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**Y'ALL EAT:  
FOODWAYS, PERFORMATIVE REGIONAL IDENTITY, AND THE SOUTH IN THE  
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

**A Thesis  
Presented in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for the degree of Master of Arts  
in the Department of Southern Studies  
The University of Mississippi**

**by**

**KIRSTEN E. SCHOFIELD**

**May 2012**

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## ABSTRACT:

“Y’all Eat: Foodways, Performative Regional Identity, and the South in the Twenty-first Century” examines the ways in which iconic Southerners—Jim Beam and his ilk, Colonel Harland Sanders, and Paula Deen—create and sustain the hypercontemporary South. Because of their media exposure and place in the popular imagination, these characters force a specific kind of performance in both an intergroup and intragroup context. Close readings of individual appearances and selected portions of these characters’ output help to shed light on how these identities are formed, upon what they rely for structure and support, and what this means for modern consumers around the country and the world. This is a new media examination of these ideas, and much of the research relies on internet comments, YouTube videos, Twitter accounts, advertising campaigns, visits to the respective places of origin, blog posts, and oral histories.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Food occupies a hallowed place in the exhibition of culture. More than any other single element, food represents the people who consume it, both to the eaters themselves and to cultural outsiders. Across nations, cultural differences can be vast, but everyone everywhere eats just the same. Food is an easy, nonexclusive entry point into someone else's culture; you need not speak German to appreciate a good schnitzel or wear a sari to enjoy saag paneer.

When you think of Mexico, your first thoughts are likely not of muralist Diego Rivera or Chichen Itza but of burritos, tacos, and tamales. When you think of Sweden, your first thoughts are probably meatballs and the silly Muppet chef. What are the first things you think about when someone asks you to explain the culture of the American South? Fried chicken? Cornbread? Sweet tea?

The South eats differently than the rest of America.<sup>1</sup> The cuisine is canonized in countless cookbooks, advertisements, and television personalities. Even today, in the rapidly globalizing New South, media executives and ad men aggressively market an unchanged culinary landscape, free from post-Civil War influence; every morsel of food made below the Mason-Dixon Line is just like Grandma used to make. Publications that focus on upper-middle class wining and dining in the South, like *Southern Living*,

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<sup>1</sup> While there are a number of different consumer products that are more widely consumed in the South, such as grits, Ski, and Nilla wavers, the proliferation of chain restaurants and the diversification of grocery stores make for evermore uniform options. Wilson, Charles R. "Lecture." Regionalism 598, Week 2. Barnard Observatory, Oxford, Mississippi. 31 Aug. 2010. Lecture.

*Garden and Gun*, and *Southern Lady*, enjoy wide circulation outside the former Confederacy.<sup>2</sup> Seven of the top fifteen bestselling cookbooks on Amazon.com are South-centric.<sup>3</sup> Television cooks like Paula Deen, Emeril Lagasse, and Pat and Gina Neely have unprecedented mass appeal outside their home states.<sup>4</sup> Kentucky Fried Chicken, today presided over by a cartoon rendition of Colonel Harlan Saunders, boasts imposing shares of fast food markets across broad swaths of Asia.<sup>5</sup> Bourbon is enjoying a renaissance among hip young urbanites.<sup>6</sup>

Modern Southern identity is bound up in these commercial representations of food. Any Southerner who has left the South can attest to how strongly these associations are felt. More than one Kentuckian abroad has identified himself as, “from Kentucky, like the fried chicken,” and been met with understanding nods by foreigners who, moments before, were uncertain of exactly where that might be located.

In a world where a Memphian is as likely to eat at an Indian buffet as a Bojangles, how are these notions kept alive? Through marketing and brand recognition, fried foods and bourbon have remained Southern to Southerners and non-Southerners alike. This study will examine three popular representations of Southern food in contemporary media: bourbon, Kentucky Fried Chicken, and Paula Deen. These are broadly recognized

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<sup>2</sup>A circulation representative at *Southern Living* headquarters in Birmingham, Alabama, estimated that between ten and twenty percent of readers are from non-Southern states. "Talk with Southern Living Representative." Telephone interview. 25 Nov. 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Amazon.com. *Top Cookbooks*. Amazon.com. *Top Cookbooks*. Amazon.com, 28 Nov. 2010. Web. 28 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.amazon.com/BestSelling-Cookbooks/lm/R3MFGQRV7D2M5E>>.

<sup>4</sup> The Food Network's official website states that the channel is broadcast into ninety-five million American homes each month. They also claim the channel is carried in nine other countries and that foodnetwork.com sees over seven million unique visitors each month. "About FoodNetwork.com : ABOUT US : Food Network." *Food Network - Easy Recipes, Healthy Eating Ideas and Chef Recipe Videos*. Web. 01 Dec. 2010. <<http://www.foodnetwork.com/home/about-foodnetworkcom/index.html>>.

