Institute, they asserted that citizen-soldiers, the production of which is the goal of VMI's education program, are not defined by matters of anatomy or gender. To support this contention, they pointed out that women were already attending the federal service academies and served in the military, therefore there must be women interested in and capable of handling the VMI experience as well. The supposedly equal educational opportunity provided women by VWIL did not begin to compare in rigor, approach, or reputation to that of VMI.<sup>20</sup> They also argued that admitting women would not mean the end of VMI. Noting that VMI survived and thrived in the face of other changes to its student body and tradition, such as racial integration, they argued that VMI would also survive and thrive with the addition of women to its student body and alumni.<sup>21</sup> Not only would VMI survive, but it would thrive because including female students in VMI would

improve the relevance of a VMI education to the "real world."<sup>22</sup> In sum, advocates of a gender-integrated Institute held that it excluded women for no other reason than to maintain its status as an exclusive, aristocratic fraternal organization, which for them was proof that VMI was simply living in the past.<sup>23</sup>

### Burke on Social Mystery and Class Distinction

Kenneth Burke, in his *Rhetoric of Motives*, enters into his discussion of social mystery through reference to Thomas Carlyle's ideas about symbols of social mystery, with clothes being Carlyle's chief example. Carlyle asks, "Is it not to Clothes that most men do reverence?"<sup>24</sup> Later Burke quotes Carlyle as stating that, "Clothes gave us *individuality, distinctions, social polity*" (Burke's italics), and as noting "the moral, political, and even Religious influences of Clothes" as well as that people are "clothed with Authority."<sup>25</sup> This idea of clothes signifying authority was seen in the VMI controversy, as the central image of VMI is of rows of cadets marching in their vintage, gray uniforms. Likewise, the images used by the VMI press office and, in turn, the media to signify the successful integration of women into VMI were images of young women in those very same vintage uniforms. What those women who wanted to attend VMI wanted, and what the activists who worked on their behalf wanted for them, was the image of them in uniform -- an image that signified they had successfully broken down the barrier of social mystery, which had kept women outside the VMI's system of social mystery. Also symbolic of the mystery of VMI are its fortress-like barracks. An important element of the motivating vision for getting women into VMI was the

metaphor of "openings its doors to women." In order to obtain knowledge of the previously all-male mystery of VMI, women needed to get inside the barracks. For once inside the barracks, the women would be inside the walls of VMI's mysteries, rather than standing outside powerless, trying to look in but only able to imagine what was going on inside.

Burke points his readers to a passage in which Carlyle "sees through the 'clothes' of class distinction to the naked universal man beneath, but restores with one hand the very hierarchic reverence he would take away with the other."<sup>26</sup> Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, in delivering the opinion of the Supreme Court, in effect stripped away the differences between men and women. These differences were symbolized before the decision by men being admitted into VMI and thus allowed to wear its uniform, and by women not being admitted into VMI and thus allowed to wear only civilian clothes, which more easily distinguished them as women. Ironically, it was only when both men and women were allowed to wear the clothing of the VMI uniform, that they were, in the eyes of the court, stripped of the gender differences signified previously by their differences in clothing. In other words, same clothing signifies same power; different clothing signifies different power. And yet, in a continued parallel of Carlyle, Ginsburg simultaneously stripped the male and female cadets of their differences while at the same time "restor[ing] with one hand the hierarchic reverence [they] would take away with the other"<sup>27</sup> in their insistence on certain accommodations being made at VMI because of the differences between male and female cadets. Especially notable in the context of Carlyle's clothes theme was the installation of privacy shades on barracks room



windows. This was done so as to give both male and female cadets privacy from one another during such times as dressing in and undressing from one's clothes -- all of which underscores the very gender differences the court otherwise denies significance.

This reflection on what today could be summed up in the cliché "clothes make the man" allows us to make sense of the VMI case as a controversy sparked by social mystery. Indeed, the very uniforms worn by VMI cadets are an element of the social mystery of the institution, the system of signifiers that differentiates between those who are part of its ranks of social power and those who are not. As Burke explains, "mystery is equated with class distinctions" because there is a "mystifying condition in social inequality," "a relation between mystification and class relationships."<sup>28</sup> When women were not allowed admission into VMI, there was an element of mystery: the mystery of secret male-bonding rituals signified by the tall stone walls of the barracks in which they were thought to take place; the mystery of military rituals signified by the wearing of not just any uniform, but the distinctive VMI uniform; and the mystery of Southern aristocracy, signified by saluting to the campus' prominently placed statue of Stonewall Jackson, mystery inherent in the "good ol' boy" network whose privileges and connections lead to power. These mysteries of maleness, military tradition, and Southern identity all combined to form a mystery perceived by those outside of it as so powerful that it had to be opened up for all the world to see, thereby equalizing the social knowledge and power of those previously barred from the rituals that lead to such knowledge and power. Texts from those advocating and opposing gender integration of the Institute will be analyzed in light of Burke's (and Carlyle's) concept of social

mystery. The presence of social mystery -- of social knowledge and privilege held by one class and not by another -- was at the very root of the conflict as to whether or not to admit women into VMI and all the social mystery contained in its walls, its traditions, and its people.

#### Anatomy and Clothes Make the Institute Man: Gendered Social Mystery

Advocates of a gender-integrated VMI perceived the social mystery of VMI as rooted, at its most basic level, in differences of anatomy. The language of Karen Johnson, national secretary of the National Organization for Women (NOW), was most vivid in explaining that women have been kept out of VMI's rituals and traditions because those in power want to prevent those who possess different sex organs from sharing in that power. She stated, in a NOW press release dated January 17, 1996: "We are here in support of the notion that citizen-soldiers come with and without penises. We are here to ask the Supreme Court to do the right thing and end the phallocracy, the rule by the phallus, that is practiced at VMI."<sup>29</sup> In the spirit of Carlyle, Johnson believed that beneath it all, beneath the gendered clothing of our culture, those of different classes -- in this case, men and women -- will be revealed as being the same, all specimens of "the naked universal man"<sup>30</sup> (though Johnson likely would substitute "person" or "being" for "man"). Later in the same speech, Johnson states that "VMI fears that persons without penises would destroy unit cohesion and esprit de corps, lower the prestige, change the methods [of] educating the citizen soldier and, of course, break with tradition."<sup>31</sup> In this, Johnson made the lowest common denominator of VMI's single-

sex policy the factor of sexual anatomy, rather than any other, more complex reasons VMI used to explain its own policies. By explaining VMI's exclusion of women in terms of those who have penises and those who do not, Johnson thereby creates on VMI's behalf a system of social stratification so ludicrous that those inclined toward the arguments of NOW would feel, as Johnson did, outrage at being excluded from initiation into a system of privilege solely on the basis of their anatomy. The only alternative VMI offers to those lacking the essential male sexual organs, posited representatives of NOW, is a second-rate one: "Virginia residents who meet requirements for admission to VMI but who are without a penis may now attend the Virginia Women's Institute for Leadership . . . [which] is described as a pale shadow of the VMI program."<sup>32</sup> In this statement, Johnson implied that, in the eyes of the VMI "phallocracy," women and their sexual organs deserve no more than admission into a second-rate, quasi-military program.

The notion of revealing what was previously hidden to women goes beyond revealing bias based on sexual anatomy. Those supporting a coeducational VMI often used the metaphor of opening closed doors, or unlocking doors previously locked off to women. Margaret Carlson opened a column about VMI by asking, "Do you ever get the feeling that the men in the world might not care if the door closed and there were no women in the room?"<sup>33</sup> Such metaphors communicate the image of an all-boys' clubhouse or fort with the proverbial "No Girls Allowed" sign that, along with a door and a lock, which prevented girls' entry into the secret world of boys. In this vein, NOW's Johnson pointed out that similar institutions have demystified themselves by

eschewing their "boys-only" status: "two decades after our military academies at West Point, Annapolis, and Colorado Springs opened their doors to women, VMI still shuts its doors to women."<sup>34</sup> In a later NOW press release, issued on the day of the Supreme Court ruling, June 26, 1996, NOW Executive Vice President Kim Gandy used similar language praising the court's opinion: "VMI will have to open the doors of opportunity to the daughters of Virginia, as well as to the sons . . . And taxpayers will no longer sponsor a system that locks those daughters out of a lifetime of networking."<sup>35</sup> And it was in a like manner that *U.S. News & World Report* delivered the verdict in its July 8, 1996, issue, declaring that, "in the end, it was an anonymous Virginia woman who tore down the barriers keeping women out of the Citadel and the Virginia Military Institute . . . last week, the walls came tumbling down, ending over a century of male exclusivity."<sup>36</sup> But there was sometimes an element of paradox lurking in the pro-gender-integration rhetoric. Writing before the Supreme Court decision, Carlson suggested that, "VMI and the Citadel might want to start building those women's bathrooms now."<sup>37</sup> Carlson lamented having doors of opportunity closed to women, but simultaneously advocated not only the building of another door, but of whole rooms that have as their object the separation of men and women. Nonetheless, despite their contradictions, we see that the images of impenetrable walls, barriers, doors, and locks were used again and again by VMI gender-integration advocates as a metaphor for the VMI policy of limiting initiation into its system of social mystery to men alone.

Not only did doors and walls socially stratify men and women in the arguments of those in favor of a coeducational VMI, but so too did conventions of physical

appearance such as haircuts and clothing -- a means of social mystification that would not surprise Thomas Carlyle and Kenneth Burke. An April 2000 report in *U.S. News* concluded with thoughts on boxer shorts (of all things) as evidence that VMI had indeed made some changes in response to women's presence at VMI: "No one questions that some routines at VMI have changed. Guys are less likely to lounge in their boxer shorts. Use of obscene words for female genitalia has decreased. Women's hair sometimes creeps from uniform caps . . . But so far, the loss of the freedom to be profane and parade in boxers has not been the death knell of VMI's time-honored traditions."<sup>38</sup>

Another post-decision article, this one in *Black Issues in Higher Education*, focused almost solely on the physical appearance of women once they joined the ranks of VMI:

women cadets . . . will get close-cropped haircuts and can't wear makeup. They'll sleep in unlocked barracks . . . If male and female cadets are in a room together, 'the lights will be on, shades will be up, and each cadet will be properly clothed,' the report [filed in U.S. District Court] said. . . . VMI's report included computerized pictures of a woman sporting the 'clean cut' haircut and the slightly longer hairstyle that will be allowed six weeks after women arrive. Previously, new cadets . . . have had to maintain the short cuts for most of the first year. 'The hair is going to be really short to start with, for the male and the female cadets,' VMI spokesman Mike Strickler said. 'Then we're going to let it grow some. It's part of the cadet equalization process.' The school will ban jewelry and cosmetics for the first semester.<sup>39</sup>

This emphasis on what clothing cadets, male and female, wear as well as how they wear

their hair is evidence of the way material things work to signify sameness or difference in social classification. In the first passage, male cadets' change in leisurewear signified their accommodation of female cadets in the context of the VMI system as a whole, though this example is somewhat contradictory in its implication that male cadets were prompted to "cover up" what had been more exposed. In the latter passage, women were portrayed as being initiated into knowledge of VMI's social mystery as they took on the appearance of VMI authority by literally putting on the Institute-mandated uniform and haircut. They were made equal to men, in this characterization, in their willingness to take on the same appearance. This, however, seems at odds with many feminists' contention that women's roles (such as with aging models and actresses, and even with corporate women) should not be determined by their physical appearance. Yet, in this case, they recognize that at VMI roles of authority often are communicated through material or physical self-presentation.

In the rhetoric of those opposing a gender-integrated VMI, its social mystery was justified in various ways. Daniel Seligman, in a May 1993 column, questioned whether women actually were being deprived of anything by being denied admission into the ranks of VMI:

Does anybody really believe that college-age women suffer deprivation in not having an opportunity to get hazed remorselessly on the 'rat line,' where first-year VMI students are systematically treated like dirt (and called rats, proclaimed to be the lowest animal on the earth)? Or that young ladies would possibly wish to deal with the school's boot-camp regimen, featuring total lack of privacy, near-

permanent mental stress, and minute regulation of behavior?<sup>40</sup>

Seligman's basic argument was that women do not want to be initiated into the kind of social mysteries VMI has to offer anyway, therefore the debate is without merit and thus easily dismissed with a couple of humorous rhetorical questions. If women were indeed desirous of initiation into VMI's rituals and traditions, the argument then became one in which the very social mysteries into which such women want initiation would, by their (women's) very presence, no longer exist. This argument was used by many in favor of keeping VMI all-male, but is best articulated in an article by D. Grier Stephenson, Jr. in *USA Today* -- "the very thing prospective female students sought would be altered, diminished, or perhaps destroyed by their presence."<sup>41</sup> Wilfred M. McClay echoed this when he stated, "it is unthinkable that the 'rat line' could survive as a common, base-line experience at a coeducational VMI, if only because it is hard to imagine well-mannered VMI men routinely dishing out such treatment to women."<sup>42</sup> In other words, the very nature of the social mystery would be unavoidably altered by the admission of women, thereby making true initiation of women into the system of social knowledge and power that was VMI an impossibility. The apparent purpose of such an argument was to discourage women from seeking initiation into the VMI rituals and traditions altogether, with the hope that this would keep VMI's system of social mystery intact. For if everyone can access the knowledge of a social mystery, it is no longer a social mystery and no longer an avenue for gaining privileged social knowledge and power.

Taking a somewhat different argumentative tack, Elizabeth Fox Genovese and Leon Podles justified maintaining an all-male VMI in their contention that, "Boys need

an initiation into masculinity," because without the decision to be a man at the cost of his pleasure or even of his life, a boy will never grow up. He will only get older. All societies have some system of paideia, of education to initiate boys into the mysteries of life and death, of what it is to be a man in a world in which struggle and mortality are inevitable."<sup>43</sup> They argued that, for young men, initiation into a system of social mystery such as VMI is necessary for their development into ethical, unselfish men. Rather than characterizing women as the weak ones who cannot survive the rigorous VMI experience, Fox Genovese and Podles asserted that women, by college age, already have learned the principles of self-sacrifice and self-discipline that are at the heart of the VMI education. Rather than implying that women should not be initiated into social mystery, they characterized women as the ones already in possession of the social knowledge that is inculcated through VMI's rituals.

In addition, traditionalists sought to dismantle their opponents' arguments as to VMI's gendered mysteries. McClay pointed out that "despite disdain for gender stereotypes, Ginsburg ends up employing them herself . . . the complete absence of privacy, the uniformity of standards, all the way down to the shaved head of every 'rat,' are central features of VMI life."<sup>44</sup> He contended that Ginsburg wanted women to be admitted into the system of VMI tradition because they deserve equal access to the social knowledge and power it confers, but that she also admitted essential differences between men and women in her demand that accommodations be made to protect women's privacy, thereby replacing one set of mysteries with another. McClay and others were also quick to point out what was, for them, the self-contradictory position



held by many women's colleges: "It is especially strange, on the face of it, that this repudiation of human difference should come . . . when there is a new appreciation of the advantages of keeping students at some remove from the strains and distractions of the dating/mating game."<sup>45</sup> Similarly, Stephenson observed that for most women's colleges, "this was sauce for the gander, not the goose."<sup>46</sup> Fox Genovese and Podles even took on the voice of their opponents, characterizing them as having a vengeful attitude at the root of their protests of VMI: "men, as we all know, have enjoyed too many advantages for too long, and it is time to punish them."<sup>47</sup> McClay, Stephenson, Fox Genovese, and Podles attempted to neutralize their opponents' arguments as to VMI's inconsistencies by pointing out the inconsistencies inherent in their arguments.

#### Of Brother Rats and Panopticon Barracks: Martial Social Mystery

Besides mysteries rooted mainly in gender difference, mysteries inherent in the military tradition of VMI were also the subject of debate. The military dynamic of VMI shapes the way its cadets sleep, eat, study, and relate to others. Both sides in the debate as to whether VMI should be gender-integrated argued for the inherent value of these militaristic rituals. Once the Supreme Court ruled that women must be admitted if VMI was to remain a publicly funded institution, the focus of the debate shifted to how best to integrate women into the VMI experience. Since those lobbying for women's admission had said much in support of women's capacity to handle the rigors of the VMI system, arguments for changing the system to accommodate women were generally limited to consideration of haircuts, privacy in the barracks, and whether different physical fitness

standards should be developed for female cadets. Once women had been present at VMI for a few years, those who had kept a critical eye on VMI's treatment of its female cadets were now lauding the successful integration of women into the mysteries of the system.

*U.S. News*, in its April 10, 2000, edition, reported that:

Cadets . . . sleep on thin mattresses on wooden racks, but the spartan surroundings, lack of privacy, and physical and psychological hazing of first-year students have a purpose: to create total equality, discipline, and lifelong bonding. It was this vaunted 'VMI experience' that school officials anticipated women would shatter -- and they deeply resented being forced to change by outsiders. . . . But the new cadets . . . complied. . . . Even the assumption that women would interfere with the bonding process turned out to be somewhat exaggerated. A cadet, it seems, is a cadet. 'They're our brother rats,' says [Derek] Bogdon, . . . 'They went through the same thing that we did.'<sup>48</sup>

Positive accounts such as these validated the arguments made earlier by women's advocates such as Karen Johnson, who recounted her own experiences in the military as well as the experiences of women who served in Operation Desert Storm in arguing that women were indeed capable of carrying out the physical rituals requisite to initiation into VMI's system of social mystery. When the Supreme Court began hearing the VMI case in January 1996, Johnson pointed out that:

I stand before you as one citizen-soldier who dedicated 20 years of my life to serve my country in the United States Air Force. I stand before you as one of the over 1.2 million veterans who are women. I was on active duty during the

Persian Gulf War when 33,000 sister soldiers put their lives on the line the desert. Those women were U.S. Soldiers experiencing the same hardships as their male counterparts and they performed their jobs admirably.<sup>49</sup>

Johnson contended that many women, including herself, have been initiated into the system of social mystery embodied in the United States military, and successfully completed its most rigorous of initiation rites: service during time of war. She argued by analogy that if women were capable and legally enabled to be a part of the nation's military, so too should they be admitted into a school known for its education of military leaders. Likewise, Jeffrey Rosen, writing in February 1996, argued that the women at VWIL do not seem satisfied with its "kinder, gentler" leadership training. Speaking of VWIL cadets, he noted that they were, "Naturally drawn to the hierarchy that their professors rejected [and] have voted to wear uniforms all day on Monday and are debating whether or not to adopt a permanent rank system along the VMI model."<sup>50</sup> Women, who were assumed by "nature" to want something very different from the VMI experience, were in this case shown to be drawn toward such military rituals as uniform and rank. So not only was it argued by Johnson that women are capable of participation in military rituals, it was also asserted by Rosen that there were young women who very much wanted to be initiated into such rituals, specifically those of VMI.

At the same time, though, Jeffrey Rosen sided with VMI and the Citadel in their quest to remain all-male, as revealed in his thought-provoking parallel between Jeremy Bentham's *Panopticon* and the VMI barracks.<sup>51</sup> Prior to the admission of women, the VMI barracks, which form a quad, had at their center a guard tower in which all could be

seen on every level of the barracks through the unobstructed windows located in each barracks room door. The result of such a system, as Rosen posited by quoting Michel Foucault, was that it "induce[s] in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power." The impact of women upon such a system was that, with the requisite windowshades, the omnipresence of the all-seeing authority has decreased significantly. Thus was the system of mystified social authority made less effective in its decreased power. However, in the face of the court-ordered integration of women into all aspects of the VMI system, those who previously had argued against women's admission to VMI shifted their rhetorical strategy to argue that the particular combination of rituals and requirements that constitute VMI's military tradition cannot and should not change. In a December 1996 *Newsweek* column, VMI Superintendent Josiah Bunting III stated that

To change any of these standards or expectations -- physical, military, or intellectual -- to accommodate the enrollment of women at VMI is to compromise exactly what those who apply -- male and female -- are seeking. The practice of gender-norming, in which different standards are set up for women and men, is most iniquitous of all. There is no gender-norming in the world of affairs into which we send our graduates.<sup>52</sup>

Bunting's statement was representative of many others in his sentiment that if the women admitted to VMI were truly to be included in its system of social mystery, then the system must not change for them. Like all other cadets, he argued, female cadets would be expected to be changed by the system into something better, something they were not

when they entered the school: citizen-soldiers. The post-Supreme Court stance of VMI traditionalists is that VMI, rather than being about reinforcing the walls of social stratification, is instead about breaking down the barriers of social mystery that divide cadets before they enter the Institute. Cadets may enter VMI in a state of social classification and mystification, but they leave it joined with one another in a state of demystification and unification and one another, though they are set apart as a class -- as VMI graduates, Institute men, and citizen-soldiers -- from the rest of the world.

#### New Market Cadets and Good Ol' Boys: Southern Social Mystery

Another way in which VMI is set apart, besides its military tradition, is through its identity as a bastion of Southern culture, particularly the role its cadets played in the Battle of New Market during the Civil War and in its reputation as a training ground for the aristocratic class of Southern gentlemen. There is a long-standing, intimate connection between military education and the training of the Southern gentleman. As Rod Andrew notes in his study of Southern military schools in the postbellum era, "A policy of aggressive military preparedness may have provided partial justification for southern military schools before the war. But afterward the southern military tradition existed mainly in the realm of legend, myth, and cultural notions of what it meant to be an honorable man." The goal of military education came to be seen not so much in terms of tactical strategy, but "in more abstract, mythical terms -- honor, patriotism, duty, respect for the law, sacrifice, and even piety."<sup>53</sup> And so it is with today's VMI -- only about 18 percent of its graduates enter into military service; many of the rest use

their VMI connections to help them achieve success as business professionals and civic leaders. But the VMI experience has, until recently, prepares cadets for another role, that of Southern gentlemen. For those critics outside the South or for those who do not identify themselves as Southerners, VMI's preeminent place in Southern culture served to further mystify it. Southerners long have been regarded by their fellow Americans as being overly concerned with setting themselves up as a class apart: in their insistence on maintaining an economy based on classifying some people as slave and some people as free; in their desire to secede from the Union; and in their stubborn maintenance of social and economic boundaries between blacks and whites well into the twentieth century. Based on these usual (yet understandable) stereotypes of Southerners as advocates of division, VMI is by virtue of its Southernness also associated with social and economic class stratification, a desire to be set apart from others.

And so it was that the central event in the history of VMI -- aside from the controversy under study here -- was the calling of 247 of cadets to the defense of the Confederate States of America in 1864, when in the Battle of New Market "their exploits became legendary."<sup>54</sup> The story of the New Market Cadets is, as Andrew summarizes so succinctly, is this:

After advancing under fire with casualties to the center of the Confederate line, the cadets came under particularly heavy Union fire. An enemy artillery blast knocked the VMI commandant, Colonel Scott Ship, unconscious. The cadets regrouped and charged, scattering the enemy in their front and awing both Confederate and Union veterans. When it was over, the cadet force of 247 had

suffered 57 casualties, 10 of whom were wounded mortally.<sup>55</sup>

The battle is commemorated in the annual New Market Ceremony, held each May 15<sup>th</sup> at the VMI campus. But the sacred sacrifice of those ten cadets on the field of battle has had more lasting effects on VMI than this annual observance. The New Market legend has resulted in cadets' reverence for that one shining moment in the Lost War in which a battle was won by a group of young men working together in the united spirit of the Corps and the South. Reference was made in many accounts of VMI's twentieth-century court battles to the Institute's role in this long-past battle. For instance, a July 11, 1996, press release issued by the ACLU in reaction to the Supreme Court ruling linked VMI's then-present battle in the courts with the secessionist battles of the state's past: "R. Kent Willis, the executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Virginia, said that lengthy resistance to federal court orders had a long history in Virginia. 'Among traditional Virginians,' Mr. Willis told the *[New York] Times*, 'there's this secessionist notion that if they dig their trenches deep enough, the Feds will go away.'<sup>56</sup> Often implied is a parallel between the small victory of the New Market cadets within the larger battle of the Lost Cause and the efforts of VMI to defend its all-male tradition within the larger battle for conserving tradition in an era characterized by great social change. But as evidenced in Stephenson's observation in *USA Today* that "this was not the first time the school had faced long odds . . . cadets from VMI had helped to defeat seasoned Union troops at New Market, Va.,"<sup>57</sup> the parallel also could be used to justify VMI's quixotic legal crusade on behalf of its all-male tradition.

Geoffrey Norman did just this in introducing his *American Spectator* article,

"Crashing VMI's Line." Norman retold the New Market story as an allegory for the contemporary battle for an all-male VMI. Beginning with a description of the 1996 New Market Ceremony, Norman observed that the cadets, wearing "white pants, gray coatees with crossed dykes, and shakos . . . marched in perfect alignment, looking like the nineteenth century on review."<sup>58</sup> His account of the ceremony led into his account of the battle that it commemorated:

The battle of New Market was a Confederate victory, and the charge of the VMI cadets had turned the tide. The action did not change history. Union troops, after all, came back up the Valley not long after the battle of New Market while, in other theaters, Sherman and Grant were squeezing the life from the Confederacy. The battle of New Market had virtually no influence on the outcome of the war, other than to add to its lamentable casualty rolls and long lists of legends. The effect on the Virginia Military Institute, however, was incalculable. Nothing like that had ever occurred -- schoolboys marching into battle, as a unit, and actually defeating an enemy. So, for VMI, the battle became a kind of sacred and somewhat mysterious event, and its spirit first helped rebuild the school (it was shelled and burned by Federal troops a few weeks after New Market) and then infused it with a kind of unique ardor that still exists.<sup>59</sup>

The implication of this parallel is that the contemporary battle of VMI, despite its small victories, would in the end be another battle fought on behalf of a Lost Cause based on social stratification, though this time around the social mystery being negotiated revolved around gender rather than race. Latent in Norman's version of the New Market



legend and its effects on the VMI spirit was a statement about the efforts of a small, Virginia school that, when dared to take on the Supreme Court, was enthusiastic in its fight. The Battle of New Market, described by Norman as a "sacred and somewhat mysterious event," explained much about VMI's willingness to defend its unique way of life, its "peculiar institution" (to borrow a phrase typically used describe slavery in the Old South) of all-male education, against the onslaught of the more dominant, change-oriented American culture. Both of VMI's infamous battles, the nineteenth-century one and the twentieth-century one, may be understood as battles on behalf of "peculiar institutions" of class distinction. One was a battle for states' rights, in particular the rights of states to determine for themselves the legality of slaveholding, which entailed giving one race of people the power to buy and sell another. The other was a battle for a state's right to determine what kind of education it should offer its citizens, in particular if it was legal to give just one of the sexes access to social power and privilege through a publicly funded single-sex education.

While VMI's Civil War exploits are central to its identity as a school rooted deeply in Southern tradition, there is more to VMI's Southern identity than the enduring legend of the New Market cadets. Chief among VMI's unique traits, unable to be replicated through an education at VWIL or any of the federal military academies, is its especially strong network of alumni connections, which serve to make the Institute's endowment the largest per capita among public colleges and universities. But the connections deemed most valuable to cadets past, present, and future are those which benefit them as individuals within a network of fellow, supportive Institute men who

help advance one another's fortunes professionally, socially, and politically. NOW, in a January 1996 press release, quoted Judge Hall from the *Faulkner v. Jones* case as stating that VMI and the Citadel "have everything to do with wealth, power, and the ability of those who have it to decide who will have it later. The daughters of Virginia and South Carolina have every right to insist that their tax dollars no longer be spent to support what amount to fraternal organizations whose initiates emerge as full-fledged members of an all-male aristocracy."<sup>60</sup> While supportive alumni networks certainly exist at schools beyond the Mason-Dixon line, those in favor of opening VMI to women used language that emphasized the Southernness of VMI's particular alumni network. Emily Mitchell, in a July 1991 issue of *Time*, noted that "only about 15% of [VMI's] graduates enter the armed forces. The majority move smoothly into the Old Dominion's most powerful business and political ranks. Barring women from the school effectively curtails their access to that old-boy network."<sup>61</sup> Likewise, Cynthia Fuchs Epstein, in her Fall 1996 article "Sex Segregation and the War Between the States," pointed out that, "These two military-style institutions, [VMI and the Citadel,] give their sons handsome educations . . . and a lifetime 'old-boy' network of contacts."<sup>62</sup> Both Mitchell and Epstein used the phrase "old-boy network" to recall the Southernness -- as in good *ol'* boys -- of this particular system of social hierarchy. Common to all three of these critics' characterizations of VMI is the image of a secret society, membership in which allows one to gain the social knowledge -- via shared experiences and thus unparalleled interpersonal connections -- requisite to climbing the ladder of social success in all aspects of their lives as Southern gentlemen. Inherent in these three views is an essential

awareness of the class disparity between those who have and those who have not -- of those who by their initiation into the ranks of the social mystery that is VMI *have* unparalleled access to the halls of power, and those who attribute their *not* having such access to their previous exclusion from the the ranks of VMI.

But, just as strongly as some attribute to VMI's rituals and traditions the capacity to keep authority in the hands of a select few, others attribute to that same system an equalizing influence. VMI Commandant Bunting asserted that, "In our system all who enroll are reduced at once to a culture of utter equality: race, birth, money, prior attainment mean nothing. All new cadets are thrown exclusively upon their resources own resources of determination, guts, and wit."<sup>63</sup> But this view is not only held by those such as Bunting who are located within the realm of VMI's social mystery. Jeffrey Rosen observed that

the most striking feature of both academies [VMI and the Citadel] is their success at educating poor black students. The Citadel has the highest retention rate for minority students of any public college in South Carolina: 52 percent of black students graduate within four years. Moreover, white students come from modest backgrounds (and only 18 percent go on to military careers), which makes it all the harder to claim that VMI and the Citadel are powerful agents of the patriarchy.<sup>64</sup>

Similarly, McClay observed that, "one of the notable virtues of VMI and the Citadel . . . is their extraordinary success with black students, who thrive in circumstances where the 'adversative' method levels the playing field, reduces consciousness of racial difference,

and breaks down traditional barriers to interracial friendship and comradeship."<sup>65</sup> For these writers, the VMI experience was not about social mystification, but instead about the possibilities for social demystification to be had through the experience shared by cadets, who come to the Institute from a variety of social and economic backgrounds, of an adversative system of military training. What they have to say about the benefits for racial minorities as well as the "typical" white-bread military-school boys flies in the face of stereotypes of the racial oppressiveness of all things Southern. No matter their background or experience before entering VMI, it was argued, by the time a class of cadets has endured four years there they will all leave on the equal footing of Institute men -- and, now, of Institute women as well.

#### Brother Rats All? Conclusions about Women and Men at VMI

The controversy over whether or not to admit women into the Virginia Military Institute can best be explained by Burke's contention that there is "the presence of a mystifying condition in social inequality."<sup>66</sup> Some women, perceiving themselves not on equal footing with men in terms of educational and professional opportunities, saw in the mysterious rituals and traditions of VMI the trappings of the social knowledge and power -- privileges they felt they were prevented from accessing based solely on gender stratification. But some men, those who sought to defend VMI's system of social mystery, saw in its rituals and traditions a way of bridging the divisions that, outside of VMI, would keep them socially stratified. But, for all their differences as to whether or not women should be admitted to VMI, both sides in this conflict valued the VMI

experience and its capacity to identify people who had previously divided -- with gender-integrationists touting the identification of men and women, and all-male traditionalists touting identification amongst men of varying racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. This contentious issue of bringing together people previously considered incongruous, and thus kept separate under the old ruling order of division, was not limited to the debate over gender integrating VMI, however.

Elsewhere in Virginia in 1995-96 (concurrent with the VMI debate) and again in 1999, a debate raged in Virginia's capitol of Richmond as to the propriety of bringing together artistic representations of people previously considered incongruous and thus segregated: whites and blacks -- and not just any whites and blacks, but Confederate whites and civil rights-activist blacks.

Notes

1. Richard M. Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay: A History of Postbellum Thought*, ed. George Core and M. E. Bradford (New Rochelle: Arlington House, 1968), 394.
2. Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 122.
3. Statement of mission and basic philosophy from the *Regulations* of the Virginia Military Institute, quoted in Henry A. Wise, *Drawing Out the Man: The VMI Story* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia for the VMI Alumni Association, 1978), 366.
4. Wise, *Drawing Out the Man*, 489.
5. From the *Preamble of the VMI Honor Code*, quoted on Wise, *Drawing Out the Man*, 390.
6. Wise, *Drawing Out the Man*, 395.
7. Wise, *Drawing Out the Man*, 395-98.
8. Wise, *Drawing Out the Man*, 397-398.
9. Wise, *Drawing Out the Man*, 399.
10. This account of the VMI controversy as it played out in the courts is general information confirmed through a number of my sources, but I gleaned this particular version from Geoffrey Norman, "Crashing VMI's Line," *The American Spectator* (December 1996), 37-40. For the Supreme Court decision itself, including Ruth Bader Ginsburg's majority decision, William Rehnquist's concurring opinion, and Antonin

Scalia's dissenting opinion, see *United States, Petitioner 94-1941 v. Virginia et al.*, Petitioners 94-2107, 518 U.S. 515 (1996). These documents are available via the Legal Information Institute at <<http://supct.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/94-1941.ZO.htm>>, <<http://supct.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/94-1941.ZC.htm>>, and <<http://supct.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/94-1941.ZD.htm>> respectively. The decision, as well as all of the preceding lower court decisions, are also available through the Lexis-Nexis Academic database. For in-depth analysis of the various court cases leading to the gender-integration of VMI, see Philippa Strum, *Women in the Barracks: The VMI Case and Equal Rights* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002).

11. For summaries of Shannon Faulkner's quest to enter The Citadel, see Amy Thompson McCandless, *The Past in the Present: Women's Higher Education in the Twentieth-Century American South* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1999), 110-16; and Strum, *Women in the Barracks*, 221. See also *Shannon Richey Faulkner et al. v. James E. Jones, Jr., et al.*, Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.

12. For more details about Erin Claunch, see Josh White, "Loudoun Woman Attains Top Cadet Post at VMI," *Washington Post*, March 23, 2000, B01, <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A54701-2000Mar21.html>>. Also see VMI Public Relations Office, "Claunch Named Battalion Commander," VMI Web site, April 17, 2000, <<http://www.vmi.edu/pr/ir/apr00/claunch.html>>. For a firsthand account of the gender integration of VMI, written by a VMI English professor and based on interviews with various stakeholders including administrators, alumni, and students, see Laura Fairchild Brodie, *Breaking Out: VMI and the Coming of Women* (New York:

Pantheon, 2000).

13. Figures quoted by Elizabeth Fox Genovese in Charles Hamel, Oran Smith, and Chris Sullivan, "Partisan Conversation: Elizabeth Fox Genovese," *Southern Partisan* (1st Quarter 1997), 42.

14. Argument made by VMI Superintendent Josiah Bunting III in Norman's "Crashing VMI's Line," 39.

15. Norman, "Crashing VMI's Line," 38.

16. Norman, "Crashing VMI's Line," 39.

17. Norman, "Crashing VMI's Line," 40.

18. Katia Hetter, "End of an All-Male Era," *U.S. News and World Report* (July 8, 1996), 50-51, *WilsonWeb*.

19. Karen Johnson, "Statement of NOW National Secretary Karen Johnson: Supreme Court Should Halt VMI's Discrimination Against Women" (press release prepared by Melinda Shelton and Susannah Schwartz), January 17, 1996, National Organization for Women Web site, <<http://now.org/press/01-96/01-17b96.html>>.

20. Johnson, "Statement of NOW National Secretary."

21. Johnson, "Statement of NOW National Secretary."

22. Based on quote from Karen Gandy, executive vice president of NOW, "NOW Leaders Call Supreme Court Decision on VMI a 'Mixed Bag' Victory" (press release prepared by Shelley Golden and Diane Minor), June 26, 1996, NOW Web, <<http://now.org/press/06-96/06-26-96.html>>.

23. Johnson, "Statement of NOW National Secretary."



24. Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 118.
25. Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 119.
26. Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 121.
27. Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 121.
28. Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 122-23.
29. Johnson, "A Statement of NOW National Secretary."
30. Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 121.
31. Johnson, "A Statement of NOW National Secretary."
32. Johnson, "A Statement of NOW National Secretary."
33. Margaret Carlson, "The Crying Game," *Time* (January 29, 1996), 34, *WilsonWeb*.
34. Johnson, "A Statement of NOW National Secretary."
35. Gandy, "Decision on VMI a 'Mixed Bag' Victory."
36. Hetter, "End of an All-Male Era."
37. Carlson, "The Crying Game."
38. Lynn Rosellini and David Marcus, "A Leader Among Men," *U.S. News & World Report* (April 10, 2000), 46-7, *Wilson Web*.
39. "VMI Sets Rules for First Female Class," *Black Issues in Higher Education* (June 12, 1997), 11, *WilsonWeb*.
40. Daniel Seligman, "Keeping Up: Women on the Rat Line," *Fortune* (May 3, 1993), 104.
41. D. Grier Stephenson, Jr., "The Future of Single-Sex Education," *USA Today* 125 (January 1997), 80-2, *WilsonWeb*.

42. Wilfred M. McClay, "Of 'Rats' and Women," *Commentary* (Summer 1996), 46-50, *WilsonWeb*.
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44. McClay, "Of 'Rats' and Women."
45. McClay, "Of 'Rats' and Women."
46. Stephenson, "The Future of Single-Sex Education."
47. Fox Genovese and Podles, "Two Views."
48. Rosellini and Marcus, "A Leader Among Men."
49. Johnson, "A Statement of NOW National Secretary."
50. Jeffrey Rosen, "Like Race, Like Gender?" *The New Republic* (February 19, 1996), 21+, *WilsonWeb*.
51. Rosen, "Like Race, Like Gender?"
52. Josiah Bunting, III, "Making Room for Sister Rat," *Newsweek* (December 23, 1996), 54.
53. Rod Andrew, Jr., "Soldiers, Christians, and Patriots: The Lost Cause and Southern Military Schools, 1865-1915," *The Journal of Southern History* 64.4 (November 1998), 682. See also Rod Andrew, Jr., *Long Gray Lines: The Southern Military School Tradition, 1839-1915* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).
54. Andrew, "Soldiers, Christians, and Patriots," 681.
55. Andrew, "Soldiers, Christians, and Patriots," 681.
56. American Civil Liberties Union, "VMI Balks at Supreme Court Ruling," ACLU

Web site, July 11, 1996, <<http://www.aclu.org/news/w071196c.html>>.

57. Stephenson, "The Future of Single-Sex Education."

58. Norman, "Crashing VMI's Line," 34.

59. Norman, "Crashing VMI's Line," 34, 36.

60. Johnson, "A Statement of NOW National Secretary."

61. Emily Mitchell, "The Thin Gray Gender Line," *Time* (July 1, 1991), 66.

62. Cynthia Fuchs Epstein, "Sex Segregation and the War Between the States," *Dissent* (Fall 1996), 12-13, *WilsonWeb*.

63. Bunting, "Making Room for Sister Rat," 54.

64. Jeffrey Rosen, "Boys and Girls," *The New Republic* (14 February 1994), 16.

65. McClay, "Of 'Rats' and Women."

66. Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 123.

WHEN RICHMOND GAINED PERSPECTIVE BY INCONGRUITY:  
JUXTAPOSING SYMBOLS OF OLD SOUTH TRADITION AND NEW SOUTH  
CHANGE IN THE CONFEDERATE CAPITAL

"[O]ne of the unique aspects of my life is  
the juxtaposition of disparate events and people."

