Internal orientalism in America: W.J. Cash’s *The Mind of the South* and the spatial construction of American national identity

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Abstract

This article is an attempt to establish a framework for investigating the spatial construction of national identity, using the case of the US. The concept of internal orientalism is used to analyze representations of the South as an internal spatial “other” in the US and to suggest a link between these representations and the construction of a privileged national identity. While scholars have explored the role of internal othering in the production of national identities, these studies have either ignored space or treated it as a subordinate component. I argue for the utility of considering the primacy of space (in the sense of the imagined space of a region within the state) in the construction of national identity. Through an analysis of the influential book *The Mind of the South* I attempt to discern the relationship between the identity of the South and that of America. Portrayals of the South such as Cash’s denote the South as the repository of a set of negative characteristics (such as poverty, racism, violence, and backwardness), and I argue that as a result, these undesirable traits are excised from the national identity. According to this argument, the geographic ideas “America” and “the South” are opposite poles of a binary, and the identity of one cannot be understood except as linked to the identity of the other; therefore, representations of a degenerate South inform an exalted national identity.

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Introduction

Since the earliest days of the United States, observers have noted regional distinctions between North and South (Alden, 1961). Thomas Jefferson once described the regions in this way in a personal letter (Boyd, 1953, p. 468):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In the North they are</th>
<th>In the South they are</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cool</td>
<td>fiery</td>
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<tr>
<td>sober</td>
<td>Voluptuary</td>
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<tr>
<td>laborious</td>
<td>indolent</td>
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<tr>
<td>persevering</td>
<td>unsteady</td>
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<tr>
<td>independant (sic)</td>
<td>independant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jealous of their own liberties, and just to those of others</td>
<td>zealous for their own liberties, but trampling on those of others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interested</td>
<td>generous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chicaning</td>
<td>candid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>superstitious and hypocritical in their religion</td>
<td>without attachment or pretentions (sic) to any religion but that of the heart.</td>
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</table>

The binaries presented in Jefferson’s letter are of a largely benign character. However, beginning with the abolitionist movement in the 19th century (and perhaps as early as the late 18th century (Greeson, 1999)), Northerners began to characterize the South in a more negative way, as a land of racism, violent intolerance, and willful ignorance (Doyle, 1995). This way of representing the South remains influential today. Consider the following poem by American writer Richard Brautigan (1999, p. 5):

“mommie
how does God
keep his house warm?”

“He burns
the souls
of bad niggers.”

Brautigan titled this poem “the south,” thus encoding racism as a geographic characteristic in addition to a human trait. In the process, Brautigan continues a long-standing tradition of analyzing American qualities in spatial terms.

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1 The term “America” of course can be claimed by peoples throughout North, Central, and South America; however, in this paper I will use the term as a shorthand to refer to the United States of America.
The construct of internal orientalism (Schein, 1997) will be employed in this paper to explain the contribution of the othering of a region internal to the state toward the construction of a privileged national identity; this is therefore an investigation into the spatial construction of national identity. After enumerating the characteristics of American national identity, I will analyze the book The Mind of the South, stressing the intertextuality of the discourse of internal orientalism along the way. Given the resulting picture of a degenerate South and virtuous America as mirror images, I suggest that an important part of the process of producing American national identity involves othering the South. American national identity derives its exalted status, in part, through representations of the South as a troubled “mythic land apart” (Smith & Appleton, 1997). The use of the term internal orientalism to describe this phenomenon requires a brief consideration of the appropriateness of the framework of Orientalism (Said, 1979).

Orientalism and internal orientalism

Said argues that “the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience” (Said, 1979, pp. 1–2). In order to play this role, the Orient must be constructed as different, set apart from the Occident. It is the distinction between these two territories that facilitates the othering of the Orient, and this difference inspires “elaborate theories, epics, novels, social descriptions, and political accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, ‘mind,’ destiny, and so on” (Said, 1979, pp. 2–3, emphasis added).

This discourse creates the inherently linked geographic ideas of the Occident and the Orient. Moreover, this juxtaposition of Occident and Orient represents a “cultural form” that predominates over others (Said, 1979, p. 7); in other words, Orientalism as a mode of cultural discourse becomes hegemonic in Western countries. A hegemonic ideology (in the Gramscian (1971) sense) appears natural and displaces competing interpretations of experience. The role of civil society in perpetuating the dominant ideology is emphasized here through its creation of hegemonic “structures of expectations” (Paasi, 1996, 35), which provide the cognitive schemes through which individuals locate themselves in their spatio-temporal contexts and classify peoples and regions. This has political as well as geographical consequences, for as Foucault (1970) warns, the very act of classification is caught up within webs of power and domination.

While Said’s theory has inspired a generation of researchers (though Gregory [1995, p. 447] has argued that geographers were ignoring him), many writers have noted shortcomings in his work. Said has been criticized for, among other things, totalizing the colonial relationship, which causes him to miss the heterogeneity of

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2 It should be noted that representations of the South have certainly not been uniformly negative. The South has been celebrated for its virtues as well as vilified for its vices. Nina Silber’s The Romance of Reunion (1993) provides a useful study of the former tendency. While I would suggest that overall, the negative representations have outweighed the positive, even positive representations reinforce the idea that the South is different and to that extent strengthen the role of the South as an internal other.
colonial power (Spivak, 1987) and the “historical multiplicity of axes of domination” (Schein, 1997 p. 72), and for ignoring the role of resistance and the ability of the “other” to represent itself (Gregory, 1995). In addition, Carrier (1992) reads Said as implying the inability of the Orient to produce essentializing representations of the Occident. It is important to understand that in constructing essentialist representations of the other, the self is simultaneously essentialized (Gregory, 1995). These identities exist as parts of binaries; one identity cannot be formed by essentializing an other without producing an essentialized self.

Orientalism is directly implicated in the creation of national identities. A national identity must be continually reproduced in order to retain its salience and vigor in the minds and hearts of citizens. Hence, nations are “not only constructions, but also continually in the making” (Hage, 1996, p. 465, emphasis in original). This is consistent with Billig’s notion of “banal nationalism,” or “the ideological habits which enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced” (Billig, 1995, p. 6). Also, the practices of nationalism, banal or otherwise, are manifest spatially, as recent work shows (e.g. Elmhirst, 1999). The framework of internal orientalism furthers this line of inquiry by allowing us to consider the spatial processes that create regional and national identities.