<sup>5</sup> Yum! Brands. Kentucky Fried Chicken. *KFC OPENS 700TH RESTAURANT IN CHINA*. *Newsroom*. Yum! Brands, 13 Sept. 2002. Web. 29 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.kfc.com/about/newsroom/091302.asp>>.

<sup>6</sup> In the last five years, a number of bars aimed at the young and affluent and boasting extensive rye and whiskey offerings have cropped up in decidedly non-Southern cities like Los Angeles (Bourbon and Branch), Washington, DC (Bourbon), Boston (Tupelo), and New York City (D.B.A.).



symbols of Southern cuisine, pervasive in the South and widely known outside it. They help to define the region, both in terms of the foods consumed and the cultural values they signify. The packaging and proliferation of these three products borrow heavily from one another, each informing its counterparts by means of a series of signifiers. Clothing, logo design, color choices, subtle distinctions in speech patterns—there is significant crossover between each product’s presentation over time and space. Lesser brands, in turn, reappropriate these indicators so they may reap the benefits of the byproducts of this system: consumer trust, a lack of pretension, and an overriding sense of patriotism. To borrow a tired idiom, myriad marketing teams have taken a leaf out of the same playbook, and all are profiting from what may have seemed like a long shot

just a few decades ago, a proverbial Hail Mary.

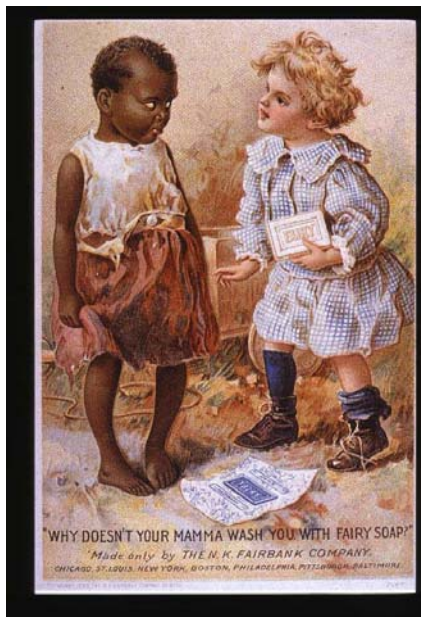


Figure 1: An ad for Fairy Soap, a product of the H.K. Fairbanks Company, circa 1880. Mehaffy, Marilyn M. "Advertising Race/Raceing Consumer (-Nation), 1876-1900." *Signs* 23.1 (1997): 136-37. *JSTOR*. Web. 15 Mar. 2012.

Using Southern identity to increase the esteem of a product is not a new marketing technique. In post-

Reconstruction America, many products were branded with Southern mascots, but they were either holdovers from the slave South or black-faced whites. Aunt

Jemima maple syrup is a poignant example, as are the countless soaps that depicted mammies washing the black off of young African-American children (see: figure 1).<sup>7</sup> To the collective American consciousness, the Southern Mammy represented the pinnacle

<sup>7</sup> Hale, Grace Elizabeth. "Bounding Consumption." *Making Whiteness: the Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*. New York: Pantheon, 1998. Print.

of authenticity and the final word on hearth and home. The message received was thus: if Lily White flour was good enough for Mammy, then it was good enough for any old Yankee.

The Civil Rights Movement and the brutal images that often accompanied it made strong associations with the South risky for advertisers. With very few exceptions, most brands divested themselves of their antebellum mascots as these fell out of favor with the public, but Southern mascots were not entirely eradicated.<sup>8</sup> White Southern mascots helped to telegraph traditionalism without the potential publicity fallout that a black mascot risked. The companies that opted to generate a new representative or return to an old one steered clear of plantation owners and belles— too laden with subtext—and instead chose Southerners that hailed from a formless, toothless South where the culture was fairly uniform and racial undertones were an afterthought. In this rendition of the South, everyone lives in a sweeping plantation home that is maintained by magic, each meal is comprised of chicken and dumplings and sweet tea that arrives effortlessly at the table, and everyone’s accent is genteel and rootless. In other words, the constructed South of advertisers dreams is a fantasy that disregards regional distinction and creates the cultural equivalent of the political “Solid South.”

From where did this idea spring forth? During the latter half of the twentieth century, the notion of an unchanging, service-based, hospitable and homey South came back in to vogue. Why this came to pass has been a matter of debate—some credit the more gracious portrait of the South put forth by *Southern Living*, others believe the runaway success of Kentucky Fried Chicken is the catalyst, and still others point to the

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<sup>8</sup> Glory Foods, a company based in Columbus, Ohio, has as recently as 2012 embraced a mammy-style mascot. Though there is little space to discuss this here, their most recent ad campaign features one such character. Recent offerings from Zatarain’s Rice and Bojangle’s Fried Chicken have also regressed to this type of branding with little outcry.

