# Southerner and Irish? Regional and Ethnic Consciousness in Savannah, Georgia

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# SOUTHERNER AND IRISH? REGIONAL AND ETHNIC CONSCIOUSNESS IN SAVANNAH, GEORGIA[*]

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to answer the following question regarding regional and ethnic consciousness: Does southern identity vary by the level of ethnic identity one professes? Less than one-third of those who identified themselves as southerners, indicate that their identity as a southerner is much more important than their other identities including their ethnic identity. Some of these respondents practice a symbolic regionalism. Ethnic identity for most of the respondents is more important than their regional identity, although for them southerner and Irish are not mutually exclusive identities. The strength of ethnic identity is not significantly related to the importance of southern identity. Thus, southern identity does not vary by the level of ethnic identity one professes.

This paper is about the relative importance of regional identity among members of Irish organizations in Savannah, Georgia. In other words, it investigates whether southern identity varies by one's ethnic identity. The research discussed in this study will allow social scientists and others to understand ethnic politics and work with individuals of Irish descent in the South better. White southerners are not a homogeneous group and ethnic identities vary in southern cities. There are a variety of reasons for investigating the relationship between southern regional identity and Irish ethnic identity. Besides being intellectually intriguing in its own right and meriting attention, Lawrence McCaffrey (2000: 21) acknowledges that more research needs to be done on the "regional varieties" of Irish Americans particularly outside the northeast. David Gleeson (2001: 2) and Reginald Byron (1999) argue that more research is needed on the Irish in the South because they have been neglected by scholars. Dennis Clark (1986) also recognizes the value of studying Irish Americans from a regional context because their experiences vary based on location.

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

*Ethnic Identity*

This paper is a contribution to the ongoing scholarly inquiry about the transformation of ethnic identity among Americans of European ancestry (Alba 1990; Brodkin 1998; Gans 1979, 1994; Glazer 1997; Greeley 1974; Hout and Goldstein 1994; Ignatiev 1995; McDermott and Samson 2005; Nagel 1994; Waters 1990). During the last 40 to 50 years social scientists have debated ethnic groups' rates of assimilation in American society ( Alba and Nee 2003; Chong 1998; Ebaugh 2003; Gans 1979, 1992; Glazer and Moynihan 1970; Gordon 1964; Greeley 1974; Sears, Fu, Henry, and Bui 2003). The transformation taking place today among ethnic groups is more complex than simply distinguishing whether the United States is a melting pot or culturally pluralistic (Alba 1990). Joane Nagel (1994: 154) states that while some scholars point to a "weakening of ethnic boundaries in the white American population" others show "a maintenance or increase in ethnic identification" thus producing what she calls an "ethnic paradox."

Herbert Gans (1979, 1994) argues that ethnicity and religiosity have become mostly subjective identities for contemporary white European Americans. Later-generation white ethnics may practice what Gans (1994: 578) calls symbolic ethnicity, "The consumption and use of ethnic symbols intended mainly for the purpose of feeling or being identified with a particular ethnicity, but without participating in an existing ethnic organization (formal or informal) or practicing an ongoing ethnic culture." Symbolic religiosity is, "the consumption of religious symbols apart from regular participation in a religious culture or in religious organizations" (Gans 1994: 577).

Ethnicity in the United States is being transformed among white European Americans and symbolic ethnicity is one outcome of such a transformation. Two other outcomes are a stronger emphasis on regional identities (based on geography) and the development of a panethnic European American identity (Alba 1990; Kivisto and Ng 2005). The issues of symbolic ethnicity, symbolic religiosity, and a panethnic European American identity among members of Irish organizations in Savannah are addressed in a previous paper (Smith and Hendry 2007). An analysis of members of Irish organizations in Savannah did not support Gans' theses of symbolic ethnicity or symbolic religiosity. Likewise, there is little evidence that a new ethnic group is emerging among members of Irish organizations in Savannah, a group Richard Alba calls European Americans. If the study population represented all Irish Americans in Savannah the findings might have supported both Gans' and Alba's theses. Besides the Irish organizations studied (most of them

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were formed within the past 25 years), Savannah has Italian, Scottish, Polish, German, and Salzburger ethnic organizations. Alba might be correct in his assumptions regarding the emergence of a European American identity, although the members of Savannah's Irish organizations are less inclined to fit this emerging profile and identify themselves in this way.