The other of Orientalism is external to the state that originates the othering. Negative portrayals of a region outside the state’s borders allow the people of that state to incorporate the opposite, positive values into their national identity. Recently scholars have moved from applying an international scale of analysis to examining the operation of Orientalist discourses within states. This research allows us to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the range of processes through which national identities are produced. These approaches have used variants of Orientalism described as “domestic Orientalism” (Piterberg, 1996), “Oriental Orientalism” (Gladney, 1994), “nesting Orientalisms” (Bakić-Hayden, 1995) and “internal orientalism” (Schein, 1997). The geography of these studies is ambiguous, however; while the othering they examine occurs at the intra-state scale, this othering is based on constructions of ethnicity, using territory (when it appears at all) simply as a way to identify the locations of certain ethnic minorities. For Paasi (1996, p. 13), a “spatial dimension is usually inherent in the definitions of the Other”; thus it is essential to consider the geography of othering.

From a geographic perspective, internal orientalism represents a discourse that operates within the boundaries of a state, a discourse that involves the othering of a (relatively) weak region by a more powerful region (or regions) within the state.

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3 In this paper I will use the term “state” to refer to a sovereign political unit that has a defined territory and population. In this framing of internal orientalism, I will work with the assumption that there is a national identity that all citizens of the state (potentially) share, even if they would also count themselves as members of other nations. By “nation” I have in mind Smith’s (1991, p. 14) definition: “a named human population sharing a historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members.” In addition, I should emphasize that the discourse of internal orientalism is generated primarily by the civil society within the state (e.g. academics, journalists, filmmakers, teachers, etc.).
The internal orientalist discourse represents a subordinate section of the state in a particular (unflattering) way so as to produce a national (i.e., state-scale) identity with desirable characteristics. The creation of the exalted national identity thus involves the production of negative stereotypes about people from the subordinate region. With a more explicit spatial reading of this dynamic, we can see that internal orientalism involves the creation of essentialized geographic identities on both sides of the binary.

To the extent that the phenomenon of internal orientalism is consistent with Said’s Orientalism, we would expect the discourse of internal orientalism to take a certain shape. This discourse would be grounded in a relationship of material exploitation and domination of the strong regions over the weak region, or Hechter’s (1975) internal colonialism. Internal orientalism would also consist of a deeply embedded tradition and practice of representing the subordinate region as afflicted with various and sundry vices and defects. This representational style would have an internal consistency, a common imagery and vocabulary which writers, artists, scholars, business leaders, and government officials all draw upon in producing their representations of the inferior region. The latter would also be viewed as an object for study, as rational, scientific methods and techniques are applied to study the region’s problems with the hopes of bringing it into line with the national standard. The people of the subordinate region might even be characterized as a different “race,” with distinct physical characteristics. This region would certainly be construed as different, so as to set it apart from the rest of the state and allow it to serve as an other against which a positive national identity may be derived.

However, the spatial relationships involved in internal orientalism, being internal to a state, are necessarily different than those of Orientalism. First, the othered region is part of the national state, and this federal association implies access to the national institutions by the people of the othered region. This suggests that the othered region would have more of a voice in the national discourse than the Orient had in the discourse of the Occident. Second, the residents of the othered region may experience a dual attachment, or nested identities (Kaplan & Herb, 1999), feeling a sense of belonging to both the othered region and the national state. Thus the relationship between the peoples of the opposing regions in Orientalism and internal orientalism may be more complex. There is also the potential for state fragmentation in the case of internal orientalism, as residents of the othered region come to resent the identity that has been imposed upon them, causing them to mobilize around autonomist or

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4 A clarification of the issues of scale involved here may be in order. Orientalism develops a positive geographic identity at two scales: the superstate (Western Europe, or “the West”) and the state (e.g. Great Britain and France). The territorial idea of the Orient serves as an other against which the privileged identities of the states of Western Europe, and the collection of these states, are derived. A similar scalar dynamic can be seen in the context of internal orientalism in the US. The South serves as the analog of the Orient, an other against which an exalted identity can be produced for both the individual states (e.g. New York, Wisconsin, California) as well as the federal state. One might complicate matters further by adding a substate regional scale, such as New England, to the mix. I will concentrate on the contribution of internal orientalism to the construction of a privileged national identity. In this sense, the US as a national state is analogous to Said’s Occident.
secessionist movements. Overall, however, internal orientalism has considerable similarities to Orientalism, and this paper posits the South as America’s primary spatial (i.e. regional) internal other.

The South as an internal other

The US is composed of many regions, which have been defined in various ways (see Garreau, 1981), and for one of these regions to serve as an internal other it must be distinguished from national standards. The South certainly meets this requirement, as Southern distinctiveness is a common theme for historians of the region (Woodward, 1993); Webster and Leib (2001, p. 273) have argued in this journal that the South remains the most distinctive American region. For many scholars, however, the South is not just different, but also contrary to national norms (Woodward, 1993; Grantham, 1994). Since at least the nineteenth century, “the South has been the region most sharply at odds with the rest of the nation. No other part of the United States has projected such a clear-cut sectional image” (Grantham, 1994, p. xv). The South has such a distinct regional identity because it has been set apart from the rest of the US; it has served as an “American counterpoint” (Woodward, 1971a). The notion that the South is an internal other is a theme that “has run through a good deal of writing on the region” (Carlton, 1995 p. 34)5.

The relationship between the South and the rest of the country meets the other expectations of the phenomenon of internal orientalism as outlined above. Many writers have commented on the colonialist or imperialist relationship the North has had with the South (Grantham, 1994; Woodward, 1971b; Webb, 1937). This relates broadly to the “sense of grievance at the heart of Southern identity” (Reed, 1983, p. 70). The sense of grievance can also be connected to the tendency to view the South as an object of study and a special problem to be solved. Howard Odum once referred to the South as “a laboratory for regional research and for experimentation in social planning” (Odum, 1936, p. 3). The South, “more than any other region of the United States, has often been defined—typically by those outside the region—as being at odds with the mainstream of American values or behavior and therefore has been constructed as a special problem ... something that must somehow be addressed and solved” (Griffin and Doyle, 1995, p. 1). Finally, some writers even posit the existence of a distinct Southern “race” (Brogan, 1944) or ethnic group (Reed, 1993), noting the differences in ethnic lineage between white Southerners and white Northerners.