--Arthur Ashe, *Portrait in Motion*<sup>1</sup>

The gothic walls of the VMI barracks were not the only site of conflict between division and identification in the Virginia of the late 1990s. Virginia's capital of Richmond also was riddled with not one but two such controversies during this period. Whereas VMI's conflict was focused mainly on the shift from the segregation to the integration of the sexes, Richmond's controversies stemmed mainly from the shift from the segregation to the integration of the races. Richmonders debated the appropriateness of bringing together symbols of the Old South's order of division, in the form of depictions of Confederate leaders, with symbols of the New South's order of identification, in the form of representations of civil rights leaders. While the presence of these debates may, at first glance, seem indicative of the deep racial divide still present in the city's public and private lives, the juxtaposition of these previously incongruous symbols ultimately served to provide an avenue through which Richmonders could identify with one another in their shared concern for and reverence of the history of their city and their region.

Indeed, Richmond is a place where the past looms large in the present, a city best known, even today, as the capital of the former Confederate States of America. As an expert on Richmond's culture commented, "Richmond is known as a city obsessed with its past."<sup>2</sup> One of the places in which the past most asserts its influence in present-day Richmond is Monument Avenue. This boulevard through the city features statues of Confederate generals Robert E. Lee, J.E.B. Stuart, and Thomas J. "Stonewall" Jackson, Confederate President Jefferson Davis, Confederate oceanographer Matthew Fontaine Maury, and, joining them there in 1996, tennis champion, author, and social activist Arthur Ashe, Jr. Monument Avenue "serves as a shrine to [the city's] obsession" with the past, "infus[ing] the city with a mythology and demonstrat[ing] how history and perceptions of the past change, and how new meanings are created."<sup>3</sup> However, as fixated as Richmond is on its past, it is also a city trying to revitalize itself by capitalizing on that very history, as are many other cities. And so it was that in 1999 the Richmond Historic Riverfront Foundation (RHRF) put the finishing touches on its Canal Walk redevelopment project. As part of this redevelopment, the RHRF installed on the city's floodwall a set of thirteen murals commemorating scenes from Richmond's history, including one featuring Lee, as part of its efforts to reenergize the city's economic and cultural climate. However, this juxtaposition of past and present -- of Monument Avenue and its Confederate statues with a contemporary African American and his likeness, and of Robert E. Lee and other historical images with the city's gleaming new redevelopment project -- created, or brought to the surface, tension amongst Richmond-area residents who held seemingly incongruous perspectives of the

city's past, especially the history of its involvement in the Civil War and its race relations in the years since.

Richmonders had the opportunity to gain what Kenneth Burke called "perspective by incongruity" when they saw these disparate images juxtaposed. It seemed incongruous to some residents that a statue of a twentieth-century, African-American athlete, author, activist would be placed on the same ground of tradition as that occupied by monuments to Confederate luminaries. And by the same token, it seemed incongruous to other citizens that a mural featuring the likeness of a nineteenth-century, slavery-defending, Confederate general should be displayed on ground that was being hailed as the latest symbol of the city's progress, the Canal Walk redevelopment area. When such terms, images, or symbols that normally would be considered at odds with one another are placed side-by-side, dissonance results. And, as the very presence of the debates over the Ashe and Lee public art indicates, such dissonance manifests itself on a collective level as community conflict. In both of these controversies, an icon of the Southern tradition of division was juxtaposed with an icon of the Southern shift toward identification: Arthur Ashe, a symbol of change, was placed in the context of Monument Avenue, a symbol of tradition. Likewise, Robert E. Lee, a symbol of tradition, was placed in the context of the Canal Walk, a symbol of change. Furthermore, the presence of these mirror-image debates within just a few years of one another in the same city can be seen as yet another level of juxtaposition in turn-of-the-century Richmond, Virginia.

Here I will examine these two controversies through the lens of perspective by

incongruity. These public debates and their resulting compromises are evidence that previously "mutually exclusive" entities can indeed be "methodically merged" through their juxtaposition.<sup>4</sup> Ideally, the change of perspective that results from such juxtaposition, also known as the comic frame, "should enable people *to be observers of themselves, while acting*. Its ultimate would not be *passiveness*, but *maximum consciousness*. One would 'transcend' himself by noting his own foibles."<sup>5</sup> Juxtaposing these previously segregated symbols of Southern tradition and change, of division and identification, allowed Richmonders to see these symbols, and in some cases themselves, in a new way -- a perspective that allowed them to see through surface differences to a level of shared essences.

#### Perspective by Incongruity

Kenneth Burke elaborated the concept of "perspective by incongruity" in his book *Permanence and Change*, which "was written in the early days of the Great Depression, at a time when there was a general feeling that our traditional ways were headed for a tremendous change, maybe even a permanent collapse. It is such a book as authors in those days sometimes put together, to keep themselves from falling apart."<sup>6</sup> Just as Burke was writing in a time of great upheaval, when the existing order seemed to be giving way to a new one, so too is the South of the late twentieth- and early twenty-first-centuries undergoing a similar shift in identity and values. Thus it is appropriate to look at Richmond's debates between tradition and change through the perspective of incongruity, a perspective that became clear to Burke just as he, like late twentieth-

century Richmond, was "[f]inding himself divided."<sup>7</sup>

The most straightforward way of understanding perspective by incongruity is to think of it as the clashing together of two entities -- be they words, images, objects, institutions, or ideas -- which until that point had not been brought together. The very bringing together of such previously disparate entities allows each to be seen from a perspective heretofore unknown; it allows these previously alienated entities to be seen in terms of one another. Burke drew a number of physics analogies to convey his sense of perspective by incongruity. In *Attitudes Toward History*, he described perspective by incongruity as, "A method for gauging situations by verbal 'atom cracking.' That is, a word belongs by custom to a certain category -- and by rational planning you wrench it loose and metaphorically apply it to a different category."<sup>8</sup> Or, as he portrayed the concept in *Permanence and Change*, it is "the methodic merger of particles that had been considered mutually exclusive. . . . [it is] fusion."<sup>9</sup> However, this merging, cracking, and fusing together of particles or atoms is but one way of illustrating the juxtaposition at the core of perspective by incongruity. Burke used another physics analogy to elaborate how perspective by incongruity can be understood as the synthesis of opposing forces:

A planet does not continually strike some kind of bargain between pulling away and falling back; *it moves in a path* -- and this path is conceptualized, made available to astronomical calculations, if we compute it as a synthesis of tangential and centripetal forces. The actual motion is the synthesis, and it is never anything else. . . . a man solves a pseudo-problem who takes, not the



*motion*, but the two *concepts* of centripetal and centrifugal forces, as the reality, thereupon devoting his energies to a scheme for uniting them into a synthesis.<sup>10</sup>

Just as the physical forces of centrifugal motion and centripetal motion may move simultaneously in opposite directions, away from and towards a center, yet together cause their common system to move, so too may social forces be understood as concurrently working against and with one another.

For instance, in the Richmond debates under consideration in this section, there were forces advocating tradition (in the form of upholding Confederate symbols) and there were forces opposing tradition (in the form of questioning the sanctity of those same Confederate symbols). On one level, these forces acted in opposite ways on the situation. But on another level, the simultaneous working of these opposing forces resulted in the development of the community through the dialogue or juxtaposition of these opposing forces' views, brought together by their very opposition to one another. The social forces of tradition-upholding/change-questioning and tradition-questioning/change-promoting were indeed moving in opposite directions, as do centrifugal and centripetal motion. But at the same time that they opposed one another, these forces by their very juxtaposition or combination within the same community worked together, perhaps in spite of themselves, to create something greater than either force in itself: the exchange of ideas, which enhanced the community through the very conflict of its various factions.

Perspective by incongruity can also be thought of in terms of violating established pieties, which codify society's "*sense of what properly goes with what.*"<sup>11</sup>

For instance, one would be violating the piety, or sense of propriety, of a word's use if it were used in a context other than that in which it is normally used.<sup>12</sup> Applying this way of thinking about perspective by incongruity to the Richmond debates, we see that some objected to placing the Ashe statue on Monument Avenue because they felt that a statue of a twentieth-century African American athlete would not "go with" the other monuments, all of which depict nineteenth-century Confederate leaders. One objector likened putting a statue of Arthur Ashe on Monument Avenue to placing a statue of Babe Ruth adjacent to the Lincoln Memorial.<sup>13</sup> Others stated that their opposition to the Ashe statue being located on Monument Avenue stemmed from the juxtaposition of such disparate styles of sculpture, claiming that it would not be aesthetically pleasing to have a contemporary-style statue by a self-selected local artist in the presence of more traditional sculptures that were the product of international design competitions. Still others argued that to place Ashe's statue on Monument Avenue would give credence to the characterization of the Confederate leaders as heroes, that Ashe was too good a man to be placed amongst the defenders of slavery. Similarly, in the Lee mural controversy, some Richmonders believed that the likeness of Lee should not be juxtaposed with the likenesses of what were to them more honorable images from the city's past; others thought that the image of Lee, a symbol of the Old South, did not fit in with the Canal Walk redevelopment, a symbol of Richmond's place in the New South.

In each of these instances, new and old, change and tradition, progress and status quo, can only be perceived in relation to one another. Burke observed of Nietzsche that, "his subject-matter was specifically that of reorientation (transvaluation of *all* values) --

yet in facing the *problematical new* he spontaneously felt as a poet that he could glorify such a concern only by utilizing the *unquestioned old*." <sup>14</sup> In order to create new pieties, or new senses of "what properly goes with what," the old pieties must first be recognized before they can be violated. Thus, the very desire to place a statue of Ashe on Monument Avenue meant that those wanting to do so acknowledged the established sense of what belonged there.

In seeking to understand perspective by incongruity, it is also important to consider the element of purpose behind juxtaposing seemingly incongruous entities. Burke, well known for his interest in motives, used medieval gargoyles to illustrate this idea of "planned incongruity": "The maker of gargoyles who put man's-head on bird-body was offering combinations which were completely rational as judged by his logic of essences. In violating one order of classification, he was stressing another." <sup>15</sup> In other words, while most people would see a human head and an avian body as incongruous on a physical level, the artist who creates gargoyles melding these two parts into a whole is doing so because he sees them as congruous on a symbolic or spiritual level. What may widely be considered as incongruous from one perspective may just as well be considered congruous from another perspective. For instance, in the planned incongruity achieved by juxtaposing Arthur Ashe with the Confederates on Monument Avenue, these men who seemingly had nothing in common beyond their shared connection to Richmond were revealed, through the juxtaposition of their depictions, to share essences such as honor, vision, and commitment to their respective causes. The purposeful juxtaposition of a descendant of slaves with defenders of slavery served to

unite them all, in the eyes of some, under the banner of "Virginia heroes," revealing not only their differences but also, perhaps unexpectedly, their common attributes.

Likewise, Burke perceived a "gargoyle element in Marx's formula of class-consciousness. . . . It is a new perspective that realigns something so profoundly ethical as our categories of allegiance. . . . members of the same race or nation who had formerly thought of themselves as allies become enemies, and members of different races or nations who had formerly thought of themselves as enemies become allies."<sup>16</sup> Looking again to the Richmond debates, we observe perhaps unexpected alignments of friends and foes. For instance, in the Ashe statue debate, both those who had utmost respect for Ashe and extreme respect for the Confederates were opposed to placing the Ashe statue on Monument Avenue; though their motivations were quite different, they shared a common goal. Another example of this is seen in the Lee mural controversy, in which two African American city council members, who had been expected by many in the African American community to support the removal of Lee's image, supported reintroducing Lee into the collection of murals, neutrally acknowledging that Lee was part of Richmond's history.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps a more vivid and unexpected example of such realigned allegiances came when former Virginia Governor L. Douglas Wilder, a participant in the Canal Walk dedication ceremonies, stood to salute the Confederate flags displayed by some who were protesting the Lee mural's removal -- this from the same man who had so stubbornly advocated placing the Ashe statue on Monument Avenue so as to make a statement.<sup>18</sup> And a local Richmond legend, civil rights lawyer Oliver Hill, expressed his hope that "in a spirit of reconciliation and forgiveness,"

opponents of Lee the general would embrace the achievements of Lee the educator.<sup>19</sup>

In this spirit of understanding and unification through juxtaposition, Burke maintained, "The discordant 'subpersonalities' of the world's conflicting cultures and heterogeneous kinds of effort can be reintegrated only by means of a unifying 'master-purpose' . . . . The segregational, or dissociative state cannot endure -- and must make way for an associative, or congregational state."<sup>20</sup> One way of integrating formerly segregated terms or entities is to bring them together, no matter how much in conflict with established pieties that juxtaposition may be. Once these previously incongruous entities can be seen side by side, in light of one another, "The comic frame . . . might mitigate somewhat the difficulties in engineering a shift to new symbols of authority, as required by the new social relationships that the revolutions of historic empowerment have made necessary."<sup>21</sup> In sum, Burke advocated that "we deliberately cultivate the use of contradictory concepts. . . . In cases where the synthetic word does not happen to be already given, [Bergson] suggests we should get it by combining the antithetical ones (a proposal which seems to be accepted in such contemporary uses as space-time and mind-body)."<sup>22</sup> If turn-of-the-century Richmonders were to overcome the entrenched Southern pieties as to which symbols belong together and which people belong together, then they needed to recognize that "planned incongruity should be deliberately cultivated for the purpose of experimentally wrenching apart all those molecular combinations of adjective and noun, substantive and verb, which still remain with us."<sup>23</sup>

### Incongruous Perspectives of Richmond's Race Relations

Just as the debates regarding the Ashe statue and the Lee mural center on the tension inherent in juxtaposing the seemingly incongruous, so too is the recounting of Richmond's history marked by incongruity amongst the various accounts of its race relations. Depending on which version one reads, one may get the impression that Richmond was more or less progressive than other Virginia localities when it came to the integration of its schools, neighborhoods, and other public institutions. In *Richmond: The Story of a City*, first published in 1976 and revised and republished in 1990, former Richmond newspaper editor Virginius Dabney articulated his sanguine perspective of racial integration and reconciliation in Richmond. In contrast, Robert A. Pratt, in his 1992 study, *The Color of Their Skin: Education and Race in Richmond, Virginia, 1954-89*, offered a significantly less satisfied account as to the nature and pace of Richmond's racial desegregation efforts.

From Dabney's perspective, the fact that Richmond at least kept its schools open in the wake of *Brown v. Board of Education*, while many other schools in Virginia closed in "massive resistance" to court-mandated integration, was a sign of Richmond being more progressive than other localities: "In contrast to schools [elsewhere in Virginia], Richmond's schools were kept open. They were integrated gradually at first and then more rapidly."<sup>24</sup> Meanwhile, the same phenomenon, viewed from Pratt's vantage point, was "passive resistance": "As Virginia's massive resistance lay dying, Richmond's *passive* resistance was just being conceived. . . . the public schools in Richmond remained open throughout the state's massive resistance campaign -- open,

but segregated. . . . Richmond's officials . . . while equally committed to maintaining segregated schools, were considerably less conspicuous in the pursuit of their objectives."<sup>25</sup> In these two accounts, we see disparate versions of the same events. In Dabney's view, school integration in Richmond was slow but sure; but from Pratt's perspective, Richmond officials were deliberate in their slowness, delaying progress as a way of protesting the mandated changes.

Integration was not just an issue affecting school systems, however. If integration of the races was to be complete, then equal opportunities would need to be given to all in aspects of life as diverse as seating on buses and in restaurants, use of public water fountains and restrooms, and opportunities for employment and recreation. From Dabney's more satisfied outlook, "The great majority of whites were not happy over the rapid advance of the blacks into areas formerly closed to them, but they realized that a new day was coming and they did not believe in defying the courts. Integration went steadily forward, so much that the liberal *Washington Post* published an article in 1962 . . . bearing the headline 'Richmond Quietly Leads Way in Race Relations.'"<sup>26</sup> However, when viewed from Pratt's more questioning perspective, the situation was not so rosy: "Whites feared that if blacks could demonstrate that they could excel in any field of endeavor if given opportunities equal to those whites received, then they would prove once and for all that their exclusion from white society was based, not on their innate racial inferiority, but on whites' ingrained racial prejudice."<sup>27</sup>

These two authors' views of Richmond as it moved into the late-twentieth century are equally divergent. With the organization "in the early 1980s . . . of

Richmond Renaissance,” Dabney observed, “A definite effort was made to alleviate interracial feeling in the city and to bring the two groups together.”<sup>28</sup> “Richmonders,” concluded Dabney, “are engaged no longer in fighting the Civil War again.”<sup>29</sup> In contrast, Pratt argued that little progress had been made in Richmond’s racial integration in the decades since *Brown v. Board of Education* : “one finds that the scenario has changed very little: Richmond’s public schools, as of [1992], are 88 percent black. . . . It is perhaps cruelly ironic that steps designed to bring the races closer together succeeded only in driving them further apart”<sup>30</sup> by instigating “white flight” to the suburbs. Juxtaposing these two quite incongruous readings of Richmond’s history of racial integration affords us enhanced insights into the state of race relations in Richmond. These two writers were recounting the history of the same era in the same city’s history, yet their accounts vary vastly. Their incongruous historical accounts are parallel with the equally incongruous accounts of the Civil War and contemporary race relations that are at issue in the debates considered here.

#### Debate I: Did a Statue of Arthur Ashe Belong on Monument Avenue?

In the summer of 1992, Richmond resident Paul DiPasquale was asked to take a group of children, including his own, to an appearance at a tennis clinic by Richmond native and tennis legend Arthur Ashe, Jr.<sup>31</sup> At this brief encounter with Ashe, DiPasquale, who also happens to be a sculptor, was inspired by the way so accomplished and renowned person as Ashe was interacting so humbly and meaningfully with these young people. As DiPasquale recalled it, he was so impressed with Ashe that he



"couldn't believe this guy was walking on the Earth."<sup>32</sup> Later that year, DiPasquale contacted Ashe about the possibility of his creating a likeness of him to be displayed in Richmond. Ashe agreed to DiPasquale creating a sculpture of him, with the caveat that it be displayed in the context of the proposed Hard Road to Glory Hall of Fame, inspired by Ashe's series of books tracing the history of African Americans in sport. According to DiPasquale, Ashe also stipulated that he be portrayed with children, wearing a sweat suit with untied tennis shoes (as was his practice when he was not on the court), and emphasizing books over tennis. The two planned to meet in early 1993 to continue their discussions of the project. Ashe promised to send DiPasquale some recent photographs of himself, as he wanted the sculptor to show him as he was at that time in his life. However, on February 6, 1993, DiPasquale learned, along with the rest of the world, that Ashe had succumbed to AIDS (which he had contracted years earlier through a blood transfusion received while undergoing heart bypass surgery). Just days later, DiPasquale received a package from Ashe's widow. Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe sent DiPasquale the photographs Ashe had planned to send the sculptor himself. Those posthumously sent photographs, combined with the inspiration of Ashe's memorial service, prompted DiPasquale to render his first sketch of what would become his sculpted tribute to the tennis champion, author, and social activist. And so it was that DiPasquale proceeded with his plans for creating a sculpture of Ashe to be displayed in Richmond.

An artist's vision, however, is not enough to see a piece of public art through to completion. Also necessary are funding for the labor and materials as well as a public space set aside for its display. While DiPasquale did use some of his own money to get

the project underway, he knew he would need more, so he approached possible financial backers. In December 1993, Virginia Heroes, a foundation established in conjunction with Ashe to provide mentors to Virginia youth, committed to raise funds for the sculpture.<sup>33</sup> The organization signed on Thomas Chewning, a childhood friend of Ashe's and a corporate executive, to spearhead the fundraising efforts. The sculpture was to be donated to the City of Richmond in the hope that it would one day stand on the grounds of the proposed Hard Road to Glory Hall of Fame. However, with the Hall of Fame still years away (and even now, in 2003, it continues to exist only as an idea), a "temporary" location was needed to display the Ashe statue. Thus, Virginia Heroes, the Planning Commission, and the Urban Design Committee each began their respective site searches. In the end, the three most discussed possibilities were Byrd Park, to whose tennis courts Ashe was denied access during the segregated days of his youth; downtown Richmond, where space was available for a park either at the site of two abandoned department stores or at the historic armory; and Monument Avenue, the city's renowned boulevard featuring statues of Confederate leaders.

The Monument Avenue site was supported early on by former Governor Wilder, who, in December 1994, stated that placing the statue there would send "a transcending message."<sup>34</sup> Another backer of the Monument Avenue location was state Sen. Benjamin Lambert, a member of the Virginia Heroes site selection committee, who argued that "it makes the right statement."<sup>35</sup> However, others such as Mayor Leonidas Young and *Richmond Free Press* editor Ray Boone believed, at least initially, that Monument Avenue was not good enough for Ashe. As Boone stated, Ashe "deserves better," and

placing his statue on Monument Avenue “would be giving credence to the false proposition that these were heroes.”<sup>36</sup> Still others disapproved of the Ashe statue being placed on Monument Avenue because they considered it an affront to what R. Lee Collins, president of the Heritage Preservation Association, called the “hallowed ground” of Monument Avenue.<sup>37</sup> Collins, and others such as members of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, argued that the city find another location for the Ashe statue so as to “pay the proper tribute to a great athlete without violating the historic sensibilities of Richmond’s Confederate-American population.”<sup>38</sup> It became clear that placing Ashe on Monument Avenue was controversial in large part because it would place Confederates, who many perceive to have been defenders of slavery, side by side with Ashe, an African American defender of human rights. This juxtaposition was disturbing to the sensibilities of many Richmonders, both those who revered the Confederates as well as those who revered Ashe, because it was bringing together entities that had for years been segregated, first by law and later in lingering attitudes and practices. For others, however, this juxtaposition was seen not as disturbing but rather as reassuring in its symbolic potential for “suggesting that Richmond has moved on from its racist past.”<sup>39</sup>

The juxtaposition of Ashe with the Confederates was not the only aspect of the Monument Avenue location to spark controversy, however. Some in Richmond’s artistic circles were disturbed that DiPasquale simply could offer a statue to the city and have it placed on the revered Monument Avenue without having to compete with other artists for that privilege. Beverly Reynolds, a local gallery owner, organized Citizens for Excellence in Public Art (CEPA) in reaction to the decision to place DiPasquale’s statue

on Monument Avenue. CEPA's perspective was that DiPasquale's rendering of Ashe neither matched the artistic quality of the other statues on the Avenue nor did Ashe justice. They advocated holding an international competition for another, permanent statue of Ashe to be placed on Monument Avenue instead of DiPasquale's. However, when CEPA members presented their proposal to the City Council they encountered resistance, in part because the majority African American council's view, voiced by Mayor Leonidas Young, was that "The appearance of your group is that it's not inclusive."<sup>40</sup> Perhaps some felt CEPA's aesthetic objections to the Ashe statue simply masked racial ones. Nonetheless, the juxtaposition of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century statues with a late twentieth-century piece -- which some characterized as resembling a saguaro cactus or a man being held up at gun point, and which others believed to be too small in scale -- created an additional layer of controversy. At issue in this layer of the debate was whether it was appropriate to place DiPasquale's self-commissioned Ashe statue alongside the existing Confederate monuments, which were commissioned only after surviving the rigors of international design competitions.

In both strands of the Ashe-on-Monument Avenue controversy, juxtaposition of seemingly incongruous entities was the source of the conflict. Initially, before the location of the statue was finalized, the appropriateness of placing a statue of a twentieth-century, African American best known for his athletic pursuits alongside statues of nineteenth-century, "Confederate Americans" best known for their martial pursuits was the principal point of contention. Later, when the placement of the statue on Monument Avenue was firm, the issue shifted to one of aesthetics, the

appropriateness of placing a local artist's late twentieth-century rendering alongside international artists' late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century representations.

Common to both strands of the Ashe statue debate (as well as the Lee mural debate) was a concern that the citizens' voices be considered when constituting the community's identity through the use of public space. In the analysis that follows, I will illustrate how the juxtaposition of these seemingly incongruous symbols -- a statue of Arthur Ashe, a symbol of twentieth-century progress in race relations, and Monument Avenue's Confederate statues, symbols of nineteenth-century Confederate efforts to maintain states' rights to legal slavery -- made it possible for Richmond to see itself from a new perspective.

#### Perspective by Symbolic Incongruity

Initially, the debate over Paul DiPasquale's statue of Arthur Ashe centered on where it should be placed. As mentioned, the three most viable locations for the monument were Monument Avenue, Byrd Park, and downtown. When Monument Avenue came to the fore as the most favored site in the view of the various committees, a public debate erupted. Monument Avenue proved to be a controversial location for the Arthur Ashe statue because placing it there, on the same ground as that occupied by monuments to Robert E. Lee and other Confederate leaders, seemed to emphasize the disparities between Ashe and the Confederates: Ashe was widely known as a defender of human rights (such as in his work to raise awareness of apartheid in South Africa) and as someone who broke racial barriers in the world of "tennis whites," whereas the

Confederates were generally seen as defenders of slavery and thus as people who wanted to maintain racial barriers. In addition, the possibility of placing an Ashe statue on Monument Avenue brought to light the fact that, years after court-mandated integration, this most prestigious address in Richmond was still segregated; up until 1996, all five of its monumental residents were Confederates. The question of whether or not it was appropriate for Arthur Ashe to join the Confederates in being honored with a statue on Monument Avenue brought back to the surface memories of segregation -- and emphasized the fact that these pieties were not yet a phenomenon of the past only. However, once the placement was finalized, residents began to see how the very juxtaposition of the Ashe statue with the Confederate statues created the possibility of new symbolism for Monument Avenue and Richmond.

#### Pro-Ashe on Monument Avenue: Sending a Message of Diversity and Reconciliation

As Burke explained, pieties are society's "*sense of what properly goes with what.*"<sup>41</sup> Especially amongst the people of the South there long existed a *sense*, inculcated through years of slavery and segregation, that whites belonged with whites and blacks belonged with blacks -- and most certainly that whites and blacks did not *properly* belong together. Witness the existence of "white churches" and "black churches" as evidence that this attitude is not entirely one of the past, nor is it limited to displays of public art in the present. For all that the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the courts may have done (or attempted to do) to change this sense of what (or who) properly goes with what (or whom), the old piety of the separation of the races has

persisted in many avenues of Southern (and American) life. The initiative to place a statue of Arthur Ashe alongside the Confederate statues of Monument Avenue was, in the eyes of many progressive Richmonders, a way to change people's sense of what goes with what, to expand their sense of where it is appropriate and acceptable for African Americans to be in the life of the community. In the view of one "Thelma Brooks, a 66-year-old from the East End who has vivid memories of segregation," and who attends the church pastored by Mayor Young, "to deny Ashe a spot on Monument would mean 'they're still keeping you back, where they want to keep you.'"<sup>42</sup> Likewise, "backing off the Monument Avenue plan . . . would sanction a 'separate but equal' policy for black and white heroes, Johnnie Ashe [Arthur Ashe's brother] and others said."<sup>43</sup> As these and other Richmonders perceived the situation, blocking the Ashe statue's entrance to Monument Avenue would have been akin to preventing them from walking or driving down that or any other Richmond street.

Thus, when it was suggested by Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe and others that Monument Avenue might not be the most appropriate place for the Ashe statue, and that the city should revisit Arthur Ashe's original intention that the monument be featured at the yet-to-be-built African American sports hall of fame, some residents believed the pieties of segregation might be enforced once again. Having experienced the white establishment's delaying tactics throughout the years of the civil rights movement (recall Martin Luther King's references to African Americans' years of *waiting* for equality in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail"),<sup>44</sup> it made sense that African Americans feared that a plan to *delay* putting a statue of Ashe or another African American on Monument

Avenue was a way to avoid *ever* placing such a statue there. Mayor Leonidas Young recognized the presence of this sentiment in the community when he stated, "A number of individuals feared this (possible delay) was a move to keep Arthur Ashe off Monument Avenue."<sup>45</sup> Further, as City Council member Viola Baskerville argued, "To say a monument of this significance should be relegated to a sports hall of fame is to put Arthur back in the milieu he transcended."<sup>46</sup> Echoing this, Planning Commission member "Terone B. Green . . . said he was offended that people think of the monument as not good enough for Monument Avenue but acceptable for an African-American Sports Hall of Fame."<sup>47</sup> Baskerville and Green were expressing a fear that Richmond was returning to the old piety of "separate but equal," this time in the form of relegating statues of African Americans to segregated sites such as an African American sports museum rather than featuring them in such prominent places as Monument Avenue.

If an African American's statue could stand beside those of Confederates on Richmond's most honored street, then the sphere of African Americans' power and influence would be significantly expanded on a symbolic level in Richmond. It was "the passion of an array of citizens -- black and white, old and young -- who argued that a street reserved for Civil War heroes had no place in modern Richmond."<sup>48</sup> Consequently, the century-old piety of consecrating Monument Avenue only to Confederate heroes was set aside in favor of honoring heroes of various eras and allegiances there. As newspaper writer Margaret Edds observed, "For many, the placement of Ashe on a leafy boulevard long dedicated to white southerners who championed the lost cause of slavery and disunion is a seismic event. . . . It will be



Richmond's, and perhaps Virginia's, visual confirmation that the era by which many outsiders identify the city and the state is dead."<sup>49</sup> Placing a monument to Arthur Ashe, an African American of the twentieth century, alongside memorials to white Confederates of the nineteenth century effectively ended Richmond's piety of venerating only Lost Cause saints with icons in its utmost shrine to heroes -- Monument Avenue.

Once it was determined that the piety of a Confederate-only Monument Avenue would be changed, people began to think more about how these statues would impact one another's meanings through their juxtaposition. On one level, just discussing the possibility of situating Ashe on the Avenue exposed conflicts that had long been festering in the city. As one resident, Rev. Sylvester Turner, observed, "The strife this monument has revealed needs to be ended. Arthur Ashe did that, he healed the (racial) rift."<sup>50</sup> But at first Mayor Young "viewed the philosophical gap between Ashe and the currently honored individuals as too wide to justify their sharing space."<sup>51</sup> This "gap" between the philosophies held by those honored in the statues brought before Richmonders' eyes the "racial rift" that existed within and amongst themselves. When "legions of city residents urged council members to place Ashe's statue among the white Confederate heroes,"<sup>52</sup> they were voicing what Vice Mayor John Conrad also articulated, on behalf of the City Council, when he said, "we need to reconcile Richmond's history with its future."<sup>53</sup> Richmond's history as capital of the Confederacy makes the city distinctive and draws many tourists to the city, but at the same time Richmonders had to find a way to promote harmony amongst themselves so that they could ensure a stable future for the city, economically and otherwise. Placing a statue of Ashe, a symbol of

Richmond's twentieth-century achievements, alongside statues of Confederate leaders, symbols of Richmond's nineteenth-century attainments, inspired writer Robert Little to note, on the day of the groundbreaking, that "Tuesday on Monument Avenue, Richmond looked more like a city of the New South. And still, it promised to remember the old days."<sup>54</sup> This juxtaposition of New South and Old South, though controversial at first, seemed to kindle confidence in some, including Little, that the stated need to "reconcile Richmond's history with its future" could indeed be met -- first through symbols and later through the dialogue those symbols sparked.

Indeed, the very idea of situating a statue of Arthur Ashe alongside the Confederate statues on Monument Avenue was an exercise in "planned incongruity," designed specifically to "reconcile Richmond's history with its future." In fact, these words about reconciling past and future were articulated in the context of introducing the City Council resolution to place Ashe on the Avenue. Among the earliest and most vocal champions of the Ashe statue's eventual location on Monument Avenue was former Governor Wilder, paraphrased by the Associated Press as stating, "Placing Ashe . . . on the city's most symbolic and arguably its most beautiful street is an important counterpoint to Richmond's legacy of slavery and segregation."<sup>55</sup> While Mayor Young characterized Monument Avenue as "definitely representative" of "all the racial barriers [that] have not been broken down in the city,"<sup>56</sup> Councilman Timothy Kaine was paraphrased as saying that "a statue of a black American would symbolize a new dawn in the capital of the Confederacy."<sup>57</sup> This juxtaposition of Monument Avenue, a symbol of racial barriers and the established pieties, with Arthur Ashe, a symbol of achievement

in spite of such obstacles, created meaning beyond what either entity could have conveyed in itself: Together they created a symbol of a new beginning in Richmond's race relations. From the perspective of those involved in planning this juxtaposition of previously incongruous symbols, situating the Ashe statue on Monument Avenue "says we have reached a new era in social affairs. It makes a positive statement about how people are able to get along,"<sup>58</sup> "shows that the old Confederacy is changing over time,"<sup>59</sup> and proves that "Richmond has finally turned a page in history."<sup>60</sup> Only when the symbols of Monument Avenue and Arthur Ashe were placed side by side, seemingly incongruous, could this new perspective be realized.

Paradoxically, it was precisely when such seemingly incompatible entities as Arthur Ashe and the Confederate leaders were brought together that their previously unseen commonalities became more apparent. Rather than seeing only external differences, such as race or citizenship, perspective by incongruity allows us to "hope that Monument Avenue at last can be identified with the internal strengths of the individuals honored there."<sup>61</sup> Monument Avenue has long been considered a pantheon for heroes. With the addition of Arthur Ashe, the common identity of all those memorialized there as heroes has been emphasized. Sculptor Paul DiPasquale, in addressing whether it was appropriate for Ashe to be on the Avenue, questioned, "Isn't it for monuments? Isn't it for heroes? No one questions that Arthur Ashe was a hero."<sup>62</sup> Likewise, Johnnie Ashe declared at the unveiling, "Arthur Ashe Jr. is a true Virginia Hero, and he belongs."<sup>63</sup> Indeed, for advocates of placing the Ashe statue on Monument Avenue and of the positive symbolism to be gained for Richmond in doing so, the idea

of "belonging" was at the very crux of their purpose. In what were perhaps the most cited words from the dedication ceremony, former Governor Wilder affirmed, "Monument Avenue is now an avenue for all people. . . . Today, I feel more pride and relevance in being here on Monument Avenue than I have at any time in my life."<sup>64</sup> Situating Ashe on the Avenue created a powerful symbol of belonging, especially for African Americans in Richmond. Even the most powerful of Virginians, the commonwealth's first elected African American governor, implied that he had once felt irrelevant on Monument Avenue. But on the day Ashe's statue was unveiled, Wilder felt that he belonged there more than he ever had before. What had been perhaps the most sacrosanct bastion of segregation in all of Richmond had finally been integrated -- not by military force, but rather by the powerful force of symbolism.

#### Anti-Ashe on Monument Avenue: Denigrating and Defending Confederate Heritage

As happy as many may have been about placing a statue of Arthur Ashe on Monument Avenue, former Governor Wilder acknowledged at the groundbreaking that, "Some say Arthur Ashe doesn't deserve to be here, some say he deserves better."<sup>65</sup> As was noted by the Associated Press at an earlier point in the controversy, "The City Council and Richmond's black mayor are reconsidering the plan [to place the Ashe statue on Monument Avenue] in light of complaints from black and white residents that Ashe would be out of place there."<sup>66</sup> Those with symbolic objections to situating the Ashe statue on Monument Avenue fell into two basic camps: those who argued that Ashe was too good to be placed alongside the Confederates, and those who contended

that the Confederate purity of the Avenue would be defiled by including a mere athlete alongside generals and the like. For the former, situating Ashe -- a contemporary hero because of his achievements as an athlete, an author, and a human rights activist -- amongst the Confederates was incongruous because, in their view, the Confederates were not truly heroes; placing Ashe alongside the Confederates would give credence to the long held contention that defenders of slavery were indeed heroes. And for the latter, Monument Avenue was dedicated to honoring the lives of Confederate heroes; to include a twentieth-century man unrelated to the Confederacy with these figures was to take away from the reverence given to the Confederacy through reserving a particular place of honor for its leaders. Both groups of Richmonders who argued against placing the Ashe statue on Monument Avenue on symbolic grounds did so because they viewed Ashe and the Confederates as incongruous, though for very different reasons.

Some of those who argued that a statue of Arthur Ashe should not be placed on Monument Avenue did so out of their deep respect and admiration for Ashe and all he had accomplished in his short life. They saw Ashe, with all that he had done to break down racial barriers in tennis and to promote human rights around the world, and the Confederates, with all that they had done to maintain racial barriers and deny equal rights to African Americans, as inexorably incongruous. As one resident, Arrelius D. Pleasant stated, "Arthur Ashe doesn't belong with those racists."<sup>67</sup> Or, as Robert Little reported, "Some blacks said [Ashe] was too great a man to stand with the generals who fought for racism and separation."<sup>68</sup> While some Richmonders, searching for some common bonds that would tie Ashe and the Confederates together, emphasized that all

were "Virginia heroes," others such as resident Robert H. Lamb thought that it was clearly "a flight of fancy . . . to suggest that Arthur Ashe viewed the Confederate heroes on Monument Avenue as kindred spirits."<sup>69</sup> Another Richmonder, Matthew Craig, more bluntly articulated the difference between Ashe and the Confederates when he stated that Ashe was "a champion. Don't put him on a street full of losers. These guys can't win a war."<sup>70</sup> And while not voicing her judgment of the Confederates, Ashe's widow Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe explained her own stance against situating a statue of her husband on Monument Avenue, a stance also grounded in deep respect and admiration for Ashe: "I have always felt that in all this controversy, the spirit that Arthur gave Richmond has been overlooked. I am afraid that a statue of Arthur Ashe on Monument Avenue honors Richmond, Virginia, more than it does its son, his legacy, and his life's work."<sup>71</sup> In Moutoussamy-Ashe's opinion, those in favor of placing Ashe on the Avenue to "make a statement" or "send a transcending message" were in reality honoring Richmond's own desired image of racial reconciliation more than they were honoring the achievements of Ashe's life. What all of those arguing within this strand of the opposition had in common was their belief that Arthur Ashe transcended the personalities of the Confederates, the pieties of Monument Avenue, and the politics surrounding his placement there.

As reporters Edds and Little observed, "still others said Ashe would be incompatible with the Confederates."<sup>72</sup> Or, as Ray McCallister articulated in an opinion column, "Monument Avenue is far from the ideal spot for this statue. Arthur Ashe has no more business with Confederate heroes than Ulysses Grant."<sup>73</sup> Richard Hines, a Sons

of Confederate Veterans member from Alexandria, stated, "The intent of the placement of the statue was to debunk our heritage."<sup>74</sup> Clearly some, such as Hines, would agree that placing Ashe alongside the Confederates was an exercise in "planned incongruity" -- but from a paranoid point of view, which sees such juxtapositions as purposeful assaults intended to obliterate all Confederate commemorations. Adjacent to the statue dedication festivities, "men in suits and skinheads in T-shirts . . . [were] holding Confederate flags and placards filled with overblown rhetoric [such as] . . . 'STATUE LOCATION IS A HATE CRIME,' 'HERITAGE DESECRATION IS NOT A CIVIL RIGHT,' and 'CULTURAL BIGOTS DESTROY SOUTHERN HERITAGE.' . . . Another sign likened the monument to 'cultural genocide.'"<sup>75</sup> For those displaying these messages, situating Ashe alongside the Confederates was deeply offensive to their "sense of what properly goes with what." To place a non-Confederate's likeness, and an African American's at that, alongside memorials to their revered Confederate heroes was not merely distasteful; it was perceived as an act of war, as an invitation to fight again on behalf of the Lost Cause. As former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke stated in an appearance in Richmond three years later, in support of restoring the Lee mural to the city's Canal Walk: "Duke said he chose the Arthur Ashe statue as the venue for his news conference 'to show the hypocrisy here.' He said it is unfair that 'we have to put up with a sports star on an avenue of Confederate heroes.' . . . El-Amin and his backers will not be satisfied until all those monuments are removed, Duke said."<sup>76</sup> And so the Confederate battle flag was unfurled, once again, as the defenders of Confederate heritage marched into battle against those they perceived as trying desecrate or destroy

their heritage, one monument at a time.