*Southern Regional Identity*

John Shelton Reed's (1975, 1982, 1983) research supports the existence of a regional subculture in the South. Specifically Reed (1983: 27) states, "most Americans and nearly all Southerners have some mental construction labeled "Southerner," some degree of regional consciousness." In addition Reed (1983: 28) finds that "there was a considerable degree of variation in how *much* regional consciousness they possessed."

Larry J. Griffin and Ashley B. Thompson (2003: 58) suggest that fewer people are identifying themselves as southerners and that the trend will likely continue as the South's population diversifies, although Griffin (2006: 10) acknowledges that a type of symbolic southernness is emerging. Lewis Killian (1985: 70) concludes that for Roman Catholics and Jews in the South (who according to Killian are often considered as 'marginal whites'), "regional loyalty has been as important to them as it has been to their white Protestant neighbors," while Larry J. Griffin, Ranae J. Evenson, and Ashley B. Thompson (2005: 12), using Southern Focus Poll data, find that 55 percent of Catholics identified themselves as southerners in comparison to 79 percent of Protestants and 33 percent of Jews.

Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan (1970: xxxiii), in their seminal work on the salience of ethnicity in American society, state, "One is a New Englander, or a Southerner, or a Midwesterner, and all these things mean something too concrete for the ethnic to adopt completely, while excluding his ethnic identity." This quotation highlights the often understated reality that regional identity and ethnic identity are often intertwined in a variety of interesting ways such that some scholars have viewed white southerners as an ethnic group (Killian 1985; Reed 1982; Tindall 1976, 1995).

Social scientists are not the only scholars to address the issue of regional identity. Literary scholar Farrell O'Gorman (2004, 2005) comments on the writing of Walker Percy (1991), a Catholic writer and Mississippi native, who, in one of his essays, discusses the obstacles often associated with labels such as American, southern, and Catholic, and the expectations that come with these labels. Noted historian C. Vann Woodward (1960: 24) reassures southerners that the southern

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literary tradition reinforces a distinctive regional identity. Woodward (1960: 25) writes, "The modern Southerner should be secure enough in his national identity to escape the compulsion of less secure minorities to embrace uncritically all the myths of nationalism. He should be secure enough not to deny a regional heritage because it is at variance with national myth." James C. Cobb (2005) describes a southern identity that is evolving and changing, an identity significantly different from the uncompromising one portrayed by W. J. Cash (1941).

*The Irish in the South*

The Irish in the United States are a very diverse group and this is particularly true in the South. The vast majority of Irish immigrants to the United States before 1800 were Scotch-Irish Protestants. They differed in origin, culture, and their reasons for emigration from Ireland than the predominantly Irish Catholics who arrived because of the potato famine of the 1840s (see Miller 1985; Miller 2000; Fanning 2000 [includes a thorough introduction to the Irish and Irish diaspora studies literature—the reader should also consult Cohen 1997 regarding the debate about the meaning of diaspora]; Gleeson 2001; McCaffrey 1997 [includes an exhaustive list of recommended readings on the Irish experience and the Irish American experience]; McCaffrey 2000; Akenson 1993; Ray 2005). Kerby Miller (2000: 88) concludes that, "In light of the relative scarcity of Famine and post-Famine immigrants in the Old South, it seems reasonable to conclude that most of that region's self-designated "Irish" in 1990 were the descendants of the South's Ulster Presbyterian and other Irish Protestant settlers (including early converts from Catholicism) who had immigrated before the American Revolution or, at the latest, before 1830." Miller's conclusion seems valid since excluding the Scotch-Irish, 90 percent of Irish immigrants did not settle south of the Mason-Dixon Line (Gleeson 2001: 2). Gleeson (2001: 187) states that, "Between 1815 and 1877, Irish immigrants in the South became Irish southerners." The Irish did not lose their ethnic identity as they assimilated into southern society, although it was substantially easier for Scotch-Irish Protestants than Irish Catholics to blend into the regional culture and become southerners.

To better understand the relationship between regional identity or consciousness and ethnic identity or consciousness among members of Irish organizations in Savannah, Georgia, this paper attempts to answer the following question: Does southern identity vary by the level of ethnic identity one professes?