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5 One could also argue that Appalachia has served as an internal other for the U.S. Shapiro (1978) shows that at the end of the 19th century Appalachia was “discovered” as a backward, isolated, and poverty-stricken region in need of assistance from modern, industrial America. However, this particular othering is focused primarily on economic characteristics, and thus provides somewhat limited grist to the mill of national identity. In addition, Silber (1993) notes that some observers considered the people of Appalachia to be the most patriotic with the deepest commitment to the American nation of all Southern whites.
American national identity

If we hypothesize that a particular style of representing the South is employed in the construction of a national identity, it is important to enumerate the characteristics of the mythic American national identity (Table 1) so that we can later assess the link between these traits and those characteristics held to be inherently Southern.

The mythical American national identity is characterized by, among other attributes, mobility, progress, change, rationality, science, and individualism. These are the hallmarks of the modern, and the theme of modernity is one that permeates the relationship between America and the South. Peter Taylor’s framework of “prime modernities” (1999) is useful for unpacking American modernity and its relationship to the South. Taylor associates each prime modernity with a state in a period of global hegemony. The American version of modernity is a corporate-based consumer modernity that is all optimism and no angst, a creation that stands as a model of

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Americans are:</th>
<th>American society is characterized by:</th>
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<tr>
<td>optimistic&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>wealth, prosperity, and economic abundance&lt;sup&gt;eg&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>powerful and strong&lt;sup&gt;ac&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>upward mobility&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ingenious&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>geographic (horizontal) mobility&lt;sup&gt;bce&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>self-reliant&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>equality of opportunity&lt;sup&gt;ace&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>moral and good&lt;sup&gt;is&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>justice&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>resourceful&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>expansiveness&lt;sup&gt;ae&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>democratic&lt;sup&gt;ed&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>classlessness&lt;sup&gt;ce&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>peaceful&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>individual liberty and freedom&lt;sup&gt;adh&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>rational&lt;sup&gt;h&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>success and victory&lt;sup&gt;k&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>innocent&lt;sup&gt;k&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>newness and youth&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>uniquely influential&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>progress and change&lt;sup&gt;bej&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>devotion to science&lt;sup&gt;aej&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>vital&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>ability to overcome obstacles&lt;sup&gt;aej&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>alive&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>capacity to transform the environment&lt;sup&gt;aei&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>growing&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>exceptionalism&lt;sup&gt;ei&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>rising&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>a sense of the country’s special mission and destiny&lt;sup&gt;abcedei&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>individualism&lt;sup&gt;abe&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<sup>a</sup> Renwick, 2000
<sup>b</sup> Zelinsky, 1992
<sup>c</sup> Potter, 1954
<sup>d</sup> Fousek, 2000
<sup>e</sup> Robertson, 1980
<sup>f</sup> Brogan, 1944
<sup>g</sup> Wallerstein, 1992
<sup>h</sup> Kohn, 1957
<sup>i</sup> Madsen, 1998
<sup>j</sup> Tuan, 1996
<sup>k</sup> Woodward, 1993
<sup>l</sup> Dijkink, 1996.
progress for the world to follow. Thus the American version eschews the alienating and disrupting aspects of modernity and stresses its liberating and fulfilling potential. This modern world “promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world” (Berman, 1988, p. 15); it nurtures “confidence in the unlimited powers of reason” (Sack, 1997, p. 3); it hails the new and welcomes, indeed insists upon, change (Harvey, 1990; Sack, 1992). Thus modernity looks forward, disdaining the backward glance. In light of the highly moral vision of Habermas’s (1984) modernism of “the ought,” one might understand the inclination of modern Americans to encourage (or perhaps compel) the rest of the world to emulate their achievement.

The framework of internal orientalism suggests that American modernity is generated in part through a spatial process. The spatiality of progress and modernity in the United States is expressed through representations of the South as the antithesis of American modernity: the South not only turns its back on, but also marches proudly away from, America’s prosperous modern destiny. I argue that it is partly through such representations of the South that America comes to know itself as the embodiment of modernity and progress. The American traits enumerated in Table 1 apply to “America,” and only signify the South to the extent that the region approaches the American ideal (in which case they would refer to the “New South”).

**Methodology**

This paper employs the notion of discourse, which refers to a representational tradition that is founded in the production of knowledge about a subject, a production that is guided by the hegemonic structures of expectations and carries with it the weight of authority and prestige (Said, 1979; Foucault, 1970). The discourse of internal orientalism informs the construction of territorial identities, creating geographic ideas that fill with meaning the abstract spaces on the map. The human activities that constitute this discourse are broadly considered “texts” (Aitken, 1997), and Said (1979, p. 94) relates these texts to power relations through the import they are given in civil society. Internal orientalist texts are suffused with “summational statements” (Said, 1979, p. 255), declarations that encapsulate the whole through an analysis of one of the parts. It is these generalizations that constitute the focus of this paper, as they allow us to discern a relationship between the development of the geographic ideas “the South” and “America.” Thus I will provide a content analysis of a central work of internal orientalism in the US, in addition to situating the book within the internal orientalist discourse that preceded it and has continued long after its publication.

**W.J. Cash and The Mind of the South**

Wilbur Cash’s *The Mind of the South* is an essential work for a study of internal orientalism in the US. Originally published in 1941, Cash’s book, while not an overnight financial success, eventually reached a wide audience and has never gone out
of print. Many authors have emphasized Cash’s impact on the intellectual class as well as the general public (Escott, 1992; Clayton, 1991; Kirby, 1992). As of 1990, Cash was second only to C. Vann Woodward as the most frequently cited writer in college courses on Southern history (Eagles, 1992, p. x). The Mind of the South has clearly had a major impact on American civil society, and haspowerfully shaped the hegemonic views of the South for the better part of the 20th century.