“professional Southerners” like Tom Wolfe or Craig Claiborne of the midcentury as early glamorizers of the region—but it was likely a confluence of these factors. Down home white characters took the place of black ones and reinforced this cohesive, invented South in the minds of consumers both in the South and outside it. Though their races changed, the trustworthy/unadorned implications remained; little changed aesthetically or practically in marketing strategies that engaged consumers’ assumptions about the South.

These characters engage with a cultural sense of loss that goes unnamed among Americans of a certain age. With the cultural upheaval of the 1950s and 1960s, the backdrop of the American home changed substantially. Slavery and its inheritor, low-wage black laborers, disappeared from domestic landscapes and with them, the groaning tables set with labor-intensive meals. Women joined the workforce, further jeopardizing the presence of foods like fried chicken, scratch biscuits, and homemade pies. While many Americans, Southern or not, sing the praises of the simple and honest cooking of their grandparents or great-grandparents, they forget or omit the social structures that made that kind of food possible. The reappearance of what could be called “whiteface” reinterpretations of blackface characters constitutes a conservative reaction to a rapidly changing world; the fact that these characters exist in white iterations is thinly veiled racism on the part of those who idolize them. The thinking goes that if a desexualized Mammy character or magical Negro is out of vogue and undesirable, the white incarnations are an adequate placeholder.

The differences between these personalities now and the Aunt Jemima and Uncle Moses of years past are fewer than you might think. Although Pappy Van Winkle, Paula Deen, and Harlan Sanders are white, they have become minstrel show characters in

their own right, effectively hemming in the public personas of other Southerners by perpetuating stereotypes about Southern character and lifestyles in the same way the patently racist blackface characters that preceded them did. Whether the character is black or white, the advertising methods used in contemporary media get at the same messages: the South is unchanging, wholesome, virtuous, simple. It is without pretention. It is authentic. It is home.

## II. THE KENTUCKY GENTLEMAN: A VICE-DRIVEN, FAMILY-FRIENDLY, MULTI-GENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON HOSPITALITY

The mint julep is perhaps the most Southern of all cocktails. The official cocktail of the Kentucky Derby,<sup>9</sup> it was the favorite of two of the South's most notable drunks: Edgar Allen Poe and William Faulkner.<sup>10</sup> Mint is not overwhelmingly associated with the South, nor is sugar, but its alcoholic base, bourbon, has been elevated to the office of supreme spirit of the South and the ultimate gastronomical mascot of its home state.

Bourbon has been produced continuously in Kentucky since the late eighteenth century; its origin myths are plentiful and none is conclusive, but the first accounts of a reddish-brown grain liquor begin to surface around 1785. So-called white dog liquor (a clear, unaged spirit consisting of corn, rye, and barley) was sent down the Mississippi River to New Orleans—by the time it arrived in Louisiana several months later, it had taken on most of the unique qualities associated with bourbon today. Soon, barkeepers the length of the river were requesting it by name; each barrel was stamped with its place of origin, Bourbon County, Kentucky. Bourbon County Whiskey was shortened to Bourbon whiskey, and eventually whittled down to simply bourbon. An American classic was born.

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<sup>9</sup> It was named as such in 1938, according to Churchill Downs' official website.

<sup>10</sup>Bailey, Mark, and Edward Hemingway. "Morning Edition." *Great American Writers and Their Cocktails*. NPR. New York City, New York, 15 Dec. 2006. Radio. University of Virginia. Small Special Collections. *University of Virginia Library Acquires Rare Poe Letter and Opens Major Exhibit. U. Va. Library Exhibition*. University of Virginia, 4 Mar. 2009. Web. 29 Nov. 2010. <<http://www2.lib.virginia.edu/press/poe/>>.

Though it is still called by the name of the central Kentucky county where it was invented, today's bourbon is distinct from its early prototype. By law, bourbon must possess certain qualities. It must be comprised of a least fifty-one percent corn liquor with only rye and barley making up the rest in whatever amounts please the distiller and subsequently aged in a never-before-used charred oak barrel. It must be no more than eighty percent alcohol by volume and it cannot be watered down to artificially deflate this figure.<sup>11</sup> It cannot have any flavors added, nor may its color be altered by anything other than the aging process.<sup>12</sup> Contrary to popular belief, bourbon does not have to be produced in Kentucky, but ninety-six percent of it is to this day. Bourbon, by law, must be made in the United States, and thus small distilleries have cropped up in New York, Illinois, and Colorado. Despite these anomalies, most bourbon enthusiasts remain wed to the Kentucky ideal of bourbon: made from limestone-filtered water and aged in sooty brick warehouses nestled deep in the country.<sup>13</sup> Parker Beam, the master distiller at Heaven Hill Distillery says, "It better damn well be [made in Kentucky] if it's any good."<sup>14</sup> This is the general consensus among industry experts and consumers alike; to date, no non-Kentucky bourbon distiller has won any of the major awards nor has it captured a noteworthy share of the market.<sup>15</sup>

Bourbon has come to be strongly associated with Kentucky, and more broadly, the South at large. Novelist and native Virginian Nell Boeschstein explains:

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<sup>11</sup> Perrine, Joy. "Getting Started." Introduction. *The Kentucky Bourbon Cocktail Book*. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky, 2009. 1-6. Print.