## A BRIEF PROFILE OF SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

Georgia Southern University is a regional university and part of its mission is to conduct research in the southeast section of the state. Savannah is approximately 50 miles southeast of the university and it is the largest urban area in a very rural region. Savannah is rich in history and home to a diverse population. It is a convenient and important research site and this is why it was chosen for the project that studied members of Irish organizations. A colleague, who is an anthropologist, has connections with several Irish organizations in Savannah and she wanted to study the social and cultural construction of ethnic identity among the members of these organizations. It was through her ties with the Irish community in Savannah that we could conduct this study.

While the Irish population in the South is overwhelmingly Protestant, more than 90 percent of the members of Savannah's Irish organizations identify themselves as Catholic (although only 3 percent of the population in south Georgia is Catholic). One explanation for why members of Savannah's Irish organizations are overwhelmingly Catholic is that historically in Savannah, Catholics were often considered Irish, even if they were not Irish, and if they were Irish they were considered Catholic, even if they were not Catholic. This practice influenced Scotch-Irish Protestants to differentiate themselves from Irish Catholics who starting in the 1850s were the victims of intense stereotyping and discrimination (Leyburn 1962: 331). Several organizations require that their members be Catholic but others such as the Hibernian Society do not. Thus, the Irish population studied is completely opposite of the demographic profile of the Irish in the South. Nevertheless, considering the limitations of the sample, this is an important study because it investigates a distinctive group of Irish Americans in the South.

Savannah is the county seat of Chatham County, Georgia. Of the county's population of 232,048, 19,059 individuals report Irish ancestry as their first or second ancestry on the 2000 census. They comprise close to 15 percent of the county's white population and Irish is the second most frequently cited ancestry in the county (after United States or American, and closely followed by English and German) (U.S. Census 2006). In 1860, the Irish numbered more than 3,000 in Savannah, making up 14.1 percent of the city's total population and 22.7 percent of its white population (Shoemaker 1990: 3). Many people who participated in the present study are descendants of early Irish immigrants.

METHODS

*Data*

Members of 10 of the 11 Irish organizations in Savannah (the Ancient Order of Hibernians, Clan-na-Erin Society, Daughters of Ireland, Fenian Society, Friendly Sons of St. Patrick, Irish Heritage Society, Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians, Police Emerald Society, Shenanigans Society, and Sinn Fein) participated in a survey. The Hibernian Society declined to participate, although individual members, who are also members of other Irish organizations, did participate. Guidelines for membership vary from organization to organization. Several organizations restrict the number of members and they currently have waiting lists. Leaders of the organizations provided access to their membership lists and all members were mailed, during the first week of November 2004, an eight-page survey (copy available on request). In Savannah belonging to several Irish organizations is common and only one survey was sent to each of these members.

A modified Dillman method was employed for this study. The full method could not be undertaken due to funding limitations. A follow-up postcard was sent the second week of November and a second one was sent the third week of November. Two hundred and sixty-one people returned completed surveys for a response rate of 33 percent. Besides the survey, 38 one-to-two hour semi-structured, tape-recorded interviews were conducted with 47 individuals (in several interviews more than one person participated) from Savannah's Irish American community between September 2003 and May 2005. The interviewee pool included 19 females and 28 males. Five of the 47 individuals interviewed had served as board members for the Center for Irish Studies at Georgia Southern University. They recommended the other 42 individuals who subsequently agreed to be interviewed. The current study is based on the sample of 261 respondents who returned the mailed survey.

*Variables*

The dependent variable of this analysis is southern identity. The following question asked survey respondents about the importance of their identity as a southerner: For those who consider themselves southerners, how important is your identity as southerner in comparison to your other identities (including your ethnic identity)? (see Table 1).

Table 1.    Frequency Distribution of Southern Identity (n=225).

| Importance of Southern Identity | Percentage |
|---|---|
| 1. Not at all important | 4.9% |
| 2. | 1.8% |
| 3. | 6.2% |
| 4. | 14.2% |
| 5. | 16.9% |
| 6. | 26.2% |
| 7. Very important | 29.8% |
| Total | 100.0% |

The main independent variable of interest is ethnic identity. Three questions from the survey are used to examine strength of ethnic identity (see Table 2): (1) "How important is your ethnicity (cultural background) to your identity?", (2) "How often do you think of yourself as a member of your ethnic group?", and (3) "How close do you feel to other members of your ethnic group?" These three questions are used to create an index depicting the strength of ethnicity. The scale's statistical properties (Cronbach's Alpha=.87) suggest that it is a reliable way to assess the strength of ethnicity.