Wilbur Joseph Cash

Wilbur Joseph Cash was born in Gaffney, South Carolina, in 1900, in his family’s modest home. After completing high school in Boiling Springs, South Carolina, he ended up at Wake Forest College in North Carolina, where he would cultivate his interest in his eventual profession, journalism (Clayton, 1991, p. 32). As an associate editor for the Old Gold and Black, the campus newspaper, Cash inveighed against intolerance, cultural backwardness, and religious narrow-mindedness. He was crucially influenced by H.L. Mencken, whose acerbic critiques of the South Cash found to be accurate and well deserved (Clayton, 1991, p. 36).

In July of 1929 Mencken’s American Mercury published its first essay by Cash. Overjoyed at the approval of one of his long time heroes, “Cash sharpened his pencil and whipped off a stunning tour de force he audaciously called ‘The Mind of the South’” (Clayton, 1991, p. 79). This article foreshadowed the major themes Cash would later advance in the book of the same name, and Mencken liked it so much that he recommended Cash to Alfred A. Knopf as a potential book author. But it would be a tortuous 12 years before Knopf would have his promised book and Cash would achieve his next professional plateau.

By all accounts, Cash loved his native South. Despite his delight in skewering what he considered to be the region’s foibles, injustices, shortcomings, and demagogues, he cared deeply about the land and its people. But he wanted more for his homeland (O’Brien, 1979). He hoped his book would jolt the consciousness of white Southerners, shock them out of their complacency and nudge them into the modern American age.

American identity and The Mind of the South

“There exists among us...a profound conviction that the South is another land, sharply differentiated from the rest of the American nation, and exhibiting within itself a remarkable homogeneity” (Cash, 1954, p. 11). Thus begins The Mind of the South, in a preface Cash entitles “Preview to Understanding.” The heading to this section suggests that Cash will use the coming pages to set up his central themes; it is therefore important to carefully consider the argument he presents here. The first sentence itself is a crucial pivot for Cash’s thesis. He asserts that the “profound conviction that the South is another land” “exists among us,” implying that all reasonable observers hold this conviction, effectively ruling out alternative views. His contention that the South is “sharply differentiated from the rest of the American nation” is central; in cleaving “the South” from “America,” Cash facilitates the essen-
tial self-other distinction that allows the observer to enumerate (and reify) the “systematic differences” (Said, 1979, p. 300) between the regions, a formulation that had long been the foundation for the discourse of internal orientalism.

Cash’s usage of the terms “land,” “country,” and “nation” is somewhat ambiguous. For example, “the peculiar history of the South has so greatly modified it from the general American norm that … the country is—not quite a nation within a nation, but the next thing to it” (Cash, 1954, p. 12). Cash hedges on the use of the term “nation” to describe white Southerners, and he never defines precisely what he means by the term, but the way that he describes white Southerners throughout the text is entirely consistent with Smith’s (1991) ethnic conception of nationhood. In contrast to the Western idea of the nation, which is founded in part upon abstract principles such as the legal equality of its members, the ethnic model of the nation stresses the importance of ancestry and vernacular languages, customs, and traditions. As we shall see, Cash stresses the ancestry of white Southerners as a way to distinguish white Southerners as a people from the rest of the American people, in addition to highlighting some of the other elements in Smith’s definition. In this sense, Cash may be interpreted as claiming that white Southerners are indeed a distinct nation within the boundaries of the US.

The “remarkable homogeneity” that one can find in the South is a convenient construction for Cash, as it allows him to paint the South with a broad rhetorical brush, obscuring the real diversity within the region. This homogeneity thesis tags the entire section with the undesirable qualities Cash will enumerate throughout his work, rather than simply reserve them for some Southerners in some parts of the South (as we shall see later, Cash’s South is a white male South—African–Americans and white women in the region are considered outside the idea of the South). Without this assumption, he could not build his case on the archetype of the “man at the center,” his Scotch–Irish yeoman farmer, a personage who is held to represent the “true” Southern personality type.

So in the very first sentence, we find Cash laying out the crux of his thesis: the South is distinct from the non-South and is a homogeneous region with one “mind.” It is important that he sets this argument up as representing the conventional wisdom, since in doing so he can be seen as building upon widely held notions about the South. That the South “is different and that it is solid—on these things nearly everybody is agreed,” and “the popular conviction is indubitably accurate” (Cash, 1954, p. 11). To the extent these representations reflect American common sense, they are able to serve as an ideological foundation for American national identity.

Before he closes his “Preview” and embarks upon the task of revealing the Southern “mind,” Cash introduces the last important foundation to his analysis. That is the notion of modernity. “To Cash, the modern mind was less a systematic philosophy than a cosmopolitan perspective. It was critical of tradition, of dogma, of sentimentality, of prejudice, of the totems and taboos of the tribal mind…The modern

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6 Though Cash does describe some diversity in the South, he still finds one South underlying these many Souths, and avers that one can trace “a fairly definite mental pattern” there (p. 12).
mind exalted tolerance and “free inquiry”...[Cash] was every inch a striving modern mind himself” (Clayton, 1992, p. 20). Taylor (1999) notes that in the 19th and early 20th centuries modernity was equated with industrialism, and this pairing was contrasted with the traditional/agricultural way of life. In his opening pages, Cash contrasts modernity with the South’s agricultural past, and finds that the South’s “mind” derives from this heritage. The South’s agricultural mentality is outdated and in fact an obstacle toward progress and development, as Cash sees it: “So far from being modernized, in many ways [the South] has actually always marched away, as to this day it continues to do, from the present toward the past” (Cash, 1954, p. 14). So the South not only lags behind the rest of America, but also defiantly marches away from American modernity. In this way, the South rejects the face of the modern Janus (Nairn, 1981) that gazes expectantly toward America’s singular destiny.

In order for the South to serve as an effective internal other, it must be subjected to a temporal as well as a spatial homogenization so that the regional idea of “the South” may have a reliable meaning; it allows characteristics found in one part of the South at one point in history to be generalized to the whole region at all points in time. Earlier we saw statements asserting the South’s spatial homogeneity. In homogenizing the South over time, Cash contends that the South is “essentially as unanalytical now as it [has] always been” (1954, p. 367); that “[v]iolence, as we have seen, has always been a part of the pattern of the South” (p. 412); and that the South has an “ancient fixation on [the] Negro” (p. 175). Said (1979, p. 300) locates a similar assertion of the eternal and uniform nature of the Orient, which contrasts to the dynamic and cosmopolitan West.