<sup>12</sup> United States. Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. Department. *GPO Access*. National Archives and Records Administration, 30 Dec. 1969. Web. 30 Nov. 2011. <<http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NRHP/Text/01000450.pdf>>.

<sup>13</sup> Gross, Matt. "On Kentucky's Bourbon Trail." *Nytimes.com*. New York Times, 06 June 2007. Web. 04 Dec. 2011.

<sup>14</sup> "Bourbon 101." Interview by Corrina Zappia. *The Village Voice* [New York City] 17 Mar. 2006: 1-3. Print.

<sup>15</sup> Whisky Magazine Editors. "Whisky Magazine Awards." *Whisky Magazine ~ Celebrating the Whiskies of the World*. Whisky Magazine. Web. 06 Dec. 2011. <<http://www.whiskymag.com/awards/>>.

“When I got to [New York City] and started going to bars with either old college friends or new graduate school ones, my first excursions would often include a dialogue along the lines of, “What do you want to drink?” “A Jack and Ginger, please.” “A *what?*” “A Jack and Ginger.” “That’s so *Southern* of you!”<sup>16</sup>



Figure 2: Martin Van Buren and Andrew Jackson Old Crow Ad. Circa 1960. Sakalauskas, Jack. "1960 Old Crow Bourbon Magazine Ad Andrew Jackson." Web log post. *Old Magazine Ads*. Blogspot.com, 27 July 2008. Web. 29 Nov. 2010.

How did it come to be thought of in this way? Why is this reputation so enduring? In this section, we will look at both the marketing campaigns and the built environments in which bourbon is produced to consider all aspects of its cultivated persona.

Bourbon has long been marketed as a Southern beverage. Midcentury print ads for Crab Orchard and Walker’s Deluxe feature bucolic plantation scenes and vibrant watercolors of the French Quarter.<sup>17</sup> There are very few plantation homes

in Kentucky, and Bourbon Street lies some seven hundred miles to the south of Bourbon County, but no matter. The marketing campaign is predicated on the consumer understanding that the product is Southern, and the best way to convey that message is by playing to regional stereotypes. Is a Yankee going to be able to discern between an antebellum mansion in Georgia versus one in Kentucky? Do they differentiate between Cajun country and bluegrass country? Even in the 1960s, advertisers were banking on the fact that they did not.

<sup>16</sup> Boeschstein, Nell. "Jack and Ginger." Editorial. *The Morning News*. 16 Sept. 2009. Web. 25 Nov. 2010. <[http://www.themorningnews.org/archives/personal\\_essays/jack\\_ginger.php](http://www.themorningnews.org/archives/personal_essays/jack_ginger.php)>.

<sup>17</sup> Nolan, Hamilton. "Classic Booze Ads: "You Know Good Bourbon, Dick."" Web log post. *Gawker*. Gawker Media Group, 30 July 2008. Web. 28 Nov. 2010. <<http://gawker.com/5031180/classic-booze-ads-you-know-good-bourbon-dick>>.

The print ads that did not focus on some vague idea of the South chose instead to set their sights on great bourbon-drinking Southern men. Ads featuring South Carolinian Andrew Jackson serving skeptical New Yorker Martin Van Buren a tumbler of Old Crow were widely circulated in midcentury magazines (see: Figure 2). Another popular featured Kentuckian Henry Clay sipping the Old Crow he kept by his bedside.<sup>18</sup> Yet another contains only a quotation from Kentuckian Abraham Lincoln: "Well, I wish some of you would tell me the brand of bourbon that Grant drinks. I would like to send a barrel of it to my other generals."<sup>19</sup> Ulysses S. Grant's stated preference for Old Crow solidified the notion that he was a great and powerful man because of his love for Old Crow bourbon.<sup>20</sup>

Today, the statesmen mascots used for many decades have largely been retired from the repertoire of bourbon ads, but the overall marketing strategies are unchanged. By way of contrast, consider the recent advertisements for Bacardi Silver Rum. A representative commercial, aired in 2003, featured club goers in varying states of undress passing an orange around a nightclub to the beat of a pounding electronic number. The suggestion of illicit behavior is on the surface; the tagline for the commercial is, "Your night just got more interesting."<sup>21</sup> Drinking Bacardi, the ad implies, makes you sexy, uninhibited, edgy, and cool. Any number of alcohol advertisements feature similar scenarios and posit comparable claims.

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<sup>18</sup> Kroll, Harry Harrison. *Bluegrass, Belles, and Bourbon; a Pictorial History of Whisky in Kentucky*. South Brunswick [N.J.: A.S. Barnes, 1967]. 15. Print.