Ten other independent variables are used as control variables in this analysis, they include age, sex, income, education, religion importance, church attendance, ethnic organizations importance, family importance, religious preference, and place of birth (see Table 3).

*Analysis Plan*

A regression model was developed to answer the question: Does southern identity vary by the level of ethnic identity one professes? The model is a regression of southern identity on the control variables (age, sex, income, education, religion importance, church attendance, ethnic organizations importance, family importance, religious preference, and place of birth) along with the independent variable labeled ethnic identity strength. Table 4 displays the results of this regression model.

Table 2.   FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF ETHNICITY MEASURES (N=225).

| Importance of Ethnicity | Percentage |
| --- | --- |
| 1 Not at all important | 0.8% |
| 2 | 1.2% |
| 3 | 3.5% |
| 4 | 12.1% |
| 5 | 16.8% |
| 6 | 20.7% |
| 7 Very important | 44.9% |
| Total | 100.0% |

| How Often Do You Think of Oneself as a Member of Your Ethnic Group | |
| --- | --- |
| 1 Not at all often | 2.7% |
| 2 | 5.0% |
| 3 | 5.4% |
| 4 | 15.5% |
| 5 | 21.3% |
| 6 | 15.5% |
| 7 Very often | 34.5% |
| Total | 100.0% |

| Feeling of Closeness to Other Members of Your Ethnic Group | |
| --- | --- |
| 1 Not at all close | 1.2% |
| 2 | 2.7% |
| 3 | 5.4% |
| 4 | 11.2% |
| 5 | 17.1% |
| 6 | 28.3% |
| 7 Very close | 34.1% |
| Total | 100.0% |

TABLE 3. FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTIONS OF CONTROL VARIABLES.

| Religion Importance | % | Ethnic Org. Importance | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 Not at all important... | 5.8% | 1 Not at all important... | 4.1% |
| 2. .......................................... | 5.4% | 2. .......................................... | 7.0% |
| 3. .......................................... | 4.7% | 3. .......................................... | 2.9% |
| 4. .......................................... | 6.6% | 4. .......................................... | 7.4% |
| 5. .......................................... | 16.0% | 5. .......................................... | 16.0% |
| 6. .......................................... | 17.1% | 6. .......................................... | 22.6% |
| 7 Very important. .......... | 44.4% | 7 Very important. .......... | 39.9% |
| Total. .............................. | 100.0% | Total. .............................. | 100.0% |

| Church Attendance | % | Age | % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Everyday.......................... | 2.7% | 23-39. ............................... | 13.8% |
| 2-3 times a week............. | 8.9% | 40-49. ............................... | 21.3% |
| Once a week. ................... | 62.0% | 50-59. ............................... | 22.4% |
| 2-3 times a month. ......... | 9.3% | 60-69. ............................... | 22.4% |
| Once a month.................. | 2.3% | 70-79. ............................... | 15.4% |
| A few times a year. ........ | 11.6% | 80-89. ............................... | 4.7% |
| Once a year...................... | 1.2% | Total. ............................... | 100.0% |
| Less than once a year.... | 1.6% | **Religious Preference** | **%** |
| Never. .............................. | 0.4% | Catholic. ........................... | 92.6% |
| Total. .............................. | 100.0% | Protestant. ....................... | 5.4% |
| **Sex** | **%** | Other................................ | 0.8% |
| Male. ................................ | 69.9% | None................................. | 1.2% |
| Female. ............................ | 30.1% | Total. ............................... | 100.0% |
| Total. ............................... | 100.0% | | |