Cash begins the main body of his book with a survey of the Old South. Cash’s Old South is centered on the prototypical Irishman, who over the years achieved a modest prosperity, garnering enough wealth to become a property owner and slaveholder. This kind of individual (to whom Cash often refers as “my Irishman”), along with the poor whites who were “the weakest elements of the old backcountry population” (Cash, 1954, p. 36), made up the majority of the white Southern demographic. Speaking of these white farmers, Cash asserts “their practice of agriculture was generally confined to a little lackadaisical digging—largely by the women and children—in forlorn corn-patches” (p. 37). The plantation system disrupted the ability of the white male farmer to support himself and his family. Since he did not own enough land and have access to sufficient markets, “it was the most natural thing in the world for him to sink deeper and deeper into idleness and shiftlessness” (p. 38). This particular development of the personality of the poor Southern white man makes sense to Cash considering all the ingredients present in the Southern environment for shaping individuals7:

7 The environmental determinism that held currency during the period of Cash’s intellectual development also surfaces in his connections between the climate and the romantic and hedonistic Southerner. For Cash, “the Southern physical world” was a “sort of cosmic conspiracy against reality in favor of romance” (p. 58). “The dominant mood [in the South] is one of well-nigh drunken reverie,” “a mood...in which directed thinking is all but impossible, a mood in which the mind yields almost perforce to drift and in which the imagination holds unchecked sway” (p. 59). With the climatic elements arrayed against
Take these things, add the poorness of the houses to which his world condemned him, his ignorance of the simplest rules of sanitation, the blistering sun of the country, and apply them to the familiar physical character of that Gaelic (maybe a little Iberian) strain which dominated in so large a part of the original Southern stocks … and there is no more mystery about even the peculiar appearance of the cracker. (pp. 38–39)

Recall that Cash claims that all white Southerners, from the poor whites and yeoman farmers to the ruling classes, derive from the same stock, and one gets the sense that these descriptions of poor whites as dirty, shiftless, ignorant, even physically revolting, implicate all white Southerners and not just the ones whom Cash specifically describes. Cash’s description of an ethnically based white Southern nation, in its idleness and impotence in the face of a changing physical environment, contrasts starkly with an American nation characterized by energy and resourcefulness (Robertson, 1980).

It would appear the Cash may have been influenced by Howard Odum’s work, in which the latter discusses “the crisis of the agrarian struggle for survival against the overwhelming handicaps of poverty, inefficiency, and the aftermath of the plantation system” (Odum, 1936, p. 13). Odum saw the South’s “rural and agrarian culture” as a potential handicap and even social pathology (Odum, 1936, p. 22). Another sociologist, Arthur F. Raper, described the 1930s South as a region of “depleted soil, shoddy livestock, inadequate farm equipment, crude agricultural practices, crippled institutions, [and] a defeated and impoverished people” (quoted in Grantham, 1994, p. xviii). Writer Fanny Kemble Butler described poor whites in Georgia in the 1800s as “the most degraded race of human beings claiming an Anglo-Saxon origin that can be found on the face of the earth—filthy, lazy, ignorant, brutal, proud, penniless savages” (quoted in Mencken, 1965, p. 164). Cash’s view was by no means unique.

One of Cash’s more interesting formulations, and one that on the surface appears potentially problematic for the internal orientalist thesis, is his claim that “the dominant trait of this mind was an intense individualism” (Cash, 1954, p. 44). To the extent that rugged individualism has been an important part of American identity (Zelinsky, 1992), Cash’s individualist white Southerner would seem to fit comfortably into the American archetype. However, Cash’s individualism appears bereft of agency and power. Rather than an embodiment of intellectual drive and expressive action, for Cash individualism signifies a simplicity and lack of sophistication that grows out of the sheltered plantation society (King, 1992, p. 74). Odum shares Cash’s take on the problem of individualism, adding it to “isolation...ingrowing patriotism, cultural inbreeding, civic immaturity, and social inadequacy” to constitute the list of causes responsible for turning the South into “America’s Tragedy” (Odum, 1936, p. 13). In Cash’s analysis, the social order in the South blocked most common white

them, it is no wonder that Southerners were held captive by their romantic and hedonistic qualities. The romantic and hedonistic Southerner is the mirror image of the rational and restrained American of nationalist mythology.
Southerners from rising to a higher class, but some “strong, craving lads” were able to percolate out of the South, carrying away with them “practically the whole effective stock of those qualities which might have generated resentment and rebellion” (Cash, 1954, p. 50). Thus the most effective, driven, and accomplished white Southern men leave the South, carrying those American traits with them, leaving behind the most simple white Southern folk. This process intensifies the mythical qualities of both America and the South as ambition and vitality is drained out of the South and infused into America.

After “intense individualism,” the “second great Southern characteristic” is “the tendency toward unreality, toward romanticism, and…toward hedonism” (p. 57). The following passage neatly sums up Cash’s take on the simple mind of the Southerner:

To say that he is simple is to say in effect that he necessarily lacks the complexity of mind…and…the habit of skepticism essential to any generally realistic attitude…that his world-construction is bound to be mainly a product of fantasy, and that his credulity is limited only by his capacity for conjuring up the unbelievable. And it is to say also that he is the child-man…that he likes naively to play, to expand his ego, his senses, his emotions, that he will accept what pleases him and reject what does not…in a word, that he displays the whole catalogue of qualities we mean by romanticism and hedonism. (pp. 57–58)

So beyond romantic and hedonistic, the Southerner is simple-minded, credulous, held in thrall by a fantastic imagination, incapable of grasping reality, primitive, childlike, a sensualist, emotional, essentially overwhelmed by traits that one fails to find in the mythical American character (e.g. Robertson, 1980; Zelinsky, 1992; Renwick, 2000).

In the next section of the book Cash goes into greater detail regarding the post-Reconstruction experience in the South and its impact on race relations. Cash sees Northern intervention in the South as fertilizing white supremacy more than attenuating it. The combination of white supremacist ideas with the white Southerner’s penchant for violence and sense of loyalty to the South proved incendiary: “To smash a sassy Negro, to kill him, to do the same to a white ‘nigger-lover’—this was to assert the white man’s prerogative as pointedly, to move as certainly toward getting the black man back in his place, as to lynch…[and] was felt as an act of patriotism and chivalry” (Cash, 1954, p. 128). Cash’s “man at the center” is distinguished by his tenacious clinging to white supremacist ideology—in fact, Cash holds that this ideology provided salve for the wounds inflicted upon Southerners by their impoverished social and economic status (p. 55). It is difficult to reconcile the picture of the violently racist white Southerner with the strictly geographical fact that Southerners are Americans, since the prototypical American exhibits an enlightened tolerance and redoubtable morality.