<sup>19</sup> Robeleteo, Vincent. "Ad for Bourbon | Ads of the World™." *Ads of the World™ | Creative Advertising Archive & Community*. Mediabistro, 18 Aug. 2008. Web. 28 Nov. 2010. <[http://adsoftheworld.com/forum/exhibition/ad\\_for\\_bourbon](http://adsoftheworld.com/forum/exhibition/ad_for_bourbon)>.

<sup>20</sup> Reed, Julia. "An Ode to Bourbon - Newsweek." *Newsweek - National News, World News, Business, Health, Technology, Entertainment, and More - Newsweek*. Newsweek, 22 Dec. 2008. Web. 28 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.newsweek.com/2008/12/21/bourbon-s-beauty.html>>.

<sup>21</sup> Creativity Online. "Bacardi Silver: Pass the Orange." *The Best in Advertising, Design, and Digital Creativity - AdCritic - Creativity Online*. Crain Communications, 6 May 2003. Web. 29 Nov. 2010. <<http://creativity-online.com/work/bacardi-silver-pass-the-orange/11636>>.



Bourbon falls outside this paradigm. Although it enjoys considerable popularity with a younger demographic (and a growing number of international drinkers),<sup>22</sup> its marketing seeks to evoke a different set of adjectives: traditional, wholesome, sincere, genuine. The strong corporate embrace of the labels' forebears is an ironclad strategy—because Kentucky was a border state in the Civil War and the Civil Right Movement was less violent an era there, the built South discussed in the introduction is more tenable a fiction. The distinguished men on the bottles lack the slaveholding baggage that a more traditional plantation mascot might, and the bourbon industry has consistently traded on this notion over a period of more than a century.

A Jim Beam ad campaign from the mid 2000s is a prime example of this mode of advertising and it plays with the traditional script in a self-aware, yet gentle, way. Black and white photos are set against a bright red background. Black text in the foreground reads, “Civil War soldiers getting their legs sawed off weren’t given a vodka cranberry.” Another ad from this series depicts a hog slaughter; the accompanying slogan is “Party like its 1899.” Yet another shows rugged men on horseback; “‘The men rode into the saloon’ is never followed by, ‘and ordered a merlot.’”<sup>23</sup>

More present-focused ads show groups of young men laughing and playing cards. The text emblazoned on the photos reads, “Good bourbon, ice cubes, and whichever glasses are clean” or “You’ve been friends since getting together for a drink meant the

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<sup>22</sup> India, South Korea, and Thailand are the lead the world in whiskey importation and consumption. Bryce, Andy. "India Consolidates Position as Number One Whisky Market." *Food And Drink Europe Marketing of Food Products & Drinks for the Supermarket Industry (prepared, Alcoholic, Soft, Snack, Energy, Convenience)*. All Decisions News Media, 25 Mar. 2003. Web. 01 Dec. 2010. <<http://www.foodanddrinkeurope.com/Consumer-Trends/India-consolidates-position-as-number-one-whisky-market>>.

<sup>23</sup> Wade, Lisa. "Masculinity, Amputated Limbs, and Whiskey » Sociological Images." *The Society Pages*. University of Minnesota, 27 Nov. 2008. Web. 30 Nov. 2010. <<http://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2008/11/27/masculinity-amputated-limbs-and-whiskey/>>.

water fountain after recess.”<sup>24</sup> Bourbon, this ad informs the consumer, is not for the fussy. It goes in whatever glasses are clean! It has no need for fancy mixers or even bar snacks! It is without affectation, like those who drink it, and those who have drunk it for generations.

Although Jim Beam himself is faceless, he seems almost like a revered forebear, the guardian angel of good times. The current company tagline, “Guys don’t change. Neither do we.” sums up the image the company is selling: Jim Beam is honest, and it is timeless. Bourbon is for good times with those you hold dear, not for picking up tube-top clad girls at bars. Drinking it is a tribute to those who came before you. This is the drink of your father, and his father before that, and his father before that, and so on. This is not the marketing approach taken by any other liquor; even other whiskies opt for the vibe evoked by Bacardi.<sup>25</sup> It is no accident that the advertisers have chosen to invoke the very words most strongly associated with the South (the Civil War) to promote its most well-known beverage.

Jim Beam is not isolated in promoting these values in conjunction. Heaven Hill Distillery, which produces Evan Williams, Elijah Craig, and Ezra Brooks, have a statement on their company website stating that they will not feature overt sexuality or nudity in their ad campaigns, stating that the company, “embraces independence, quality and tradition as hallmarks of our reputation” and feels that nudity and sexuality

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<sup>24</sup> Coffee, Gordon. "Analyzing Persuasive Appeals in Advertising in 2006." *Ad Analysis*. Armstrong Atlantic State University, 15 Feb. 2006. Web. 01 Dec. 2010. <<http://www.nt.armstrong.edu/Raa06GC.html>>.