TABLE 3. FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTIONS OF CONTROL VARIABLES *continued*

| Income | | Education | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Under $20,000. ............... | 2.4% | Some high school. .......... | 0.8% |
| $20,000 – 29,999. ............ | 5.7% | High school/GED. ........ | 10.4% |
| $30,000 – 39,999. ............ | 8.5% | Post secondary (not college). ........................... | 3.1% |
| $40,000 – 49,999. ............ | 10.2% | Some college. .................. | 31.3% |
| $50,000 – 59,999. ............ | 8.1% | Bachelor's degree. .......... | 20.1% |
| $60,000 – 69,999. ............ | 7.7% | Some graduate school. ... | 10.0% |
| $70,000 – 79,999. ............ | 13.8% | Graduate degree. ............ | 24.3% |
| $80,000 – 89,999. ............ | 8.5% | Total. ............................... | 100.0% |
| $90,000 – 99,999. ............ | 8.5% | | |
| $100,000 or more. .......... | 26.4% | **Family Importance** | **%** |
| Total. ............................... | 100.0% | 1 Not at all important. ... | 1.9% |
| **Place of Birth** | **%** | 2. ....................................... | 5.0% |
| Savannah. ......................... | 57.9% | 3. ....................................... | 7.8% |
| Georgia (not Savannah). | 11.0% | 4. ....................................... | 8.1% |
| Southern state (not GA). | 14.2% | 5. ....................................... | 19.0% |
| Other state. ...................... | 15.4% | 6. ....................................... | 21.3% |
| Foreign-born. ................. | 1.6% | 7 Very important. .......... | 36.8% |
| Total. ............................... | 100.0% | Total. ............................... | 100.0% |

The control variables (age, sex, income, education, religion importance, church attendance, ethnic organizations importance, family importance, and religious preference) were not significantly related to southern identity. Ethnic identity strength was not significantly related to the importance of southern identity. Three dummy variables were created to measure place of birth–born in Savannah, born in the South but not in Georgia, and born outside the South. The comparison category is comprised mainly of those people born in Georgia but not in Savannah. Place of birth (born in Savannah) was significantly related to the importance of southern identity, meaning that the Savannah-born respondents were less likely to stress the

TABLE 4.  IMPORTANCE OF SOUTHERN IDENTITY REGRESSED ON AN ETHNIC IDENTITY SCALE AND CONTROL VARIABLES.

| VARIABLE | BETA |
|---|---|
| Ethnic identity scale. | -.03 |
| Age. | .13 |
| Sex. | .22 |
| Income. | -.06 |
| Education. | .01 |
| Importance of religion. | .09 |
| Church attendance. | .13 |
| Importance of ethnic organizations. | -.05 |
| Importance of family. | .10 |
| Protestant. | .33 |
| Born in Savannah. | -.91[*] |
| Born in Southern state but not in Georgia. | -.35 |
| Born in other state. | -.54 |
| Adj. $R^2$ | .10 |
| F-test | 2.63[*] |

[*]$p < .05$

importance of southern identity compared to those born in Georgia but not in Savannah. Respondents born in the South but not in Georgia as well as those born outside the South are not significantly different from those respondents born in Georgia but not in Savannah in terms of their rating of the importance of southern identity.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Clark (1983: 209) writes that in the antebellum South "the Irish retained their identity" while simultaneously they "blended into the regional consciousness." This process is occurring among some contemporary Irish Americans in Savannah (see also Gleeson 2001; Shoemaker 1990). A quotation from a 68-year-old gentleman illuminates Clark's position. This quotation was in response to a question about

potential differences between Irish communities in New York, Boston, and Chicago with Irish communities in the South. He stated, "Maybe we're a little more trusting or open, maybe…But I do feel like it's what a lot of us say is Irishness—I don't know, maybe it's more southern, or more Savannahian or something…But it's different I think. And it's not unlike what you find in Charleston…It's not unlike what I have experienced with some in New Orleans."

Ronald Inglehart (1977) offers a plausible explanation for why members of Irish organizations in Savannah identified more strongly with their ethnic identity than their regional identity. As society becomes more post-materialist, individuals are less likely to identify with micro entities (regional ties) and become more likely to identify with macro entities (ethnic ties). Forty-five percent of the survey respondents said their ethnicity was very important to their identity, 30 percent indicate that their identity as a southerner is much more important than their other identities including their ethnic identity, and 18 percent of those who state that their ethnicity is very important to their identity also state that their identity as a southerner is much more important than their other identities. These findings are similar to those from the Southern Focus Polls (2006) which reveals that 27.8 percent of those who indicate that they are a southerner replied that being a southerner is very important to them.