Those opposing the placement of Ashe amidst the Confederates on the grounds that it would be anachronous did so with less bombast and more tact than did demagogue David Duke. Edward J. Willis III argued before the Commission of Architectural Review's Board of Appeals that placing the Ashe statue on Monument Avenue "would historically fracture the identity of the neighborhood."<sup>77</sup> Eventually, Willis attempted to file suit against the city, claiming "that the monument site is within The Old and Historic District of Monument Avenue and is at an important location within the city's second line of defense during the Civil War. He says the city is failing to protect historic property. He also says the modern statue violates city code, undermines preservation and will harm tourism."<sup>78</sup> An elderly Daughters of the American Revolution member and her husband, interviewed on the street by a reporter, observed that, "While they admired Ashe, they don't see a statue to him in keeping with the theme of Monument Avenue. 'Our world has changed,' said her husband, who believes the tall pedestal and the stone wall around it were designed to thwart vandals. 'This is not part of our world,' the 75-year-old woman said."<sup>79</sup> Another articulation of the Ashe-as-anachronous argument came from Edward Smith, director of the American studies program at American University in nearby Washington, D.C. (and, as it happens, an African American): "what I find most distasteful and disrespectful about the Ashe Memorial is that he is positioned so that his back faces the other monuments . . . . If his location on that street was for the expressed purpose of making the avenue more inclusive, then why is he facing in the opposite direction, thereby rejecting the presence of those who came



before him?"<sup>80</sup> The common thread throughout these statements of the anachronous case against placing the Ashe statue on Monument Avenue is the idea of incongruity -- that a monument to a twentieth-century athletic luminary does not *properly belong with* monuments to nineteenth-century Confederate personages, and that a late twentieth-century sculpture does not *properly belong with* architecture and monuments from the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries.

#### Perspective by Aesthetic Incongruity

While many Richmonders argued about the symbolic appropriateness of placing the Ashe statue on Monument Avenue, others questioned or defended it based on aesthetic considerations. Aesthetics is, "The branch of philosophy concerned with the nature of art and with judgments concerning beauty. 'What is art?' and 'What do we mean when we say something is beautiful?' are two questions often asked by aestheticians."<sup>81</sup> As Margaret Edds reported, "Art critics in Virginia's capitol have quietly mounted an effort to do what Confederate aficionados last summer could not: delay the placement of a statue of tennis great Arthur Ashe on Monument Avenue. Unlike last summer, however . . . the issue is not location, but the statue itself."<sup>82</sup> At issue in this strand of the debate was whether the statue of Arthur Ashe sculpted by Paul DiPasquale was the most *appropriate* rendering of Ashe to be placed amidst the Avenue's existing monuments. Members of the general public, even those who bracketed their critiques with "I'm not an art expert, but . . .," commented how the Ashe statue "is not majestic enough. It is too small for its base. And despite improvements, it

continues to look like a giant trophy . . . Or a man being held up . . . Or a saguaro cactus."<sup>83</sup> Those in the city's artistic community formed an organization known as Citizens for Excellence in Public Art (CEPA), characterized by one columnist as "a group of artistic snobs,"<sup>84</sup> which circulated a petition and raised funds in support of an international competition to select a permanent Ashe monument for the Avenue. Those who believed DiPasquale's statue conformed to Ashe's final wishes, and as such best captured the essence of how Ashe wanted to be remembered in his hometown, challenged the arguments advanced by CEPA. Once again, incongruity was at the heart of the controversy, with CEPA supporters emphasizing the aesthetic incongruity between DiPasquale's statue and the existing monuments, and with dissenters attempting to trump CEPA's aesthetic concerns with appeals to Ashe's original intent.

#### Anti-DiPasquale Statue: Upholding Artistic Standards and Properly Honoring Ashe

The main opponents to placing DiPasquale's sculpture of Ashe on Monument Avenue were self-proclaimed members of the Richmond artistic community, organized as Citizens for Excellence in Public Art (CEPA) under the leadership of gallery owner Beverly Reynolds. In the preamble to its petition to hold an international competition, CEPA members argued, "for all the reasons Arthur Ashe should be honored, he should be honored with a statue that will be worthy of him and a work of which the city and its citizens can be proud. We therefore urge the City Council . . . to conduct an international competition among artists designed to produce a world-class monument to Arthur Ashe."<sup>85</sup> One Richmonder, Sally Todd, "characterized the statue as

commonplace and undistinguished. 'We've had world-class sculptors for all the other statues on Monument Avenue,' she said, 'so why should we have less than the best for one of Richmond's distinguished citizens?'"<sup>86</sup> Another area resident, Mary Lou Carr argued, "The statue should not be in casual dress or modern style."<sup>87</sup> Newspaper columnist Ray McCallister, taking on the voice of Kilservative in a satiric monologue between Von Liberal and Kilservative on Richmond current events, portrayed the aesthetic opposition in this way: "don't let [DiPasquale] put his lifeless work on Monument Avenue. Works of majesty belong there, not stick figures with upraised arms. The [Jefferson] Davis statue may not be much, but at least it doesn't look like a deodorant commercial."<sup>88</sup> As these comments indicate, those opposed to the Ashe statue for aesthetic reasons argued that DiPasquale's statue of Ashe, dressed in a sweat suit and tennis shoes and talking with children, did not properly fit in with the existing Confederate statues, all of which were "majestically" arrayed in more formal garb and riding horses or contemplating the globe (in the case of oceanographer Maury). In addition, they stated that in order to be worthy of inclusion on Monument Avenue, a sculpture should be the product of an international competition and not merely the gift of a local sculptor. This perception of incongruity -- in terms of how the statues were clothed, in which activities they were depicted engaging, and how the sculptures were selected -- can be explained by another concept elucidated by Kenneth Burke: social mystery.

Burke, in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, enters into a discussion of social mystery through reference to Thomas Carlyle's ideas about symbols of social mystery, with

clothes being Carlyle's chief example. Carlyle asks, "Is it not to Clothes that most men do reverence?" Later Burke quotes Carlyle as stating that, "Clothes gave us *individuality, distinctions, social polity,*" and as noting "the moral, political, and even Religious influences of Clothes" as well as that people are "clothed with Authority." Burke's articulation of social mystery centers on the idea that "*mystery* is equated with *class distinctions.*"<sup>89</sup> Both strands of this aesthetic argument against DiPasquale's tribute to Ashe indicated the presence of perceptions of class division -- not only between those depicted in the statues, but also between those who disagreed as to whether it mattered if Ashe were portrayed in a sweat suit or a business suit. Regarding the perception of class division or incongruity between Ashe and the Confederates, CEPA and other aesthetic opponents to DiPasquale's statue seemed to be advocating that Ashe be portrayed in such a way as to diminish the perception of class division between him and the Confederates. They argued that portraying Ashe in such a casual manner, in athletic clothes, and in such a simple, "stick-like" style did not work to equalize people's perceptions of Ashe and the Confederates, but rather worked to reinforce certain factions' contention that Ashe was not good enough, that his accomplishments as an athlete were not significant enough, for him to be placed alongside the more "majestic," less "commonplace" renderings of the Confederates. Thus, they advocated portraying Ashe more formally, both in dress and in mode of sculpture, so as to send the message that Ashe was just as deserving of a place of honor on Monument Avenue as were the Confederates.

But CEPA's aims to more adequately honor Ashe were undermined by its

inattention to racial matters. However well-intentioned CEPA's efforts of behalf of a statue more "worthy" of Ashe may have been, the group's mostly white racial composition was central to their failure. In response to charges from the African-American majority City Council that CEPA was composed almost entirely of whites -- and the implication that the group may have had a hidden, racially motivated agenda to keep DiPasquale's Ashe statue off of Monument Avenue -- CEPA responded that its concerns transcended race. As Reynolds noted in an opinion column published after CEPA's efforts had been derailed, "It was not until we reached the City Council for final approval that race entered into the effort. . . . This issue was never about race but about how to establish a process to ensure that this first Monument Avenue statue to an African-American be artistically and conceptually excellent -- that it be more than just a symbol, that it be a great work of art also."<sup>90</sup> Aesthetic opponents to the DiPasquale rendering of Ashe situated themselves not against a statue of Ashe, but rather as for a higher quality depiction of him: "we had only one agenda: to honor a great African-American with a great monument."<sup>91</sup> For CEPA members, it was not enough to have just any statue of Ashe; for Ashe to "fit in" and carry equal symbolic influence with the other statues, they argued, it was necessary for his statue to equal theirs in formality and artistic merit.

Aesthetic quality was not the only argument put forward by those opposed to DiPasquale's sculpture. Another element of the statue about which they were concerned was aesthetic accuracy -- whether DiPasquale's rendering was congruous with the essence of who Arthur Ashe was. This concern is reflected in CEPA's petition

preamble, which states, "for all the reasons Arthur Ashe should be honored, he should be honored with a statue that will be worthy of him."<sup>92</sup> For some, DiPasquale's depiction was less than satisfactory in its portrayal of Ashe's physical condition. As one caller to the *Richmond Times-Dispatch's* reader feedback phone line observed, "The statue looks like ET in glasses. It's not a very good likeness of Arthur Ashe."<sup>93</sup> Another opined that "the informality and the depiction of Ashe as he looked near the end of his life [when he was suffering the effects of AIDS] create a less-than-dignified impression."<sup>94</sup> One member of the Commission for Architectural Review, Douglas Harnesberger, advocated for a "middleground" between Ashe at the end of his life and Ashe in his top condition.<sup>95</sup> These concerns seem to stem from many people's discomfort at seeing the gaunt figure of a man dying from AIDS juxtaposed with the more robust figures of the Confederate generals on their trusty steeds, or the juxtaposition of a sickly Ashe with the four healthy children gathered around him in the sculpture.

Another possible interpretation of these expressions of uneasiness at seeing an AIDS-stricken Ashe immortalized in bronze is that the statue seemed incongruous with the widespread image of Ashe as a champion athlete, who at the peak of his game and his media exposure was shown in top physical condition. "What a clumsy effort to picture a man who's [sic] essence was speed, grace and intellectual presence," remarked one Richmonder, "It reminds me somewhat of the Soviet political statues except that they at least got the anatomical proportions right."<sup>96</sup> Steve Clark argued that a tribute to Ashe should depict his "agility, grace and power. True, Ashe was much more than a tennis player. He also was an educator and a humanitarian. But . . . I say let the Ashe

statue focus on the tennis hero in action. I want to see his muscles rippling and beads of sweat on his brow."<sup>97</sup> While most statues depict their subjects in idealized form, DiPasquale's showed Ashe as he was at the end of his life. Sculpting someone known most widely for his athletic achievements in less than vigorous form, yet still holding a racquet and wearing tennis clothes, was too incongruous with the image of the more energetic and fit athlete many Richmonders wanted to remember through a statue in his honor.

While some argued that DiPasquale's Ashe was not portrayed athletically enough, others contended that Ashe should have been depicted in a more well-rounded manner, reflecting more accurately the diversity of his accomplishments and the depth of his character. As Paul Woody stated in a sports-section commentary, "Some make the argument that Ashe was just a tennis player and that depicting him in this manner is more than satisfactory. But that sells Ashe short."<sup>98</sup> Likewise, Frances Lewis, characterized as "one of Virginia's premier art patrons," noted that "Arthur Ashe's lovingness, his energy, his intelligence . . . this championship man does not show in the statue and there could be an improvement."<sup>99</sup> Others such as Sandi Stovall, of the Commission for Architectural Review, noted that the artist's changes helped soften the statue, but that Ashe needed to be shown making eye contact with the children.<sup>100</sup> Stovall and others like her felt that the sculptor should strive to, as the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* paraphrased DiPasquale, "create more interaction between the Ashe figure and those of the children."<sup>101</sup> These comments reflect some community members' belief that it was not sufficient to depict Ashe just as an athlete. Rather, they hoped Ashe's statue

would more effectively immortalize his roles as an advocate for children and as an author. Again, it seems that these concerns as to whether Ashe's statue was inadequate at representing his greatness likely stemmed from its placement in the presence of the existing monuments on the Avenue. As Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe stated, "Given where the statue was supposed to be located [in front of the African American Sports Hall of Fame], Arthur requested that he be posed in a sweatsuit with a racquet and books, and with children around him. It is important to understand that had Arthur felt that the statue was to be used for other purposes or placed in a different location, he surely would have chosen a different pose."<sup>102</sup> Moutoussamy-Ashe, calling on the authority of Ashe's intentions, echoed the argument that an athletically oriented sculpture of Ashe was not appropriate in the context of Monument Avenue. Once again, the Ashe statue was presented as incongruous. And in Moutoussamy-Ashe's view, not only was the statue incongruous with the context, it was also incongruous with the wishes of the very man whom it depicts.

#### Pro-DiPasquale Statue: Respecting Ashe's Intentions, Capturing His Essence

Though Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe drew on Arthur Ashe's intentions to bolster her argument against placing his likeness on Monument Avenue, most people who appealed to Ashe's original intentions did so in support of DiPasquale's particular rendering of Ashe. Randy Ashe strongly contended that his cousin's wishes were best represented in DiPasquale's depiction: "just one person in Richmond, Virginia . . . asked Arthur Ashe what message he wanted to say."<sup>103</sup> In Randy Ashe's view, the existing



statue showed "Arthur as he asked to be portrayed."<sup>104</sup> For David Erhardt, who e-mailed his opinion to the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, Ashe's desires were more deserving of consideration than the aesthetic concerns of others: "If Mr. Ashe had not participated in the basic design of the statue . . . there could be some excuse for the continued wrangling about the design."<sup>105</sup> In the oft-repeated narrative of how the statue came to be, reporter Margaret Edds explained how "The sculptor and Ashe had a phone conversation in which Ashe outlined his preferences . . . , including that he be informally dressed in tennis sweats, that his shoes be untied, and that he be interacting with children."<sup>106</sup> Part of the reason these appeals to Ashe's original intentions were so effective is that they connected with some people's desire to determine how they will be remembered by others. As Thomas Chewning, childhood friend of Ashe and chief fundraiser for the statue, argued, "The best way to pay tribute to anyone is to remember them in the manner they want . . . . [This statue] completely captures the spirit and messages Arthur wished to leave with us."<sup>107</sup> Likewise, Allen J. Taylor observed, "It captures the nature of Arthur Ashe as a scholar and great tennis player."<sup>108</sup> Though many complained that the scale of the Ashe statue, especially in contrast with the other nearby monuments, was not grand enough to do him honor, Reverend Sylvester Turner contended, "I like the size of the monument. . . . I probably would like to see a larger statue. But Arthur Ashe never presented himself as larger than life. This monument exemplifies that fact."<sup>109</sup>

In the views of these and others advocating the placement of DiPasquale's version of Ashe on Monument Avenue, DiPasquale's mandate from Ashe as to how he wanted to be rendered, and his self-described faithfulness to Ashe's wishes, imbued his

statue with the authority of the very man being depicted. It was difficult for opponents to argue against these claims that DiPasquale's statue was true to Arthur Ashe's own wishes -- and not just any wishes, but his last wishes. Only when Jeanne Moutoussamy-Ashe entered the debate with her January 1996 letter to the editor in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* did some begin to reconsider DiPasquale's claims of abiding by Ashe's original intentions. However, by the late date at which Moutoussamy-Ashe made her opinions known, the momentum in support of placing DiPasquale's tribute to Ashe on Monument Avenue was essentially unstoppable.

#### Of Heroes and History: Finding Identification through History's Division

While the various factions debating the symbolic and aesthetic propriety of including Arthur Ashe's statue with the existing Confederate figures on Monument Avenue were divided in their senses of "what properly belongs with what," a sense of identification was present in their division. Those who revered the Confederates shared with those who revered Ashe the desire to honor their heroes and their history. By defending the cause of an all-Confederate Monument Avenue, neo-Confederates and the like could identify with their own Confederate forebears as they fought on behalf of the Lost Cause — or its symbols, anyway. And in their defense of including Ashe on the Avenue, African Americans and others could identify with their civil rights forebears, such as Ashe, as they fought on behalf of integration — or at least an artistic representation of it. In their defense of and identification with their respective heroes, advocates on both sides of the Ashe on Monument Avenue debate were joined in their

concern for honoring the past and furthering their respective interpretations of history.

### Debate II: Did a Mural of Robert E. Lee Belong in the Canal Walk Historical Display?

On June 2, 1999, almost three years after the Ashe statue was unveiled on Monument Avenue, the Richmond Historic Riverfront Foundation (RHRF) was installing on the city's floodwall a display of murals depicting events and people from throughout Richmond's history. This exhibition was to be the crowning touch on the organization's Canal Walk redevelopment project, which was scheduled to open soon thereafter with special dedication activities and events designed to bring area residents downtown to visit the city's latest step toward urban revitalization. The *Richmond Times-Dispatch* featured a photograph of workers installing one of the murals on the floodwall; this photograph happened to show the hanging of the "War" mural, which included an image of Confederate General Robert E. Lee. City Councilman Sa'ad El-Amin was livid when he saw this image of Lee being displayed in the city's public space. El-Amin immediately contacted James E. Rogers, president of the RHRF, and James J. McCarthy, executive director of the Richmond Riverfront Development Corporation. El-Amin first met with McCarthy, demanding that "either it [the Lee mural] comes down, or we jam,"<sup>110</sup> and later that day met with Rogers and Brenton S. Halsey, president of the RRDC board, as well. As a result of these meetings, the offending mural was promptly removed on June 3, before the mural gallery opened to the public the following day.

News of the Lee mural's removal spread quickly throughout the community.

Among those most offended by the mural's removal were the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV). While El-Amin was the one who initially threatened a boycott of the Canal Walk, with the removal of the Lee mural it was the SCV's turn to threaten one. Area residents did not hesitate to make their views, mostly in favor of restoring the Lee mural, known through the local newspaper's comment line and editorial pages. At the June 4 dedication ceremonies, Lee's mural may have been absent, but his supporters were not. SCV members and others, some wearing Confederate uniforms, waved Confederate flags and otherwise made their presence known during the dedication festivities. By the next week, the RHRF announced plans to form a citizens' panel to decide whether or not Lee's image should be returned in some form to the Canal Walk display. After meeting a number of times, this panel decided to change somewhat the mix of images included in the mural gallery, including adding images that would make the display more diverse, deleting the image of dancer Bill "Bojangles" Robinson, as well as replacing the previous image of Lee in uniform with an image of Lee, sans insignia, outside his Richmond home shortly after the War. This new collection of images was put on display at the Richmond Centre for six days in July; forms were available for citizens to leave their comments, and panel members also were present to listen to their comments. Meanwhile, El-Amin decided to bring the issue before the City Council for a vote, though there was some question as to whether the matter was within the council's jurisdiction. Organizations such as the Coalition for Racial Justice, the NAACP, and the Baptist General Convention of Virginia all issued statements opposing the restoration of Lee to the floodwall exhibition. Thus, when two African American

council members, Bill Johnson and Gwen Hedgepeth, cast their votes in support of a resolution calling for the mural's restoration, the Coalition for Racial Justice pledged that it would encourage other African American organizations to ostracize them and to assist in defeating them in the next election. And, further heightening the level of controversy, former Ku Klux Klan leader David Duke of Louisiana announced he would visit the city to show his support for the Lee mural. Despite these developments, the RHRF citizens' panel decided in favor of displaying the revised set of murals, though having entirely new murals fashioned would cost the RHRF thousands of additional dollars.

In December 1999, the local newspaper headline declared, "Lee Likeness Returns to Wall Without a Shot Fired,"<sup>111</sup> conveying that no protests were made by individuals or organizations who had expressed their displeasure over the previous Lee image's place on the floodwall. However, a little over a month later, in the very early hours of January 17, 2000, Lee's image was burned off its vinyl-mesh mural by a Molotov cocktail set off by an unknown person under the cover of darkness. That this took place on the Monday set aside each year in Virginia to honor the lives of Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and Martin Luther King, Jr. only added fuel to SCV leaders' claims that the arson be investigated as a hate crime. However, local police and prosecutors noted that the hate crimes statutes only address crimes against persons, not against places or objects. Some discussion ensued as to whether or not the RHRF should replace the mural that included Lee. However, considering all the effort the RHRF had expended on deciding to include Lee in the revised set of murals, and that the only expense would be to have one new mural printed (using the existing design), the RHRF

determined that it would indeed replace the damaged mural. As RHRF president James Rogers stated, not to replace the mural “would condone that act of vandalism and ignore the city’s public review and approval process for the floodwall gallery.” Another community group, the Wednesday Morning Fellowship, described as “a biracial, nondenominational voluntary fellowship of laymen who live or work in the Richmond region,”<sup>112</sup> donated the \$4,500 necessary to replace the banner, and the replacement mural arrived in just a matter of weeks. Shortly thereafter, in February 2000, the City Council decided to consider renaming local bridges after civil rights leaders, once again bringing to the fore issues of race, history, public space, and community identity in Richmond.

#### Incongruous Perceptions of the Past: Lee and the War

In the controversy as to whether it was appropriate for an image of Confederate General Robert E. Lee to be included in an historical display at the city’s new Canal Walk, a main point of contention revolved around incongruous interpretations of Lee’s character and what the Confederacy was fighting for in the Civil War (or War Between the States). For those who opposed Lee’s inclusion in the mural display, such as Sa’ad El-Amin and the Coalition for Racial Justice, Lee was perceived as a racist and a defender of slavery, while the Confederates were perceived as having fought to preserve that peculiar institution. Meanwhile, for those such as the Sons of Confederate Veterans and interloper David Duke (whose entrance into the controversy was not welcomed by the SCV), Lee was perceived to be an honorable man who fought for the Confederacy

more out of loyalty to Virginia than in defense of slavery. In their view, the Confederacy seceded and fought in the War to protect states' rights in general -- not solely states' rights to permit slavery -- in the face of Northern political and economic aggression. A third strand in this debate sought to bring the other two factions together through appealing to Richmond's ultimate term: history. Those taking this stance emphasized that history provided a common ground both for those who admired Lee and those who questioned him.

#### Pro-Lee Mural: Lee as Honorable and Anti-slavery

When Lee's image was removed from the floodwall in June 1999, those Richmonders and others who were most offended were those who ardently admired him not just as a great general, but perhaps more so as a great man. One common argument for restoring the Lee mural was that Lee's moral character was essentially stainless. As Michael Fellman has observed of this veneration of Lee,

He was indeed duty bound, self-controlled, and deeply pious -- that was his goal and his persona, which others took as the whole story, inflating him into sainthood, thus oversimplifying and dehumanizing him in the cause of sanctifying his name. . . . After his death, he could do nothing to prevent others from bleeding him of his humanity and elevating him into the pantheon for their social and political uses.<sup>113</sup>

Related to this belief in Lee's veritable sainthood was the contention that though Lee led the Confederate Army, he was opposed to slavery. But, as Fellman further asserted

regarding the sainting of Lee in the public memory, "To accept Saint Robert would be to accept the code of the white South at face value, to deny the reality of terrible historical questions by embracing the willful self-blinding of hero worship."<sup>114</sup> This anti-slavery depiction of Lee is, of course, intertwined with a related assertion, which is that the Southern states seceded from the Union and fought the War not chiefly over the institution of slavery, but rather to defend their economic and political sovereignty as states. And, countering accusations that Lee was a traitor to the United States, Lee's defenders in this controversy characterize him as both a loyal Virginian and a loyal American, emphasizing at times these aspects of Lee's identity over his role as a Confederate leader. Those who were opposed to Lee's image perceived Lee to be incongruous with the milieu of the Canal Walk redevelopment project, a symbol of the city's progress and place in the New South. In contrast, those who supported restoring Lee's image argued that Lee -- as a moral, anti-slavery, loyal Virginian and American -- did indeed fit in with the Canal Walk environs, as well as with the other images from Richmond's history which comprised the display. Furthermore, argued Lee's defenders, presenting a display of images of Richmond's history that excluded Lee would be incongruous with the facts of the city's history.

Robert E. Lee, in the estimation of his supporters, was much more than a Confederate general; from their perspective, Lee was a moral paragon. One editorial argued that he was "an honorable man who tied his fate to a Lost Cause that was well lost."<sup>115</sup> Columnist Ray McCallister explained the "flip side on Lee," which is "that historians judge him as a remarkable man, regardless of choosing to defend his



homeland. Lee was brilliant and kind -- and anti-slavery, by the way."<sup>116</sup> Lee's defenders tried to make congruous the seemingly incongruous juxtaposition of a righteous leader with a cause widely agreed upon, from a contemporary perspective, to have been unrighteous. However, another Lee defender called upon the authority of renowned Lee biographer Douglas Southall Freeman to make the point that "Lee was one of the small company of great men in whom there is no inconsistency to be explained, no enigma to be solved. What he seemed -- he was -- a wholly human gentleman, the essential elements of whose positive character were two and only two, simplicity and spirituality."<sup>117</sup> For these Lee defenders, there was no moral or ethical incongruity in Lee's decision to join the Confederate cause.

In answer to Lee's critics, who questioned his morality on the basis of his being aligned with the Confederacy's defense of slavery, Lee loyalists held him up as a model of virtue, "a man of . . . untarnished character and nobility,"<sup>118</sup> as someone who deserved to be remembered with a place of honor on the floodwall. As Henry Kidd of the Virginia SCV stated, "I would ask those who are against this [picture] to study the man, to study the man's moral values."<sup>119</sup> At a rally held on the state capitol grounds, "a series of speakers portrayed Lee as a devout Christian, a key conciliator after the Civil War and a savior of Richmond."<sup>120</sup> In short, wrote Andrew P. Bost in an e-mail to the local newspaper, Lee was simply "one of the most ethical, moral and honorable men in our nation's proud history."<sup>121</sup> As evidence of Lee's respectable character, director of the American studies program at American University in nearby Washington, Edward C. Smith, "said Lee was so respected that President Lincoln initially invited him to lead the

Union Army. Other admirers of Lee have included British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, President John F. Kennedy and civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr."<sup>122</sup>

By citing other, more widely respected leaders, including those especially revered by Lee mural opponents, Smith was seeking to enhance Lee's ethos by association.

Aligning Lee with such advocates for African Americans as Lincoln and King was an attempt to prove that Lee was indeed congruous with leaders more commonly seen as racially progressive.

The main reason cited by those opposed to Lee's inclusion in the floodwall historical display was their revulsion at Lee's support of the institution of slavery. Consequently, Lee partisans knew that they had to prove that their hero was opposed to slavery. As Collin Pulley of the SCV pointed out, "Anyone who has even the slightest knowledge of General Lee knows that he did not stand for slavery."<sup>123</sup> To counter any perceptions that Lee hated African Americans, the SCV's Henry Kidd observed that, "Robert E. Lee loved everyone. . . . He was not a racist man."<sup>124</sup> And as proof of Lee's amity toward African Americans, Gordon Hickey recounted, "While slavery was one of the issues that led to the Civil War, Lee had freed the slaves from his plantation prior to the war."<sup>125</sup> This narrative of Lee setting slaves free, rather than seeking to continue their bondage, was echoed by a youth correspondent for the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, who clarified, "Lee did not approve of secession or a divided nation and believed slavery was a 'moral and social evil,'" setting his father-in-law's slaves free as executor of his estate.<sup>126</sup> Lee's own words that slavery was a "moral and social evil," though not quoted completely by any of these advocates, may have been the most powerful (and under-

utilized) argument of all for proving his anti-slavery stance.

Related to this, Lee's defenders articulated their version of why Lee and the Confederates seceded from and fought against the United States. Whereas Lee mural opponents characterized the Confederate cause as one chiefly concerned with maintaining the institution of slavery, Lee mural advocates were compelled to prove otherwise, telling their own narrative explaining why the Confederates left the Union and Lee's role in that story. An editorial in the *Roanoke Times & World News* recounted how

Lee was a military genius who reluctantly applied his considerable gifts to the cause that his state had embraced in this nation's Civil War. He was a man of his time, a Virginian in an America that was not the cohesive, monolithic United States of today, but a loosely joined nation in which many citizens felt allegiance first to their state, then to the country of which the states were a part.<sup>127</sup>

In a similar vein, Robert Barbour, commander of the Virginia SCV, characterized Lee as "an honorable man who did not support slavery, but fought for the Confederacy to defend constitutional principles and states' rights."<sup>128</sup> Echoing this was Bost, who stated in his e-mail to the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* that "Robert E. Lee . . . did not fight to defend the institution of slavery but to win political and economic independence from an oppressive and tyrannical government."<sup>129</sup> Ray McCallister ultimately let Lee speak for himself on the topic of civil war, concluding a column with Lee's 1860 statement, "If strife and civil war are to take the place of brotherly love and kindness . . . I shall mourn for my country and for the welfare and progress of mankind."<sup>130</sup> In so characterizing

Lee and the Confederacy, Lee mural supporters sought to make the general and his cause more acceptable in light of contemporary pieties against slavery and secession. Rather than defending slavery, backers of Lee and the Confederacy instead chose to depict them as fighting for states' rights, a cause audiences were likely to find more congruous with their late-twentieth century political sensibilities.

Notwithstanding all their depictions of Lee as an honorable man fighting for an honorable cause, Lee mural defenders knew that they had to go further. Some Lee mural opponents characterized Lee as a traitor. Because of such accusations, Lee champions put forth numerous depictions of Lee as a loyal Virginian and American to counter the prevailing image of him as faithful only to the Confederate cause. In recounting the story of Lee's life, Rebecca Previs noted that he was "reluctant to fight against family and friends . . . but he remained faithful to Virginia."<sup>131</sup> Previs acknowledged Lee's "extreme loyalty . . . to Virginia," and asked, "Why wouldn't we want someone who loved his state as much as Lee did on our floodwall, which represents our history?"<sup>132</sup> Not only was Lee a true Virginian, his supporters argued, but he also remained a true American -- and an exceptional one at that. As SCV member Henry Kidd contended, "He was one of the greatest Americans who ever lived. . . . He gave his talents, his life, and his devotion to this country."<sup>133</sup> Previs characterized Lee as someone who "loved his country," "felt a great sense of loyalty and duty" to the Union, and even "applied to restore his U.S. Citizenship."<sup>134</sup> Especially notable among such depictions of Lee as loyal American was one put forth by a "local legend," civil rights lawyer Oliver W. Hill, who portrayed the Confederate general as a "healing force who urged his former

followers to embrace their U.S. citizenship rather than look backwards toward their Confederate heritage."<sup>135</sup> In these depictions of Lee, his supporters conveyed a sense that Lee's role as a Confederate general was not necessarily incongruous with his identity as a Virginian and an American. It was imperative for Lee's champions to prove that he did indeed fit in with Richmond's present status as Virginia capital and American city, and not just with its past identity as the Confederate capital.

#### Anti-Lee Mural: Lee as Dishonorable and a Defender of Slavery

Those who admired Lee and supported returning his image to the Canal Walk argued that Lee, in his life and his beliefs, was congruous with the goals and ideals of contemporary Richmond. However, others believed that Lee's was the most incongruous of images to be displayed in the context of the Canal Walk, a symbol of an evolving Richmond. Lee's detractors depicted him as unheroic and racist due to his defense of slavery, a man who not only was disloyal to the United States, but also had, at best, weak connections to Richmond. In the minds of many, especially African Americans, it was inconceivable that Lee could have served as leader of the Confederate forces and not have been a defender and supporter of slavery and racism. Those Richmonders who were most vocal in their opposition to displaying the Lee mural were those who felt that if General Lee had been successful in his endeavors, they as contemporary African Americans might be enslaved still. Most opponents of including Lee's image in the floodwall historical display perceived Lee as a symbol of slavery and other entrenched forms of racial oppression. Such a symbol was utterly incongruous with contemporary

Richmond, a largely African-American city seeking to enter the new millennium focused on race-uniting goals such as economic revitalization, the Canal Walk but the latest symbol of this aim.

The first and loudest voice in favor of removing Lee's image from the Canal Walk was that of City Councilman Sa'ad El-Amin. Explaining his successful efforts to have the mural removed, El-Amin stated that Lee, "is offensive to the African-American community because of what he stood for. . . . He is a pariah in my community."<sup>136</sup> What Lee stood for, El-Amin argued, was slavery: "If Robert E. Lee had accomplished what he set out to do, which was to win the war, then most of us would be picking cotton for free." As one newspaper paraphrased El-Amin's perspective, "El-Amin said . . . that the general supported and defended the Confederacy and that made him a supporter of slavery."<sup>137</sup> To illustrate just how offensive publicly displaying Lee's portrait was to him, El-Amin contended that it was parallel with putting up a Hitler portrait in Berlin or Israel.<sup>138</sup> El-Amin's view that Lee supported slavery was shared by others in the community, such as Reverend Roscoe Cooper, who described Lee as "a dead man" who supported "this peculiar institution. . . . trafficked in human cargo and owned my people."<sup>139</sup> Eric G. Williams, while conceding "that many say the Civil War was about states' rights and [the] economic prosperity of the South," argued that, in fact, "One of those states' rights was the right to own slaves. In Virginia, and much of the South, the thriving economy was made possible by a cheap labor source -- mainly enslaved Americans. Thus slavery was the main cause of the war."<sup>140</sup> Likewise, Donald Minor situated Lee in this effort to maintain a slaved-based economy by depicting him as "a

man who led military forces that would have preserved slavery."<sup>141</sup> Overall, observed Virginia Commonwealth University political science professor W. Avon Drake, those opposed to displaying Lee's image perceived him as "the supreme symbol of their enslavement."<sup>142</sup> In a city whose City Council had been comprised since 1977 by a majority of African American members, and in a time when African Americans possessed equal rights under the law and increasing levels of social, economic, and political influence, adding yet another symbol of slavery (in a city already teeming with Confederate memorials) in the context of the Canal Walk, a symbol of the city's progress, seemed incongruous. To give added approbation to a man who symbolized slavery sent the message to many African-American Richmonders that perhaps not so much progress had been made in late-twentieth century Richmond as they had hoped; perhaps an image of Lee was not so incongruous with contemporary Richmond's political climate as they would have liked to believe.

Others adverse to the Lee mural, and its attendant symbolism of slavery, couched their reservations by conceding their opponents' belief that Lee did not personally stand for slavery. Florence Franklin acknowledged, "It does offend [black people] to think that Lee supported slavery' . . . She said she knows Lee did not favor slavery and 'I know he considered fighting for the Union,' but his decision to support the Confederacy was also a decision to support slavery." Likewise, Willie Pender conceded, "I know Lee didn't have slaves and everything, but if he had won the war, slavery would have continued for a long time."<sup>143</sup> However, *Richmond Times-Dispatch* writer Robin Farmer, while granting that Lee was "considered by many to be a noble man," argued

that he was, at minimum, "conflicted about the topic of slavery." To prove this contention, Farmer juxtaposed two seemingly incongruous quotations from Lee on the topic. Farmer, for a brief moment, appeared to concede Lee supporters' contention that the general was morally opposed to slavery when she cited a December 27, 1856, letter in which Lee stated, "In this enlightened age, there are few I believe, but will acknowledge, that slavery as an institution is a moral and political evil in this country." However, she immediately invalidated this supposed proof of Lee's opposition to slavery by noting that Lee later added, "The blacks are immeasurably better off here than in Africa, morally, socially, and physically. The painful discipline they are undergoing is necessary for their further instruction as a race, and I hope will prepare and lead them to better things. How long their subjugation may be necessary is known and ordered by a merciful Providence."<sup>144</sup> In exposing the incongruities within Lee's own opinions about slavery, Farmer offered perhaps the most persuasive evidence that Lee's views of the peculiar institution were indeed incongruous the image of a New South Richmond so coveted by city leaders.

Slavery was not the only reason offered for keeping Lee's image out of the floodwall mural gallery. As King Salim Khalfani, executive director of the Virginia NAACP, pointed out, "The Confederates were found to be traitors to the United States."<sup>145</sup> Donald Minor echoed this sentiment, and was paraphrased as stating that "Lee should have been arrested for treason."<sup>146</sup> In other words, Lee, having turned his back on the United States in a time of war, was essentially a traitor and should not be honored in this celebration of Richmond's history. Others argued that Lee, who was not



a native of Richmond and only lived there for a short time following the war, consequently was not very relevant in the big picture of Richmond's history. Thus, they argued that Lee should not be honored alongside those whose lives were more intertwined with and whose roles were more crucial to the city's development. Vice Mayor McCollum voiced this argument when "He added that Lee really had little to do with the history of Richmond as a city."<sup>147</sup> Overall, Lee mural opponents argued that the general should no longer be given a place of honor and influence in Richmond life. As Ruth Hunter declared, "It's time to stop teaching . . . children that Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson are heroes."<sup>148</sup> Those who posited that Robert E. Lee symbolized slavery, committed treason against the United States, and did not play a significant role in Richmond's development were essentially arguing that Lee, and his image, were incongruous with the picture of Richmond that city leaders wanted to project through its Canal Walk redevelopment project. A treasonous, pro-slavery, non-Richmonder was deemed irrelevant to a public art display which, in their view, was meant to celebrate only the best of Richmond's long history.

#### A Neutral Stance on Lee and the War: History as Richmond's Ultimate Term

In addition to the two main factions in this debate, which advanced disparate portrayals of Lee in the service of their respective positions as to whether his portrait belonged in the Canal Walk display, there existed a third, more loosely bound faction which emphasized a unifying appeal to history. Those taking this third perspective believed that the purpose of the floodwall was not to *honor* certain individuals and

events from Richmond's history, but rather that its goal was simply to *conserve* a sense of the city's past. As Frank Bahen stated in comments on the local newspaper's call-in line, "Those murals represent who we are good and bad."<sup>149</sup> Mayor Timothy Kaine, "who said Lee on the floodwall would serve as a history lesson -- both good and bad -- for everyone,"<sup>150</sup> typified those taking this third basic stance in the Lee mural controversy.

That there existed this third party promoting the depiction of history for its own sake, apart from particular factions' readings of it, is hardly surprising in "a city obsessed with its past."<sup>151</sup> For those taking this stance, history was their "ultimate term." As Kenneth Burke stated,

The "ultimate" order of terms would thus differ essentially from the "dialectical" . . . in that there would be a "guiding idea" or "unitary principle" behind the diversity of voices. . . . Thus, . . . we can get a glimpse into a possible alternative, whereby a somewhat formless parliamentary wrangle can, by an "ultimate" vocabulary, be creatively endowed with design. And even though the members of the parliament . . . may not accept this design, it can have a contemplative effect; it can organize one's attitude towards the struggles of politics, and may suggest reasons why one kind of compromise is, in the long run, to be rated as superior to another.<sup>152</sup>

In Richmond, the ultimate term is history; it is a city that considers itself distinctive because of its veneration of the past even as it moves into the future. In his continued discussion of ultimate terms, Burke noted how Socrates sought "to define the human

dispositions brought to the fore by each of the different political structures. . . . Each [political structure] has its own peculiar idea or summarizing term."<sup>153</sup> Richmond, in Socrates' (and Burke's) taxonomy, is a timocracy: "A state . . . governed on principles of honor and military glory."<sup>154</sup> Richmond has certainly been ruled, at least up until recently, by the principles of honor and military glory in its reverence of Lost Cause symbols. Those arguing for "history" as the Canal Walk display's ultimate term sought to unify the disparate concerns of Lee's supporters and his detractors under the banner of history, which appears to have been the shared concern of both these factions: Lee mural supporters wanted the city to continue to commemorate Richmond's role as capital of the Confederacy, while Lee mural opponents hoped people would remember the role of slavery in the Confederate cause. As one anonymous caller to the local newspaper opinion line advocated, "Declare the murals are there to tell the story of Richmond, be it good, bad, or ugly. [Slave revolt leader Gabriel] Prosser and Lee are both part of that history. For that reason alone, both should be on that wall."<sup>155</sup>

In Richmond, the "sense of what properly goes with what" has been determined in large part by the city's ultimate term of history. In the context of this debate, this ultimate piety of history was used to argue that figures as disparate as a Confederate general and a slave revolt leader both *belonged* in the floodwall murals because both were part of Richmond's history. As argued in a *Roanoke Times & World News* editorial, Lee's "place in such an exhibit is justified by his place in history."<sup>156</sup> This idea that Lee was part of history was used by those on various sides of the issue as a way of establishing common ground. Former Governor Wilder, a staunch supporter of placing a

statue of Arthur Ashe on Monument Avenue, also declared, "There is a place for Robert E. Lee on the wall."<sup>157</sup> Eric Williams, who argued there were enough memorials to Lee elsewhere in the city, conceded that "Robert E. Lee is a part of Virginia's history."<sup>158</sup> City Councilwoman Gwen Hedgepeth, derided by the Coalition for Racial Justice for her vote to restore the Lee mural, justified her vote by stating that Lee is a part of our history.<sup>159</sup> Edgar Toppin, a distinguished professor of American and African American history at Virginia State University who was consulted by the RHRF as to the content of the historical display, was surprised by the negative response, contending, "The mural is about Richmond and the Civil War," and asking, "How can you talk about the Civil War without Lee?"<sup>160</sup> Eric Penn, an African American city employee who voiced his view on the local newspaper opinion line, defended Lee's inclusion on the wall, saying, "He played a significant role in the history of America. We can't erase him from the history books."<sup>161</sup> Or as Canal Walk business owner Andy Thornton observed, "Lee does belong . . . because he was a part of history."<sup>162</sup> In the Lee mural debate, those appealing to the piety of history sought to make room for everyone's heroes, even those as seemingly incongruous as Gabriel Prosser and Robert E. Lee, in Richmond's sense of what properly belonged in its communal history.