It is important to emphasize here that when Cash speaks of Southerners, he is strictly referring to white Southern men. As Painter (1992, p. 100) argues, Cash places “the Negro” apart from his idea of the South, and thus African–Americans are seen as somehow separate from the South. In expunging blacks from the semiotic
(and geographic) scope of the term “Southerner,” Cash is certainly not unique; as Kirby (1986, p. xx) contends, this elision is standard practice among observers of the South. The consequences of Cash’s adoption of this semantic maneuver demand attention. Jenkins (1999, p. 68) argues that, in spite of Cash’s revulsion at the racist violence he witnessed around him, he “nonetheless extended many of the metaphors of old-style Southern racism he undoubtedly hoped to erode.” In Cash’s South, black men represented a threat to the sexuality of white men, and from this feeling of vulnerability sprang the “rape complex” (Cash, 1954, p. 125), the intense fear and suspicion among white Southern men that “their” women were terribly vulnerable to the sexual predations of “the Negro.” While black men loom large in the minds of white Southern men, black women are nearly invisible, except “as a sexual partner to white men and boys” (Painter, 1992, p. 99). Though he recognized the intertwined histories and destinies of Southern whites and blacks, his inability to recognize African–Americans as Southerners drastically skews his observer’s perspective and automatically renders his analysis suspect.

As his central construct, the “man at the center,” suggests, Cash also gives short shrift to white women in the South. White Southern women are generally presented (when they appear at all) as devoid of individuality or agency, serving mainly as mothers to the white race and indicators of the social status of white men, claimed by the latter as property (Painter, 1992, p. 99). For Cash, Southern culture embraces “gyneolatry,” a worship of the Southern lady, a notion reflected in the following passage:

She was the South’s Palladium, this Southern woman—the shield-bearing Athena gleaming whitely in the clouds, the standard for its rallying, the mystic symbol of its nationality in face of the foe...Merely to mention her was to send strong men into tears—or shouts. (Cash, 1954, p. 97)

Ultimately, Cash presents the white women and African–Americans of the South as caricatures, two-dimensional cutouts that provide the backdrop for the actions, emotions, and thoughts of white Southern men. As Renwick (2000) shows, American identity has historically been constructed in part through a gendered and racialized othering, so Cash is part of a long-standing tradition in this regard, and his analysis reflected the prevailing prejudices of race, gender, and class characteristic of “conventional, middle-class white southerners of his generation” (Painter, 1992, p. 91).

The last section of the book covers the contemporary South (1900–1940), and we find the familiar themes revisited. Cash claims that industrial progress in the South was hampered by the legacy of the plantation system, which attenuated the progressive influences of industrial modernization. Also getting in the way was the savage ideal, which in this case represented “the patriotic will to hold rigidly to the ancient pattern, to repudiate innovation and novelty in thought and behavior, whatever came from outside and was felt as belonging to Yankeedom or alien parts” (Cash, 1954, p. 320). The implication is that the source of progress comes from outside the South, and that resistance to ideas from “Yankeedom” obstructs the South from making progress it so sorely needs. This view recalls Tuan’s (1996) description of the cos-
mopolite: a modern individual whose outlook embraces the world, expressed through an ease in dealing with people and ideas from other places; the savage ideal represents the antithesis of the attitude of the cosmopolite. Though he does not use the term, Frank Tannenbaum describes the savage ideal in an article about the origins of the Klan in the South:

The traditions of slavery, the broad scar of the Civil War, the wounded pride and the bitter indignation of the period of reconstruction, tinge the texture of emotional outlets and social behavior in the South...The original Ku Klux Klan was a reflex of the vindictiveness of Northern politicians and of the unscrupulous carpet-bagger who swooped down upon the South as a vulture upon a wounded and stricken victim. It was a desperate act of self-assertion and self-defense. (Tannenbaum, 1923, pp. 873–874).

Thus the Klan was one way for white Southerners to manifest this savage ideal.

Cash’s penultimate paragraph, describing his “basic picture of the South,” is widely quoted and provides a useful summary to the themes we have been following through the book.

Violence, intolerance, aversion and suspicion toward new ideas, an incapacity for analysis, an inclination to act from feeling rather than from thought, an exaggerated individualism and a too narrow concept of social responsibility, attachment to fictions and false values, above all too great attachment to racial values and a tendency to justify cruelty and injustice in the name of those values, sentimentality and a lack of realism—these have been [the South’s] characteristic vices in the past. And, despite changes for the better, they remain its characteristic vices today. (Cash, 1954, pp. 425–426)

Again, Cash is not alone in his view of the white South. Greeson identifies similar written representations of the South dating back to the 1790s, when “Southern citizens [were] primarily characterized as drunken, lascivious, lazy, gluttonous, and violent” (Greeson, 1999, p. 230). In his classic study *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*, John Dollard shares his initial assessment of white Southerners as “a whole society with a psychotic spot, an irrational, heavily protected sore through which all manner of venemous hatreds and irrational lusts may pour” (Dollard, 1957, p. 33).

Cash’s picture of the white South as a place where people are violent, racist, intolerant, credulous, cruel, unjust, excessively sentimental, xenophobic, and close-minded creates a geographic mirror image with the mythical American national identity (Table 2). This depiction of “the South” would then be quite useful as a foil for the construction of a privileged national identity.