<sup>25</sup> Canadian Club, Tullamore Dew, Jamisons, and even Bailey’s Irish Cream, which is derived from whiskey, have club-centric commercials and print ads.

are at odds with these values.<sup>26</sup> The men whose names and faces grace these decanters were real people, but they have, by now, taken on a mythical quality, much like Catholic saints or the Founding Fathers. Their good deeds and sanitized biographies are enumerated on company homepages, but, “they're just company names, label names,” says bourbon expert Lenell Smothers.

“I always tell people that there's a lot of marketing behind these brands. People will come in and think there's some old man coming down the mountain with a donkey and a barrel on it. I'm like, do you realize there's eight distilleries cranking out a ton of whiskey? So it's really just a lot of branding... And you'll see on bottles, "X Y Z distillery". Half of those don't really exist as a distillery.”<sup>27</sup>

The reputation of bourbon has been forged on these legends. The Van Winkles, who still own and operate the namesake brewery, make a point of referring to the man on the bottle as “Pappy” or “Mr. Van Winkle” as often as possible. By invoking their names frequently, the Elijahs, Jims, Ezras, and Evans become indicators of authenticity rather than just woodcut faces on a label. The subtext is that the bourbon they are making in 2010 has a pedigree that dates back hundreds of years. It has been handed down, generation in and generation out, and is authentic. Even though there are “eight distilleries cranking out a ton of whiskey,” these mascots lend a gravity to these liquors that Captain Morgan cannot. By making them into dignified grandfathers, they are able to sell the virtues of days gone by, making bourbon consumption something of a patriotic act, if not a thoroughly wholesome one. Patriotism and a sense history are associated strongly with the mythology of the South as the land time forgot. Authenticity is, in this way, a consumer good, and it is manufactured in charred oak barrels.

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<sup>26</sup> Heaven Hill Distilleries. "About Heaven Hill Distilleries - Kentucky Bourbon Whiskey and Other Fine Spirits." *Heaven Hill Distilleries : Kentucky Bourbon Whiskey and Other Fine Spirits*. Heaven Hill, 2010. Web. 01 Dec. 2010. <<http://www.heaven-hill.com/csrs.shtml>>.

<sup>27</sup> Zappia, p. 3

To reinforce these marketing campaigns, several distillers sought to undergird bourbon's reputation as Kentucky's greatest export, and embarked on a family-friendly tourist campaign in the form of the Kentucky Bourbon Trail. The Trail was started in 1999 by the Kentucky Distillers Association, a Frankfort-based professional association and lobbying group that protects the interests of the industry. The state and the industry alike poured millions into the nascent tourism project in hopes of bringing more visitors in to the state.<sup>28</sup> It was a big gamble for a poor state, but one that paid off. The Trail was quickly featured in the *New York Times Travel* section, *National Geographic*, *Wine Spectator*, *Southern Living*, *Imbibe*, *USA Today*, and countless other newspapers, magazines, books, and websites; guests began to arrive en masse to central Kentucky to see how the only American spirit is produced. Though the advertising and publicity were helpful, their timing was also fortuitous; after years of stagnation and subsequent decline, demand for bourbon has increased more than fifty percent in the intervening period, apropos of very little.<sup>29</sup>

Today, the state has more barrels of bourbon aging within its borders than it does permanent residents and bourbon has become a critical source of revenue, providing more than ten thousand jobs and more than a billion dollars of tax-assessed value.<sup>30 31</sup> The Trail officially features six distilleries—Maker's Mark, Wild Turkey, Jim Beam, Heaven Hill, Woodford Reserve, and Four Roses—and suggests several more for the

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<sup>28</sup> "History of Kentucky Distillers' Association." *Kentucky Distillers' Association*. Kentucky Distillers' Association. Web. 07 Dec. 2011. <[http://www.kybourbon.com/index.php/about\\_us/](http://www.kybourbon.com/index.php/about_us/)>.

<sup>29</sup> Howlitt, Rick. "New Prosperity for Kentucky Bourbon." *All Things Considered*. WFPL, Louisville, KY, 15 Sept. 2011. *WFPL.com*. Radio Louisville, 22 Nov. 2011. Web. 30 Nov. 2011. <<http://www.wfpl.org/2011/11/22/new-prosperity-for-kentucky-bourbon/>>.

<sup>30</sup> In the Commonwealth of Kentucky, there are now 4.3 million people and 4.7 million barrels of bourbon. Block, Melissa. "Kentucky Bourbon Surges in Popularity." *All Things Considered*. NPR. WFPL, Louisville, KY, 15 Sept. 2011. *WFPL.com*. Radio Louisville, 15 Sept. 2011. Web. 30 Nov. 2011. <<http://www.npr.org/2011/09/15/140513410/kentucky-bourbon-resurges-in-popularity>>.