#### Conclusion: Finding Congruity through Incongruity, Identification through Division

Just as those advocating the Ashe statue's placement on Monument Avenue did so out of a desire to belong, so too did advocates for restoring Lee's mural to the floodwall murals argue out of their own desire to belong in the narrative of Richmond's

history. In both debates, advocates rallied around depictions of Ashe and Lee, which acted as symbols of African Americans and Confederate descendants respectively. Both groups shared a desire to "properly fit in" to Richmond's history through the approval of their groups' respective symbols in the public space, as well as a desire to determine what other symbols should be considered "proper" in the city's evolving piety of its history.

In this section I have examined, using the concept of perspective by incongruity, two debates concerning symbols of the Southern tradition of division and the Southern change toward increased identification. As I have shown, these public debates and their resulting compromises are evidence that previously "mutually exclusive" or divided entities can indeed be "methodically merged" or identified with one another through their juxtaposition.<sup>163</sup> The very bringing together of such previously disparate entities allowed each to be seen from a perspective heretofore unknown; it allowed these previously alienated entities to be seen in terms of one another. Juxtaposing these previously segregated symbols of Southern tradition and change, of the orders of division and identification, allowed Richmonders to see these symbols, and in some cases themselves, in a new way -- a perspective that allowed them to see through surface differences to a level of shared essences. By viewing themselves, their symbols, and their city through the perspective of incongruity, Richmonders could begin to attain a "maximum consciousness" through which they could transcend their segregated past by becoming aware, through a perspective by incongruity, of its "foibles."<sup>164</sup> As the Arthur Ashe statue's sculptor reflected,

Still, DiPasquale insists he is glad his work generated so much debate. "The dialogue exists on a social and spiritual level," he said. "That's what art is supposed to do." He also said that because the Ashe statue is so different from the others on Monument Avenue, it will force people to think about all the monuments on the avenue. "It does create sort of self-analysis of who are our heroes and why. That does more for the statues on Monument Avenue than anything else."<sup>165</sup>

Even as they were debating one another, these proponents of Southern tradition and change, by their very juxtaposition or combination within the same community, worked together, perhaps in spite of themselves, creating something beyond what either could achieve alone: the exchange of ideas, which enhanced Richmond through the very conflict of its various factions.<sup>166</sup>

It is true that the opposing factions in both of these debates were in many ways divided in their respective interpretations of the city's history. However, juxtaposing Arthur Ashe with the Confederacy's president and generals, and later Robert E. Lee with the leader of a slave rebellion and civil rights pioneers, revealed to Richmonders the possibility of identifying with one another through their shared valuing of history, albeit from quite distinct perspectives. Similarly, South Carolinians juxtaposed divergent narratives to explain their interpretation of one symbol: the Confederate battle flag. As was the case in Richmond, South Carolinians — as well as those in other states debating Confederate flag issues — found themselves at once divided from and identified with

one another through the ultimate term of history, specifically their shared history of racial struggle.

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148. Associated Press, "City Council Approves Lee Portrait for Public Mural," *Associated Press State & Local Wire*, July 27, 1999, AM Cycle, *Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe*.
149. "Reaction," A6.
150. Hickey and Johnson, "Council Supports Mural of Lee," A1.
151. Driggs, Wilson, and Winthrop, *Richmond's Monument Avenue*, 1.
152. Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 187-88.
153. Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 187-88.
154. William Morris, "Timocracy," in *The American Heritage Dictionary*, Second College Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), 1271.
155. McCallister, "Here's What You'd Do on the Canal Walk," B1.
156. Editorial, "Return Robert E. Lee to His Place in History," A10.
157. Gordon Hickey, "Mayor: 'Congratulations to Us'; Praise, Protest at Waterway Ribbon-Cutting," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, June 5, 1999, A1, *Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe*.
158. Williams, "To the Lion, Hunters Aren't Heroes," A10.
159. Rhea Borja, "Put Mural Debate Behind, Hedgepeth Tells Her Critics," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, August 5, 1999, B3, *Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe*.
160. Johnson and Hickey, "Many Say Put the Portrait Back," A1.
161. "Reaction," A6.
162. Gordon Hickey and Carrie Johnson, "Talking about the Walk; Most Agree Lee Deserves a Spot in the Gallery," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, July 7, 1999, A1, *Lexis-*

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163. Kenneth Burke, *Permanence & Change: An Anatomy of Purpose*, xxi.

164. Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes Toward History*, 171.

165. Hickey, "A Monumental Change for City," A1.

166. Since these debates took place, another such controversy arose in Richmond. At issue in this latest conflict was the unveiling in April 2003 of a statue depicting President Abraham Lincoln and his son Tad on their visit to Richmond in April 1865, shortly after the close of the Civil War and just ten days before Lincoln was assassinated. Placing a statue of Lincoln in the former Confederate capital seemed quite incongruous to those Richmonders sympathetic to the side of the South in the War Between the States. For more on this controversy, see Jeremy Redmon and Lindsay Kastner, "Lincoln Statue Unveiled: Reaction Mixed Among Residents, Visitors to Area," *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, April 6, 2003, B1, *Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe*.

## HERITAGE VS. HATE: THE NARRATIVES OF THE CONFEDERATE FLAG CONTROVERSY IN SOUTH CAROLINA

As contentious as the artistic portrayals of Southerners from Robert E. Lee to Arthur Ashe may have been in Richmond, no one symbol has served to divide the contemporary South as widely and to such an extreme as the red field, blue cross, and white stars of the Confederate battle flag. This "rebel flag" has been displayed as a symbol of racist defiance by such Southerners as Ku Klux Klansmen and others of their ilk, who continue to defend a racially divided South years after identification became the ruling order through federally mandated integration. Such divisive uses of the flag<sup>1</sup> have imbued it with the symbolism of division or hate in the minds of many, especially those who have pressed most to see this new order of identification enforced: African Americans, especially those living in the South and those associated with such civil rights organizations as the NAACP. But some other Southerners, namely white neo-Confederates such as those associated with the Sons of Confederate Veterans, take issue with the meaning of division or hate being associated with any Confederate symbol, especially the battle flag under which their Confederate forebears fought. For these proud Confederate descendants, the flag symbolizes their identification with the cause of their ancestors -- the cause of states' rights to secede and rule themselves. Given such division over what the Confederate battle flag symbolizes, it was not surprising when, in early 2000, a debate erupted as to the propriety of displaying the flag atop the South Carolina Capitol in Columbia, as well as within its legislative chambers. The way each

side in this debate told its story of the War and the raising of the flag in 1962 revealed the way it interpreted the symbol of the flag.

Indeed, each side even referred to the War differently, with neo-Confederates tending to refer to it as the War Between the States or the War of Northern Aggression, and civil rights activists and others tending to refer to it as the Civil War.<sup>2</sup> The defenders of the flag portrayed the War as having been fought for states' rights and sovereignty in the face of a tyrannous central government, thus making their ancestors' fight honorable. This in turn made the flag symbolic of a positive heritage of fighting for a just cause, and flying the flag atop the Capitol a reminder of a noble heritage worth preserving. On the other hand, critics of the flag depicted the War as having been fought over the issue of slavery. They saw the flag as symbolic of those who wanted to keep their ancestors in slavery, who oppressed them during the decades of segregation, and continue to oppress and hate African Americans and others still today. Thus, they attributed to the flag meanings of racial oppression and hate, and as a result wanted to see it removed from its position of prominence atop the Capitol.

This positioning of the flag had much to do with its symbolism and thus is at the heart of this controversy. A flag flying atop a seat of government is symbolic of what entity holds power there. Thus, the reasoning of many South Carolina groups who passed resolutions in favor of removing the flag was that since the Confederate States of America was not a contemporary, ruling authority in the state, its flag should not be flown along with the flags of those entities that do rule: the United States (whose flag is always to be flown the highest) and the State of South Carolina. The controversy was

not about whether the Confederate battle flag (or any other Confederate flag, for that matter) can or should be flown by individuals or groups, but whether or not it was appropriate for a state to fly a flag representing an entity that is no longer sovereign alongside the flags of two entities that are.

This conflict was but one instance of a debate taking place throughout the South as to the appropriateness of flags, monuments, and place names connected with the Confederate States of America, as well as its war heroes and political leaders. In recent years throughout the South, mainly in the former states of the Confederacy, the presence of Confederate flags, monuments, and even names on public property has been increasingly questioned. Many African Americans and others believed it was inappropriate for government entities to promote the cause and ideals of the Confederacy via these symbols' presence on publicly owned property. Rising to the defense of their cherished symbols and landmarks, groups such as the Sons of Confederate Veterans have worked actively to identify threatened flags, monuments, street names, and school names. The SCV continues to feature a monthly "Heritage Report" in its *Confederate Veteran* magazine, alerting members to "Heritage Violations," giving them the addresses of the appropriate officials to contact regarding them (and even pre-addressed postcards for this purpose), and offering members a means of reporting new threats to their Confederate heritage.

In his book *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies*, Sanford Levinson details many recent conflicts in the South involving the public display of Confederate flags and monuments as well as the naming of public spaces such as streets



and schools after Confederate heroes and slave owners. For instance, in October 1997, the Orleans Parish School Board in Louisiana moved to change the name of George Washington Elementary School to Dr. Charles Richard Drew Elementary School, and to change the name of General P. T. Beauregard Junior High to Thurgood Marshall Junior High, in accordance with the board's policy not to name schools for "former slave owners or others who did not respect equal opportunity for all."<sup>3</sup> Elsewhere, in Austin, Texas, a controversy raged over a plaque on the base of a statue located on the state capitol grounds. The statue depicts members of each of the four branches of the Confederate military with Jefferson Davis, president of the CSA, in the center, standing above them. But, as noted, what was at issue was the plaque's interpretation of the War and the Constitution: "Died for state rights guaranteed under the Constitution. The people of the South, animated by the Spirit of 1776, to preserve their rights, withdrew from the federal compact in 1861. The North resorted to coercion. The South, against overwhelming numbers and resources, fought until exhausted."<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, in Stafford, Virginia, a judge called for the removal of the Confederate flag from a courthouse exhibit of all the flags that had flown over Stafford, including not only the Confederate flag, but also the British Union Jack. A circuit judge concurred and said the flag must be removed; the curator took down all the historical flags, leaving only the current state and national flags, saying, "If you're going to take [the Confederate flag] down, take them all down. . . . You have to tell the history, warts and all."<sup>5</sup>

Likewise, in Georgia and Mississippi, there has been a swirl of controversy regarding the design of their respective state flags. In 1993, then-Georgia Governor Zell

Miller tried, unsuccessfully, to convince state legislators to change the flag from its then-current design, which opponents argue was designed in 1956 as a protest to the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Miller advocated a return to the 1905 design, which was based on one of the less recognizable and, as a result, less divisive national flags of the Confederacy. By the time of the South Carolina flag debate in early 2000, the Reverend Jesse Jackson said that Georgia would be next in line for boycotts if it did not change the design of its flag. In 2001, Georgia legislators adopted a new flag featuring a blue field on which were displayed the state seal surrounded by thirteen stars (Georgia was the thirteenth of the original thirteen colonies), the motto "In God We Trust," and a banner featuring the motto "Georgia's History" along with miniature versions of all the flags that have flown over the state, including the 1956 state flag. But this new design, though it seemed offered something for everyone, did not settle the flag issue in Georgia. In the 2002 gubernatorial campaign, candidate Sonny Perdue promised that, if elected, he would call for a statewide referendum giving voters a choice between retaining the new design or returning to the 1956 design. Perdue was indeed elected, and when he took office in early 2003, his flag referendum proposal was much discussed by state legislators, the media, and citizens across the state. State legislators proposed yet another flag design, this one based on a less contentious Confederate national flag design (known as the Stars and Bars). This new flag was comprised of two red bars with one white bar in between them with the words "In God We Trust," and featuring a blue field in the upper lefthand corner emblazoned with the state seal surrounded by thirteen stars. Perdue and like-minded state legislators continued to push, for a time, for a statewide

referendum in which voters would have had the opportunity to return to the 1956 flag. But in the spring of 2003, the most recent flag design was approved by state legislators without any provision allowing voters to bring back the more controversial 1956 flag.<sup>6</sup>

While Georgia voters did not have the opportunity to decide the flag issue, Mississippi voters were given that opportunity in 2001. The present state flag, which features the Confederate battle flag in one corner, was adopted in 1894. However, in 2000 the Mississippi Supreme Court found that the law establishing that flag had, in fact, been repealed -- likely unknowingly -- twelve years later in 1906. Therefore, Governor Ronnie Musgrove established a commission that met in the summer and fall of 2000. After studying the issue and holding public hearings on the matter, the commission recommended to the state legislature that a statewide referendum should be held, giving voters a choice between the 1894 design and a new design that would replace the battle flag portion of the 1894 flag with a blue field featuring a circle of twenty white stars (Mississippi was the twentieth state admitted to the Union). The legislature approved the referendum proposal, and the issue was put up for a statewide vote on April 17, 2001. When the votes were cast, 65 percent voted to keep the 1894 design, while only 35 percent voted to adopt the new design. Thus, Mississippians elected to keep their existing state flag, Confederate battle flag and all.<sup>7</sup>

What all of these conflicts have in common with one another and with the South Carolina flag controversy is that they were the product of what happens when the symbols associated with one group's interpretation of history are displayed in the public domain or are meant to represent the state as a whole. In each of these cases, a

government entity was perceived to be affirming one version of history or Constitutional interpretation -- the Confederate version -- to the exclusion of others, which was offensive to all those who dissented from it. What happened to the flag in South Carolina impacted the status of Confederate symbols throughout the South. Thus, by looking at the conflict between these two identity groups -- change-seeking African Americans and others and tradition-maintaining, neo-Confederate white Southerners -- over the flying of the Confederate battle flag over the South Carolina Capitol, it may be possible to come to a better understanding of all such conflicts over Confederate symbols.

To explore these issues of tradition and change as related to the status of Confederate symbols in the twenty-first century South, I will analyze, from a rhetorical perspective, the narratives told by the three basic groups of stakeholders involved in the South Carolina flag debate: flag advocates, flag opponents, and middlegrounders. Flag advocates were those who wished to keep the flag atop the Capitol. Those who aligned themselves with this side in the debate -- such as the Sons of Confederate Veterans and the United Daughters of the Confederacy -- were proud of the flag, believing it to be a positive reflection of the state's Southern heritage and their Confederate ancestors. Flag opponents were those -- such as the NAACP and the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition -- who wished to remove the flag from the Capitol grounds altogether. They were offended by the flag and believed it to be a symbol of racist oppression and a valorization of the Confederate States' defense of slavery. Middlegrounders or compromisers were those -- such as the Heritage Roundtable, a group with an economic interest in the Upstate, and

the faculty senates, trustees, and presidents of the state's two flagship universities (Clemson and USC) -- who wished to move the flag to the Confederate memorial or to a nearby museum. They understood the pride many felt in the flag; some compromisers even felt some pride and positive connection with the flag themselves. However, they also understood that many were offended by the flag and that the flag caused the state to be characterized as ignorant and behind-the-times, thus negatively impacting the state economically and academically.

In this section, I will analyze public communications delivered on behalf of the above-mentioned groups. These texts include speeches, Internet postings, position papers, newspaper columns, and a letter to the editor of a newspaper. These particular kinds of texts illustrate how public moral arguments proceed, how fantasy themes are generated "in group interaction out of a recollection of something that happened to the group in the past or a dream of what a group might do in the *future*."<sup>8</sup> Each of these groups told its own stories of the War and desegregation, as well as the state's future in terms of economic development and harmony amongst identity groups. These different stories explain these stakeholders' varying interpretations of the flag and what its role and placement should be in the future of South Carolina. As Fisher explains, "dramatic stories constitut[e] the fabric of social reality for those who compose them. They are thus 'rhetorical fictions,' constructions of fact and faith having persuasive force, rather than fantasies."<sup>9</sup> Thus, I have selected these public texts so as to illustrate and argue my contention that the way such public moral arguments are negotiated is through the narration of stories that imbue contested symbols -- in this case, the Confederate flag --

with their respective meanings.

Theoretical Foundations: Barthes, McGee, Burke, and Fisher

In analyzing this controversy over the meaning of a symbol, I will draw on Roland Barthes' semiotic and mythic theories, Michael Calvin McGee's formulation of the ideograph, Kenneth Burke's articulations of social mystery and agonistic stress, and Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm. Specifically, I will consider the Confederate battle flag as an icon that interacts with the ideographs of "heritage" and "hate" in a sort of public agon expressed in narratives generated by each side in the controversy, with the very presence of this controversy serving as evidence that social mystery is in fact linked with class distinctions.

For Roland Barthes, "the semiological project [is] . . . to study the life of signs at the heart of social life, and consequently to reconstitute the semantic systems of objects . . . [and] to study that mysterious operation by which any message may be impregnated with a secondary meaning, a meaning that is diffuse, generally ideological, and which is known as the connoted meaning."<sup>10</sup> In simple terms, "every message is the encounter of a level of expression (or signifier) and a level of content (signified)" and "All objects which belong to a society have a meaning."<sup>11</sup> Thus, from this we can state that the Confederate battle flag is not simply a piece of red, white, and blue cloth, but that, as an object that belongs to our society, it has meaning for all members of society who encounter it -- though the meaning attributed to this icon will vary depending on the background and beliefs of those beholding it. In addition, placement of an image or icon

plays a role in its meaning as well. Bill Nichols, in considering the case of Orthodox Christian religious icons, notes that "Religious icons marked a place of meaning precisely and singularly. If they were moved, their meaning could no longer be the same," and he allows that this may be true of other icons as well, saying that "commonly, an image's environment enters into the production of meaning."<sup>12</sup> Certainly, this idea of an icon's environment playing a role in its meaning may be applied to the flag, in that its very placement atop the South Carolina Capitol was at issue precisely because of the differing meanings its placement conveyed to various stakeholders. In sum, the Confederate battle flag is an icon or signifier that has meaning or signifieds determined by the experiences of those who perceive it as well as by its placement.

Michael Calvin McGee's articulation of the ideograph is helpful for understanding the basic signifieds or meanings underlying the material form of the flag icon. McGee defines ideographs as "the basic structural building elements, the building blocks, of ideology . . . like Chinese symbols they signify and 'contain' a unique ideological commitment . . . each member of a community will see as a gestalt every complex nuance in them . . . [they] are one-term sums of an orientation."<sup>13</sup> It is useful to consider this controversy in terms of its ideographs because, as McGee continues, "One can precisely define the difference between the two communities, in part, by comparing the usage of definitive ideographs. . . . there are special interests within the United States separated from one another precisely by disagreements regarding the identity, legitimacy, or definition of ideographs."<sup>14</sup> Disagreement over the meaning of the Confederate battle flag, as both material object and the words we use to signify that

object -- and over interpretations of the ideographs of heritage and hate associated with it -- was at the crux of the South Carolina flag conflict.

Each group of stakeholders in this debate used myth and narrative to create, explain, or defend the particular meaning the group attributed to the icon of the flag and the ideographs of heritage and hate. Flag advocates were the ones in this conflict who had a myth, the myth of the Lost Cause, and flag opponents were the ones seeking to expose and abolish that myth. According to Barthes, "The oppressed makes the world, he has only an active, transitive (political) language; the oppressor conserves it, his language is plenary, intransitive, gestural, theatrical: it is myth. The language of the former aims at transforming, of the latter of eternalizing."<sup>15</sup> This idea may be applied to the flag controversy in that we see in the rhetoric of flag advocates the drama of the myth behind the flag, the myth of the genteel defenders of a would-be new nation, of a better way of life that was thwarted; their aim was to "eternalize" the ideals of the Confederacy, to keep the memory of their honorable ancestors alive. Meanwhile, in the rhetoric of flag opponents, their aim was to "transform"; they wanted to change the status quo, to bring the flag down from atop the state house so as to keep up with the changing times, with the changed status of African Americans and other formerly oppressed minorities in our culture.

Of particular interest in Barthes' theory of mythologies is his idea of the three ways by which myths are received: 1) "focus on an empty signifier," 2) "focus on a full signifier," and 3) "focus on the mythical signifier as on an inextricable whole." Each of these ways of receiving a myth correlates with one of the three sides involved in the flag



controversy. The middlegrounders "focus[ed] on an empty signifier." They started with the reality of the flag as material object and let whichever outlook was most amenable to the individual fill it. In other words, the middlegrounders did not endorse one signifier or the other; they did not dictate that the flag be interpreted to mean heritage or hate, only that some compromise between these possibilities be reached. Flag opponents "focus[ed] on a full signifier . . . clearly distinguish[ing] the meaning and the form, and consequently the distortion which the one imposes on the other, . . . undo[ing] the signification of the myth."<sup>16</sup> They sought to deconstruct the joining of the form of the flag with the meaning of heritage, and thereby "undo the signification of the myth"<sup>17</sup> by offering an alternative meaning to be joined with the flag: the meaning of hate. Flag opponents fulfilled Barthes' belief that "Wherever man speaks in order to transform reality and no longer preserve it as an image . . . myth is impossible."<sup>18</sup> Finally, flag advocates "focus[ed] on the mythological signifier as on an inextricable whole made of meaning and form."<sup>19</sup> For them, the meaning of their Lost Cause heritage could not be separated from the form of the flag; thus, they were blind to any other possible interpretations of the flag. This makes sense when we consider that in the world of the flag defender, "The petit-bourgeois is a man unable to imagine the Other. If he comes face to face with him, he blinds himself, ignores and denies him, or else transforms him into himself . . . otherness is reduced to sameness,"<sup>20</sup> as evidenced by the recent rhetorical move of contemporary Confederates to point out the role played by African Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanics in the ranks of the Confederate Army. The myth of the Lost Cause of the South and the related myth of why the flag came to be

atop the statehouse in the first place were questioned and dissembled by the flag's opponents or supported and eternalized by the flag's advocates.

Related to these myths were the three sides' respective narratives, which either serve to support, neutralize, or undermine these myths. Walter Fisher's narrative paradigm explains why storytelling is an ideal means of persuading in the context of a public moral argument, which he defines as public in that it is "made available for consumption and persuasion of the polity at large" and "moral in the sense that it is founded on ultimate questions" such as "how persons should be defined and treated."<sup>21</sup> The controversy over the flag in South Carolina was indeed played out in the public forum, as evidenced by the texts considered here, and did involve the question of "how persons should be defined and treated." The narratives told by all sides in this controversy were "descriptive . . . offer[ing] an account, an understanding, of any instance of human choice or action" and involved "recounting and accounting," which are "stories we tell ourselves and each other to establish a meaningful life-world."<sup>22</sup>

In the narratives told in the course of the South Carolina flag controversy, the storytellers talked past one another, telling stories of the flag and the ensuing controversy that were "life-worlds" apart. Fisher addresses such stories told in the context of protest:

From the perspective of the narrative paradigm, the dynamic of this situation is that rival stories are being told. Any story, any form of rhetorical communication, not only says something about the world, it also implies an audience, persons who conceive of themselves in very specific ways. If a story

denies a person's self-conception, it does not matter what it says about the world. In the instance of protest, the rival factions' stories deny each other in respect to self-conceptions and the world. The only way to bridge this gap, if it can be bridged through discourse, is by telling stories that do not negate the self-conceptions people hold of themselves.<sup>23</sup>

Herein was the conflict between the various storytellers in this flag debate. In their rhetoric, flag advocates glossed over or simply ignored the role of slavery in the War, and thus attempted to delegitimize a significant part of African Americans' identity -- their ancestors' struggles in the era of slavery and beyond. Many flag defenders portrayed flag opponents as reverse racists, out to avenge past wrongs against their group, rather than as noble, non-violent protesters in the tradition of the mid-twentieth century civil rights movement. Likewise, flag opponents denied in their rhetoric a significant part of white Southerners' identity -- their belief in their ancestors' heroism, nobility, and valor fighting a War for independence that, to them, paralleled the Revolutionary War. Those opposed to the flag perceived flag proponents as racists, whose talk about heritage was nothing but a ruse to disguise their white supremacist agenda. Because stakeholders of each extreme in this debate told their stories in ways that negated the identity of their opponents, it is doubtful that they will ever be able to convince one another to listen to their respective stories, let alone concede common ground. The middlegrounders in this controversy may have been able, as Fisher says, to bridge the gap between the two extremes, in that their rhetoric did not negate anyone's self-concept. Rather, the middlegrounders attempted to value the self-concepts and

stories both of those defending the flag as well as those opposing it.

Though the opposing sides did not seem to be seeking to persuade one another through their rhetoric, this is not to say that some common ground could not result from their agonistic meeting. The two ideological poles in this debate were separated by social mystery -- neither could understand the other due to "the relation between mystification and class relationships."<sup>24</sup> The flag was at the heart of this great social mystery between many white Southerners, who prized what it signified to them, and many African Americans, who loathed what it signified to them. The whole conflict can be traced back to class distinctions both racial and economic. In the past, one group could own slaves and the other group could be owned as slaves -- and today, there is still an economic gap between many whites and blacks, especially in the South. As Burke notes, "Perhaps there would be no mystery of an appreciable resonance, if distinctions of class were abolished. . . . Maybe there would be no mystery. Maybe there should be none. For present purposes, it does not matter. . . . [There is] the presence of a 'mystifying condition' in social inequality."<sup>25</sup> In other words, we are stuck with the conflict between social classes. Since we are stuck with such conflict, it becomes our task as rhetoricians to make it useful, if not in practice than in our criticism of rhetorical practice. And so, while I am not seeking to solve the conflict between flag advocates and opponents -- only those directly involved in the debate can do that -- hopefully this study enhances our rhetorical understanding of it.

In such rhetorical conflicts as this one, there is what Kenneth Burke terms "'agonistic' or competitive stress," which is the product of arguing with an adversary.

While on the surface such adversarial debates seem destructive, the competitive stress results in what Burke calls the "proving of opposites," a kind of purifying fire of debate which results not in the distillation of one side's argument or the other, but of the refined, purified truth of both, melded together through the heat of their debate. Says Burke,

The notion of rhetoric as a means of 'proving opposites' again brings us to the relation between rhetoric and dialectic . . . ideally the dialogue seeks to attain a higher order of truth, as the speakers, in competing with one another, cooperate towards an end transcending their positions. Here is the paradigm of the dialectical process for 'reconciling opposites' in a 'higher synthesis.'<sup>26</sup>

By revealing the points of tension between the various narratives offered in the course of this debate, we can come to an enhanced understanding of how the South came to be in this situation, and of how the situation is symbolically constructed and maintained. A rhetorical analysis of this conflict hopefully will lead to an enhanced understanding not only of this controversy, but also of the nature of the conflict between tradition and change, and specifically how the differing values of tradition and change coexist and are negotiated in the context of the turn-of-the-century South. It is only through increased understanding of such conflict that we can ever hope to find a way out of it -- if indeed we should find a way out of it.

### A History of Heritage vs. Hate

Before beginning a rhetorical analysis of this controversy, it is important to understand its social and political underpinnings. In the wake of the U.S. Supreme

Court's decision in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, many white Southerners were angered by the federal mandate that they racially integrate their public schools. Stephen A. Smith, in *Myth, Media, and the Southern Mind*, states that, "The *Brown* decision, like every force which has challenged the myth and threatened the security of the racist South, was blamed on outsiders."<sup>27</sup> Looking for symbols around which to rally their protest, however, white Southerners found themselves at a disadvantage when it came to using traditional, American symbols. As Francis Wilhoit points out, "from the outset the South's counterrevolutionaries suffered from the handicap of having their opponents preempt virtually all the national historic symbols of the United States. . . . the South's leaders found themselves at a distinct disadvantage . . . for all they had left to manipulate were regional myths and icons discredited by the Great Rebellion."<sup>28</sup> These Southern "counterrevolutionaries" would have been better off using no symbols at all rather than the defeated symbols of the Old South. As Richard Weaver put it in a premonition-like statement in his 1943 dissertation, later published as *The Southern Tradition at Bay: A History of Postbellum Thought*, "Considerations of strategy and tactics forbid the use of symbols of lost causes. There cannot be a return to the Middle Ages or the Old South under slogans identified with them. The principles must be studied and used, but in such presentation that mankind will feel the march is forward. And so it will be."<sup>29</sup> However, many white Southerners, whether protesting desegregation or commemorating the War, were of a different mind. Not being able to associate the American flag with their cause, these Southerners chose to resurrect the symbols of the Confederacy, which had always been present in Southern culture in the

postbellum years, but not to such a great degree until the era of desegregation. As Smith observes, "The Confederate flag and the song 'Dixie' gained renewed popularity among the masses, especially in relationship with the rituals of intercollegiate football in the South and the countless ceremonies commemorating the Centennial of the Civil War."<sup>30</sup> Further, as Lewis M. Killian notes in *White Southerners*, "Homage to Dixie and the Confederate battle flag regained a significance they had lost over the years. . . . The white South was once again an embattled minority, with the forces of the Supreme Court, the NAACP, northern liberalism, and 'Yankee ignorance' arrayed against it."<sup>31</sup> It was in this cultural climate that the Confederate battle flag was first hoisted to the top of the South Carolina Capitol in 1962, with the stated intent of commemorating the one-hundredth anniversary of the War. Flag opponents, however, believed that the real reason for beginning to fly the flag in 1962 was to protest desegregation, which makes sense in light of the fact that the centennial of the beginning of the War was 1961, not 1962.

Over thirty years later, on November 26, 1996, then-South Carolina Governor David Beasley advocated, in his first televised address as governor, removing the flag from the Capitol dome and relocating it to a less controversial location: a soldiers' monument on the Capitol grounds. During his election campaign he had committed not to disturb the flag, so some critics saw his shift as motivated by future, national political aspirations or as pandering to the growing international business presence in South Carolina. Beasley, however, located his change of heart and policy in a religious realization that led him to be more sensitive to the perspective of those South

Carolínians offended by the flag: "I'm asking that we come together as a people -- to honor each other and understand each other, to forge a ministry of reconciliation that extends to every citizen from the greatest to the least."<sup>32</sup> In the aftermath of his address, the matter became for a while a hot topic in the state, especially in the 1998 South Carolina gubernatorial campaign, which resulted in the election of a new governor, Jim Hodges. Some, including Beasley, attributed his loss in part to many flag supporters' perception that he had betrayed not only his initial promise, but also the state's Southern heritage.

In July 1999 the issue again came to the fore, sparked mainly by the threat of a tourism boycott of the state by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People if the flag were not removed from the Capitol by the end of that year. When the new year arrived the flag was still flying. Thus, on January 1, 2000, the NAACP began its tourism boycott of South Carolina. The NAACP asked individuals not to vacation in the state, families not to plan reunions in the state, and corporations and organizations not to hold conferences in the state. In the first month of the boycott, many South Carolina entities and individuals, including Governor Jim Hodges, issued statements and resolutions calling for the legislature to take down the flag; some even passed resolutions at the end of 1999, realizing the boycott was imminent. Rallies were held in Columbia and around the state both by those for the flag and those against it. By May 2000, the controversy remained unsettled and the boycott was still in effect. At that time the South Carolina Senate and House passed legislation to remove the flag from the Capitol and relocate it to the Confederate soldiers' monument on the Capitol grounds. This event



was full of drama, as captured in the documentary film *The Unfinished Civil War*, as many came out to celebrate and protest the flag's ceremonious removal from the Capitol dome by two uniformed Citadel cadets.<sup>33</sup> However, at last report, the NAACP had decided that taking the flag off the Capitol was, after all, an unsatisfactory compromise; they now advocate removing the Confederate battle flag from the grounds altogether. It was this social and political context that framed the debate to be considered here.

#### Battling over the Battle Flag: Narratives of the War, the Flag, and the Debate Itself

It is clear that there is a parallel between the ideological orientation of a group and the symbolism that group attaches to the flag. Kenneth Burke's articulation of terministic screens is helpful for understanding this phenomenon. Thus, if a group has as its purpose the honoring of members' regional heritage, then that group will tend to see all issues in terms of that heritage. I will consider as representative of pro-flag rhetoric the communications of June Murray Wells, president general of the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC); the South Carolina Division of the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SC SCV); and the national Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV). Likewise, if a group has as its purpose the advancement of people of a particular race, then that group will tend to see everything in racial terms. My representative examples of anti-flag rhetoric come from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), including a speech by its president at the time, Kweisi Mfume, and from the Rev. Jesse Jackson, then the president of the Rainbow/People United to Save Humanity (PUSH) Coalition. Finally, if a group has as its purpose the

growth of a state's commerce, as with the Heritage Roundtable, then it will tend to see all issues in economic terms. Examples of compromise rhetoric were found in materials from the Upstate group known as the Heritage Roundtable as well as an opinion column by Clemson University President James Barker. Terministic screens are important to keep in mind as we consider how groups taking various positions in this controversy framed their arguments. The ideographs and narratives with which they chose to identify their respective causes were determined by the particular terministic screen through which they viewed not only the icon of the flag, but themselves, their opponents, Southern history, and the nature of this controversy.

#### Flag Advocates' Narratives of Heritage

Heritage was the term supported in the narratives put forth by defenders of the flag. All pro-flag rhetors had to say was "heritage" and they knew their intended audience of fellow, self-identifying Southerners would think immediately of their Confederate, Southern heritage. The communications of flag advocates were centered in the idea of heritage, as all the actions they advocated had to do with defending, commemorating, and celebrating their heritage as descendants of the soldiers, officers, and citizens of the Confederacy.

Heritage was the ideograph of choice for flag advocates such as June Murray Wells, president general of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, who addressed the January 2000 Heritage Rally in front of the Capitol in Columbia.<sup>34</sup> In her rhetoric she sought to rally an audience predisposed to identify with the ideograph of heritage to take

action by working with her and other leaders in defense of the flag. She spoke to reinforce attitudes her audience already held about the Confederate battle flag and the heritage it represents, sharing narratives from her life, her organization, their shared Southern history, and the controversy in which they were embroiled to prove that the flag signifies the heritage of the descendants of the Confederacy. The ideograph of heritage and its supporting narratives, working in conjunction with the myth of the Lost Cause, served to unify and strengthen Wells' intended audience of white, history-oriented Southerners, thus emboldening them to continue to fight for their flag.

Wells began by characterizing herself as a Southerner, saying that, "I have spent my entire life in South Carolina and my entire adult life teaching the truth of Confederate history," charting her life story as a student at the College of Charleston, a politically active Southerner, a school teacher, and the director of the Confederate Museum in Charleston. After characterizing herself as solidly Southern, Wells went on to characterize the nature of her particular group, the UDC, noting that its "objectives are historical, benevolent, educational, memorial, and patriotic." In particular, she wanted people to perceive her group as ameliorative rather than extremist in nature, pointing out that, "During the years, the UDC has worked harmoniously on many projects with our Northern counterparts. We have worked toward forgiveness and peace." She explained why the UDC is rarely involved "in debates and arguments . . . in marches and protests": "The rules set by our founders and still in effect today require us to be non-political." This explanation of the limits of her group's political activity served two purposes: It emphasized the urgency of the flag situation by her very presence at the rally as a

speaker, and it implied that the flag debate transcended the realm of mere politics. Wells' narration of her life as a Southerner and her narration of the history of her particular group worked by analogy to reinforce and justify the attitudes and actions of her pro-flag audience. They could identify with her experiences; they too grew up in cities and towns that revered the flag and were told stories of their ancestors who made sacrifices for the sake of the Confederate cause. Wells, in recounting the stories of herself and the UDC, was seeking to persuade her audience to identify with those stories, with the values and good works inherent in them. In so doing, she was reinforcing the positive aspects of their identity so that they too would feel confidence in answering their opponents.

Once Wells had so characterized herself, her group, and the nature of the debate, she proceeded to tell her narrative of the War:

South Carolina seceded first . . . . We would also be the only state to vote unanimously to secede. . . . The South did not leave the Union with animosity. They left simply because they wanted to be left alone to live in the way they chose. But this was not to be. A peaceful settlement could not be reached. The South did not invade the North. The North invaded the South causing us to defend our homes, our way of life and even our lives.

In Wells' story of the War, the South was simply a peace-seeking confederation looking for a better way of life on their own, apart from the United States; there was no mention of the "peculiar institution" of slavery, just an oblique reference to "liv[ing] in the way they chose." In her narrative of events, the motivations of the South in leaving the

Union were characterized only as positive; the South's defensive stance came only when the North provoked it with through the threat of invasion. In this telling of the War story, Wells was reinforcing her audience's belief that their ancestors were on the right side of the War, that their heritage as Southerners was one of a peaceful pursuit of independence, made violent only by the offensive action of the North. (This accounts for many Southerners' preference to refer to the Civil War as the "War of Northern Aggression.") In addition, her War narrative counteracted any "false teachings" her audience may have received as students in the public schools. She answered any doubts they may have had about the flag's meaning as a result of hearing opponents' version of the War, which placed blame on the South and situated its desire for independence in its desire to protect slavery. In her narrative of the War, Wells negated this alternate view of the War by leaving out all mention of slavery, and in so doing negated African Americans' feelings of being oppressed by a flag that for them signified hate, first through slavery and later through segregation.

Not only did Wells share her narrative of why the War was fought, so too did she tell her story of how a flag from that war, the Confederate battle flag, came to be flown atop the South Carolina statehouse just over a century later:

The Battle Flag was chosen because it had been chosen by the living United Confederate Veterans as their symbol . . . I was here at this same building in 1962 when the flag was raised. There was absolutely no negative intent. In fact quite the opposite. It was raised to commemorate the centennial of the war; to honor the memory of men, women and children; black and white, both military

and civilian who lived in and defended the South during the War and came together after the war to rebuild the South they all called home.

In Wells' narration, the flag signified the shared experience and achievement of all Southerners who went through the War and then rebuilt their region. She explained that raising the flag commemorated the common heritage of the War for all those descended from Southerners of the mid-nineteenth century as an answer to opponents' accusations that the flag held positive meaning for only one segment of the state's population: whites descended from Confederate officers and soldiers. In answering her critics with this story, Wells again provided her audience with a quick answer to those who argued that the flag did not represent the heritage of all South Carolinians. However, once again Wells was negating her opponents' interpretation of the flag in what she left out of her flag-raising account. In her story, Wells makes no mention of the social upheaval going on in 1962 in the wake of the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. In leaving this important fact out of her story, Wells omitted social circumstances that did much to shape the self-concept of her opponents (not to mention that of members of her target audience). In the rhetoric of Wells and other flag advocates, the heritage being defended was solely that of white Southerners with ancestral ties to the Confederate military, despite the lip service paid to the roles of other groups in Wells' account of Southern history.