Cash condemns an entire region with his critique, while simultaneously removing from that region white women and African–Americans. But Cash is himself a white Southerner, so would he not be including himself in this criticism? In casting a critical eye on the South, Cash rhetorically excises himself from the region, constructs himself as an outsider able to look rationally upon the Southern scene. Cash
was keenly aware of the spatial limbo he was creating for himself. But he felt he had a job to do. Cash’s role was to confront the racism, sentimentality, and fear that characterized the white South (Clayton, 1991). To push white Southerners beyond these traits would in the process lead them to become more American, at least in terms of American mythology. Cash hence represents a modern vision for the South, one that espouses rationality, liberation from premodern ways of thought, and a forward-looking attitude that promises to move the region toward the warm glow of the light of progress (Singal, 1982, p. 373) refers to the book’s publication as evidence of the “triumph of Southern Modernism”). The South is in need of someone to remove its ancestral straightjacket so that it can break free of its historical predilection to repeat the mistakes of the past. This is a task for which the mythical American is supremely fit; leading other peoples “out of the darkness of prejudice and into the light of a new day beyond history” (Clayton, 1991, p. 2) is part of the job description for Americans. It is this exalted American identity that awaits the South once it breaks free from its historical chains. However, to the extent that this vision of America depends upon and is constructed through an othering of the South, that achievement may always be just out of reach.

Cash was surely not consciously constructing the South as different so it could act as a vehicle for producing a privileged national identity, but his work must be seen within the ideological context of the time. In this sense, The Mind of the South was an unusually effective distillation of the hegemonic ideas about the South. The extent to which Cash’s picture of the South represented the dominance of the internal orientalist discourse is reflected in the reception the book received upon publication and its continuing influence.

Reviews and reaction

The Mind of the South is the work of a single author. In order to make any claims about the place of this work in the broader discourse of internal orientalism, we must
consider the reaction to the book and investigate the responses to Cash’s claims. To the extent that *The Mind of the South* reflects and reinforces the hegemony of the internal orientalist view of the South, we would expect it to receive considerable praise; the accolades heaped upon the book signal the grounding of its themes in the common sense of the nation (Billig, 1995).

In assessing the reaction to *The Mind of the South*, the views of academics are particularly noteworthy given their role as “functionaries” providing the ideological underpinnings of the hegemonic social order and mediating dominant ideas for the general public (Gramsci, 1971). We have already noted C. Vann Woodward’s evaluation of *The Mind of the South’s* lasting influence. Woodward (1941) initially received the book warmly, expressing limited reservations. While today scholars assail Cash for asserting the ability to define the “mind” of a region (Painter, 1992), Woodward validated Cash’s views, acknowledging the “obscure problems of Southern mentality” (1941, p. 401).

Joseph L. Morrison writes that upon publication, “quickly there arose a chorus of praise for this unknown writer” (Morrison, 1967, p. 111). For *Time*, “[a]nything written about the South henceforth must start where [Cash] leaves off,” as the book “casts more light on the ancient riddle [i.e. the South] than any book before it” (Psychoanalysis of a nation, 1941, p. 98). The notion of the South as a riddle accents the inscrutability of the region to the rational, American observer, implying the transparency of the American virtues. *The Atlantic Monthly* enthused:

This is that one American book in ten thousand that makes us, for the sake of the national health, wish it could be universal compulsory reading…[It is] a systematically patient, lucid, reasonable, thorough, fundamental attack on sectional misunderstanding…These 400-odd brilliant pages by a Southern journalist possess the power to make understanding flourish and triumph in one of the areas where bigotry and misunderstanding have been the norm for a century. The book is a literary and moral miracle. (Follett, 1941, p. 7).

This passage deserves close attention. Follett’s wish that *The Mind of the South* be “compulsory reading” suggests in an unusually explicit way the hegemonic nature of the book’s themes. The attributes that Cash is said to have brought to bear on his subject, namely patience, lucidity, and reasonableness mesh with the mythic American identity, and contrast sharply with the set of traits Cash denotes as uniquely Southern. The misunderstanding Follett cites refers to the mistaken assumptions Northerners tend to have about Southerners. For Follett, Cash demonstrates that Southerners essentially cannot help being the way they are, as the environmental, historical, and social forces surrounding them overwhelm their ability to break free from these constraints; the Southern “mind” is therefore inevitable, and based on this insight, outsiders should not hold them in contempt. The “miracle” Cash may have performed by writing his book consists of an increased understanding of the Southerner and enhanced prospects of improving conditions in the South, for a central element of American modernity is the urge to lead the less fortunate of the world into the shining light of progress and enlightenment.
While by the late 1960s the book was starting to suffer criticism and cracks in the verbal shrine to Cash first started to appear, it nonetheless continued to garner wide attention and unceasing accolades. In 1965’s landmark anthology *Writing Southern History*, contributors called the book “magisterial” (Cunningham, 1965, p. 384) and “brilliant” (Grantham, 1965, p. 442). In his *Books that Changed America*, Robert B. Downs claims that Cash’s analysis “has since influenced a multitude of investigators of regional problems, in the South and elsewhere” (Downs, 1970, p. 238).

Cash is important because his manuscript represents the distillation of the prevailing ideas about the South in academia. Said reminds us that “[e]very writer on the Orient…assumes some Oriental precedent, some previous knowledge of the Orient, to which he refers and on which he relies” (Said, 1979, p. 20). Cash has synthesized the previous scholarship into a literary and metaphorical package, one accessible to scholar and lay reader alike, and one that would set a powerful precedent for future writers on the South. Here Said and Gramsci converge, as the “previous knowledge” of Orientalism is the very stuff with which the actors in civil society mold into a hegemonic ideology. Attesting to Cash’s force in establishing the previous knowledge of the South, Reed argues that many people “have taken *The Mind of the South* as gospel, which means that, right or wrong, it is undeniably important as an event in the South’s intellectual and cultural history” (Reed, 1992, p. 140). Within the context of internal orientalism, the book was just as important an event in the intellectual and cultural history of the United States, as its picture of the South provides a useful counterpoint to the hegemonic image of a prosperous, innocent, and virtuous America.

**Conclusion**

I have tried to make the case that negative representations of the American South can be put to use to construct a positive national identity. However, since authors of textual representations of the South will generally not consciously intend or see their efforts as contributions to the project of constructing American national identity, the link between these representations and the identity production process is indirect. As noted above, Paasi contends that “others” generally have a spatial dimension; I would further this contention by arguing that the “self” will be equally as spatial as the other, and also that the self is created simultaneously with the production of the other (Said, 1979). Hence in creating a spatial other, we produce a spatial self.