Most of the members of Savannah's Irish organizations state that their ethnic identity is more important than their regional or southern identity. As previously noted, while an analysis of this group did not support Gans' theses of symbolic ethnicity and religion, the present analysis of southern identity suggests that some members (those born in Savannah) practice a symbolic regionalism or a symbolic southernness (see Griffin 2006: 10). It can be argued that their southernness is a form of cultural or political capital that has the potential to enhance their position within Savannah's Irish organizations. Southernness might be mostly a subjective identity for these respondents similar to what Gans (1979, 1994) claims ethnicity and religiosity are for contemporary white European Americans. Although for respondents like the following 56-year-old woman who responded to the survey, southern identity is probably more systemic than symbolic, "While it was fun to celebrate our Irish Heritage my family, when I was growing up, was more interested in celebrating its southern heritage and being closely identified with groups like the Daughters of the American Revolution and Colonial Dames." In the following quotation from a 68-year-old man, one the 47 interviewees, traits tied to southernness such as reminiscing about the past, help differentiate southerners from native Irish, "I think—I've always maintained the Irish community in Savannah

might not fly in Ireland. I think it's more Irish/southern. I really think so…We have our meetings at the Oglethorpe Club—very nice…Invariably, conversation goes back to forty years ago, fifty years ago, or your grandparents and so on…You know southerners do a lot of that stuff too…I know a lot of people my age and younger that are from Ireland. I don't hear them doing that that much. They seem more interested in getting ahead and doing things in business and…I think we do maybe more of that—a little more nostalgia than they do. And I wonder if it's not southern, a southern kind of characteristic."

The study population is not representative of Irish Americans in Savannah and being a member of an ethnic organization might bias one in favor of an ethnic identity over a regional identity. That said, for some respondents, membership in an ethnic organization does not stand in the way of having a stronger preference for a regional identity over an ethnic identity. Eighteen percent of the respondents take Clark's previous statement to heart and identify themselves as southerners and Irish.

While religious preference was not significantly related to the importance of southern identity, the findings lend partial support to Griffin, Evenson, and Thompson's (2005: 14) explanation for why Catholics are less likely than Protestants to identify themselves as southerners. Only 14 of the 261 survey respondents identify themselves as Protestant (all 14 Protestants consider themselves southerners) and 43 percent of the Protestants indicate that their identity as a southerner is much more important than their other identities. Two hundred and thirty-nine of the survey respondents identify themselves as Catholics and 205 of them consider themselves southerners. Twenty-eight percent of them said that their identity as a southerner is much more important than their other identities. The vast majority of respondents are native Savannahians and their families have resided in Georgia for several or more generations.  They do not feel unwelcomed nor are they new to the region. The intertwining of their Catholicism and membership in ethnic organizations gives them strong social networks. Perhaps there is less need for a strong regional consciousness since their needs are being met through other social connections.

That said, religion is important for the members of Irish organizations in Savannah for forming and maintaining their ethnic identity. Forty-five percent of the respondents said religion is very important in forming and maintaining their ethnic identity. Ethnic organizations also play a significant role in the formation of their ethnic identity. Forty percent of the respondents report that ethnic organizations are very important in the formation of their ethnic identity. Most of

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these ethnic organizations are recent phenomena, showing perhaps recent movement toward emphasizing ethnic identity more.

The research on members of Irish organizations shows the complex ways in which various dimensions of ethnic identity are interrelated. Southern identity does not vary by the level of ethnic identity one professes. Ethnic identity for most of these Savannahians is more important than their regional identity, although for them southerner and Irish are not necessarily mutually exclusive identities. It can be argued that those born in Savannah practice a symbolic regionalism. As Clark (1986: 110) states, "It is the record of conscious regional identification and discrete familial and ethnic memory that has sustained Dixie's Irish-Americans." The following quotation from a 59-year-old man who has a very strong southern identity, one of the 47 interviewees, supports Clark's position, "you act differently-that's just the way the southern thing is…And then again it goes back to the trinity of the southern mind: history, family, and religion. And southerners really hold that dear. Southern people are very proud of what their family did…Southerners are kind of insular people…They're defensive, because we were made to be that way."

A distinctive Irish American community survives in Savannah despite high levels of interethnic marriage and fervent identification as Americans and southerners as expressed by some respondents. The history of the Irish in Savannah demonstrates how ethnicity for whites is highly localized and tied to place.

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