Moving into the present, Wells narrated her version of the contemporary flag controversy and boycott: "Now our heritage is being threatened by newspaper ads and a boycott, both scare tactics. . . . If we elected the right legislators, our symbols will be

safe. If you see a newspaper ad that is designed to cause fear and division among Southerners, throw it in the trash where it belongs." This story of the contemporary conflict paralleled Wells' narrative of the War: Once again the heritage of the South was being threatened, and again she characterized the South's defenders as passive victims who were not responsible for the conflict. But rather than admitting South Carolina was being hurt by the economic sanctions, Wells turned the tables and spun an alternative tale, one in which the enemy was portrayed as hurting its own adherents:

it is a very sad thing that the NAACP is hurting their own people. I know there are many fine black people who own their own businesses and many who work at hotels, restaurants and other tourist oriented businesses. I think the NAACP should be working to help these people, not use them as pawns in a fight over a flag most of them have never seen. I am not particularly concerned over those events that have been withdrawn from South Carolina. It just leaves more time and space on the tourism calendar for our fine heritage groups and re-enactor groups to hold events that will attract tourists to learn about the truth of Confederate history.

In Wells' version of the boycott story, flag opponents were hurting themselves rather than South Carolina flag advocates. She articulated this version of the boycott not only to answer her critics, but also to help her audience feel better about the situation. If the boycott was hurting only those who were carrying it out, why should it concern Wells and her fellow flag defenders?

When we consider the syntax of Wells' characterization of the NAACP and those

whose interests it represented, however, we see that she was in fact doing that which she had accused the NAACP of doing: hurting her own cause. Phrases such as "their own people," "many fine black people," and "these people" betray a tone of condescension symptomatic of an attitude of white supremacy on her part. Wells could be seen as resituating African Americans in a servant role by emphasizing the fact, in her view, that there were many African Americans "who work in hotels, restaurants and other tourist related businesses"-- in short, the *service* industry. And the NAACP was characterized as merely playing a game, thereby degrading their cause. But perhaps the clearest indicator of Wells' underlying racist narrative of the flag conflict is her assertion that many African Americans in South Carolina had never seen the flag atop the Capitol. This assumption characterized African Americans as ignorant and ill-traveled. Her argument here was similar to the ubiquitous tree falling in the forest: If a flag flies but those who are purportedly offended by it never see it, does it really offend anyone?

Wells closed her story of the boycott by privileging the tourist business of reenactors and other War enthusiasts (read whites), thereby minimizing the importance and effects of the NAACP-initiated boycott. The negative implications of this narrative took away from Wells' credibility in her previous narratives as to the unifying nature of the flag as a symbol for all Southerners, not just whites. But, to her audience, pointing out the self-inflicted wounds of the boycotters provided them with a sense of justice, with a sense that they had not been wounded by the enemy's fire inasmuch as the enemy had wounded its own.

Finally, it is important to consider the meanings Wells attached to the flag. She



saw the flag as representative of herself and vice versa: "The Confederate States of America has several flags. They all represent me and I represent all of them. I'm proud to be an American, not just any old plain kind, but a Southern American, one still proud to be represented by that flag of the Confederacy on the dome." In this statement, Wells encouraged her audience to equate themselves with the flag, giving them more of a stake in fighting for it. Note the present-tense "has" in her statement, "The Confederate States of America has several flags," as if the CSA still exists. For Wells and many other flag advocates it does, as evidenced by speaking of the CSA in the present tense. And this gets at the heart of their defense of the flag: It was the last vestige of their beloved Confederacy to be displayed in an official seat of government power, the last Confederate flag to fly over a Southern statehouse. This fact may explain why not only South Carolina traditionalists rallied to the flag's defense, but also those from around the South and the nation, as well as why so many in South Carolina and beyond wanted the flag to come down. The very fact that it was the last flag left in such a position of privilege imbued it with even more symbolic power, thus explaining the intense nature of this particular flag conflict. And, adding to that intensity was the belief by people on both sides of the issue that if this flag came down, it would create a domino effect of changes in the Georgia and Mississippi state flags (both of which, as of 2000, still featured the Confederate battle flag in their respective designs), and perhaps the status of War memorials as well. Wells equated the flag with the very self-identity of her audience, implying that if the flag were taken down, a part of their own identities would be defeated. As evidenced throughout her rhetoric, Wells aimed to increase her

audience's sense of personal investment in the flag so that they would be more likely to come to its defense.

Also characteristic of the pro-flag rhetoric in this debate were statements found on the Web site of the South Carolina Division of the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCSCV).<sup>35</sup> Their narrative also portrayed the controversy as parallel with the War. This was an attractive and effective metaphor for "rallying the troops," as it afforded them a chance to re-fight the War on behalf of their ancestors in the hope that this time they would emerge victorious:

we have once again been drawn into a battle over our Confederate flag. The forces of modernism and appeasement have determined to make another assault on the emblem of our ancestors. It is our duty to come to the defense of their good name. If we falter now, we will surely be faced with more and even greater demands for removing and relocating Southern symbols. We have tried to be patient and conciliatory throughout this matter, but the other side will have none of it. Now is the time for action! **There are three things you must do RIGHT AWAY** (SCSCV).

Words such as "battle," "forces," "assault," "duty," and "defense" framed the flag conflict as a re-enactment of the War. This was an appropriate characterization for a group whose membership is focused on studying and re-enacting the history of the War, a war in which they situate themselves via genealogical ties. Not only did such syntax frame the contemporary flag conflict as a war, but the plot offered parallels with many SCV's narrative of the War Between the States. The assertion that, "If we falter now,

we will surely be faced with more and even greater demands for removing and relocating Southern symbols" paralleled the belief of the Southern secessionists of the nineteenth century that if the South kept capitulating to Northern-oriented policies, the situation of tyranny would not disappear but instead intensify. Thus echoing their nineteenth-century Southern forebears, the SCSCV called its members to immediate action in the hope of victory in the war for the flag, the war for a separate Southern identity, this time around.

Indeed, the SCSCV continued its narrative elsewhere on the Web page saying, "I am often asked this question, 'when will all this controversy be over?' That is an easy answer: **when we give up.**" Again there was a parallel with the War itself, with the implication that while the Confederacy gave up its fight too soon, today's defenders of the South could lose only if they stopped fighting for their cause. This also reflected their belief that it was in the very process of fighting that honor was won, an attractive idea to those who very much wanted to defend the honor of their ancestors' sacrifice on behalf of the Lost Cause. Even though those ancestors lost the War, they had gained honor simply by fighting. Drawing a parallel between defending the state's right to fly the flag atop the statehouse and the defending states' rights in the War was a very appropriate rhetorical strategy for rallying those who were descendants of Confederate soldiers and officers. In portraying the flag debate as their chance to re-fight the War, pro-flag rhetors chose an especially appropriate means of inspiring their "troops" to keep up the good fight, to sacrifice their time, money, and other resources on behalf of the Confederate battle flag.

More pro-flag rhetoric was found in materials from the national headquarters of the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV) on how to deal with "heritage violations" of all kinds.<sup>36</sup> The SCV offered its members and other allies rhetorical advice for characterizing the SCV and its cause in a positive way. On the "How to Handle a Heritage Violation" page of its Web site, the SCV stated:

Heritage violations are most severe. SCV members are reminded however to keep their cool. Those that cause a heritage violation sometimes take steps in an attempt to provoke us. Those that create heritage violation [sic] sometimes would like nothing better than for us to fly off the handle. Do not over react. Always handle yourself like the responsible Southern gentleman that you are . . . the SCV on a national level will respond when needed. We will respond with the truth, facts not fiction, and do it in a positive and calm manner.

And on the "Sons of Confederate Veterans Heritage Issues" page,<sup>37</sup> the SCV stated that it "promotes a positive resolution to all heritage violations. Correspondence to suspected violators MUST be dignified, thoughtful and polite." In these two passages the SCV characterized itself and strongly encouraged its members to characterize themselves in a positive, calm, and dignified manner. Clearly the SCV was not blind to the widespread narratives portraying Southern partisans as racist and ignorant in both their beliefs and behavior. Thus, the SCV countered such negative portrayals with what it believed to be the essence of its membership: the Southern gentleman. And just as it offered advice for positive self-presentation, the SCV conveyed a negative image of its opponents.

### Flag Opponents' Narratives of Hate

For flag opponents, the term "hate" contained and summed up flag opponents' interpretation of the flag, its uses, its defenders, and its origins. All an anti-flag rhetor had to say was "hate" and his or her target audience would understand immediately that he or she was referring to the hate of slaveholders, Ku Klux Klansmen, and all others whose racist views had denied them equal opportunity through the years. The communications of flag opponents were centered in the idea of hate, as the actions they advocated were concentrated on defending their group against the oppressive hate of racists who continued to fly what was to them the flag of slavery.

Hate was the ideograph of choice for Confederate battle flag opponents such as Kweisi Mfume, president and CEO of the NAACP, who in a February 19, 2000, speech at the NAACP Annual Board Meeting,<sup>38</sup> offered his own narrative explaining the NAACP's decision to boycott South Carolina tourism:

The Black American economy is an unexplored treasure chest in a wrecked ship that must now be opened[,] inspected and liberated. We want as our forebears wanted throughout the twenties and the thirties and the forties, we want an end to the economic grandfather clauses, the perpetual contracts that have helped us simply as consumers. Too many industries have engaged in a process of systematically ignoring our buying power or boycotting our intelligence. . . . So when we talk ab[ou]t economic sanctions against South Carolina, we are boycotting it because our dignity has been boycotted by others.

In telling this story, Mfume was arguing that the spending power of African Americans

has been underappreciated, and that the present NAACP membership simply wanted what their forefathers wanted. Therefore, they initiated the boycott of South Carolina not only to bring down the flag, but also to highlight their right to equal opportunities in a capitalist society. Focusing his story on the boycott in this way, Mfume appealed to the righteous indignation of his target audience of African Americans, many of whom felt they had been prevented from achieving economic success by the very people who stubbornly continued to fly the Confederate flag over the South Carolina statehouse. When Mfume stated that "someone else's heritage is really our slavery," he not only redefined the flag in his group's terms, but he also connected the economic realities of the slavery symbolized by the flag with the fact that African Americans are no longer commodities to be bought and sold. Contemporary African Americans, Mfume argued, are citizens who can buy and sell as fellow consumers and businesspeople in the American capitalistic system, and they were using those very economic acts to make their voices heard in the flag controversy. He further detailed his group's interpretation of the flag as a negative, divisive symbol when he noted that "the folly of flying a flag that is symbolic of racism and anti-Semitism and bigotry and intolerance will simply not be allowed to occur." Mfume denied his opponents' ideograph of heritage and instead offered his audience their own ideograph for the meaning of the flag: the ideograph of hate. This hate was symbolized materially in the form of the flag and economically in the opportunities that continued to be closed to many African Americans.

Like the other rhetors thus far considered, representatives of the NAACP also shared their own narratives about the War and why the flag was first raised above the

South Carolina Capitol. In its July 1999 emergency resolution, "Economic Sanctions for South Carolina,"<sup>39</sup> the NAACP recounted:

the Confederate States of America came into being by way of secession from and war against the United States of America out of a desire to defend the rights of individual states to maintain an economic system based on slave labor, and . . . the Confederate Battle Flag was raised in the States that comprised the defunct Confederate States of America for the supposed celebration of the Centennial of the War Between the States and as an unspoken symbol of resistance to the battle for civil rights and equality in the early 1960s.

Thus, the NAACP depicted the purpose of the Confederacy as defending the institution of slavery rather than defending states' rights. In addition, they noted that the timing of raising the flag in 1962 was significant not because it was the centennial of the War (though they recognized their opponents' alternate narrative), but because it was a time when the segregated institutions of the South were being increasingly threatened by federally mandated integration. Mfume offered his audience this version of the War and the raising of the flag so as to counteract historical narratives of these events promulgated by what the NAACP perceived to be the dominant culture, which included those who defended the flag and told a much different version of its history. Armed with their own version of history, Mfume's audience was thus empowered to defend their pairing of the flag with the ideograph of hate.

Just as its narratives of the War and flag-raising differed significantly from that of pro-flag groups, so too did the meaning the NAACP attached to the flag itself. The

NAACP depicted the flag as symbolic of racism because it had been "embraced as the primary symbol for the numerous modern-day groups advocating white supremacy." They also objected to the flag because its "placement . . . at the South Carolina State House with the flags of two existing governments . . . implies sovereignty and allegiance to a non-existent nation." Because of this negative symbolism, the NAACP initiated its economic sanctions in the hope that change would result. The narrative of what the NAACP hoped would happen was "the removal and relocation of the Confederate Battle Flag to a place of historical rather than sovereign context." This narrative of the flag being removed and relocated translated into a belief on the part of the NAACP that changing the context of the flag would change the meaning of the flag to one less offensive to African Americans, thereby helping to create a less oppressive economic and social environment for African Americans living in South Carolina and elsewhere throughout the South.

Representatives of the NAACP were not the only ones to articulate anti-flag narratives in this debate. Reverend Jesse Jackson, founder and president of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, also spoke out about the controversy through his syndicated newspaper columns. In Jackson's January 19, 2000, column, "Pandering to Racism,"<sup>40</sup> Jackson offered a look at the conflicting interpretations of the flag, asking, "What is the confederate flag? It is the symbol, as Republican Senator John McCain stated on his good day, 'of racism and slavery.' (One day later, McCain reversed himself to South Carolina reporters, saying the flag was a 'symbol of heritage.'" Of course, the flag is a symbol of both -- a symbol of heritage to some and a symbol of slavery and racism to



others. Or in the case of McCain, the flag was a symbol of both to the same person, an incongruency Jackson used to point to the pandering nature of that year's Republican presidential contenders. Jackson used this narrative of McCain's Janus-like position on the flag to illustrate to his readers that the establishment-backed politicians of the Republican Party, even a supposed "reformer" such as McCain, could not be trusted. Even when they appeared to be on the side African Americans, Jackson argued, they inevitably would be on the side of the status quo -- or on the side of no other cause than their own political success. In sharing the McCain example with his readers, Jackson emphasized the need for them to be critical and questioning of what people say in this and other political situations.

Like others involved in arguing about the meaning and placement of the Confederate flag, Jackson shared his own narrative of the War and the raising of the flag:

The confederate flag is not an insult to black people only. It is the banner flown by those who so strongly believed in racial supremacy and slavery that they turned to sedition, and tried to destroy the United States of America. A Republican president, Abraham Lincoln, was forced to war to preserve the union. More American lives were lost in that terrible war than in any other conflict in our nation's history. Slavery, sedition, savagery -- that is some heritage. South Carolina's officials only raised the confederate flag over the capital in 1962 as a direct insult to the civil rights movement. It was the symbol of their commitment to legal apartheid and their opposition to equal rights for a race they considered

inferior.

In this passage, Jackson recounted the widely held anti-flag narrative that the War was about slavery and that the flag was raised chiefly to protest the civil rights movement. Like Mfume, Jackson offered African Americans their own reading of the events of the War and the raising of the flag, a reading that revealed flag advocates' beloved "heritage" to be a heritage of hate. In his version of Southern history, Jackson took the ideograph of heritage, emptied it of the positive connotations attributed to it by its defenders, and refilled it with his own interpretation of the Confederate heritage: "Slavery, sedition, and savagery -- that is some heritage." In so resignifying the ideograph of heritage with the meaning of hate, Jackson claimed for his audience the power to characterize their history and experience in their own terms. In addition, he sent a message to his opponents through his very act of overturning the meaning of their revered ideograph of heritage.

Another element of Jackson's argument was his inclusion of a parallel narrative to the South Carolina flag debate, a similar situation involving the Confederate flag in another Southern state: "Alabama took its confederate flag down in 1993 after a lawsuit by black legislators. It was only when its public romance with racism ended that it was able to attract major manufacturers like Mercedes and Honda." This story of breaking with the Confederate tradition resulting in positive economic consequences sent this message: Take down the flag and your state, too, will benefit. Jackson offered another narrative parallel in his January 26, 2000, column, "On Super Sunday, Let's Celebrate One Flag and One Nation."<sup>41</sup> Here the story was that Georgia could face the same

situation as South Carolina if it did not soon move to change its state flag, which in 2000 still featured prominently the Confederate battle flag: "That boycott will surely come to Georgia if the flag is not changed," a possible plot twist he repeated, for emphasis, throughout his column. He underscored this narrative threat when he concluded, "South Carolina is reacting to growing outside pressure. If Georgia doesn't act soon, it will be next." Jackson used the narrative of South Carolina's conflict to instruct other states, such as Georgia, as to the consequences that could befall them if flag opponents' demands were not met, as well as the benefits to be gained by embracing change. In addition, he encouraged his target audience of fellow African Americans that if they were persistent in their efforts, then they would see rewards tangible -- in the form of economic opportunity -- and intangible -- in the form of victory over those who had formerly oppressed them.

### Middlegrounders' Narratives of Compromise

For flag middlegrounders, the term "compromise" contained and summed up their belief that common ground was possible between the extremes of those who revered the flag and the heritage that it signified for them, and those offended by that same flag and the racist hate that it signified for them. When a middlegrander said "compromise," the rhetor's target audience of civic and business leaders immediately understood that the he or she was referring to the possibility of building a bridge over the deep ideological and cultural divide that separated flag advocates and opponents. Such a bridge would make it possible, they argued, for roads of commerce to continue to

connect South Carolina and the rest of the world, as well as allow graduates of the state's colleges and universities to continue to pursue paths to professional opportunities beyond the state's borders. The communications of flag neutralists were centered in the idea of compromise, as the actions they advocated were focused on finding an agreement that would benefit all South Carolinians economically and socially.

Thus, a capitalistic version of compromise was the ideograph of choice for flag middlegrounders such as the Heritage Roundtable (HR), which characterized its membership as "a group of Upstate industry and business leaders, pastors, elected officials, lawyers, legislators and concerned citizens who have joined together to find a solution to the controversy. . . . confident they will soon restore South Carolina's auspicious reputation and replace controversy with solution."<sup>42</sup> They interpreted the flag as "a symbol of the struggle between the North and South during the War Between the States. It stood for a nation's fight and has been transformed into the physical representation of the Southern heritage and way of life. . . . In recent years, the flag has been a source of much controversy -- mainly because the flag means different things to different people." Based on the way they defined the flag's meaning, it seems the HR went along with the traditional heritage interpretation yet recognized the fact that other interpretations existed and that they could not be ignored. Rather than stating that the flag symbolized the Confederacy, they instead took the position that the flag signified the struggle between the North and the South rather than the ideology of one side or the other. They summed up the narrative of the flag conflict quite succinctly, noting that, "The banner has put a strain on black and white relationships, not only in the public

arena, but in the private sector as well. The issue is tearing friendships, relationships, businesses and communities apart." Middlegrounders' message to their audience of citizens concerned about the state's economy and reputation was that it did not matter which side in the War was right or which side is right now. Instead, they argued that what mattered was the negative impact the very presence of the conflict was having upon the relationships of the state, both internal and external. These compromisers wanted South Carolinians to agree that what mattered most was not the past, but the social and economic conditions of the present and future. Middlegrounders argued that South Carolinians should support whatever compromise would be necessary to ensure a positive future for the state, no matter how negative their experiences of its past and present. In other words, compromisers advocated shifting the focus of the debate from intangible ideals and interpretations of history to the tangible benefits to be had by moving beyond the flag conflict.

This group offered a solution to the flag controversy based in the shared narrative of South Carolina history and motivated by the hope of a shared narrative of future South Carolina prosperity. The Heritage Roundtable proposed legislation for the establishment of a Heritage Park, to be located on the site of the former Capitol, which would embrace various narratives of South Carolina's history from 1848 through around 1870. In a press conference unveiling the HR's plan for the park, HR member and State Senator David Thomas told his story of the shared narrative of South Carolina history:

I have always believed that if there was a common ground it had to be out of our common history and the heritage shared by us all. Black or white, if you are

from South Carolina, your forefathers were affected and we all have been impacted forever by the outcome of the War Between the States. It is in that heritage that we have found the answer to this controversy.

In this statement Thomas pointed to a history that was shared rather than divided or contested. By retelling the story of South Carolina race relations and history as one of shared struggles, Thomas hoped the HR could, through its proposed park, rewrite the future of South Carolina in terms of improved race relations and continued economic growth. Notably, State Senator Ralph Anderson, also of the HR, literally characterized the situation as a narrative, stating, "I am happy to stand today with Senator Thomas as we open a bright chapter in our state's unwritten history." Thomas' and Anderson's remarks conveyed to their audience the message that it is possible to rewrite history, to overcome past conflicts through positive, cooperative attitudes in the present. By offering a plan that they hoped would please those on both sides of the issue, HR members also were sending a message to business interests beyond South Carolina's borders that the voices of reason would prevail and that South Carolina would become an even more ideal place in which to do business.

Meanwhile, another middlegrunder, Clemson University President James Barker, related his institution's own narrative of balancing tradition and change<sup>43</sup> (and his own role in it as a Clemson student during that time of change in the 1960s):

As I began my Clemson education in the early 1960s, the University was changing rapidly. We had successfully made the conversion from an all-military college for men to a coeducational civilian university. . . . However, other

important changes were coming as Clemson prepared to change from an all-white institution to an integrated institution. African American students peacefully enrolled at Clemson . . . It was a process that showed the best of Clemson University, and it was described in the national press as "integration with dignity." As Clemson's population became more diverse, we became more aware of existing symbols that represented our university at sports and other public events. These symbols included the playing of "Tiger Rag" and "Dixie," as well as the Tiger and the Country Gentleman mascots, and the confederate flag. Clemson listened carefully to our new, more diverse student body. It was clear that some of these symbols were stronger than others in representing the kind of place Clemson wanted to be and the kind of future Clemson envisioned for itself.

Barker concluded his story by noting how Clemson ended up "maintaining aspects of its traditions including 'Tiger Rag' and the Tiger mascot and letting the other symbols -- the Country Gentleman mascot, the confederate flag and 'Dixie' -- be part of Clemson's past. Of course, the Tiger Paw and the University Seal were later added to symbolize the Clemson we know today." By relating this story, Barker was offering a precedent for the state to follow, a model for surveying its symbols and thinking about how those symbols related not only to the past, but also how those symbols impact the present and the future. Barker's narrative of tradition and change at Clemson showed that it was possible for the two to coexist without one negating the other. In conveying this narrative he argued that it was possible for the state as a whole to strike such a balance

between tradition and change as well. The ideograph of compromise was given life and credence in the story of how compromise worked in the history of Barker's own institution, Clemson University.

Underlying both the Barker and Heritage Roundtable narratives was a concern for polishing the state's reputation, which was requisite, they argued, to maintaining and further developing the state's economic growth. Barker, as president of a university with many financial and relational ties to industry -- industry which gives his university grants, his students internships, and his alumni jobs -- and a university which has as its goal to rise in the national rankings, very much had a stake in whether or not the flag remained atop the statehouse. Thus, he offered the narrative of Clemson's change in philosophy and image in the hope that legislators would follow suit. The moral of the story imparted by Barker is that "much of Clemson's success can be traced to the decisions made more than three decades ago regarding the symbols that would represent Clemson University in the future." Barker characterized South Carolina as having "one of the nation's healthiest economies . . . and is a rapidly growing population center. Its future seems undeniably bright," emphasizing the aspect of the state that would most benefit, in his estimation, from taking down the flag: its economy. He went on to list the many other "strong symbols" of South Carolina and proposed "the palmetto tree, the state flag, revolutionary battlefields, and our natural scenic beauty" as more appropriate (in terms of the state's economic interests) symbols to represent the state in the future. Rather than debating whether or not the flag should remain, Barker constructed an alternative narrative for the debate when he proposed that, "Our debate should center on



which of these symbols will best represent us and the kind of future we want to build for South Carolina." Again, Barker redirected the focus of the debate from conflict over past narratives to the hope of an agreement that the future narrative of the state would be one focused on progress, especially in the capitalistic sense.

#### After the Battle: Can Identification Result from Divergent Narratives?

All sides in this conflict would agree that the War and its consequences were central to each of their distinctive Southern identities, be they Confederate descendants, civil rights activists, or capitalistic compromisers. All involved cared about what the flag's absence or presence conveyed about their state, and the very existence of this debate stemmed from their unacknowledged consensus that, for better or worse, the Confederate battle flag reflected the way those on all sides viewed themselves and others as Southerners affected by the conflict resulting from the South's shift from an order of division to one of identification. Fisher's narrative paradigm provides a valuable means by which to understand the texts of the Confederate battle flag controversy because when we "consider that public-social knowledge is to be found in the stories that we tell one another . . . [it] enable[s] us to observe not only our difference, but also our commonalties, and in such observation we might be able to reform the notion of the 'public.'"<sup>44</sup> By allowing us a means to discover not only the dynamic of division in the narratives of this controversy, but also the presence of identification, the narrative paradigm offers some hope of understanding in an otherwise polarized field of conflict.

Therefore, even though there was division as to the flag's meaning, there also was

identification stemming from the fact that the flag's very existence and the historical narratives it symbolized were important to all participating in this debate. All involved in the flag debate agreed that the War, its outcome, and what happened in the decades that followed constituted a narrative crucial to understanding Southern identity, but that narrative took many forms depending on the experiences of those telling the story. These distinctive narratives of the War, race relations, and the flag-raising explain the equally distinctive meanings attributed to the symbol of the flag through the ideographs of heritage and hate. When these divergent ideographs and narratives were considered together in the agonistic crucible of this conflict, their meanings and messages ignited a fire that purified and refined the messages of each side. In the end, when the fire of controversy had burned out, what remained was what was common to all stakeholders: a shared concern for their distinctive history as Southerners. But the debate over the Confederate battle flag in South Carolina would not be the last skirmish in the "unfinished civil war" for Southern identity. Other public debates would also serve to purify Southerners' shared identity through the agonistic crucible of conflict. One such debate was on the horizon in December 2002, when equally divergent stories would be told in the accusations and apologia that constituted the Trent Lott-Strom Thurmond debacle.

## Notes

1. "The flag" will be used throughout this section to refer to the Confederate battle flag.
2. "The War" will be used throughout this section to refer to the conflict variously referred to by participants in this debate as the Civil War, the War Between the States, or the War of Northern Aggression.
3. Sanford Levinson, *Written in Stone: Public Monuments in Changing Societies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998): 24.
4. Levinson, *Written in Stone*, 55.
5. Levinson, *Written in Stone*, 103.
6. This summary of the Georgia state flag debate was gleaned from these articles: Dick Pettys, "State Flag Fight Flies Again," Associated Press Wire, *Albany (Ga.) Herald*, January 8, 2001, 1A, 4A; Jim Galloway, "Perdue Pushes a Vote on Flag," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, January 15, 2003, A1, A6; and Kristen Wyatt, "Flag Deal Struck," Associated Press Wire, *Albany (Ga.) Herald*, April 5, 2003, 1A, 7A.
7. This summary of the Mississippi state flag debate was gleaned from these articles: Alan Eisner, "Mississippi Vote Shows Power of Civil War Legacy," Reuters Wire, *Daytona Beach News-Journal*, April 18, 2001, <<http://www.news-journalonline.com>>; Reed Branson, "Mississippi Rallies 'Round Old Flag; Votes 2-1 to Keep Rebel Emblem in State Banner," *The (Memphis, Tenn.) Commercial Appeal*, April 18, 2001, A1, *Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe*; and Marlon Manuel, "Mississippians Sticking with Flag," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, April 18, 2001, 1A, *Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe*.
8. Ernest G. Bormann, "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: The Rhetorical Criticism of

- Social Reality," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 59 (1972): 143-159.
9. Fisher, "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm," 271.
  10. Roland Barthes, *The Semiotic Challenge*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1988): 159.
  11. Barthes, *The Semiotic Challenge*, 182.
  12. Bill Nichols, *Ideology and Image* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981): 60.
  13. Michael Calvin McGee, "'The Ideograph': A Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66 (1980): 7.
  14. McGee, "'The Ideograph,'" 13.
  15. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972): 149.
  16. Barthes, *Mythologies*, 128.
  17. Barthes, *Mythologies*, 128.
  18. Barthes, *Mythologies*, 146.
  19. Barthes, *Mythologies*, 128.
  20. Barthes, *Mythologies*, 151.
  21. Fisher, "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm," 276-77.
  22. Fisher, "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm," 270, 273.
  23. Fisher, "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm," 279.
  24. Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969): 122.

25. Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 122-23.
26. Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*, 52-3.
27. Stephen A. Smith, *Myth, Media, and the Southern Mind* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press): 41.
28. Francis M. Wilhoit, *The Politics of Massive Resistance* (New York: George Braziller, 1973), 123-124. Cited in Smith, *Myth, Media, and the Southern Mind*, 41.
29. Richard M. Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay: A History of Postbellum Thought*, ed. George Core and M. E. Bradford (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1989): 379.
30. Smith, *Myth, Media, and the Southern Mind*, 41.
31. Lewis M. Killian, *White Southerners* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985): 38.
32. Governor David Beasley quoted in Sid Gaulden and John Heilprin, "Beasley Says Moving Flag 'Right' Thing," *The (Charleston, SC) Post and Courier*, November 27, 1996, A1, *Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe*. For another account of Beasley's speech, see Al Hinman, "Confederate Flag Must Come Down, Says S.C. Governor," *CNN Interactive*, November 27, 1996, <<http://cnn.com/US/9611/27/rebel.flag/>>. The full text of Beasley's speech is likely available through the South Carolina Archives, Papers of Governor David M. Beasley (1995-1999) (RG: 556000). See especially S 556043, Speeches, remarks and talking points and S 556038, Video tapes. For more information on the archives of Beasley's papers, see <<http://www.state.sc.us/scdah/guide/rg0556.htm>>.

33. Craig Haffner and Glenn Kirschbaum, executive producers, *The Unfinished Civil War* (New York: A&E Television Networks, 2000). Produced by Greystone Communications Inc. for the History Channel.
34. June Murray Wells, "Talk at South Carolina State House, Columbia, South Carolina, January 8, 2000," January 8, 2000, United Daughters of the Confederacy Web site, <<http://www.hqudc.org>>. For further insight into the mindset of Confederate enthusiasts, including members of the UDC and the SCV and especially about re-enactors, see Tony Horwitz, *Confederates in the Attic: Dispatches from the Unfinished Civil War* (New York: Pantheon, 1998).
35. Danny Verdin, "To: All Compatriots and Supporters of Southern Heritage, From: Danny Verdin, South Carolina Division Commander," South Carolina Division Sons of Confederate Veterans Web site, March 1, 2000, <<http://www.jamespurck.com/scv/URGENT.html>>.
36. Sons of Confederate Veterans, "How to Handle a Heritage Violation," November 2, 1999, SCV Web site, <<http://www.scv.org/scvher02.html>>.
37. Sons of Confederate Veterans, "Sons of Confederate Veterans: Heritage Issues," SCV Web site, February 10, 2000, <<http://www.scv.org/scvher00.html>>.
38. Kweisi Mfume, "Speech at NAACP Annual/Board Meeting," February 19, 2000. Retrieved from National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Web site, <<http://www.naacp.org>>.
39. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, "Emergency Sanctions for South Carolina," July 12, 1999, NAACP Web site,

<<http://www.naacp.org/em-resolution.html>>.

40. Jesse Jackson, "Pandering to Racism," Los Angeles Times Syndicate, January 19, 2000. Retrieved from Rainbow-PUSH Coalition Web site, <<http://www.rainbowpush.org/commentary/011900.html>>.

41. Jesse Jackson, "On Super Sunday, Let's Celebrate One Flag and One Nation," Los Angeles Times Syndicate, January 26, 2000, Rainbow-PUSH Coalition Web site, <<http://www.rainbowpush.org/commentary/012600.html>>.

42. Heritage Roundtable, "Senators Unite to Find Resolution to Flag Controversy," February 8, 2000, South Carolina Sons of Confederate Veterans Web site, "Legislation is Being Introduced to Create 'So-Called' Heritage Park," <<http://www.jamespurck.com/scv/Legislation.html>>.

43. James Barker, "Clemson History Offers Perspective for Flag Debate," *Clemson World Magazine*, Winter 2000: 2. Reprint of December 3, 1999 letter to the editor, *The State* (Columbia, SC).

44. Fisher, "Narration as a Human Communication Paradigm," 280.

## SENATOR TRENT LOTT: SOUTHERN SINNER, SCAPEGOAT, AND SACRIFICE

If the Confederate battle flag was the most divisive of Southern symbols throughout the twentieth century, the causes with which it has most often been associated during that century, segregation and racism, have been just as divisive in practice. Just as formerly segregated Southern institutions such as VMI were beginning to admit women, Southern cities were making room for depictions of a more diverse array of Southern heroes than Confederate generals, and Southern symbols of division such as the Confederate flag were being taken down, a new controversy arose when questions surfaced as to whether one of the most powerful Southern political leaders on the national scene was a supporter of racial segregation. When Mississippi Senator Trent Lott made remarks interpreted by many as supportive of Strom Thurmond's 1948 segregationist presidential bid, he became associated in the minds of many with segregation, the twentieth century South's chief manifestation of the order of division. Lott's accusers looked for evidence that not only were his recent remarks divisive, but that his entire career was filled with instances in which Lott chose to associate himself with the causes of division rather than the causes of identification. In response, Lott needed to prove that he had moved increasingly away from the order of division and toward the order of identification through the course of his life. At the resolution of this controversy, however, Lott was forced to resign from his post as incoming Senate Majority Leader. Lott's resignation was another instance in which the new order of identification triumphed over the old order of division in the turn-of-the-millennium



South. A scapegoat needed to be sacrificed to expiate the sins of the South, the political establishment, the media, and the nation in the area of race relations. Lott, because of his controversial remarks and his position of power, was singled out by his accusers as a worthy sacrifice. However, it remains to be seen if Lott as scapegoat was a sufficient sacrifice for the South's history of segregationist sins.

#### The Beginning of the End: The Context of Lott's Controversial Comments

If one were to have asked most Americans before December 5, 2002, if South Carolina Senator J. Strom Thurmond had ever been a candidate for president, and if so when and for what political party, many likely would not have known. But surely Thurmond's family, friends, staff members, and Senate colleagues, who had gathered for his 100th birthday party, knew that Thurmond had indeed run for president in 1948; as the candidate of the States' Rights Democratic Party, Thurmond garnered 39 electoral votes and made a name for himself on the national political scene. Though he did not come close to winning the election, Thurmond believed he and his party had been successful in letting the Democratic Party know that it should no longer take for granted the South's support on Election Day. Furthermore, the exposure Thurmond gained through his presidential bid helped him make the move from two-term governor of South Carolina to U.S. senator from South Carolina in the 1954 election -- an office he still held 48 years later as he marked his 100th birthday, just weeks before his eighth and final Senate term came to a close.

But on December 5, 2002, the focus was not Thurmond's distant, sometimes

controversial political past, which had endured from the days of racial segregation through to federally mandated integration, from Thurmond as Democrat to States' Rights Democrat to Republican. Instead, the mood was jovial. It was in this atmosphere of levity that Trent Lott took the floor to share his thoughts on Thurmond and his good wishes for him, as well as some humor. But couched between lines about Bob Dole "dang near" winning the presidency by telling Strom Thurmond jokes and "Thurmond never leav[ing] the Senate until the Capitol froze over," in the same remarks in which Lott would tell "of that great debate in 1850, when John C. Calhoun . . . whirled around to face Daniel Webster . . . to declare, 'Dan, I know Strom Thurmond. He's a friend of mine. And, Dan, you're no Strom Thurmond,'" came three brief sentences that would have very serious consequences for Lott: "I want to say this about my state: When Strom Thurmond ran for president we voted for him. We're proud of it. And if the rest of the country had of followed our lead we wouldn't of had all these problems over all these years." After the first two sentences, the transcript indicates there was both laughter and applause. But after the third line, the audience neither laughed nor applauded. Instead, Lott moved on to the rest of his jokes and compliments about the guest of honor.<sup>1</sup> But when the first of much reporting focusing on Lott's controversial comments appeared two days later, in a *Washington Post* article by Thomas Edsall,<sup>2</sup> Lott could only pray that the press, the public, and his political colleagues would move on as quickly. This, however, was not to be. Trent Lott's remarks about Strom Thurmond's 1948 presidential campaign sparked a two-week long, mass-mediated exchange of accusations and apologia in which Lott was made the scapegoat on behalf of the South's,

and perhaps even the nation's, unatoned sins of segregation and racism.

In this section, I first will survey the events of this rhetorical situation, offering a timeline of the various accusations and apologia that constituted this debate. Next, I will provide some background material about Thurmond's 1948 presidential campaign and his subsequent decades on the national political scene, so as to put the controversy surrounding Lott's comments about Thurmond in historical context. I also will briefly summarize Trent Lott's life, paying special attention to his dealings with race-related issues from his college days through to his terms as a U.S. senator. Once a thorough understanding of the rhetorical situation has been established, I will review the literature on *kategoria* and *apologia*, as well as scapegoating, victimage, and mortification, which will explain the theoretical underpinnings of this section. Next, I will offer a detailed rhetorical analysis of the various accusations leveled against Lott in the midst of this controversy, as well as of the various *apologia* Lott (and a few defenders) articulated in response to these accusations. Ultimately, this rhetorical analysis will lead to some overarching conclusions regarding the scapegoating of Trent Lott for the sins of segregation some 40 years after the civil rights movement resulted in segregation's legal demise.