This leads to the question of what is the most salient spatial self implicated in a regional othering such as that of the South? Certainly by othering the South one might construct other regional identities, such as those of New England or the Midwest. But the national identity associated with the scale of the state has been claimed to be the most fundamental space-time identity for modern individuals (Taylor and

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8 Or even a local identity, at the scale of, say, the city.
Flint, 2000, p. 234), and it seems reasonable to suggest that within the US, the national identity is far more present for the country’s citizens than their regional identities. Indeed, Said (1979, p. 11) makes a similar argument regarding the production of knowledge about the Orient: i.e., an American confronts the Orient as an American first, and as an individual second. Thus representations of the South as a degenerate region will produce negative spatial characteristics that can contribute to the construction of a positive national identity. More research needs to be done to make a clearer and more direct link between the othering of a region and the construction of a national identity, but I believe this paper establishes a framework that will facilitate such investigations.

The framework of internal orientalism might be fruitfully applied to other cases as well. Observers have noted regional divides within other states, particularly Great Britain (Jewell, 1994), Italy (Gramsci, 1978), and France (Weber, 1976), though there are perhaps many other countries where one might find a similar spatial dynamic in which a region is othered to produce a national identity. A question to be explored is whether these are examples of internal orientalism (i.e., involving the economic, political, and cultural domination of a region by the rest of the country), or simply an internal othering that is not accompanied by (and productive of) unequal power relations.

To reiterate, representations of the South as backward, intolerant, poor, racist, and premodern allow a national identity to be produced that claims the opposite characteristics as its own; thus the archetypal American is progressive, tolerant, prosperous, enlightened, and modern. In constructing the image of the South as the American region uniquely beset with its associated array of flaws, the national identity is wiped clean of these unfortunate traits, so that the presence of poverty, racism, etc., throughout the rest of the country is not considered evidence of the “American-ness” of these characteristics, but rather is seen as anomalous, aberrational, and ironic. The vices of racism, poverty, xenophobia, violence, backwardness, and intolerance have been spatialized (one might say “regionalized”) through the national discourse, so that this set of undesirable traits is held to inhere in the imagined space called “the South.” (At the same time, this discourse racializes the notion of the South to the extent that it tends to refer to whites and ignore the presence of African Americans and other non-white groups.) The specificity of the allegedly Southern traits provides an interesting contrast with the ambiguity of the actual physical borders of the South (Tindall, 1976, p. x). But what matters is the clarity of the regional idea, the imagined space, of the South; to the extent that the South’s regional identity informs the national identity, it matters little (at the level of discourse) where one places the region’s actual territorial boundaries.

This internal othering occurs within the context of regional power relations, in the sense that the South has historically been the least powerful of the country’s

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9 This claim has been made before (e.g. Woodward, 1971a; Cobb, 2000). What I have attempted to add is a theoretical framework that situates this dynamic in a spatial context within the US and that also allows for the exploration of similar relationships within other states.
regions in political, economic, and cultural terms, and therefore it has generally not had the ability to effectively counter the internal orientalist discourse at the national scale. However, many writers have noted the tendency of white Southerners to other the North through history, as well as to advance their own representations of their region (Grantham, 1994; Tindall, 1976; Taylor, 1969). Perhaps one of the most significant of these projects is that undertaken by the Southern Agrarians (Malvasi, 1997; Duncan, 2000). A group of white Southern men who wrote from a humanist perspective, the Agrarians coalesced in the 1920s around Vanderbilt University and offered an agrarian vision of Southern life as an alternative to what they saw as the encroaching industrialism from the North. Their manifesto was the 1930 tome *I’ll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (published under the authorship of “Twelve Southerners”), which collected an assortment of essays praising the white South’s economic and cultural heritage. In spite of the earnestness of their efforts, though, the Agrarians were unable to launch a mass movement in the South that might tip the representational scales in favor of white Southerners (Winchell, 2000), and they eventually faded into obscurity.

There has been an ongoing debate about the alleged erosion in the distinctiveness of the South (e.g. Current, 1983) that is relevant to the thesis of this paper, as internal orientalism depends on and reproduces this idea that the South is distinct from the rest of the US. Prominent in this debate has been Egerton’s (1974) “Americanization of Dixie” hypothesis, arguing that the South and America are growing ever closer and their differences are rapidly diminishing. This is not the final word, however; many argue that in spite of the undisputed changes sweeping the region, the South maintains a distinct identity (Reed, 1993; Webster & Leib, 2001). In addition, it is quite possible that the South could experience fundamental changes that bring it in line with the rest of the US and yet hold on to its position as an internal other, since there may be a considerable degree of inertia in the stereotypical representations of the South, particularly to the extent that such representations as a group are self-referential and are not based on the reality of daily life in the South.

Finally, the application of the internal orientalist framework to the United States does not imply judgments about the relative oppression of “Orientals” and “Southerners.” The point is to posit similarities in the spatial dynamics involved in both phenomena, not to compare the human experience of the peoples caught up within these relationships. In addition, this analysis should not be read as suggesting that it is somehow inappropriate to criticize or agitate against injustice in the South. However, we need to consider the way we talk about injustice in the South. When we spatialize human flaws and endow vices and undesirable traits with a geographic nature, unfortunate consequences result. We thereby essentialize geographic ident-

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10 Some have argued that the South’s political power has climbed to the point where it is possibly the most powerful region in the US (Sale, 1975), and Black and Black (1992) find the South playing a “vital” role in national elections. Even granting the important role of the South as a bloc in the electoral college, this does not undermine my argument about the identity-producing nature of the discourse of internal orientalism because this electoral clout is not used to advance an agenda that is inherently “Southern” (Woodward, 1993, p. 258).
ities, implying that certain vices inhere in particular spaces and that a region’s essence can be boiled down to certain characteristics. By making the assumption that the South is the exclusive location of the set of negative characteristics we find in Cash, we erase those characteristics from the national identity and thus blind ourselves to their very real presence in our own backyards. Since the space of non-Southern American is supposed to represent all these exalted virtues, problems like racism, poverty, violence, and intolerance are seen as anomalies, aberrations, or ironies and are not treated as seriously as they would be if we did not define their existence out of our national identity.

Is there racism in the South? Yes. Is there poverty in the South? Indeed. But we should be clear: we can find racism and poverty (and other serious problems) everywhere in the US. They permeate all the national space. If we blind ourselves to this reality by assuming these are uniquely Southern problems, we help perpetuate injustice rather than eradicate it.

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