<sup>31</sup> Kentucky Distillers' Association, and DISCUS. "Quick Shots." *Kybourbon.com*. Kentucky Distillers' Association. Web. 2 Dec. 2011. <[http://www.kybourbon.com/images/uploads/Quick\\_shots.pdf](http://www.kybourbon.com/images/uploads/Quick_shots.pdf)>.

more dedicated visitor—Buffalo Trace, Barton’s, and Michner’s—in addition to highlighting some of the other aspects of bourbon production by offering cooperage and farm tours and bankrolling a museum dedicated to the history and creation of the spirit. Those who visit all the distilleries are eligible for tie-in prizes and there is no time limit for completing this task in an effort to encourage repeat visits. The Kentucky Bourbon Festival, held each year in September, is the Trail’s signature event, but most distilleries enjoy a steady stream of interested drinkers throughout the year. Though the Festival represents a spike in attendance, more than two million people have visited at least one of the official distilleries in the last five years. 2011 was a banner year for the trail—more than four hundred thousand people had visited as of mid-autumn.

The Trail has been so successful that a group of Louisville interests started the Urban Bourbon Trail in the mid 2000s in an attempt to recreate its success and keep visitors in Kentucky longer. The Urban Bourbon Trail highlights some of Louisville’s most storied bars and taverns such as the Seelbach (F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald’s haunt), the Brown (birthplace of the Hot Brown sandwich), and Proof (a relative newcomer operated by James Beard-award-winning chef Michael Paley). Its website promotes Louisville as something of a Southern Las Vegas, proffering weekend flight and hotel deals to Louisville from myriad cities around the country.<sup>32</sup> While not directly associated with the trail, these two organizations operate in conjunction with one another in an effort to keep tourists in the state another night; promoters on the Kentucky Bourbon Trail suggest that visitors stay the night in hotels convenient for Urban Bourbon touring and the Urban Bourbon Trail officials suggest helpful ways to do both distillery tours and cocktail tastings over the course of a long weekend. The

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<sup>32</sup> *Bourbon Country*. Go To Louisville. Web. 05 Dec. 2011. <<http://bourboncountry.com>>.

stability of this industry and its import to the health of tourism for the region cannot be overstated: aside from tourists brought in by the legendary Kentucky Derby in Louisville, this is the greatest source of visitor interest in the state. For many smaller communities like Loretto, home of Maker's Mark, the Kentucky Bourbon Trail is the *only* meaningful source of tourism dollars.<sup>33</sup>

Using the paradigms of marketing outlined above, a certain tourist experience is to be expected. Because these marketing strategies have now weathered several generations of ad campaigns and drinkers, firm expectations of what the means of production will look like have taken root. All six of the distilleries on the Trail play to the authenticity and heritage angles set out for them by the marketing campaigns. The aforementioned packaging and advertising have primed visitors to have certain expectations, and thus there are consistencies throughout.

All six exist in a secluded setting. Some, like Maker's Mark in Loretto or Woodford Reserve in Versailles, exist so far off the beaten path that the drive itself is something of a tourist experience; a twenty minute drive down a windy, one lane road during a Kentucky autumn creates a sense of rusticity that takes root deep within the conscience of visitors. Others were built relatively close to where the interstate system eventually ran—Jim Beam and Heaven Hill replicate the rural feel of the other sites by creating long, lush, meandering driveways complete with covered bridges and heavy foliage.

Each of these distilleries makes use of similar tropes in architectural and graphic design. Warm browns, reds, oranges, creams, and yellows feature prominently in the

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<sup>33</sup> Cooms, Paul, and Barry Kornstein. *Economic and Fiscal Impacts of Bourbon Distilling in Kentucky*. Kentucky Distillers' Association, Dec. 2009. Web. 3 Dec. 2011. <[http://www.kybourbon.com/images/uploads/Economic\\_Impact\\_of\\_Distilling\\_in\\_KY.pdf](http://www.kybourbon.com/images/uploads/Economic_Impact_of_Distilling_in_KY.pdf)>.

tourist literature, exhibit designs, signage, and websites of all of the sites. The visitor centers are uniformly colored in this way so much so that they appear sepia-toned. All six visitor centers feature a homey design, hardwood floors, and a porch and position their aging warehouses and water sources similarly.

The performance of authenticity at all six is codified by the videos shown and the tours given. The words “heritage,” “craft,” “old-fashioned,” “time-honored,” “family,” “authentic,” and “real” come up over and over; the founders listed above are endlessly name-checked and the origin myths of each distillery are intoned carefully regardless of which tour the individual visitor has chosen to take. All six of these sites, in conjunction with their omnipresent marketing campaigns, make a concerted effort to convince visitors that they are peddling a real, authentic Kentucky experience.