#### The Rhetorical Situation: A Timeline of Accusations and Apologia

From the first media coverage of Lott's remarks on December 7 through the senator's resignation from the post of majority leader-elect on December 20, many accusations and apologies were articulated. Lott's spokesman, Ron Bonjean, offered a

brief explanatory (but unapologetic) statement soon after the event, stating that "Senator Lott's remarks were intended to pay tribute to a remarkable man who led a remarkable life. To read anything more into these comments is wrong."<sup>3</sup> This explanation, however, was not sufficient to prevent public criticism of Lott. Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sr., of the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition, issued a statement on December 8 calling for Lott to step down as incoming majority leader.<sup>4</sup> The following day, December 9, former Vice President Al Gore, in an interview with Judy Woodruff on CNN's *Inside Politics*, described Lott's words as "a racist statement," but did not go so far as to call Lott a racist. Gore recommended that Lott withdraw his remarks or else face formal censure by the Senate.<sup>5</sup> Also on this day, Lott issued his first apology: "A poor choice in words conveyed to some the impression that I embraced the discarded policies of the past. . . . Nothing could be further from the truth, and I apologize to anyone who was offended by my statement."<sup>6</sup> However, this brief, emotionless apology was unsatisfactory to many. On December 10, two interest groups from opposite ends of the political spectrum spoke out against Lott and his remarks. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) called for Lott to resign his position as the incoming majority leader.<sup>7</sup> The same day, the Family Research Council issued a statement critical of Lott, asking whether the Republican Party should consider someone else to be its Senate leader.<sup>8</sup>

December 11 brought news from Lott's past, information that made his 2002 comments seem not so isolated and extemporaneous as the senator and his spokesman had portrayed. Carl Hulse reported in the *New York Times* that Lott had made a very

similar remark on November 3, 1980, in a Mississippi campaign appearance with Thurmond on behalf of Ronald Reagan's presidential campaign: "You know, if we had elected this man 30 years ago, we wouldn't be in the mess we are today."<sup>9</sup> Also on December 11, Lott gave his first interview on the topic to Sean Hannity on his afternoon talk show, which is nationally syndicated on ABC Radio (with this particular segment simulcast on the Fox News Channel). In this conservative-friendly forum, Lott went into more detail than in the previous statements given through his press office; in this interview, Lott admitted his mistake, asked forgiveness, and expressed hope that he would be able to move on and turn the mistake into an opportunity for growth. Of particular note was his repeated use of the phrase that his was "a mistake of the head, not of the heart," which is a simplified version of Jesse Jackson's 1984 apology at the Democratic National Convention for negative comments he had made in reference to New York City's Jewish community.<sup>10</sup> That evening, Lott was interviewed by telephone on CNN's *Larry King Live*.<sup>11</sup> In addition to the 1980 revelation and the interviews, another interest group, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), issued a brief statement denouncing Lott's comments on this day.<sup>12</sup>

December 12, a week after Lott made his controversial remarks, brought a development much anticipated by many political pundits: a statement from President George W. Bush addressing Lott's situation. In a brief aside in a speech delivered on faith-based community development initiatives, Bush observed that, "recent comments by Senator Lott do not reflect the spirit of our country. He has apologized, and rightly so. Every day our nation was segregated was a day that America was unfaithful to our

founding ideals."<sup>13</sup> In addition, the Congressional Black Caucus, through its outgoing chairperson Representative Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-Texas) and its incoming leader Representative Elijah Cummings (D-Maryland), called for "a formal censure of Senator Lott's racist remarks."<sup>14</sup> Further, two articles calling attention to Lott's questionable history regarding issues of race were published in the national media. A *Time* magazine article by Karen Tumulty detailed Lott's successful bid in the early 1960s to keep his fraternity, Sigma Nu, segregated -- not only at his chapter at the University of Mississippi, but nationally. The same article noted, however, that Lott, in his senior year of college, was responsible for convincing his fraternity brothers not to participate in the riots protesting the integration of Ole Miss.<sup>15</sup> In an Associated Press article released the same day, "Over 30 Years, Lott Brushed with Race, Confederacy Issues Several Times," John Solomon highlighted Lott's association with the Council of Conservative Citizens (CCC), his push to restore Jefferson Davis' citizenship, his statement to the Sons of the Confederate Veterans (SCV) that "the spirit of Jefferson Davis lives in the 1984 Republican Platform," and his votes against the Martin Luther King, Jr. national holiday and the Voting Rights Act. In the latter article, Lott spokesman Ron Bonjean was quoted as saying that Lott "repudiates segregation because it is immoral," and of his efforts to keep Sigma Nu segregated that "This was years ago in a different time, in a different era. . . . He repudiates segregation and supports integration in his old fraternity."<sup>16</sup> And, foreshadowing developments in the week ahead, December 12 also brought a brief statement from Senator Bill Frist (R-Tennessee) in which he agreed with Bush's comments and accepted Lott's apology.<sup>17</sup>

On a day following so many crucial developments in his situation, it is not surprising that Lott held a news conference on December 13. Speaking in his hometown of Pascagoula, Mississippi, Lott began by stating, "Segregation is a stain on our nation's soul. . . . It represents one of the lowest moments in our nation's history, and we can never forget that." Regarding Thurmond, Lott described him as "a friend, a colleague, and conservative who came to understand the evil of segregation and wrongness of his own views. He's said as much himself." In terms of his comment favorable to Thurmond's presidential bid, Lott clarified, "In celebrating his life, I did not mean to suggest in any way that his segregationist views of 50 years ago were justified or right." Lott ended his news conference remarks with reference to the future, declaring "I will dedicate myself to undo the hurt I have caused and will do all that I can to contribute to a society where every American has an equal opportunity to succeed."<sup>18</sup>

As is often the case in the weekly news cycle, Saturday (December 14) brought no major developments in the Lott situation. However, Sunday, December 15, did bring one key development: the first public statement by a Republican Senate member raising the possibility of someone else being majority leader. Senator Don Nickles (R-Oklahoma), while accepting Lott's apology, stated that "this is bigger than any single senator now. I am concerned [he] has been weakened to the point that it may jeopardize his ability to enact our agenda and speak to all Americans. There are several outstanding senators who are more than capable of effective leadership and I hope we have an opportunity to choose."<sup>19</sup> Nickles, along with Frist, Senator Mitch McConnell (R-Kentucky), and Senator Rick Santorum (R-Pennsylvania) all would be talked about in

the press as possible alternatives to Lott for the Senate majority leader post.

On December 16, America watched as Lott sat down for another interview, this one with Ed Gordon of Black Entertainment Television (BET). In his responses to Gordon's questions, Lott frequently emphasized themes of forgiveness and redemption: "The important thing is to recognize the hurt I've caused, and ask for forgiveness, and find a way to turn this into a positive thing, and try to make amends for what I've said and for what others have said and done over the years. I'm looking for this to be not only an opportunity for redemption, but to do something about it." In addition to querying Lott about his then-recent comments regarding Thurmond's 1948 presidential bid, Gordon also queried Lott about his college fraternity, his votes against the King holiday and the Voting Rights Act, his views on affirmative action, his connection with the CCC, and his support of controversial judicial nominee Charles Pickering. Lott's appearance on BET constituted his most in-depth apology over the course of the two-week uproar.<sup>20</sup>

Meanwhile, Frist released a second statement on December 17, this one in response to media reports that he had endorsed a new election for Senate majority leader. In his brief statement, Frist simply acknowledged that Senate Republicans were considering what to do, and that he had "endorsed no specific proposal at this time."<sup>21</sup> The next day, December 18, brought the first statement by a Senate Republican publicly declaring the hope that Lott would step down from his leadership position. Senator Lincoln Chafee (R-Rhode Island), as a guest on Steve Kass' talk show on Providence radio station WPRO, talked at length about the situation, the procedure necessary to elect



a new majority leader, possible candidates, and his contention that Lott's apologies weren't "connecting" with the public and that Lott should leave.<sup>22</sup> Another blow to Lott's chances of survival as majority leader-elect came during a State Department joint news conference featuring Secretary of State Colin Powell and European Union foreign ministers. In response to a question regarding Lott's comments and apologies, Powell noted, "I was disappointed in the senator's statement. I deplored the sentiments behind the statement. There was nothing about the 1948 election or the Dixiecrat agenda that should have been acceptable in any way to any American at that time or any American now."<sup>23</sup> In addition to Chafee's and Powell's criticisms that day, news of negative comments from former President Bill Clinton, Florida Governor Jeb Bush, and outgoing Representative J.C. Watts (R-Oklahoma) also surfaced in the media at this time.

On December 19, Frist released a third statement, this one acknowledging that he had been approached by some of his fellow Senate Republicans about being a nominee for Senate majority leader.<sup>24</sup> Following this "signal," Lott proffered his resignation as majority leader-elect the next day, December 20: "In the interest of pursuing the best possible agenda for the future of our country, I will not seek to remain as majority leader of the United States Senate."<sup>25</sup> Two days later, on December 22, Lott gave his first post-resignation interview to Sheila Hardwell Byrd of the Associated Press. Speaking at his Pascagoula home, Lott vacillated between taking responsibility for his words and blaming others for the fate that had befallen him. On the one hand, he stated, "I don't think there's any use in trying to say I'm disappointed in anybody or anything. An inappropriate remark brought this down on my head." But, at the same time, he also

voiced his belief, "A lot of people in Washington have been trying to nail me for a long time. . . . When you're from Mississippi and you're a conservative and you're a Christian, there are a lot of people that don't like that. I fell into their trap and so I have only myself to blame."<sup>26</sup> The following day, Senate Republicans elected Bill Frist their new majority leader. Few would have predicted that Strom Thurmond's 100th birthday party would come to have such far-reaching effects.

#### Flashback: Thurmond for President

Understanding why Lott's comments regarding Thurmond's 1948 presidential bid were seen as controversial enough to force Lott's resignation requires a brief look back at Thurmond's campaign. Just after Thurmond won his first South Carolina gubernatorial election in November 1946, President Harry Truman formed the President's Committee on Civil Rights (PCCR) in December 1946 and, in Executive Order 9008, instructed this committee "to enquire [sic] into and to determine whether and in what respect current law-enforcement measures and the authority of and means possessed by Federal, State, and local governments may be strengthened and improved to safeguard the civil rights of the people." On October 29, 1947, the committee issued its report, *To Secure These Rights*, which included "calls for abolition of poll taxes, enactment of antilynching legislation, legal proscriptions of discrimination in interstate transportation, and guaranteed voting rights in federal elections for qualified voters."<sup>27</sup>

Soon afterward, in February 1948, the Southern Governors' Conference convened in Wakulla Springs, Florida. Thurmond spoke in response to what he perceived to be

"the spectacle of the political parties of this country engaging in competitive bidding for the votes of small pressure groups by attacking the traditions, customs and institutions of the section in which we live." He stated his opposition to "a so-called anti-lynching bill" on the basis that "lynching has been virtually stamped out in the South without outside interference" and that such "legislation would be an unconstitutional invasion of the field of government of several states." Likewise, he argued against "a so-called anti-poll tax bill" because it would be "an unconstitutional infringement on the right of the several states to prescribe voting qualifications."<sup>28</sup> His constitutional arguments against federal encroachment on states' rights were to become a common theme in Thurmond's political rhetoric of this era.<sup>29</sup> Another common theme was his contention that, on a day-to-day basis, segregation was beneficial to the lives of whites and blacks alike: "They talk about breaking down the laws which [the] knowledge and experience of many years have proven to be essential to the protection of the racial integrity and purity of the white and negro races alike. . . . their sudden removal would jeopardize the peace and good order which prevails where the two races live side by side in large numbers."<sup>30</sup> These two arguments, along with the beliefs that the Truman administration and other Democrats were promoting civil rights legislation purely for political advantage and that the Democratic Party had for too long taken the South and its political support for granted, became the basis of the States' Rights Democratic Party, which would, in a short time, grow out of this February 1948 conference.

By the summer of 1948, despite Truman's efforts to get the more modest 1944 civil rights platform passed at the 1948 Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia,

a more ambitious civil rights platform inspired by *To Secure These Rights* was passed under the leadership of Minneapolis Mayor Hubert Humphrey.<sup>31</sup> With the inclusion of this more radical civil rights plan in the official Democratic Party platform, Southerners made good on their promise to leave the convention and nominate their own candidates for president and vice president -- candidates who would defend the sovereignty of states' rights so as to protect "custom and tradition" in the area of race relations and civil rights. And so it was that Thurmond and Mississippi Governor Fielding Wright became the presidential and vice presidential candidates of the still-nascent States' Rights Democratic Party on August 11, 1948, at its convention in Houston.<sup>32</sup>

Throughout his campaign speeches and materials, candidate Thurmond continued to emphasize the three themes he had promoted since his remarks at Wakulla Springs: 1) the unconstitutionality of federal laws mandating employment, voting, and criminal justice practices in the states; 2) the subsequent loss of community peace and individual freedoms for those impacted; and 3) the political motivations behind such civil rights legislation. On November 1, Thurmond delivered a radio address, carried on ABC throughout fourteen Southern states, in which he made one last effort to urge those who believe "the South is right in this fight . . . [to] go to the polls tomorrow and vote your honest convictions." Thurmond, besides his typical political and constitutional arguments, also included his usual emotional appeals to his audience's fears of anything that might disturb their way of life, painting a vivid picture of how "the so called civil rights program would bring about the end of segregation in the South, forcing the mixing of the races in our hotels, in our restaurants, in our schools, in our swimming pools, and

in all public places." He emphasized that "A vote for Truman, for Dewey, or for Wallace is a vote that says 'We want the FEPC [Fair Employment Practices Commission] and the mingling of the races.'"<sup>33</sup> In the end, Thurmond and Fielding carried their home states of South Carolina and Mississippi, plus Alabama and Louisiana, for a total of 39 electoral votes (which included the vote of one rogue elector from Tennessee), nowhere close to Truman's 333 electoral votes and Dewey's 189.<sup>34</sup> However, Thurmond would go on to win a U.S. Senate seat as a write-in candidate in 1954, a seat he would hold for eight terms until January 2003, when he retired from public office at age 100.

In his eight terms as a U.S. senator, Thurmond's public views and Senate votes on issues of race reflected the changing mores of the nation. By the 1990s, Thurmond was voting in favor of civil rights legislation and supporting the nomination of an African American, Clarence Thomas, to the Supreme Court. As Thurmond observed shortly after he was elected to his seventh term in 1990, "If you can't change with the times when it's proper to change, you'd be lost in the shuffle. I don't think I've sacrificed any principle in my career, but times change." Thurmond biographer Nadine Cohodas concluded that, though "he never rose up in indignation and vowed to help change the rules, his long career had shown that few knew better how to adapt once those rules were changed."<sup>35</sup> Perhaps Trent Lott would have benefited from a refresher course in such adaptation to the times, a course based on the political life lessons of his "hero" Strom Thurmond.<sup>36</sup>

### Trent Lott: From Sharecropper's Son to Senate Majority Leader

Like Thurmond and many other politicians, Trent Lott has his own "rags to riches" story that he uses to emphasize his working-class roots and how he has, by his own efforts and not through family wealth or prestige, succeeded in life. Though Lott was not so fortunate as to have had the proverbial log cabin in his past, he often tells the story of where, how, and by whom he was raised. Born Chester Trent Lott to parents Chester and Iona Lott on October 9, 1941, in Grenada, Mississippi, Lott emphasizes his identity as a "sharecropper's son." As the story is told in his official Senate biography,

Trent Lott's early years were shaped by the no-nonsense values of hard-working parents in hard-working times. More than once, the family moved to take advantage of a job opportunity and a chance at a better life. He grew up in a home where frugality countered economic uncertainty and where personal advancement had to be based on personal achievement.

While his father did work for a time as a sharecropper, eventually the family moved to Pascagoula, where Lott's father worked as a pipefitter in the local shipyards and his mother worked as an elementary schoolteacher.<sup>37</sup>

Lott went on to Oxford, Mississippi, to attend the University of Mississippi (also known as Ole Miss), a college whose sports teams and fans are known as the Rebels. When Lott was a college student there in the 1960s, it was tradition for fans to wave Confederate battle flags and sing "Dixie" at football games.<sup>38</sup> Lott's extracurricular activities included being a cheerleader and a member of Sigma Nu, a traditionally Southern fraternity.<sup>39</sup> In the early 1960s, when some Northern chapters of Sigma Nu

wanted to integrate, Lott and his Ole Miss brothers argued for retaining an all-white brotherhood. When the fraternity held its national convention, Lott defended the stance of his and other Southern chapters, and threatened that these chapters would leave if the national fraternity moved to integrate; thus, Lott and other like-minded Sigma Nus were successful in their bid to keep the brotherhood all-white for a while longer. Meanwhile, during Lott's senior year, Ole Miss made national headlines as Mississippi Governor George Wallace and others attempted to prevent James Meredith from being the first African American to enroll at the university, even in the face of federal troops. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly -- in light of the Sigma Nu episode just recounted -- Lott persuaded his brothers not to participate in the riots protesting the university's integration.<sup>40</sup>

After receiving his bachelor of science in public administration in 1963, Lott stayed on at Ole Miss for law school. He financed his legal studies by working in the university's alumni affairs office, and graduated with his juris doctorate in 1967. By 1972, Lott was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, where he eventually ascended to the role of Republican Whip. In 1988, Lott was elected to the Senate, and in 1996 he became its sixteenth majority leader when Kansas Senator Bob Dole left to run for president. After a shift in the balance of political power in the Senate, Lott became the minority leader. However, with the Republicans' regaining of the Senate majority after the 2002 election, Lott was poised to regain his post as majority leader.<sup>41</sup>

On December 5, 2002, Lott's role as the incoming majority leader was secure; plans already were being made for the Republicans' policy priorities in the 108<sup>th</sup>

Congress. But with Lott's seeming endorsement of Strom Thurmond's segregationist, States' Rights presidential bid, and his wistful remark that "if the rest of country had of followed our lead [in voting for Thurmond], we wouldn't of had all these problems over all these years,"<sup>42</sup> a side of Lott was brought to the public's attention that had, for the most part, been ignored in the mainstream of press and public attention. AP writer John Solomon, as well as organizations such as Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR),<sup>43</sup> noted Lott's association through the years with a group known as the Council of Conservative Citizens (CCC), which Solomon describes as "advocat[ing] the preservation of the white race." In addition, the CCC is believed by many to be "the successor to the notorious white Citizens Councils, whose history dates back half a century to the 1950s when the groups were referred to as the 'uptown Klan.'"<sup>44</sup> Solomon reported that in 1992, Lott delivered a keynote address at a CCC gathering in which he stated that "the people in this room stand for the right principles and the right philosophy." In addition, Solomon and others observed that Lott has had columns on policy issues included the CCC's official publication and that he has hosted CCC representatives in his D.C. office.<sup>45</sup> The CCC describes itself "as a non-profit organization to work for the rights and collective interests of true conservatives," and notes that, "on some issues, such as forced busing, quotas and immigration, the Council does indeed speak out for white European-Americans, their civilization, faith and form of government, but we do not advocate or support the oppression or exploitation of other races or ethnic groups." However, beyond this benign self-description are found statements articulating the CCC's stance "against the tide of nonwhite, Third World



immigrants swamping this country," and its belief that "There is no acceptable substitute for the civilization that has evolved through the Greeks, Romans, Celts, and Anglo-Saxons."<sup>46</sup> Lott's association over the years with the CCC, his involvement with a less controversial group, the Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV), his voting record (given a failing grade by the NAACP), and similarly positive remarks made in the past about Thurmond's presidential run caused many to wonder whether Lott's comments were a more revealing gaffe than Lott and his advisors wanted the public to believe.

#### Theoretical Perspectives: *Kategoria* and *Apologia*, *Victimage* and *Mortification*

As evidenced by the timeline of the Trent Lott debacle detailed earlier, this controversy can be understood as a set of accusations and apologies. While some might prefer to focus solely on the *apologia* offered by Lott and his few defenders, I agree with Halford Ross Ryan's contention

that the critic will better understand both accusation and defense by evaluating them as a speech set. By identifying and assessing the issues in the accusation, the critic will gain insights into the accuser's motivation to accuse, his selection of the issues, and the nature of the supporting materials for his accusation. As a response to the accusation, the apology should be discussed in terms of the apologist's motivation to respond to the accusation, his selection of the issues -- for they might differ from the accuser's issues -- and the nature of the supporting materials for the apology.

Ryan argued that accusations and defenses are either about character or about policy, a

shift from the traditional view that they concern only questions of character; he did, however, leave open the possibility that an accusation against policy could be answered with an apology for character, and vice versa. In addition, he did not "exclude the possibility that the critic may find in accusations and apologies elements of both policy and character in a speech. [He] merely contend[ed] . . . that one motive/response will tend to dominate . . . . Moreover, a comparison of the accusation/apology speeches as analog will help the critic decide whether policy or character dominates the given instance of discourse." Further, Ryan's concept of "policy" is a broad one, including "a wide range of actions or practices: vice, theft, sexual misconduct, libel, treason, illegal activities, etc."<sup>47</sup> Finally, Ryan advocated a three-pronged approach to analyzing accusation-defense speech sets: "(1) the accuser's and apologist's respective motives must be explicated; (2) what classical stases [fact, definition, quality, and, for apologia only, jurisdiction] the accuser and apologist argued in their speeches must be demonstrated; and (3) the rhetorical situations must be analyzed in terms of their exigencies and mediating audiences."<sup>48</sup> Overall, Ryan's main contributions were his expansion of the concepts of *kategoria* and *apologia* to include more than just questions of character, and his advice that critics enrich their analyses of rhetorical conflict by considering accusations and defenses together.

Informing Ryan's work on *kategoria* and *apologia* were B.L. Ware and Wil A. Linkugel's studies of *apologia*. In their 1973 article, "They Spoke in Defense of Themselves: On the Generic Criticism of *Apologia*," Ware and Linkugel drew on the "the theory developed by Robert P. Abelson pertaining to the resolution of belief

dilemmas." They designated Abelson's "four 'modes of resolution': (1) denial, (2) bolstering, (3) differentiation, and (4) transcendence" as "factors" or choices available to the rhetor undertaking a self-defense. Denial and bolstering, they posited, are strategies rhetors use to "reform" their audience's image of them, while differentiation and transcendence are means rhetors use to "transform" their audience's vision of them.<sup>49</sup> These four "factors of verbal self-defense" have become commonplaces in the study of apologia, as the work of William Benoit and other contemporary scholars analyzing defensive communication attests.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, Noreen W. Kruse drew on Maslow's hierarchy of needs as another psychologically-based avenue toward understanding apologia. Looking solely at non-denial apologia, she grouped them according to what human need they addressed and, as a result, came up with three categories:

(1) Replies demonstrating that the speaker feels some aspects of his security or safety ha[ve] been threatened, or *Survival Responses*; (2) Replies in which the primary need is to restore or regain affection, status, mastery, prestige, or esteem, or *Social Responses*; and (3) Replies produced when the speaker attempts to maintain, primarily for himself, an image consistent only with his idiosyncratic values and his personal sense of right and wrong, or *Self-Actualized Responses*.<sup>51</sup>

Ware and Linkugel's four factors of verbal self-defense and Kruse's three need-based responses are instructive in that they remind critics, as Ryan also advised, to be ever-mindful of rhetors' motivations. Whether accusing or defending, communicators always have motivations, external and internal, which must be considered in any well-rounded

analysis of their texts. Kenneth Burke's rhetorical theory was centered in considering the basic forms of thought which, in accordance with the nature of this world as all men necessarily experience it, are exemplified in the attributing of motives. These forms of thought can be embodied profoundly or trivially, truthfully or falsely. They are equally present in systematically elaborated metaphysical structures, in legal judgments, in poetry and fiction, in political and scientific works, in news and in bits of gossip offered at random.<sup>52</sup>

As will be elaborated in the rhetorical analysis to follow, *kategoria* and *apologia* are intertwined with spiritual motives of purification and redemption, motives that can be understood through application of Kenneth Burke's theory of scapegoating.

Burke, throughout his writings, returns again and again to the idea of the scapegoat, which is one upon whom the sins of others are placed or blamed, who is then in turn sacrificed so as to purify all those whose sins he or she now contains or represents. As societies moved from the more primitive to the more complex, "the tendency was to endow the sacrificial animal with social coordinates, so that the goat became replaced by the 'sacrificial King.'" Sacrificing a person of power and privilege such as Lott can be understood in this way, as the sacrifice of the Republicans' senatorial "king." Burke delineated three ways in which such a scapegoat is made "'worthy' of sacrifice," the first two of which are applicable to Lott:

- (1) He may be made worthy legalistically (i.e., by making him an offender against legal or moral justice, so that he 'deserves' what he gets).
- (2) We may make him worthy by leading toward sacrifice fatalistically (as when

we point the arrows of the plot that the audience comes to think of him as a marked man, and so prepares itself to relinquish him). . . . while the transition into the sacrifice may often employ an intermingling of this second kind of worthiness with the first, as when the Greek dramatists reinforced the fatalistic operations with a personal flaw, hubris, punishable pride, the pride that goes before a fall.<sup>53</sup>

In Trent Lott's case, he was "made worthy" of sacrifice in the first two ways.

Legalistically, some of Lott's accusers gathered evidence of a pattern of sinful behavior (support of segregation and segregationists, lack of support for civil rights initiatives) so as to prove he was worthy of sacrifice in the form of giving up his position of Senate leadership. Fatalistically, some of Lott's accusers and defenders made the argument that he was a "marked man" because of his identity as a Southern conservative, and Lott himself used this argument in his post-resignation interview with the AP; from this perspective, Lott was sacrificed for the sins of all Southerners, of all "true" conservatives (read paleoconservatives). It may be that Lott's tragic, personal flaw was his continued identification with paleoconservative, neo-Confederate ideologues in a political environment in which such associations were considered worthy of punishment.

As the rhetorical analysis to follow will illustrate in more detail, those who would make Lott their scapegoat, his accusers, came from many ideological and political camps. Besides the more obvious accusers from civil rights organizations, leftist political action groups, and the Democratic Party, Lott was also sacrificed by his fellow Republicans (mainly by those in the party's neoconservative mainstream) and his fellow

Southern paleoconservatives. This phenomenon of equal-opportunity scapegoating proves what Burke believed to be "a related process of dialectic: unification by a foe shared in common."<sup>54</sup> Though their motivating reasons for guilt varied as widely as their ideological and political views, all who participated in the scapegoating of Trent Lott were brought together by their guilt and were redeemed together in his sacrifice. An analysis of the various strands of accusation in this debate in concert with an analysis of the various apologies offered by Lott and his few defenders should lead us to a more thorough understanding of the rhetoric of race as a rhetoric of sin, sacrifice, and redemption in contemporary American, and especially Southern, political culture.

#### Accusations: Proving Lott a Worthy Sacrifice

Lott's accusers came from a variety of political and ideological perspectives, but they can be roughly categorized into three basic groups: 1) African Americans (such as representatives of the NAACP, Rainbow-PUSH, and the Congressional Black Caucus) and those sympathetic with their perspective in politics in general and on the Lott situation in particular (such as the editors of *Roll Call* and *The Nation*), Democratic politicians, and some moderate (neoconservative) Republicans; 2) Republicans, in particular the more moderate face of the party establishment as personified by the White House (not only President Bush, but also such leaders as Secretary of State Powell), Lott's fellow Republican senators, and prominent pundits (such as Peggy Noonan and David Frum); and 3) white Southern conservatives, many of whom could be considered paleoconservatives (such as the League of the South) and the less rational among them

perhaps unreconstructed racists (such as the Council of Conservative Citizens).

Coming from such a wide range of perspectives, it is not surprising that the accusers generated an equally wide range of accusations against Lott. I grouped the accusations I found under eight basic headings: 1) Lott was a racist segregationist; 2) Lott simply gave the impression of supporting racism and segregation; 3) Lott's life provided evidence that his remarks were part of a pattern of behavior; 4) Lott meant what he said; 5) Lott's remarks and underlying attitudes were unbecoming a Senate majority leader; 6) Lott damaged the Republican Party; 7) Lott, by apologizing, was cowardly and weak; and 8) Lott was more concerned about himself than his constituents. None of these accusations was made by a single group of accusers; rather, I found there to be some overlap between the various groups' accusations (sometimes in unexpected ways).

My rhetorical analysis of these accusations was guided by four basic questions: 1) Who was carrying out the scapegoating/accusing?; 2) What aspect of Lott was being scapegoated?; 3) How were they going about scapegoating? (Which strategies were being used?); and 4) What motive was behind this scapegoating? (Why?). As established earlier, my perspective in this section of rhetorical analysis has been shaped especially by the ideas of Ryan (on considering *kategoria* and *apologia* as a speech set) and Burke (on scapegoating).

#### Lott Is/Was a Racist Segregationist

Perhaps the most obvious accusation made against Lott in the wake of his

comments was that he is a racist who still believes segregation was just. Through their interpretations of the meaning of and attitudes behind Lott's comments, his accusers drew the conclusion that these words proved that Lott held racist, segregationist views. Some of Lott's accusers were motivated to accept this interpretation of his remarks because they, as African Americans, are members of the main group that experienced the negative effects of segregation in America. Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sr., argued that Lott "is supposed to be the Senate Majority Leader for all Americans, but he has once again shown he is interested only in Confederates."<sup>55</sup> In this statement, Jackson was accusing Lott of representing only white, neo-Confederates rather than all the citizens of Mississippi and the United States, thereby leaving many without the political representation -- and influence -- that is their right. Secretary of State Colin Powell, perhaps the most popular and powerful African American Republican, also voiced his disappointment, stating, "I deplored the sentiments behind the statement. There was nothing about the 1948 election or the Dixiecrat agenda that should have been acceptable in any way to any American at that time or any American now."<sup>56</sup> When a fellow Republican (albeit a much more moderate one) such as Powell joined in accusing Lott of accepting the Dixiecrats' agenda -- most often associated with the defense of segregation -- his accusation held particular weight, in part because of his personal identity as a widely respected African American, and also because of his position of power as the sitting secretary of state. Though Powell did not speak out against Lott's comments until December 18, almost two weeks after the remarks were made, just two days later Lott resigned his majority leader position.



Not only was Lott accused of racism and support of segregation in his initial comments praising Thurmond's presidential bid, but so too was he accused of racism in the very language in which he chose to apologize. Representative Jesse Jackson, Jr. (D-Illinois), argued that Lott's explanation that he was praising Thurmond's other policy stances, such as in the areas of the economy and national defense, can be read as proof of the very racism Lott was denying in this explanation:

Yes, I'm deeply concerned about the words expressed by Senator Lott at Strom Thurmond's birthday party. But I'm even more concerned about the words he used to EXPLAIN them. He said he wasn't praising Senator Thurmond's past racial stance, but he liked his commitment to a "strong defense" and his "fiscal conservatism." Before the Civil War the Democratic slave masters used to have anti-black conventions where they called us "out-our-names." But after the Civil War, when they had lost power and were trying to get it back, they knew they had to change their language.

Jackson, Jr. went on to explain how, during Reconstruction, racists would gather for "anti-taxation" rallies as a cover for their true purpose of gathering to discuss their opposition to Reconstruction policies, opposing increased taxes because they believed these were used to fund social programs benefiting former slaves. The phrase "tax-and-spend liberals," Jackson, Jr. asserted, originated with these Reconstruction-era racists as code words for those who promoted civil rights and the enforcement of Reconstruction initiatives.<sup>57</sup> Even former Reagan speechwriter Peggy Noonan wondered if "maybe it was the kind of thinking mistake politicians sometimes make," recalling how:

Way back in the 1950s and '70s and even '80s some Southern politicians of Mr. Lott's generation -- in both parties -- employed the "thinking mistake" to talk about race. So when Mr. Lott the other day emphatically but nonspecifically declared that if Strom Thurmond had been elected president, "we wouldn't have a lot of the problems we've had," a lot of people, including me, wondered if he were not making a thinking mistake.<sup>58</sup>

Thus, when Lott defended his ambiguity by saying his intent was to praise Thurmond's fiscal policies and the like, those such as Jackson, Jr. and Noonan argued that this very explanation may have been additional evidence of Lott's inherent racism.

Similarly, writers for two journals of political opinion and observation, *Roll Call* and *The Nation*, also accused Lott of being a racist and a segregationist. These authors offered interpretations of the meaning behind the seemingly vague terms "we" and "problems" in Lott's original statement: "we wouldn't of had all these problems over all these years."<sup>59</sup> In their editorial, "Lott's Disgrace," the editors of *Roll Call* posited, "The 'problems' Lott apparently thinks would have been 'avoided' include integration of the schools, the right of blacks to vote, anti-lynching laws, and equal access to jobs, housing and public accommodations."<sup>60</sup> Likewise, in their editorial, "Lott Should Resign," *The Nation's* editorial board offered their interpretation of Lott's use of "we" and "these problems": "Who is the 'we' in Lott's declaration? The white people of the South who used the powers of the state and local governments to impose the racial caste system called Jim Crow upon their fellow citizens. What were 'all these problems' Lott wished to avoid? The triumph of legal equality for African-Americans, including, in the

South, the long-denied right to vote."<sup>61</sup> Clearly, the editors of these two journals of political thought were accusing Lott of loading seemingly vague and innocent words such "we" and "problems" with bigoted, exclusionary meaning, thereby accusing Lott of being quite specific and far from innocent in the coded meaning he was (allegedly) attempting to convey.

### Lott Simply Gave the Impression of Supporting Segregation and Racism

While many of Lott's critics charged that his words betrayed his true identity as a racist, others of his critics chose to accuse him of simply giving the *impression* of being racist. Those most likely to accuse Lott of the lesser sin of only appearing to be racist were his fellow politicians. For instance, in outgoing Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle's initial public response he stated:

It is clear that Senator Lott's remarks left many people with the impression that he felt the segregationist policies of the past would have been preferable to the equality under law that so many fought for in the civil rights movement. When Senator Lott called me . . . he indicated he did not mean for his statement to be interpreted to condone segregation, and I accept that. That does not mean, however, that I found the statement appropriate. Regardless of how he intended his statement to be interpreted, it was wrong to say it and I strongly disagree with it."<sup>62</sup>

One of the first conservative pundits to comment on Lott's situation was David Frum, formerly a speechwriter for President George W. Bush. Looking at the scenario from his

perspective as a speechwriter, Frum had this to say: "I for one do not believe Trent Lott is a racist or a segregationist. My guess is that his speechwriter gave him note cards with a few jokes, and that when Lott finished reading them, he launched himself into what he probably intended to be nothing more than a big squirt of greasy flattery. But that's not what came out of Lott's mouth."<sup>63</sup> Early on in the controversy, when Daschle and Frum made these observations, the possibility that Lott simply had misspoken and been careless with his words was a more widely held interpretation of the incident than later in the controversy. However, in the days immediately following Daschle's and Frum's comments, accounts of similar comments Lott made in 1980 and his college efforts to keep his fraternity segregated were circulated in major media outlets. Once these accounts became common knowledge, accusations of Lott merely giving the impression of racism all but disappeared, and accusers such as Daschle stepped up the severity of their accusations.

#### Lott's Life Provides Evidence that His Remarks Were Part of a Pattern of Behavior

In addition to using close readings of Lott's word choice to accuse him of promoting racism and segregation, Lott's accusers also sought to prove of pattern of racist behavior throughout his personal and political life. They referenced specific incidents from throughout Lott's life to prove that his December 5 remarks were not an isolated incident, but simply the most recent in a lifetime of racism. As Jackson, Sr. argued in one of his syndicated opinion columns, "Lott's comments were not an aberration. Once the sleepy press started to look, they found ample [sic] evidence of

Lott's racial attitudes and policies." In the same column, Jackson, Sr. concluded, "his rhetoric fits his record. The pronouncement is part of a pattern, a practice and a policy."<sup>64</sup> Some, such as Jackson and Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) not only accused Lott of a "long history" of racist words and deeds, but also accused the mainstream media for not giving Lott's racist record sufficient attention, even in the wake of the Thurmond controversy. As FAIR, whose 1999 report on Lott resulted in some limited mainstream attention at that time to his CCC ties, observed, "Lott's public record on race going back more than 25 years indicates that the incoming majority leader has consistently preferred the legacy of Lincoln adversaries such as Jefferson Davis to that of Lincoln. Lott's long history of support for racist and neo-Confederate causes is generally missing from coverage of the Thurmond controversy."<sup>65</sup>

Many accusing Lott of a pattern of racist behavior detailed a chronological litany of his sins. Of these catalogues of Lott's sinful behavior, NAACP Board Chairman Julian Bond's was typical:

From his college days until today, Trent Lott has consistently and aggressively opposed accepted remedies for discrimination, opposed integration of his own fraternity, celebrated the Confederacy, successfully supported restoring the citizenship of war criminal Jefferson Davis, embraced, praised and endorsed the goals of a white supremacist organization and hosted its leadership in his Senate office, and in statements 22 years apart, expressed regret that racist candidate Strom Thurmond had not been elected president in 1948 and his policies adopted by the nation. No apology can change the attitude and work of a lifetime.<sup>66</sup>

Other accusers emphasized Lott's congressional voting record as evidence of this pattern of racist behavior, as did *New Republic* writer Michelle Cottle when she noted that "during his 16 years in the House, Lott cast more than a few votes that showed the esteem in which he held the vestiges of his home state's racist past."<sup>67</sup> Kweisi Mfume of the NAACP called attention to controversial votes often referenced by other Lott accusers, emphasizing that the Lott of December 5, "is the same Trent Lott who voted against the extension of the Voting Rights Act, extension of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and against the Martin Luther King Jr. Commission and the federal King Holiday."<sup>68</sup> The NAACP's Bond questioned the sincerity of Lott's contention in his BET interview apology that the controversy concerning his comments had been a "wake up call" to him:

It could only have been a wake-up call for someone who was sound asleep from his college days 40 years ago until last week. Upon awakening, he's surprised to find he's been in bed with racists and white supremacists, and cannot explain how he got there. Lott kept saying he'd made a mistake, but he didn't make just one; his whole public life has been a mistake, and he compounded the mistake last night [in his BET interview].<sup>69</sup>

By accusing him of not only racist words, but also of racist deeds, Lott's accusers strengthened their case against him retaining his position of power and influence.

However, just as Lott's accusers exposed the long litany of Lott's failings on racial issues, they were simultaneously revealing their knowledge of those shortcomings -- and their failure, up until this point, to have curtailed them successfully. The editors of *The Nation*, in denouncing Lott as "a racist -- actually an unreconstructed

segregationist," in the same breath admitted that, "We knew the truth about this man long ago, since his career in Washington is littered with the evidence of his reactionary views on race." They explained, somewhat, their tardiness in effectively calling attention to Lott's "reactionary" record by arguing that he was "particularly dangerous at this point [in December 2002]" because, "buoyed by postelection Republican triumphalism, the Mississippi Senator found the audacity to crow about his racist opinions in public."<sup>70</sup> Overall, providing evidence of Lott's record on racial issues from throughout his life gave weight to accusations that his December 5 comments were not isolated, but rather indicative of a lifelong pattern of behavior and a long-held set of beliefs. However, revealing that Lott's espousing of racism and segregation were nothing new may have also served to accuse Lott's critics of not taking action to prevent such a person from rising, practically unchecked, to such a position of influence.

### Lott Meant What He Said

Initially, as will be detailed in my analysis of the apologia, Lott's strategy was to explain his comments as "intended to pay tribute" to Thurmond<sup>71</sup> and as nothing more than "a poor choice of words [that] conveyed to some the impression that I embraced the discarded policies of the past."<sup>72</sup> In answer to this explanation, not only did Lott's accusers seek to provide evidence of his pattern of racist behavior, but so too did they seek to prove that his remarks of December 5 were the product of intent rather than accident. Many accusers backed up their claim of racist "authorial intent" by pointing to, as Mfume did, the fact that "The senator made comments praising segregation in the 80s

similar to the ones he made last week, " leading Mfume "to believe that those were not a 'poor choice of words,' they were his favorite choice of words."<sup>73</sup> Others, such as the editors of *Roll Call*, found not only his past, similar comments to be evidence of Lott's authorial intent, but also his very delivery of the remarks as additional proof that he meant them: "Lott's offensive words were in fact expressed forcefully and with apparent deep conviction -- and, it turns out, he's expressed them before. So we think further explanation on the history of his racial attitudes is required."<sup>74</sup> Neoconservative columnist Charles Krauthammer questioned Lott's explanation that he had simply chosen his words poorly:

It was not "a poor choice of words," as he later pleaded. It was a perfectly clear choice of words articulating a perfectly clear idea. Had Lott stopped with Thurmond-for-president, 1948, this might have been written off as idle and presumably insincere birthday flattery for a very, very old man. But Lott did not stop there. He added, fatally, that America would have been better off had it embraced Dixiecrat segregation. With that, Lott cut off any retreat.<sup>75</sup>

In this, Krauthammer offered Lott's elaboration as additional evidence of the fact that Lott meant what he said. Similarly, paleoconservative Samuel Francis refused to let Lott off the hook, pointing out that "what Mr. Thurmond's States['] Rights Party mainly stood for was racial segregation, and Mr. Lott knows that," thus arguing that Lott, knowing full well the basis of Thurmond's presidential bid, also knew well the implications of praising that campaign.<sup>76</sup> As Michelle Cottle of *The New Republic* observed, "The problem with Lott's little birthday tribute wasn't that he thoughtlessly misspoke. It's that,



as even the most cursory review of Lott's history on racial issues suggests, the senator's toast was a textbook gaffe as defined by former TNR editor Michael Kinsley: The case of a politician accidentally saying what he really believes."<sup>77</sup> In response to Bob Novak's defense that "Trent Lott got out there and he winged it. That's one of the dangers of not having a text. He thought it was a social occasion. He's thinking what comes to his mind," FAIR argued "That sounds like a perfect reason to continue investigating Lott's racist connections."<sup>78</sup> Overall, Lott's accusers offered evidence that Lott's words were not a mere "poor choice of words" made by an ill-equipped extemporaneous speaker, but were rather more of a Freudian slip that revealed racist beliefs left over from the Old South lurking beneath Lott's New South facade.

#### Lott's Remarks and Underlying Attitudes Were Unbefitting a Senate Majority Leader

While the previous accusations were concerned more with proving how Lott's words, actions, and intentions marked him individually as a racist, other accusations were focused on how Lott's racism or impropriety (depending on one's terministic screen) impacted his relations with others, especially in the political realm. As the incoming Senate majority leader, Lott's accusers expressed their concerns that someone who would utter such words, whether intentionally or unintentionally, was not worthy or capable of holding such a position of power and influence. As the NAACP's Mfume argued, such "callous, calculated, hateful bigotry . . . has no place in the halls of the Congress. His remarks are dangerously divisive and certainly unbefitting a man who is to hold such a highly esteemed leadership role as the majority leader of the senate."<sup>79</sup>

Or, as the ADL's National Director Abraham H. Foxman observed, "The Senator's praise for a candidacy based on segregationist policies was irresponsible and unacceptable, and unbecoming of a leader of his stature in Congress."<sup>80</sup> While some Lott defenders such as Sean Hannity reminded Lott's detractors of equally controversial, racist words uttered by fellow Senator Robert Byrd (D-West Virginia), not to mention Byrd's association with the Ku Klux Klan, Lott accusers differentiated between Byrd's and Lott's sins based on their distinct Senate roles. As *Roll Call's* editors noted, they did call "on Byrd to make a full and complete apology on the Senate floor (which he didn't)." However, the editors of *Roll Call* believed, "It's more incumbent upon Lott to do so because he is Majority Leader."<sup>81</sup> Taking a more harsh stance, columnist Krauthammer not only called for an apology, but for Lott's resignation: "Trent Lott must resign as Senate majority leader. It's not just that no one who has said this can lead an American political party. It's that no one who *could* say something like this should be an American leader." Like the *Roll Call* editorial board, Krauthammer pointed out that while "Backbenchers might be permitted such a lack of vision. Leaders are not. Lott must step down." Whether Lott was guilty of racism or just political clumsiness, his accusers made the case that his controversial remarks disqualified him from the top Senate leadership post. That Lott could exhibit such "historical blindness" as to the significance of segregation and the civil rights movement in the nation's development, observed Krauthammer, "utterly disqualified" him from leading the nation, through the Senate, toward future progress.<sup>82</sup>

## Lott Damaged the Republican Party

Not only did Lott's remarks damage him such that he could no longer effectively lead the Senate, but so too, argued some, did his comments damage his political party. Some accused Lott of damaging the Republican Party as a way into accusing the party itself of racism. For instance, Jesse Jackson, Sr., in looking back at the controversy in a December 24 opinion column, argued that

Lott embarrassed Republicans with his fervid endorsement of Strom's pro-segregation, pro-lynching party. But he outraged them by apologizing on Black Entertainment Television and announcing that henceforth he would support affirmative action. It was bad enough that he exposed the racial politics behind the Republican rise as the party of white sanctuary in the South. It was worse when he expressed opposition to the next chapter in their playbook — the assault on affirmative action.<sup>83</sup>

In this accusation, Jackson simultaneously exposed the sins of both Lott and his party, using the Lott debacle as a way into exposing what he perceived as the inherently racist strategies of the GOP. Likewise, the editors of the *Nation* hypothesized, "The reason the White House turned on Lott had little to do with distaste for the Mississippian's remarks at Thurmond's 100th birthday party; it moved only when it appeared the controversy might expose a penchant to play the race card when convenient."<sup>84</sup> Here again is an example of accusers outside the Republican Party using the sins of Lott the individual as an opportunity for revealing the sins of the system of which he was a part (Republican leadership as personified by the Bush administration).

While those outside the Republican ranks used Lott's sins as an opportunity to reveal how Lott had damaged his party by revealing its racism, most of the accusations that Lott's words had damaged his party came from within it. As Noonan complained in one of her syndicated columns, "of course the Republican Party is damaged by having as one of its leaders a man who, half a century after Jim Crow's long death began, makes statements that can be construed as meaning segregation was better than its demise."<sup>85</sup> As mentioned earlier, Noonan hypothesized that Lott's remarks may have been racial code words meant to send some sort of message to likeminded constituents. Not only did Noonan accuse Lott of this transgression, she also argued that "a man who does that should not, half a century into the modern movements for civil rights, be allowed to continue as the face of a major political party in politics."<sup>86</sup> In other words, Lott's racist face, now revealed, was a face that would cause his party damage -- in the media, in elections, and in their policy initiatives. The image of a racist, or even a seeming racist, as the Republicans' Senate leader was not the image the GOP wanted to convey to the press or the larger public, as it was an image which would tarnish public perception of Republicans' principles as well as their political agenda.

Throughout the public debate about Lott's controversial comments, many allusions were made to the Republican Party being the "party of Lincoln," both by those accusing Lott from outside his party and by those accusing him from within it. External accusers, such as FAIR, alluded to Lincoln, the first Republican president and the chief executive to whom the abolition of slavery is credited, as a means of highlighting the unfavorable contrast between the party's first and most widely admired (across party

lines) leader and Lott: "the incoming majority leader has consistently preferred the legacy of Lincoln adversaries such as Jefferson Davis to that of Lincoln."<sup>87</sup> FAIR pointed to Lott's espousal of the policies and principles of Jefferson Davis as evidence of Lott's, and thus his party's, straying from the purer principles of party founders such as Lincoln. Meanwhile, internal accusers such as former Senator Jack Kemp, described by Edsall and Balz as a longtime "advocate for the GOP to return to its roots as the party of Abraham Lincoln," maintained that "until he [Lott] totally repudiates segregation and every aspect of its evil manifestation," the party would continue to suffer damage. "The party can't duck it," Kemp said.<sup>88</sup>

Lott's remarks were deemed sinful by many of his fellow Republicans because they were at odds with the principles the Republican Party espoused, or wanted the public to believe it espoused. When President Bush finally spoke out about Lott's remarks on December 12, he was careful to emphasize that, in contrast to Lott's "suggestion that the segregated past was acceptable or positive . . . the founding ideals of our nation and, in fact, the founding ideals of the political party I represent was, and remains today, the equal dignity and equal rights of every American."<sup>89</sup> On a more pragmatic level, Republican columnist and former Bush speechwriter David Frum theorized that Lott, as reflected in his remarks, did not stand for the principles of Lincoln nor those of Davis: "This week, the only principle he stands for is the principle of careerism. And that's just not enough to qualify for the leadership of the party that remains after all these years the party -- not of Davis -- but of Lincoln."<sup>90</sup> For more mainstream, neoconservative Republicans and those concerned with the party's image

and continued livelihood, even the appearance of deviating from the preferred party image as the party of Lincoln's principles was a transgression worthy of punishment. Republican strategists and pundits wanted to prevent the stigma of this sin from staining their collective image and influence. Noonan's interpretation of Bush's remarks, and indeed her approbation of Bush's response, was that "Mr. Bush hit Mr. Lott hard . . . . Because he wants to separate himself and his party from Mr. Lott and his mouth."<sup>91</sup> Likewise, Frum argued from the earliest days of the controversy that if Lott did not offer a more substantial apology "than a curt 'I am sorry if you were offended' . . . [then] Republicans need to make it clear that Lott no longer speaks for us."<sup>92</sup> Those concerned with safeguarding the GOP's image, if only its self image, as the "party of Lincoln" knew early on that they would need to differentiate and separate themselves as moderate, modern Republicans from the increasingly held view of Lott as an extremist throwback.

The motivation for many Republicans intent on differentiating themselves and their principles from Lott and his principles was saving the party's political agenda. Kemp, speaking from a more idealistic perspective, observed that Lott "set back what President Bush is trying to do to broaden the Republican Party."<sup>93</sup> Meanwhile Frum, ever the pragmatic political operative, foresaw a future in which "the Republican party will be led in the Senate by a leader who owes his survival to the sufferance of his political opponents. . . . All those bold, unapologetic conservatives who believe that Republicans should rally around Lott and not yield the Democrats an inch should understand: The party will probably be able to save him -- but only by selling *you* out." Not only did Frum fear the party would have to sacrifice its policy initiatives to save

Lott, but also "That Lott will try to save himself by jettisoning the conservative agenda in the Senate."<sup>94</sup> Specifically, Lott is accused -- outrightly by Frum, and more subtly by other Republicans -- of jeopardizing the party's hopes for overturning affirmative action in the coming year:

Lott could hardly have chosen a more inopportune time to hand his opponents proof that the Republican party is an updated version of the Dixiecrats. The Supreme Court this term will take up the issue of racial preferences in education. Conservatives and Republicans have spent two decades denouncing preferences in the name of color-blindness and legal equality for all. Lott's words will be used to question the sincerity of our commitment to this high principle.<sup>95</sup>

Lott, in his praise of Thurmond's 1948 campaign and by association his segregationist stance at that time, tainted the image of a pure "commitment to . . . principle" that moderate Republicans such as Frum were trying to associate with Republican attempts to overturn racial preferences in areas such as college admissions and hiring.

Later in the controversy, Lott's fellow senators began to come out against him in the hope of saving the party's image and agenda. On December 15, Oklahoma Senator Don Nickles issued a statement in which he not only differentiated Lott from the mainstream of the party -- "His comments did not represent Republican ideals"-- but went on to suggest that Lott, because of his transgression, was "weakened" and thus should be purged for the greater good of the GOP: "this is bigger than any single senator now. I am concerned Senator Lott has been weakened to the point that it may jeopardize his ability to enact our agenda and speak to all Americans. There are several outstanding

senators who are more than capable of effective leadership and I hope we have an opportunity to choose."<sup>96</sup> Despite Noonan's assertion that "Normally Republicans rally around when they think one of their own is being unfairly smeared,"<sup>97</sup> it seems more accurate to say that in this case Republicans circled around a weakened Lott. They circled not as in protectively "circling the wagons," but rather as in opportunistic "circling vultures" out to make sure their own stomachs were fed off the carcass of a politically weakened Lott -- either fed with political position (as was Nickles' hope) or prestige (as with Bush using the incident as an opportunity to enhance his own standing with African Americans).

#### Lott, by Apologizing, Was Cowardly and Weak

While mainstream, mostly neoconservative Republicans accused Lott of being weak and thereby weakening his party in his politically incorrect praise for Thurmond's 1948 presidential bid (and, by implication, the segregationist policies and racist attitudes associated with it), more extremist, paleoconservative Southerners accused Lott of being weak and thereby weakening those in his region in the many apologies he offered for his controversial remarks. Initially, Lott's constituents in these more right-wing Southern circles were happy to hear of his very public praise of Thurmond and by association his policies and perspectives of 1948: "For one brief shining moment, it was beginning to look like Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott was taking hormone shots."<sup>98</sup> Or, as Council of Conservative Citizens (CCC) CEO Gordon Baum declared, "God bless Trent Lott."<sup>99</sup> However, as Lott began to apologize for his comments, Lott's former allies in



this camp -- which includes such groups as the League of the South and the Council of Conservative Citizens (CCC) -- quickly lost hope that Lott would continue to defend their extremist views and saw Lott's weakness as indicative of wider decline. As one paleoconservative commentator articulated it, "There is no fight left in the white public sector. That is why we saw immediate disavowals and apologies from Trent Lott."<sup>100</sup> So disgusted were these Southerners at Lott's apologies that he was characterized as no better than a cowardly Yankee, a severe punishment for a fellow Southerner and Confederate descendant such as Lott: "Not since General Pierre Gustave Toutant Beauregard sent Yankees reeling back over Bull Run Creek has America witnessed such a reversal of fortune as that displayed by Senator Lott's pitiful and puerile reaction to liberal criticism."<sup>101</sup>

Aside from this likening of Lott to fleeing Northern troops, most of the imagery evoked by Lott's unreconstructed accusers was of a religious bent, focusing attention on issues of ritual sacrifice, repentance, and submission. Greg Kay, in an opinion piece linked to the CCC's Web site, painted a vivid image, recounting how

When Lott backed down and began his penance of crawling on his knees to the Jerusalem of political correctness, endlessly repenting while accepting the ritual scourging from the self-appointed watchdogs of society, he proved . . . to be an abject coward. A man, a Southern man in particular, would have stood up on his hind legs and defended his beliefs, whatever they happened to be, and not apologized for them.<sup>102</sup>

Similarly, the CCC observed how "Lott continues to flagellate himself with a tar brush.

Next he will be singing 'We Shall Overcome' at NAACP headquarters."<sup>103</sup> Flogging was also evoked by Lew Rockwell, who, in a column linked to the CCC site, wondered, "Why would a conservative Republican suddenly find himself embracing the full panoply of the left-wing racial agenda and flog himself so mercilessly?" Rockwell's explanation was more charitable than Kay's, likening Lott to "a Chinese political prisoner under Maoist Communism . . . , [in which ] the accused was already guilty as charged so he had only one right: to repent of his errors. If he appeared insufficiently repentant, the attacks were renewed until the accused was completely destroyed."<sup>104</sup> From these perspectives, apologizing -- often described in terms such as Lott being on "his wobbly knees"<sup>105</sup> -- was portrayed as submitting to the reigning political and cultural order, as permitting the War of Northern Aggression to be lost all over again with each new apology. Apologizing for one's politically incorrect, unreconstructed beliefs was portrayed as being weak and therefore sinful. As Kay, among others, argued, Lott should resign "not for telling the truth, but for apologizing for it, thus calling that truth a lie, and agreeing with his detractors' insults against Dixie and its people. Besides, if a man can't stand for something, what good is he?"<sup>106</sup> From this point of view, Lott's apologies were transformed into transgressions worthy of further repentance.

#### Lott Was More Concerned about Himself Than about His Constituents

What motivated Lott to succumb to the pressures of political correctness? A number of Lott's accusers attributed his sudden about-face to the further sin of being

tempted by the fruits of political position and power. One neoconservative, Frum, late in the controversy, noted that "This week, the only principle [Lott] stands for is the principle of careerism. And that's just not enough to qualify for the leadership of the party."<sup>107</sup> However, most of those charging Lott with being overly concerned with protecting his political position were from the paleoconservative camp. Feeling Lott had betrayed not only them but his "true" beliefs, Lott's fellow (or formerly fellow?) Southern paleoconservatives were wistful for the days before Lott sold himself to the devils of "Cultural Marxism" (their term):

Would that Trent Lott had cared more for his integrity than his position as Senate leader. If he really believed in the things embodied in the compliment given to a 100-year-old man on his birthday, then Lott would be worth a whole lot more to Mississippi and the rest of us as a simple Senator who just might be representing a majority of white people who have no one to speak for them."<sup>108</sup>

In their eyes, Southerners of their ilk would have been better served by a non-majority leader Lott who was true to their (formerly) shared beliefs, than by a Majority Leader Lott whose position had been maintained (as it was at that point) only by sacrificing his Southernness at the altar of political correctness. As Greg Kay asserted, "it could be even worse if he maintains his leadership position. If he manages to pull it off with his continuous butt kissing, he will then owe the people who hate the South for their allowing him to continue to exist, and he will owe them big-time! When they come to collect, it's going to be hard on Dixie -- if we sit back and allow it."<sup>109</sup>

Whether viewed from the perspective of neoconservative Republicans or

paleoconservative Southerners, Lott's "willingness to jettison all political principle for the sake of saving his status as Majority Leader"<sup>110</sup> was a transgression that not only hurt Lott's personal integrity, but also the agendas of these two constituencies. Lott's quest for political survival at the expense of his past-stated neo-Confederate beliefs was particularly hurtful to those who continued to hold those convictions. Many of these unreconstructed Southerners considered "Lott's playing to his opponents at the expense of his natural constituency [to be] . . . a form of betrayal." As is often the case with those who feel abandoned politically, they lashed out with threats of non-support: "I'm certain that he will feel their displeasure sharply during the next election, unless he bows out completely as many of his detractors demand."<sup>111</sup> Or, as the CCC threatened none too subtly: "Whatever direction Lott takes, he better keep in mind that Beltway liberals and black harpies did not elect him to office. The conservative white vote in Mississippi sent Lott to Washington, and that same vote can retire him."<sup>112</sup> Having been denounced for the sake of Lott's political future, those such as the members of the CCC believed they had no other recourse but to sacrifice Lott as they perceived he had first sacrificed them.

#### Apologia: Denying, Bolstering, Differentiating, and Transcending

In studies of more traditional accusation and defense speech sets, these conflicts typically consist of one accusation text answered by one apologetic text.<sup>113</sup> However, this age of 24-hour television and Internet news coverage has created a rhetorical situation in which there are more back-and-forth exchanges between accusers and

defenders. This was certainly the case in the Trent Lott debacle. As evidenced in the previous section, accusations were made against Lott most every day in this two-week ordeal. So, understandably, Lott could not offer one isolated apology and be done with it; the nature of the rhetorical situation required multiple apologies in answer to the evolving charges being made against him. Strictly speaking, Lott made six different apologies throughout this controversy. On December 6 Lott's spokesman, Ron Bonjean, did make a brief statement explaining Lott's remarks; however, this was not so much an apology as it was an explanation.<sup>114</sup> Lott's first true apology came on December 9 in the form of a prepared statement in which he apologized for his "poor choice of words."<sup>115</sup> The second apology was made on the afternoon of December 11 in the form of an interview on the *Sean Hannity Radio Show*;<sup>116</sup> the third apology came the same evening in the form of an interview on *Larry King Live*.<sup>117</sup> (Lott "appeared" on both of these programs by telephone, rather than sitting down face-to-face with the respective hosts in their studios.) On December 13, Lott made his fourth apology, this one a news conference in his hometown of Pascagoula, Mississippi, at which he read a longer prepared statement.<sup>118</sup> Then, on December 16, Lott issued his final formal apology in the form of an interview with Ed Gordon on Black Entertainment Television; for this interview, Lott was interviewed face-to-face in BET's Washington, D.C., studio.<sup>119</sup> On December 20, Lott issued a brief statement announcing his resignation from the post of majority leader-elect, but this did not constitute an apology per se.<sup>120</sup> Finally, Lott gave a post-resignation interview to Sheila Hardwell Byrd of the Associated Press on December 22 at his home in Pascagoula; this served as Lott's sixth apology.<sup>121</sup> In

addition, a few apologia on behalf of Lott, such as those by Pat Buchanan, are included in the final section of apologia under analysis. In my rhetorical analysis of these apologia, I have grouped them according to Ware and Linkugel's four factors of apologetic discourse: denial, bolstering, differentiation, and transcendence.<sup>122</sup> In particular, I found Lott to be 1) denying accusations that he had racist intentions and had taken racist actions; 2) bolstering his image through attempts to establish common ground with his accusers; 3) differentiating by separating Thurmond, himself, and the South from segregation; and 4) transcending his situation by "fetching good out of evil" and pointing to a conspiracy against him and those like him.

#### Denying Racist Intentions and Actions

In his initial explanation and in his first official apology, Lott denied that his words were anything but kindness and respect shown to Thurmond on the occasion of his 100th birthday. In fact, Lott even denied the plausibility of interpretations to the contrary. As Lott spokesman Ron Bonjean stated shortly after the comments were made, "Senator Lott's remarks were intended to pay tribute to a remarkable man who led a remarkable life. To read anything more into these comments is wrong."<sup>123</sup> This statement did not so much constitute an apology as it did an explanation, as it admits of no wrongdoing -- except perhaps on the part of those "read[ing] anything more into these comments."

Lott's first apology, also issued as a prepared statement, addressed the accusations of racist intent, albeit obliquely: "A poor choice of words conveyed to some

the impression that I embraced the discarded policies of the past. Nothing could be further from the truth, and I apologize to anyone who was offended by my statement."<sup>124</sup>

In this statement, Lott did admit to a "poor choice of words," but denied that his remarks did anything more than leave him open to misinterpretation. He avoided acknowledging the interpretations of support for "racism" and "segregation" per se, choosing instead to refer to the accusations more vaguely as concerning "the discarded policies of the past" (and he did not, as some accusers noted, condemn those "discarded" policies as wrong). He firmly denied the legitimacy of such interpretations in his statement that "Nothing could be further from the truth." And with that firm denial of racist meaning or intentions, Lott should have ended his apology. However, as in his initial remarks about Thurmond, Lott continued to talk himself into further trouble. In closing his statement, Lott apologized "to anyone who was offended by my statement." Though Lott admitted to "a poor choice of words," overall this first apology could be read, in conjunction with Bonjean's initial explanation, as more of an accusation of those hypersensitive few who read too much between the lines or were too easily offended. These statements put the onus more on Lott's audience of interpreters than on himself as the rhetor who made the "poor choice of words" that opened his comments up to such interpretation. In Lott's next apology, his interview with Sean Hannity, Lott apologized for the impression of blaming the audience given in his first apology, stating that "it was not intended just to say, 'I'm sorry if you didn't like it.'"<sup>125</sup> Thus, beginning with this second apology, Lott began to take more direct responsibility for the "impression" given through his "poor choice of words."

In addition to apologizing for his first apology, in his second apology Lott also began to articulate more clearly his denial of racist meaning or intent in his comments about Thurmond. In both apologies made on December 11, his second on the *Sean Hannity Radio Show* and his third on *Larry King Live*, Lott repeatedly referred to his transgression as a "mistake of the head, not of the heart."<sup>126</sup> For instance, early in the Hannity interview, Lott stated, "I can almost say that this was a mistake of the head, not of the heart, because I don't accept those policies of the past at all." Later in the interview, Lott reiterates, "The main thing I want to say to them [his accusers], and people all across the country, [is] that my comments conveyed things that I did not intend, and I regret it. And, you know, I apologize for it."<sup>127</sup> By his fourth apology, given as a news conference in his hometown of Pascagoula, Lott realized it was not enough simply to deny racist intent and tiptoe gingerly around words such as "racism" and "segregation." In this December 13 apology, Lott stated, "Let me be clear: segregation and racism are immoral . . . In celebrating [Thurmond's] life, I did not mean to suggest in any way that his segregationist views of 50 years ago were justified or right. Segregation was immoral then and it is wrong now."<sup>128</sup> As the accusations of racist intent increased in number and intensity, Lott began to deny them in more unequivocal terms such as these.

Perhaps the strand of accusations that put the most pressure on Lott to take up the apologetic strategy of denial was the strand in which evidence from Lott's past was offered as proof of the racism behind his remarks. Around December 11, charges surfaced that Lott had made similar comments about Thurmond in 1980. In his



interview with Hannity that day, Lott denied any racism in his comments of 1980 or 2002 by explaining them as "typical of a friendly relationship with Strom Thurmond." Also in his conversation with Hannity, Lott denied his appearance at a CCC event as proof of racism on his part, repeatedly describing the event in question as "an open forum for candidates" at which he was but one participant.<sup>129</sup> Later, in his fifth apology, which was given in the context of an interview with Ed Gordon on BET, Lott admitted that it "was wrong" for his fraternity to remain segregated, but denied accusations that he led the movement for Sigma Nu to remain all-white, stating that he "was not as active a participant as some people would have said." Also in his interview with Gordon, Lott denied that supporting Charles Pickering's judicial nomination constituted racism, defending Pickering as "a good man who . . . is not a racist or a segregationist in any way. . . . many of the things said against him he was not guilty of" and as "a fine man with an outstanding record who actually took risks with his own life in actions against the Klan."<sup>130</sup> In each of these instances, Lott denied allegations that he was racist or had supported racist causes by offering alternative explanations for his allegedly racist actions and associations.

#### Bolstering: Finding Common Ground with His Accusers

Lott, like many other apologists before him, not only denied the accusations against him, but also attempted to bolster his reputation with his audience by "identify[ing] himself with something viewed favorably by" them or by "reinforc[ing] the existence of a fact, sentiment, object, or relationship."<sup>131</sup> One bolstering strategy that

appeared repeatedly in Lott's apologia was identifying himself with those of his accusers in the African American community by emphasizing 1) his connections with African Americans and 2) commonalities between his life experiences and theirs. Another bolstering strategy utilized by Lott was emphasizing positive motivations for his comments, such as friendship and respect, with which a broad spectrum of audience members could identify, and reinforcing the fact that he was not alone in praising Thurmond on the occasion of his 100th birthday. By emphasizing connections and parallels between himself and his audience of African Americans and the wider public, as well as reinforcing possible positive interpretations of his remarks, Lott was attempting to bolster his damaged reputation in the eyes of those who accused him or who could come to accept said accusations.

The main way in which Lott attempted to bolster his image in his various apologies was identification with one of the most crucial parts of his audience: African Americans. As a senator from Mississippi, many of Lott's constituents are African Americans.<sup>132</sup> Further, as evidenced in the accusations detailed earlier, the controversy over Lott's remarks centered in how they reflected Lott's attitudes toward racism and segregation; therefore, many of Lott's accusers were either African American activists or those sympathetic to their reaction to Lott's words. Thus, in order to repair his image in the eyes of this key group of constituents and accusers, Lott needed to emphasize those aspects of his life which they shared rather than those aspects of his life which had so repulsed them. One such shared life experience or belief emphasized by Lott was the American dream. In his interview with Sean Hannity, Lott argued that

the best thing to do [is] to help all people, regardless of their ethnic, religious, or racial backgrounds, to give them an opportunity to live the American dream. Which I have lived, by the way. I'm the son of a sharecropper myself. . . . I grew up in a blue-collar . . . family, and I understand that you need economic opportunity in America, you need a quality education everywhere, regardless of race or background.<sup>133</sup>

Likewise, in his Pascagoula news conference, Lott again referred to his blue-collar roots when he stated that, "I am humbled by the American dream because I have lived the American dream. To those who believe I was implying that this dream is for some and not for all, I truly apologize."<sup>134</sup> By emphasizing his belief in and experience of the widely cherished American dream, Lott was attempting to identify with an idea or value that bridged the ideological gap between those advocating more equal opportunities for achieving that dream and those advocating less government intervention and more individual initiative in realizing that dream. By alluding to this broadly held aspiration, Lott was endeavoring to identify his own life experiences and aspirations with those of his audience, thereby attempting to span the political divide with a bridge of shared experience.

Another shared life experience Lott emphasized so as to identify with his audience was his religious faith. Realizing that Protestant Christianity is a faith common to many Southerners, white and black, Lott drew on this aspect of his life in several of his apologies. In addition, emphasizing themes of repentance, forgiveness, and redemption with an audience whom he perceived to be sympathetic to these concepts

provided another way he could resonate with their values and persuade them to practice forgiveness toward him. Following a day (December 12) on which a number of high-profile accusations were made against him -- notably President Bush's comments, the Congressional Black Caucus' statement, and *Time's* article revealing the Sigma Nu incident -- Lott concluded his Pascagoula news conference (December 13) by emphasizing his faith and underscoring that faith by citing scripture: "As a man of faith, I have read the Bible all of my life. I now fully understand the Psalm that says 'a broken spirit: a contrite and humbled heart.'"<sup>135</sup>

Likewise, in his December 16 interview with Ed Gordon, Lott referred to his church attendance and alluded to a passage from Ecclesiastes when he recalled how, "When I went to my home church on Sunday, the preacher talked about the seasons of life -- the good times, the bad times, and a time for correction." Earlier in the same interview, Lott pointed out that, "I feel strongly about my faith, and I have grown over the years," as a way toward explaining how he came to the belief that "in order to be a racist you have to feel superior. I don't feel superior to you at all. I don't believe any man or any woman is superior to any other man." When asked by Gordon if he had always held that view, Lott framed his response in religious terms, answering, "I think I did. I grew up in a religious family, and I had concerns about what I saw over the years. I didn't act on it." A few exchanges later in the interview, Lott gave additional evidence as to his increased faith and ultimate redemption by recounting a conversation between himself and his daughter:

Gordon: There is relevance to the past.

Lott: There is -- oh, absolutely. But there is also change from the past and redemption. Ed, who among us does not mature? You know, my daughter a few years ago said, 'Dad, you know, you've changed.' Me. She said, 'Well, you used to be quicker to anger, you wouldn't spend as much time. You didn't talk as much about your faith. What happened?' . . . And I said, well, as you get older you learn from your mistakes. You begin to love people in a different sort of way.<sup>136</sup>

By identifying himself as a religious man -- such as through these references to his reading of the Bible, church attendance, and personal spiritual growth -- Lott was seeking to establish common ground with many in his audience: his Mississippi constituency, African Americans throughout the nation, and the influential religious right within the Republican Party. Further, through these and numerous other allusions to the tenets of repentance, forgiveness, and redemption, Lott hoped to inspire forgiveness of his sins and a subsequent redemption of his image and influence in the political sphere.

Identifying with his audience through reference to his own life experiences was not Lott's only strategy for redeeming himself with his various audiences. Another way in which Lott attempted to bolster his image with African Americans in particular were his frequent references to reaching out to their leaders and practicing of affirmative action or diversity as an individual. For example, when prompted by a question from Sean Hannity about the Congressional Black Caucus, Lott affirmed that, "I have talked with them, and I think we've had good conversations. I've answered questions and

pointed out . . . what I have done in my own office and in my own career in terms of making sure we had involvement and participation by African-Americans in my own staffing and in my appointments."<sup>137</sup> In his interview with Larry King, Lott pointed to, as he did in others of his apologies, the specifics of what he, as an individual, has done to further diversity in his home state:

I do have a long record of trying to involve African-Americans and supporting our historical black colleges and universities . . . [and] making sure we had an active intern program to bring African-Americans into the [Senate]. We have a leadership program at the University of Mississippi that probably has half of its students are minorities; not all African-Americans, . . . Vietnamese and others.

So I think . . . the programs I've supported, indicate that I'm not insensitive to the need for fair elections and community renewal.<sup>138</sup>

And later, in his December 16 interview on BET, Lott again underscored his efforts to "reach out" to African Americans in particular: "I've been reaching out, talking to a lot of different people -- African Americans -- seeking their advice -- pastors, media, business leaders -- and looking for their suggestions of what we can do. J. C. Watts has been very helpful in making sure that I understand how people feel about what I said. . . . Even today I talked to John Lewis, Congressman Lewis from Georgia." Lott referenced Lewis' invitation (made on *Meet the Press*) for Lott to join him on a tour of civil rights sites throughout the South, and described a possible plan for he and Lewis to develop "a task force of reconciliation" in which they would "sit down and talk" in "a bipartisan way, bicameral and multi-racial" with "young and old men and women from

all sections of the country."<sup>139</sup> By reinforcing his own efforts to increase diversity on his staff and leadership opportunities for minorities and identifying himself with African American leaders, especially former civil rights activist Lewis, Lott sought to bolster his weakened image on racial matters by offering evidence, in terms of his personal record and relationships, that would enhance his image with the very constituency whom he had most offended.

Appealing to a broader audience, Lott also sought to explain his comments in terms of such widely held and practiced values of friendship and respect. On December 11, Lott explained to Sean Hannity and his largely conservative radio audience that his comments were part of a tradition between he and Thurmond in which

I've always . . . kidded [him] about the kind of job he has done and what he has stood for, and it is basically saying, 'You know, you would have made a great president.' He lights up, he smiles at that. That's the vein it was in. It was never intended to say, 'Because of the policies you were advocating in 1948.' It's because of a lifetime of service . . . what are you going to say, 'I wish you'd lost'? But really [it] is just typical of a friendly relationship with Strom Thurmond.<sup>140</sup>

Similarly, in his interview later that day with Larry King, Lott stated, "This is a guy that's 100 years old, and I've been in the Senate with him . . . since he was 86. And I've always . . . been nice to him and . . . tried to honor him every way I could."<sup>141</sup>

In addition to defending his comments about Thurmond as indicative of his friendship with and respect for the elder statesman, Lott also pointed out in his

December 16 interview with Ed Gordon that he was not the only senator to have praised Thurmond on the occasion of his 100th birthday and retirement from the Senate:

let me tell you what I said on the floor of the United States Senate about him in a serious moment, thinking about what I was going to say. . . . I was one of 36 senators that spoke praisingly. Not one condemned his past, but six of us did comment on it. And I said Senator Thurmond is a different case in many ways. He is of course a different generation, and he exemplifies its strengths, just as he has worked to leave behind its shortcomings.<sup>142</sup>

In comments such as these, Lott was defending his remarks as well intentioned, springing from the widely held and approved values of friendship and respect for one's elders. Further, by offering evidence of the fact that three dozen senators, not himself only, had made similarly respectful and friendly statements about Thurmond on the Senate floor made his comments seem less of an aberration and more like one praise among many, and clothed them with more respectability considering the bipartisan makeup of the 36 senators who lined up to pay homage to Thurmond. Noting that he was among the minority of those who did remember to couch their commendations with recognition of Thurmond's weaknesses further enhanced Lott's ethos as one who was not offering unqualified praise for Thurmond and his controversial past.

Similarly, in his December 11 interview with Sean Hannity, Lott drew a parallel with the remarks he made about Thurmond and comments he made about the then-recently deceased Senator Paul Wellstone (D-Minnesota): "I went to the floor of the Senate not too long ago and said words of praise for Paul Wellstone. Now, did that



mean I was endorsing his positions in the Senate? No. What it meant was, this was a man who served the people, he was killed in a plane accident, and he was always courteous to me and friendly, and so that was . . . the human and right thing to do." Framing his praise for Thurmond as made in the spirit of friendship and respect, Lott was likely hoping to evoke in his audience memories of similar remarks they had made in their own lives about friends, relatives, or colleagues; indeed, as he continued in his remarks following the Wellstone analogy, "quite often we do become too exuberant in our endorsements of people that perhaps we work with or that are retiring or it had been birthdays, in this case."<sup>143</sup> Setting his remarks in the context of similar remarks made by himself and many others on the Senate floor -- about Thurmond, Wellstone, and many others -- added a level of credibility and respectability to his explanation for why they were made in the first place.

#### Differentiating: Separating Thurmond, Himself, and the South from Segregation

While Lott did indeed seek to make his comments about Thurmond seem more respectable by allying them with the values of friendship and respect as well as the credibility of the Senate, he also realized the need to answer the accusations of racism by separating Thurmond, himself, and their region from the sins of segregation. In doing this, Lott was practicing the apologetic strategy of differentiation, "separating some fact, sentiment, object, or relationship from some larger context within which the audience presently views that attribute."<sup>144</sup> Throughout his several apologia, Lott differentiated Thurmond's present from his past, arguing that he was praising Thurmond the man and

not his segregationist background. Along these lines, Lott also pointed out, repeatedly, that Thurmond long ago had repudiated segregation, thereby offering evidence that Thurmond had separated himself from his past segregationist ways. Not only did Lott emphasize Thurmond's changed stance regarding civil rights and race, so too did he underscore changes in his own attitudes regarding such issues. Finally, Lott argued that not only had he and Thurmond changed, but so too had the South as a whole. By emphasizing the changes in attitude and policy made by Thurmond, himself, and their region, Lott sought to differentiate all three from their less than respectable record on issues of race.

From the very earliest of Lott's apologies, Lott sought to differentiate praise of the man (Thurmond) from praise of his past policies (in support of segregation). As Lott's spokesman Ron Bonjean explained on December 6, "Senator Lott's remarks were intended to pay tribute to a remarkable man who led a remarkable life. To read anything more into these comments is wrong."<sup>145</sup> As Lott clarified in his December 11 interview with Hannity, "when I think back about Strom Thurmond over the years, what I've seen is a man who was for strong national defense and economic development and balanced budgets and opportunity, and that's the kind of things I really had in mind." He explained his remarks about Thurmond in 1980 similarly, noting that, "in the '80s . . . when I talked about Strom again, we were talking about the problem in Iran, talking about deficits over the years, strong law enforcement speeches. . . . So those are the kinds of things we've had problems with over the years with defense, budgets, . . . law enforcement. I think we could have done a better job."<sup>146</sup> Lott made similar comments

to both King and Gordon in which he differentiated the Thurmond he came to know in the 1980s and 1990s with the Thurmond who ran as a segregationist in 1948. As Lott was sure to point out in more than one of his apologies, including his December 13 news conference, "By the time I came to know Strom Thurmond -- 40 years after he ran for President -- Strom himself had long since repudiated these repugnant views."<sup>147</sup> By specifying less controversial and more recent policies supported by Thurmond, Lott was seeking to differentiate clearly the racist, segregationist Thurmond of 1948 from the 100-year-old, more moderate and even "progressive" Thurmond of 2002. As Lott told Larry King, "He has changed over the years and I think that . . . he has developed . . . a progressive record in many ways."

Not only did Lott, through his several apologies, seek to differentiate Thurmond present from Thurmond past, so too did he attempt to differentiate Lott present and future from Lott past. Shortly after telling King how Thurmond had changed, Lott described how he had as well: "my positions have changed over the years. I have changed my emphasis -- greater emphasis on things like education and economic development and . . . opportunity for community development."<sup>148</sup> Several days later, speaking with Gordon on BET, Lott spoke about his personal and political evolution:

Gordon: When would you say you changed?

Lott: Well, I think it was evolutionary. . . . part of it is when you get outside of a cocoon, when . . . you begin to live other places . . . . When I got . . . into law school, I started studying civil rights suits and [the] Civil Rights Act of 1964 . . . . But I think it really happened when I started to move around statewide, and I

went into the poorest part of the state. I saw poverty I had never seen before. . . .

Gordon: But you would say that you would have changed by the '90s? Fair?

Lott: I was very much changing, but it wasn't complete. In fact, it's never complete. You never -- I am not a perfect person. I have made mistakes, and I am sure I will make more.

Gordon went on to ask Lott about a number of race- and civil rights-related issues about which many in the African American community had disagreed with Lott. Responding to the list of "transgressions" as a whole -- which included his votes against the federal Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday, the King Commission, the Civil Rights Act of 1990, and the extension of the Voting Rights Act in 1992 -- Lott argued that, "There are a number of things that I have done in recent years that I think would show that I have been changing: the legislation I have sponsored, bills that I moved." In response to particular accusations, such as his vote against the King holiday, Lott admitted, "I am not sure we in America -- certainly not white America and the people in the South fully understood who this man was, the impact he was having on the fabric of this country. . . . but I have learned a lot since then . . . and I now . . . would vote for a Martin Luther King holiday."<sup>149</sup> In these and other instances in his apologies, Lott works to differentiate the Lott of the present and future -- the Lott who would vote for the King holiday and who wants to form a "task force of reconciliation" with John Lewis -- with the Lott of the past -- who was accused of maintaining segregation in his fraternity, voting against civil rights legislation in the House and Senate, and fraternizing with white supremacists through his association with the CCC.

Beyond illustrating how both he and Thurmond had changed their stances on race and civil rights over the years, Lott also sought to show how their region of the South had evolved through recent decades as well. Conversing with Larry King on December 11, Lott observed how "We're way beyond those policies of the past, Larry. They were bad at the time; we've made huge progress since then. My state has more African-American elected officials than any other state."<sup>150</sup> Two days later, in his Pascagoula news conference, Lott recounted:

I grew up with segregation. I grew up in an environment that condoned policies and views that we know were wrong and immoral . . . I have seen what it did to families, to schools, and to communities. I have seen personally the destruction it has wrought on the lives of good people. . . . I lived through the troubled times of the South, and along with the South I have learned from the mistakes of the past.<sup>151</sup>

Finally, in his December 16 interview on BET, Lott pointed out specific changes of which he was proud at the University of Mississippi:

Lott: . . . I think you should reach out to people.

Gordon: Across the board?

Lott: Absolutely across the board. That's why I am so proud of my alma mater now, University of Mississippi, that obviously had a difficult time in the '60s and '70s -- now led by an outstanding chancellor Robert Khayat, that has gotten rid of the Confederate flag, that has now got an Institute of Reconciliation . . .<sup>152</sup>

Illustrating how the South has changed by differentiating the South of the past, which

still dominated the popular imagination, from the South of the present and future, Lott set himself and Thurmond in the context of a changing, progressive South. Perhaps it would have been easier for Lott's wider audience to believe that he and Thurmond had changed if Lott could show that the very region which had voted in large numbers to elect Thurmond and preserve segregation had itself made significant changes in the intervening years.

#### Transcending the Situation: Fetching Good Out of Evil and Pointing to a Conspiracy

Especially in his later apologies, Lott attempted to transcend the boundaries of his then-present quandary by "cognitively join[ing] some fact, sentiment, object, or relationship with some larger context within which the audience does not presently view that attribute."<sup>153</sup> The two strands of Lott's apologies which furthered such transcendence were 1) Lott's efforts to "fetch good out of evil" by rhetorically changing his political problems into political opportunities, and 2) Lott's and others' contentions that in the world "inside the Beltway" of national politics, people were "out to get him" or to sacrifice him rather than his party's agenda and image. Throughout his apologia, Lott repeated his hope that everyone would "move on" or "move past this" so as to achieve greater good and understanding. In his later apologia, these "moving on" statements came to be stated in ways very reminiscent of Bormann's fantasy theme of "fetching good out of evil." In Lott's final apology, his post-resignation interview with the Associated Press, Lott seemed to resign himself to (or finally express openly) a more paranoid interpretation, reminiscent of Richard Hofstadter's articulation of "The

Paranoid Style in American Politics," in which his situation was explained not by some greater, immaterial good, but rather by the darker, overarching mechanisms of political life.

In the fantasy theme of fetching good out of evil, as Ernest Bormann explained, "Evil always has a purpose since God does not afflict his chosen people with troubles unless they are failing to live up to the covenant he has with them. The community members and their spokesman must, therefore, search the evil and discover the good that is within it. . . . the participants in [this] fantasy type ask, 'How have we sinned? What must we do to be saved?'"<sup>154</sup> This is an apt way to understand Lott in the wake of his controversial comments about Strom Thurmond. The earlier manifestations of this theme in Lott's apologia take the form of "moving on" statements. For instance, after telling Sean Hannity that "my comments conveyed things that I did not intend, and I regret it. And, you know, I apologize for it," Lott expressed his "hope that we could move on from that and move on to things that we can do to help the people all across the country" through initiatives that would ensure "economic opportunity for everybody, community renewal, . . . election reforms, . . . and put[ting] more money in education."<sup>155</sup> Similarly, in his Pascagoula news conference, Lott stated that, "In the days and months to come, I will dedicate myself to undo[ing] the hurt I have caused and will do all that I can to contribute to a society where every American has an equal opportunity to succeed."<sup>156</sup> In his later apologia, Lott's wording more clearly evoked Bormann's "fetching good out evil" fantasy type, such as in his December 16 BET interview when he stated, "I hope that maybe this bad experience for me, the mistake I

made, will wind up helping lead to better relationships and improvements." Lott elaborated on this theme when, in concluding his interview with Gordon, he articulated his belief that, "I think this actually can help us move an agenda that will be good for America -- all Americans -- equal opportunity for everybody, and improved society. And I am going to work to make that happen."<sup>157</sup> Shortly after his resignation, Lott told an AP reporter on December 22, "I feel very strongly about my faith. God had put this burden on me, I believe he'll show me a way to turn it into a good."<sup>158</sup> In statements such as these, Lott seemed to be expressing simultaneously his hope for both political and spiritual redemption. By explaining his situation in such terms, Lott's strategy seemed to have been to convince his audience to take up a similarly rose-colored terministic screen of forgiveness, a perspective by which they would be more inclined to forgive him of his sins and allow him the opportunity to make amends by "fetching good out of evil" or, in the words of popular wisdom, "turning lemons into lemonade."

But were such repentant, optimistic statements sincere? Perhaps only Lott and his God will ever know for sure. However, after making a long string of such hopeful comments, Lott appeared to give in to a more accusatory, pessimistic, and even paranoid perspective. While Lott had made a conscious attempt throughout his apologies not to respond to specific accusers (as he was asked to do in various interviews), in the end, after resigning his majority leader-elect post, Lott voiced a seemingly paranoid reading of his situation, one in which he was not so much at fault as were his accusers: "A lot of people in Washington have been trying to nail me for a long time. When you're from Mississippi and you're a conservative and you're a Christian, there are a lot of people



who don't like that. I fell into their trap and I have only myself to blame."<sup>159</sup> Lott, however, was not the first or only rhetor in this exchange of accusations and apologia to voice such a conspiracy theory.

While Lott found few defenders coming to his aid, one person who consistently defended him throughout the controversy was Pat Buchanan, who in a December 13 opinion column argued, "The words were said in gracious tribute. But the malicious saw opportunity. Tom Edsall of the *Washington Post* dug up 54-year-old Thurmond quotes . . . , then phoned around to elicit the 'outrage' he had sought to incite. As ever, the left and a few neoconservatives were delighted to contribute" (among them Bill Kristol, David Frum, Jonah Goldberg, and Andrew Sullivan).<sup>160</sup> Buchanan further developed this conspiracy theory as one of intra-party betrayal in his December 18 column, arguing that, "When the official autopsy is performed on the corpse of Trent Lott, it will be revealed that he died of a stab wound that came from above. This time, Caesar knifed Brutus." He portrayed Bush, in his December 12 comments, as joining in "throw[ing] Lott . . . to the wolves." Adding further fuel to the fire of Bush's betrayal, Buchanan contrasts Bush's actions with what he imagines Reagan would have done in the same situation: "Ronald Reagan would have never knifed a friend and ally like this, even if he were guilty! It is a failing of the Bush family that they believe in loyalty up, but not loyalty down." Buchanan added another level to his conspiracy theory in his observation that Lott's "own president cut him dead and collaborated, almost surely at the instigation of 'Boy Genius' Karl Rove, with his assassins." Buchanan concludes that had Bush framed his comments about Lott with more loyalty, "Lott's enemies would have

scattered like the jackals they are. Now, with Bush's assist, they have horribly wounded his majority leader. Trent Lott is the victim of a hate crime, not the perpetrator of one."<sup>161</sup> Looking back on the situation from the vantage point of December 30, Buchanan reflected on "the squabble among neoconservatives over who among them was the first to stick his nail file in the back of Trent Lott," and observed that, "their collusion in ruining Lott, their relish in the pats on the head they are receiving from the left, confirm the suspicion: Neoconservatives are the useful idiots of the liberal establishment."<sup>162</sup>

In addition to Buchanan, a number of Lott's paleoconservative accusers, whose specific accusations were detailed earlier, simultaneously accused the Republican Party of disloyalty to Lott -- and thus to its Southern base. The Council of Conservative Citizens accused Lott's "fellow Republicans" of "joining the hyena pack of blacks and liberals who are demanding his ouster."<sup>163</sup> Or, as *The South Was Right* co-author Walter D. Kennedy asked rhetorically, "Did anyone notice how quickly the President and the National GOP tried to distance themselves from the South? . . . The South is encouraged to jump on the Republican bus and take a ride. As soon as Dixie gets on board, she is told to 'go to the back of the bus, sit down, shut-up, and for goodness sake, don't wave that Confederate flag!'" In short, Kennedy explained, "the media could not have caused Lott's demise without a lot of help from the beleaguered senator and the Republican Party."<sup>164</sup> In a similar spirit, Greg Kay, in his column linked to the CCC Web site, laid out a very specific conspiracy theory whereby President Bush, after his December 12 comments chastising Lott,

immediately crawfished . . . after Lott's staffers informed him that if Lott was forced to resign from the Senate leadership, he would likely resign from his seat as well . . . . Faced with his greatest fear -- a 50/50 Senate that might cease to be a rubber stamp -- Dubya prudently shut up about the whole thing. His great moral outrage be damned; the possible frustration of his dictatorial powers was just too high of a price to pay."<sup>165</sup>

While these same rhetors had harshly accused Lott of weakness, cowardice, and disloyalty to the South through his many apologia, they situated Lott in a bigger picture in which he, as representative of Southern conservatives such as themselves, had been betrayed by the Republican Party's national establishment in the person of George W. Bush. While the GOP's betrayal of Lott did not absolve Lott of his sins against his (former) brothers in the South, it served to frame his transgressions within the overarching political system, which was proven, through this controversy, to be conspiring against the South and its defenders.

Not only did these right-wing Southerners discern a conspiracy at work in Lott's situation, so too did more moderate and liberal commentators, who also had been among Lott's accusers. A December 19 editorial in *Roll Call* summed up well this more mainstream version of the White House conspiracy to get rid of Lott:

Despite formal pronouncements by White House spokesman Ari Fleischer that President Bush does not think . . . Lott (R-Miss.) should resign, the newspapers are filled with unsourced -- but authoritative-sounding -- statements that Bush does not think that Lott can, will or should survive. The evidence suggests that

Fleischer's statements are vain attempts to remove the White House's fingerprints -- or bootprints -- from Lott's back.

The writers of this editorial argued quite bluntly, and vividly, that "Bush is not just letting Lott 'twist slowly in the wind,' in the cruel phrase from the Nixon era, but is actively building the scaffold and tying the rope."<sup>166</sup> Such a perspective was shared by neoconservative columnist David Frum, who, the day after Bush's public comments, posed this question: "It couldn't be clearer if the president actually pulled the lever on the trap door himself, could it?"<sup>167</sup> Likewise, the editors of *The Nation* opined in January 2003 that "Lott's fate was sealed when the White House decided it needed a smoother, and smarter, son of the Confederacy running the Senate."<sup>168</sup> Jesse Jackson, also looking back on Lott's resignation, argued that, "The Bush White House helped push the drive to dump Republican Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott . . . . Echoing unnamed White House advisors, Republicans argued that Lott would be an 'impediment to the passage of the president's agenda,'" which Jackson argued was to overturn affirmative action laws.<sup>169</sup> While not defending Lott in their accusations that the White House ultimately decided Lott's fate from behind the scenes, these more mainstream conspiracy theories helped legitimize the idea that Lott was a victim of (somewhat) unseen political forces beyond his control.

In describing "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," Richard Hofstadter argues that in this mode, "the feeling of persecution is central, and it is indeed systematized in grandiose theories of conspiracy . . . see[ing] the hostile and conspiratorial world . . . directed against a nation, a culture, a way of life whose fate

affects not himself alone but millions of others."<sup>170</sup> Lott stated that he was being targeted because of his identity as a Christian conservative from Mississippi. Implicit in this statement is the belief that so too were all Christian conservatives from Mississippi - - and perhaps the South in general -- being victimized by those outside their region and belief system. So joining his fate with those of his fellow Southern, Christian conservatives may have been a rhetorical strategy to reidentify with the very constituency Lott had jettisoned (perhaps only temporarily) via his apologia. As Hofstadter observes, "the paranoid disposition is mobilized into action chiefly by social conflicts that involve ultimate schemes of values and that bring fundamental fears and hatreds, rather than negotiable interests, into political action. Catastrophe or the fear of catastrophe is most likely to elicit the syndrome of paranoid rhetoric."<sup>171</sup> Having lost the very position he had sought to preserve through his apologia, Lott needed to save face with his previously loyal constituency of likeminded white Southerners if he were to avoid his ultimate political demise: the loss not only of his leadership position, but of his Senate seat in the next election. If Lott cannot rebuild the bridges he burnt with his traditional base by the end of his next term, or build amazingly strong new ties with African Americans in his state, political catastrophe could well be at hand. Having failed in his attempt to transcend his mistake through articulating the hope that good could come from his evil, Lott resorted -- whether through rhetorical strategy or genuine fear or both -- to the conspiracy theories so often turned to by the contemporary right wing.<sup>172</sup>

### Conclusions: Lott as Segregation's Scapegoat?

Trent Lott's remarks about Strom Thurmond's 1948 presidential campaign sparked a two-week long, mass-mediated exchange of accusations and apologia in which Lott was made the scapegoat on behalf of the South's, and perhaps even the nation's, unatoned sins of segregation and racism. On one level, Lott served as the scapegoat for all the old-school Southern politicians whom the press and the political establishment neglected to punish adequately for their sins. When Lott made his now-notorious remarks at Thurmond's party, the sins of Lott and his Southern political forebears and cohorts -- Strom Thurmond, Robert Byrd, William Fulbright, Bob Barr, and others -- were brought back before the public eye of the media and the political establishment, and this time they would not let the opportunity for victimage pass them by. In particular, Lott's celebration of Thurmond's most segregationist moment, his 1948 presidential bid as a "Dixiecrat," reminded Lott's accusers that they had not punished Thurmond -- for if they had, he would not have gone on to serve eight terms in the Senate. Thurmond, wrinkled, weak, and immobile at age 100, was no longer a candidate for sacrifice, perhaps too close to a natural death to be an acceptable kill -- though his segregationist sins were, it could be argued, worse than Lott's. But Lott, comparatively young (at 61) and ascendant in power had something that could be sacrificed (his position as majority leader-elect), and had made himself vulnerable to attack through his December 5 remarks -- seemingly unmoved by the attempts of FAIR and others in the late 1990s to reveal his association with the CCC, among other sins, to the larger public. Therefore it could be said that Lott was made a victim both by others (homicidally) and

by his own actions (suicidally).<sup>173</sup>

On another level, it could be said that Lott was made a scapegoat to bear the burden of the sins of his accusers. Lott's controversial comments not only brought to light his own sins in matters of race, but also the sins of other people of influence (Thurmond et al.) that had gone unpunished. The fact that such racism in the halls of Congress had gone unchecked for so long, with no one paying the price, may have made Lott's accusers experience feelings of guilt at not having done enough to expose the sins of the Lotts and Thurmonds of the political realm, and not having done more to remove such sinners from positions of influence. As *Salon* columnist Joe Conason opined, "The attitude that ignores or downplays Lott's remarks is what used to be called institutional racism."<sup>174</sup> By sacrificing Lott in the press, in the public estimation, and amongst his political colleagues, Lott's accusers could in turn experience a feeling of redemption, that at last they had done something that would take away their feelings of guilt at having let such entrenched institutional racism stay unchecked for so long. By their own inaction or ineffective actions, Lott's accusers had allowed him and others like him not only to stay in positions of power, but to survive and thrive in those positions of power; Thurmond's eight Senate terms were vivid evidence of this. Accusing Lott again and again until he was forced to become their sacrifice helped them to purge their guilt, resulting in their feeling that they had been redeemed through his resignation as majority leader-elect.

But Lott's political and ideological rivals were not the only ones sacrificing him. Fellow Republicans, such as George W. Bush, allowed Lott to be attacked as a sacrificial

lamb left unguarded in a political landscape populated by hungry wolves in the media and from across the political aisle. By not coming to Lott's defense, Republicans were essentially making Lott their sacrifice as well, though seemingly in a more passive manner than Lott's more obvious political rivals and ideological enemies. Republicans allowed Lott to become their sacrifice, their scapegoat, so they would not have to sacrifice any more of their flock. At a time when Republicans had been making more overtures toward recruiting African Americans and other minorities, Lott's comments constituted a major sin against the party's growth strategy. Further, Republicans could not allow the general public to think of them as the party of racists and old-time segregationists, even though they had given safe haven to Strom Thurmond for over 30 years -- not to mention CCC sympathizers such as Trent Lott and former Representative Bob Barr (R-GA). And, perhaps most crucially, many Republicans believed that Lott's remarks would hurt, in terms of press coverage and public opinion, their hopes for overturning affirmative action in the year to come via the University of Michigan cases. And so it was that they allowed Lott to be sacrificed to the media and political wolves, and yet managed to save face with their Southern Republican base by selecting as his successor Bill Frist, a younger Republican from the South, but one whose medical profession shrouded him with a sense of scientific purity and rationality in contrast to Lott, who was seen as allowing his emotions, passions, and prejudices to overwhelm him.

Finally, in addition to being sacrificed by those within his own political party, Lott was also scapegoated by the very people with whom associating had caused him to



be further accused by others: Southern paleoconservatives from such groups as the League of the South and the CCC. Lott's comments favorable to Thurmond's 1948 presidential bid were not sinful in the eyes of these former Lott defenders. Rather, Lott's apologies for those comments were what caused Lott to be sacrificed in paleoconservative, neo-Confederate circles. When Lott not only apologized for his remarks but began to pledge his support for civil rights initiatives, Southern paleoconservatives no longer saw Lott as a brother and fellow unreconstructed Confederate, but rather as a coward and a traitor to what they believed to be his true convictions. And so it was that Lott was also sacrificed by his former "brothers" to pay the price of disloyalty for not only his own sins, but perhaps also those of the neoconservatives whom they believed had betrayed true conservatism in return for political influence. And, though any CCC member worth his salt would never admit to it, on a deeper level they likely were sacrificing Lott as a burnt offering for their own sins of racism, anti-Semitism, and other practices of hate.

That Trent Lott became a scapegoat for the sins of the South because of his remarks about Strom Thurmond seems appropriate, since Thurmond's life essentially spanned and therefore symbolized the history of race relations in the twentieth-century South. The proximity in time of Lott's sacrifice to atone for the segregationist sins of such Southerners as Thurmond to Thurmond's recent death may be, in a way, a sign of division's demise as the South's distinctive order. Lott's stepping down as Senate Majority Leader in December 2002 because of his remarks favorable to Thurmond's

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165. Kay, "Lott's Lot."

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179. Jackson, Sr., "Changing the Cover, Not the Book."

170. Richard Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style in American Politics," in *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996): 4.

171. Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style," 39.

172. Hofstadter, "The Paranoid Style," 23-28.

173. Burke, *On Symbols and Society*, 289.

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## CONCLUSION

If any one person could be said to embody the changing order of the South in the twentieth century, a strong case could be made that it was Strom Thurmond. As

Delaware Senator Joseph Biden noted in his July 2003 eulogy of Thurmond:

Strom Thurmond was the only man I knew who in a literal sense lived in three distinct and separate periods of American history . . . . Born into an era of essentially unchallenged and unexamined mores of the South, reaching his full maturity in an era of fully challenged and critically examined bankrupt mores of his beloved South, and living out his final three decades in a South that had formally rejected its past on race -- in each of these stages . . . Strom represented exactly where he came from.<sup>1</sup>

Thurmond was born in Edgefield, South Carolina, in December 1902, and it was there that he died just over a century later in June 2003. Raised as the son of a small-town lawyer, Thurmond grew up in the shadow of Edgefield's other famous political son, the populist but virulently racist Benjamin "Pitchfork" Tillman, a family friend. In 1925, it has been revealed recently by some biographers, he fathered a daughter out of wedlock with the daughter of his family's African American housekeeper.<sup>2</sup> Eventually, in 1946, he was elected governor of South Carolina, and then in 1948 ran for president as the candidate of the States' Rights Democratic Party. In the 1960s, in the days of the Goldwater Republicans, he switched his party affiliation to Republican. By the 1970s, he was the first Southern senator to hire black staff members, and in the 1980s and 1990s

he cast votes in support of the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday, renewal of the Voting Rights Act, and in favor of confirming Clarence Thomas as a Supreme Court justice.

Looking at the timeline of Thurmond's life, we see a man who, at the peak of his political career, ran for president on a platform rooted firmly in the defense of the Southern states' right to remain segregated. Yet, as Diane McWhorter observes,

Thurmond has always been an ornery redemption project. He did not repent. Even so, his illegitimate daughter further complicates the moral picture. Does she mean that he was more heinous than we knew? Or that -- dude! -- he wasn't such a racist bastard after all? We need not dwell on the obvious mind-boggling hypocrisies here: that someone who ran for president on an anti-pool-mixin' platform was party to an integrated gene pool. . . . This form of duplicity has been a Southern tradition dating back to those miscegenating slave owners.<sup>3</sup>

McWhorter argues that the reason that this aspect of Thurmond's life story has not been more widely reported is that, "The particulars of this family saga simply do not fit into the 'redemption narrative' Americans tend to impose on our more regrettable bygone: Better that ol' Strom 'transformed' from the Negro-baiting Dixiecrat presidential candidate of 1948 to One of the First Southern Senators To Hire a Black Aide in 1971."<sup>4</sup>

So whose interpretation of Thurmond's life are we to believe, Biden's more hopeful narrative or McWhorter's more skeptical one? Biden argues that while "it's fairly easy to say today that [Thurmond's evolution] was [due to] pure political expediency," he believes instead that

Strom knew America was changing, and that there was a lot he didn't understand

about that change. Much of that change challenged many of his long-held views. But he also saw his beloved South Carolina changing as well, and he knew the time had come to change himself. . . . Thurmond was doing what few do once they pass the age of 50: He was continuing to grow, continuing to change.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, McWhorter argues, "That [Thurmond's racial demagoguing] was just 'bidness' [sic] may account for why Strom Thurmond never felt compelled to ask the forgiveness of a race he devoted so much public capital to making miserable -- a race that included members of his own family. Then again, he had always been an integrationist."<sup>6</sup> Biden argues that as America and the South shifted their paradigms from that of division to that of identification, Thurmond in turn adjusted his paradigm accordingly -- not for "political expediency," but rather because he, like his nation and his region, over time had come to accept identification as the more moral order.

Meanwhile, McWhorter argues that it was Thurmond's racist rhetoric of his earlier career that was politically expedient for a politician representing a South that valued the order of division, while Thurmond's personal life and even some of his political actions (such as repealing the poll tax and passing an anti-lynching law) of that period bespoke someone who embraced, at least on some levels, the order of identification.

It may be that there is some truth in both Biden's and McWhorter's interpretations of Thurmond's life. Not being able to know the innerworkings of Thurmond's heart and mind, especially now that he has died, we will never know for sure the reasons why Thurmond acted as he did in the area of race relations over the years. And yet it does seem accurate to say, as Biden did in his eulogy, that "Strom represented exactly where

he came from."<sup>7</sup> Thurmond's actions in the first part of his political career were undertaken largely to conserve the existing Southern order of division, in particular the division of the races. As his long career progressed, the rhetorical situation changed in such a way that Thurmond began to take political actions not to defend the order of division, but in time to move forward (or at least not hinder) the order of identification. Whether he was persuaded so to evolve for moral or political reasons we do not know. But as McWhorter points out, Thurmond had one level "always been an integrationist."<sup>8</sup> Perhaps it is in this seeming paradox that Thurmond best "represented exactly where he came from."<sup>9</sup> Though the South long had promoted and defended the order of division in public, the private reality of the South had been one in which identification was not so much the exception as it was the rule. At the root of recent debates over Southern identity may be the fact not so much that identification is replacing division as the ruling order of the South, but rather that Southerners are finally acknowledging identification to be not only the private order of the South but its public order as well.

#### Recent Debates: Evidence of the Conflict Between Identification and Division

The four debates analyzed from a rhetorical perspective in the previous sections reflect the shift from division to identification as the more influential order in Southern public culture. The order of division ruled the South through slavery (the division of labor, master and slave, according to race), secession (the division of the nation due to different perspectives on states' rights, one of the divisions of power delineated in the Constitution, specifically their right to slavery), and segregation (the division of groups

of people by race, gender, and other characteristics, both by law and social custom). The reason for so many instances of conflict over the past decade, as exemplified in the debates considered here, is that the late 1990s and early 2000s have constituted a crucial turning point in this shift from the old order to the new order. By this decade, legally mandated forms of division such as segregated public institutions were now largely things of the past, replaced firmly by legally mandated ways of achieving identification such as integration and affirmative action. As a result, Southerners and others who continued to embrace the old order of division -- through their reverence for and defense of Old South symbols, traditions, and institutions -- found themselves in conflict with those who advocated more identification not only through legislation and the Constitution, but also in what symbolism and traditions would be allowed to hold sway in the public sphere -- especially in the former states of the Confederacy with their many remaining symbols and traditions memorializing the South's divided past.

This was the case at the Virginia Military Institute, founded before the Civil War in 1839,<sup>10</sup> where the old order of division was evidenced in its identity as an all-white college until 1968<sup>11</sup> and as an all-male college until the Supreme Court ruling of 1996. Symbols of VMI's ruling order of division included the walls of its imposing, seemingly impassible Gothic-style barracks, its distinctive uniforms, and its unspoken promise of admission into the ranks of the South's "good ol' boy" network upon graduation as "Institute men" or "citizen-soldiers." But with the integration first of racial and ethnic minorities and then of women into the social mysteries of VMI, identification overtook division as the ruling order of VMI. Now, men and women, blacks and whites, can all

identify with one another as fellow cadets, with identification brought before our eyes as women donned the VMI uniform, bunked inside its fortress-like barracks, and graduated into the ranks of privileged Institute men and women. People formerly divided now can identify with one another within the institution of VMI as they together put on the vestments of its particular symbols and traditions.

Today, cadets of both sexes and of various races and ethnicities are now identified with one another within VMI, yet as a collective they can still claim a distinctive identity from other colleges and universities through their symbols and traditions (such as their uniforms, rings, and class system), though perhaps not quite as distinct an identity now that it has gender integrated as the federal academies had done before it. A wider spectrum of people now have the possibility of being admitted (literally) into the social mystery that is VMI, but that no longer means that the social mystery of VMI, the source of its distinctiveness, can no longer exist on any level. Rather than emphasize some of the former aspects of its distinctiveness -- all-white and all-male -- today's VMI should emphasize those aspects of its distinctiveness (such as its martial and Southern traditions) that have remained constant through such changes as racial and gender integration, as well as potentially new aspects of its distinctiveness that have emerged as a result of enduring such changes.

Elsewhere in Virginia in the capital city of Richmond, the old order of division was evidenced by its identity as the capital of the Confederate States of America -- the capital of states that separated themselves from the Union -- as well as in the deeply ensconced institution of racial segregation, which ruled the city both through law and



social custom. The division of the city into a hierarchy of white and black was seen vividly on the city's most famous street, Monument Avenue. By including only Confederates on Monument Avenue, those with the power and authority to order the city sent the message that only "dead white males," and only Confederate ones at that, were deserving of this place of honor in Richmond's public commemoration of its history. And so it was that when Arthur Ashe grew up there in the 1950s, not only did the imposing statues of Monument Avenue symbolize the ruling order of racial division in Richmond, so too did Richmonders experience this division in their daily lives. Whites and blacks not only attended "separate but equal" schools, but also had to play tennis on separate courts in separate neighborhoods. However, in the years since *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954, legally mandated segregation has been replaced gradually by legally mandated integration in Richmond and elsewhere. Though "white flight" has resulted in Richmond proper having a majority African American population today, legally mandated segregation no longer exists -- though de facto segregation continues to exist in people's associations with one another, as evidenced in the city's racially distinct neighborhoods, churches, civic groups, and the like.

Nonetheless, as the legal barriers between people have been removed, people of different backgrounds, ethnicities, races, and genders attained a more influential voice in Richmond's public life. With this greater diversity of voices in the public forum came the recognition that others, in addition to Confederate white males, have been influential in Richmond's history and development and as such should be honored for their contributions. Including Arthur Ashe in Monument Avenue's pantheon of heroes and

representing a diversity of Richmonders in the floodwall murals depicting the city's history -- not to mention the community debates that led to these developments -- created a symbolic identification of formerly divided segments of Richmond's populace. Perhaps such symbolic identification may result eventually in increased opportunities for identification in the daily lives of Richmonders, both now and in the future.

Meanwhile in the philosophical cradle of the Confederacy, the state of South Carolina, the old order of division was evidenced in the state's role as a hotbed of secession in the days leading up to the Civil War, and in more recent years as a state that was not only home to a segregationist presidential candidate (Strom Thurmond in 1948) but also continued to fly the Confederate battle flag atop its Capitol. Whether one believes flag advocates' story that the flag was placed there to commemorate the centennial of the Civil War, or flag opponents' narrative that the flag was hoisted to protest federally mandated integration, either way the flag was raised to honor and/or defend the old order of division, which accounted for both secession and segregation. Though the Civil War, Reconstruction, and federally enforced integration all seemed to mean the end for legally mandated division, de facto division lingered, as evidenced by the divergent narratives explaining the reasons behind secession and the Civil War, the placing of the flag atop the statehouse, and flag advocates' efforts to keep the flag flying high over the Capitol dome as well as in its legislative chambers.

However, the very fact that multiple explanatory narratives now exist is evidence that people of various backgrounds have gained a more influential voice in South Carolina's public life. The debate itself forced those defending the old order to recognize

that some South Carolinians were offended by the Confederate battle flag and its place of prominence at the state's Capitol. By 2000, the presence of a diversity of voices in American and South Carolinian public life opened up the possibility of a public debate about the flag, whereas in earlier years many of those offended by the flag did not believe they had a voice that would be heard, let alone influential, in South Carolina state politics. This debate resulted in moving the Confederate battle flag from a place of sovereignty atop the state Capitol and within its legislative chambers to a Confederate memorial on the Capitol grounds. Relocating the flag in this way is evidence of the increased influence of those formerly silenced by the very order of slavery and segregation that the flag symbolized for many involved in this debate. But division remains amongst those who debated the propriety of flying the Confederate flag atop the South Carolina statehouse. Once the flag was removed to the Confederate memorial, some flag opponents wanted it removed from the Capitol grounds altogether. Perhaps increased identification could begin to be achieved by placing a memorial to South Carolina slaves alongside that to South Carolina Confederate soldiers on the statehouse grounds, or by promoting South Carolina tourism (the NAACP's boycott of which served as the opening salvo of this debate) with an emphasis on the state's historical significance both to the descendants of slaves and the descendants of Confederates.

More recently, comments made by Mississippi Senator Trent Lott about South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond served as evidence of the lingering influence of the old order of division. Lott's comments were interpreted by many as sympathetic to Thurmond's segregationist 1948 presidential bid. This opened up a debate as to the

propriety of allowing someone even seemingly sympathetic to the old order, not only through his remarks but also through his association with such groups as the Council of Conservative Citizens, to serve as Senate Majority Leader at a time when politicians in general, and Republicans in particular, want to be seen as embracing the new order of identification. It is no longer politically correct to espouse publicly the order of division because people of diverse backgrounds and perspectives now have a more influential voice in public life. Even Thurmond seemed to adopt, albeit gradually, a more identificatory stance in the latter decades of his life.

And so it was that Lott realized that in order to survive politically, to retain at least his Senate seat if not his position as Majority Leader -- especially representing a heavily African American state such as Mississippi -- he had to show that he had a change of heart, not just recently but over the course of his life. As Lott developed his apologia over the course of this month-long debate, he emphasized how he had embraced identification more and more over the course of his life by offering examples of what he, as a Southern leader, had done and hoped to do to promote the new order of identification rather than the old order of division. Whether Lott's embrace of identification over division was pure political expedience, a true epiphany, or some combination of the two remains to be seen. But the result of this debate, Lott's stepping down from his post as Majority Leader-Elect, can be interpreted as evidence for the increased influence of those advocating identification and the decreased influence of those implicated in promoting division.

### A Compromise: The South Should Embrace Both Identification and Division

The potential solution to this conflict between division and identification is not forcing acceptance of only division or only identification, but rather coming to a compromise that combines the best aspects of both of these orders. Yes, Southerners should attempt to identify points of common ground they share as Southerners. But at the same time, Southerners should attempt to appreciate and respect the diversity of people, backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives that exist amongst them. In fact, on one level, I would argue that it is this very diversity within the people of the South balanced with an identification amongst the people of the South that is (or could be) what makes the South distinctive in the nation.

Further, rather than trying to prove either that the South is really the same as the rest of the nation and distinctiveness just a wishful figment of its collective imagination, or trying to prove that the South is so markedly different than the rest of the nation that its interests are not joined with it or that it has nothing to learn from or teach the rest of America, Southerners and Americans need to recognize that the South has been influential in American history and that it has lessons both to offer and learn from the rest of the nation. As Richard Weaver observed, "Intercommunication and cross fertilization are necessary. I covet a chance to talk someday to a Southern audience on what they need to learn from the North. But these express two-way relationships."<sup>12</sup> The South is a distinctive part of the United States -- distinct, yet still a crucial piece of the whole. Perhaps Calhoun's idea of the concurrent majority may still be of use to us today if we consider that the basic principle he was hoping would be achieved through

this idea is parallel with the solution I am offering here. While the identification that results in collectives or majorities should be valued, it should not be valued at the cost of disrespecting the rights and value of minority or distinctive communities within the whole. Just as people within the South should learn to respect the value of the diversity of its people, so too should Southerners be respected an element of the diverse people of the United States.

Southerners, whether descended from slaves or Confederates, share a more spiritual, nonmaterialist approach to life than do other Americans (as theorized by the Fugitive Agrarians, Richard Weaver, and C. Vann Woodward), which is the direct product of their historical experience of tragedy, loss, and hardship. With tragedy, loss, and hardship as their collective defining experience, Southerners have come to value perhaps to a greater degree than Americans of other regions<sup>13</sup> those basic aspects of life that not only endured with them through these hard times, but may have in fact helped Southerners bear these burdens—be they the burdens of slavery and segregation, or the burdens of the Lost Cause and Reconstruction. Such elements of daily life as faith, family, and food provided Southerners with the spiritual, social, emotional, and physical sustenance to carry on through their distinctive historical experiences of tragedy and loss. And so it is that today, when someone such as myself thinks of what it is that makes her family Southern or the places in which her family has lived Southern, I think of growing up with the “power in the blood” hymns of the Southern Baptist church, visiting my grandparents’ homes in rural, small towns of Georgia and Kentucky, and savoring such simple dishes as cornbread, fried okra, and cheese grits. As evidenced in

the pages of recent years' issues of *Southern Living*, faith, family, and food also are valued by many others who identify themselves as Southerners. Southerners' distinctive appreciation for such simple aspects of life as faith, family, and food -- the appreciation of which is the direct result of Southerners' historical experience of tragedy and loss through the order of the division -- can now serve as a source for furthering identification's influence in the twenty-first century South.

#### History's Power to Divide and Identify Southerners

Southerners are identified with one another through their shared customs and spirituality, which are the direct result of their shared history of division. Black Southerners experienced, via their ancestors, tragedy and loss through slavery, and more recently experienced them firsthand through segregation and discrimination. White Southerners, via their ancestors and the continuing influence of the Lost Cause, experienced tragedy and loss through their defense of slavery and states' rights in the Civil War and their defense of segregation in the decades that followed. Whether as those victimized by slavery or as those who lost a war in defense of it, Southerners have experienced tragedy and loss in ways the rest of the nation has not (at least until the nation's recent experience of terrorism on September 11, 2001). The South's acquaintance with tragedy and loss have served to help make it distinct from the rest of a nation that has been shaped largely by belief in its own victories and successes. That Southerners of different backgrounds, slave and free, black and white, have shared in their history the experience of tragedy and loss, albeit from differing vantage points, can

serve to unite them through their common reverence for that history. Southerners of various backgrounds and experiences seem to revere their ancestors and their history to perhaps a greater degree, on the average, than do people in other regions. Southerners, though historically divided from one another along racial, socioeconomic, and other lines, can find a way to identify with one another through their shared valuing of history. But if they are to do this, they must first recognize that there is more than one narrative of Southern history, more than one point of view to be considered as we look back on the region's past (and forward to its future).

The history of the South is equally one of slaves and masters, tenant farmers and landlords, women and men. In the recent debates over Southern identity examined here, much of the conflict stemmed from rhetors on the various sides in these debates insisting that their perspective on Southern history and order be adopted to the exclusion of other possible perspectives. Representatives of each side argued with the goal that everyone should identify with their respective viewpoints, rather than trying to find shared points for identification while recognizing the value in the aspects of their perspectives that kept them divided or distinctive. "Distinctiveness" may be the key to identifying Southerners with one another while recognizing the value to be found in the diversity that has, up until now, kept them divided both from one another and the rest of the nation. As Kenneth Burke observed, it is possible to be consubstantial with one another in some respects while maintaining distinctiveness in other respects.<sup>14</sup> This observation may be the key to "fetching good out of the evil"<sup>15</sup> of the South's long history of being ordered according to the principle of division. The division that has been for so long the



defining characteristic of the South's history may be the key to achieving identification in the South's present and future. Weaver concluded his own dissertation on Southern rhetoric by observing that, "The Old South may indeed be a hall hung with splendid tapestries in which no one could care to live; but from them we can learn something of how to live."<sup>16</sup> Contemporary Southerners should not try to recapture the division of the Old South by clinging stubbornly to its more divisive symbols and traditions or by using it as a model for reordering the New South. Instead, today's Southerners should look to their divided history as the source of their identification with one another, the source of their distinctiveness from the rest of the United States, and the source of valuable lessons not only for the New South but for the rest of the nation.

#### Postscript: Implications for Further Research

Many of the scholarly books and articles that have been produced in the area of Southern rhetoric have been traditional studies of well-known, "influential" rhetors. These single-rhetor, historically grounded studies have provided an important foundation for the study of Southern rhetoric and should be continued to include a more diverse group of Southern rhetors, including more women, Native Americans, and African Americans who have helped shape the course of the region and the nation through their words. In addition, archival research of these as well as the more traditionally studied Southern rhetors, not to mention key moments in Southern history, offers virtually limitless avenues for rhetorical critics.

Surveying the existing literature, I discovered that there have been too few

rhetorically based studies of the controversies that have shaped the region, both in terms of Southerners' relationships with one another and with the rest of the nation. As the conversations that took place as part of an April 2003 Southern States Communication Association panel on the future of studying Southern rhetoric<sup>17</sup> revealed, established scholars such as W. Stuart Towns and Carl Kell are concerned that not enough has been published in this area in the past decade. Perhaps the new approaches to studying Southern rhetoric employed by myself and my fellow young counterparts -- such as my studies of debates that shape Southern identity, Christina Moss' planned dissertation in the theory of Southern rhetoric, or Thomas St. Antoine's interest (as well as mine) in studying media portrayals of the South from a rhetorical perspective -- in concert with a continuation of more traditional approaches, will result in increased scholarly activity in this important, though recently neglected area of specialization.

Notes

1. Joseph Biden, "U.S. Senator Joseph Biden (D-DE) Delivers Remarks at Memorial Service for Senator Strom Thurmond," Federal Document Clearing House (FDCH) Political Transcripts, 1 July 2003, eMediaMillWorks/Federal Document Clearing House, *Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe*.
2. Diane McWhorter, "Strom's Skeleton: The Late Segregationist's Black Daughter," *Slate*, 1 July 2003, <<http://slate.msn.com/id/2085087>>. See also Jack Bass and Marilyn W. Thompson, *Ol' Strom: An Unauthorized Biography of Strom Thurmond* (Atlanta: Longstreet, 1998).
3. McWhorter, "Strom's Skeleton."
4. McWhorter, "Strom's Skeleton."
5. Biden, "Remarks at Memorial Service for Senator Strom Thurmond."
6. McWhorter, "Strom's Skeleton."
7. Biden, "Remarks at Memorial Service for Senator Strom Thurmond."
8. McWhorter, "Strom's Skeleton."
9. Biden, "Remarks at Memorial Service for Senator Strom Thurmond."
10. Henry A. Wise, *Drawing Out the Man: The VMI Story* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia for the VMI Alumni Association, 1978), 14-15.
11. Wise, *Drawing Out the Man*, 287.
12. Richard M. Weaver, *The Southern Essays of Richard M. Weaver*, ed. George M. Curtis, III and James J. Thompson, Jr. (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1987), 229.
13. Southerners are often understood in contrast to their dialectical opposites,

Northerners, who, according to Southern partisans, are more characterized by their capitalism, materialism, industrialism, and secularism.

14. Kenneth Burke, *On Symbols and Society*, ed. Joseph R. Gusfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 180.

15. For more on the concept of "fetching good out of evil," see Ernest G. Bormann, *The Force of Fantasy: Restoring the American Dream* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001).

16. Richard M. Weaver, *The Southern Tradition at Bay: A History of Postbellum Thought*, ed. George Core and M. E. Bradford (New Rochelle: Arlington, 1968), 396.

17. "Brave New World or Conquered Civilization? A Roundtable on the Future of Southern Rhetoric," Rhetoric and Public Address Division panel, Southern States Communication Association, April 2003, Birmingham, AL. This panel featured Carl Kell, Western Kentucky University; Christina Moss, Young Harris University; Thomas St. Antoine, Palm Beach Atlantic University; Stuart Towns, Appalachian State University; and myself.

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