Though superficially these distilleries and their attendant tours seem to be the same, there are essentially three approaches to the structure of their presentations. While all six of these distilleries have existed for a considerable amount of time, they have varying degrees of claim on so-called authenticity and confront that idea differently. In the first camp exist Jim Beam and Wild Turkey.<sup>34</sup> This pair of distilleries are among the oldest outfits still in operation and were, until the relatively recent past, family affairs. Their lineage can be traced with relative ease and, to some degree, is in agreement with their respective advertising campaigns’ branding attempts; Jim Beam was a real person who made bourbon at the present-day Jim Beam facility. Although certain elements are highlighted and others are downplayed, both of these places are sticking to a somewhat faithful script.

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<sup>34</sup> In this category also exists Buffalo Trace, the oldest continually operating distillery in Kentucky. It perhaps has the greatest claim on this distinction, but is not a part of the original Trail for reasons too complex to detail here. There are rumors floating around in industry circles that it will join the official Trail soon, but has been no definitive word from the Bourbon Distillers’ Association.

In the second group exists Heaven Hill and Four Roses. These distilleries are both quite old but have murkier stories and a host of complicating factors that will be detailed below; in short, their stories are not as straightforward as those of the Jim Beams and Wild Turkeys of the world but they still attempt to tell a story of history and authenticity. Though they can claim neither continuous operation nor direct inheritance on the part of the distillers, they use the shreds of authenticity they have to great effect in an attempt to replicate the experience a visitor might have at one of the first class of distilleries.

In the third category exists Maker's Mark and Woodford Reserve. Both operations were built on the sites of extant distilleries, but in name only. Neither of these has a legitimate claim on the authenticity presented at the other four sites, and they do not make an attempt to create it nor to exploit the nominal ties they have to history. These are strictly New South operations; they are manufactured and they like it like that. Far from apologizing for their lack of heritage, they try to persuade visitors that their method, story, and history are actually superior to a moldering old site like Four Roses or Wild Turkey.

Jim Beam Distillery in Clermont, Kentucky, is the number-one selling bourbon brand in America. While the operation is vast and expanding (some of their bourbon is aged off-site in larger warehouses in other parts of the states) as well as innovative ("the two hundred sixteen year old startup" has recently branched out into super-premium labels as well as marketing directly to women<sup>35</sup>), it has the greatest claim to the aforementioned "heritage" that the Trail promotes. Bourbon has been made at this site since James Beam built it in 1795, making it the oldest distillery on the trail still

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<sup>35</sup> Novellino, Teresa. "At Beam Inc., It's Ladies Night." *Business First* [Louisville] 14 Oct. 2011: 1+. Print.



operating today.<sup>36</sup> Though it was closed during Prohibition, it was rebuilt “by hand” in 1934 by Jim Beam himself.<sup>37</sup> The visitors’ center and layout have been vaguely outlined above; the only spatial consideration worth noting is its proximity to Interstate 65, which runs alongside the westernmost edge of the property and brings in visitors from Louisville and Nashville. Jim Beam Corporation has had to take special pains to maintain the pastoral setting in the face of this development, and they do so by erecting their more recently build storehouses to block much of the noise.

On the tour, the guide takes visitors through the original house of James Beam, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, pointing out various plot points in the Beam story; the words “heritage” and “history” were mentioned more than two dozen times. The artifacts in the home range from the obvious (the original copper still, photos of the seven generations of Beams who have made bourbon “according to James Beam’s original recipe”) to the homespun (Booker Noe’s childhood baseball glove).<sup>38</sup> While the family holdings are impressive and informative, they are not the attraction here. The efforts to bolster a sense of tradition and family are more reinforced by things like touring the Beam home and looking at their personal effects than they are by the tiny working still that can be found in the visitors’ center. If any single distillery on the Train can claim the traditional, family-oriented mantle that they each claim with any legitimacy, it is Jim Beam.

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<sup>36</sup> The distinction of oldest continuously operating facility goes yet again to Buffalo Trace in Franklin County. Records show that bourbon has been made, without ceasing, on that site since the 1770s; Buffalo Trace was granted special dispensation to continue manufacturing spirits during Prohibition for “medicinal purposes only.” It was the only distillery in the country for the duration of Prohibition. Pezzoni, Daniel. *Application to the National Register of Historic Places*. 30 Nov. 2000. Document detailing the historical significance of Buffalo Trace Distillery in Frankfort, Kentucky. Lexington, VA.

<sup>37</sup> Jim Beam Corporation. *Come as a Friend, Leave as Family: Jim Beam*. Clermont, KY: Jim Beam Corporation, 2011. Print.

<sup>38</sup> “Jim Beam Distillery Tour.” Kentucky Bourbon Festival. Jim Beam Visitors’ center, Clermont, KY. 16 Sept. 2011. Address.

The other distillery in this first category, Wild Turkey, is located just west of Frankfort in Lawrenceburg, Kentucky. It lies far off the beaten path, more than twenty minutes of driving off Interstate 64, but unlike some of the other distilleries, its edifices are much less well cared for. Though it is now owned by Campari Spirits, it was bought in the recent past from the Ripy family, who had owned and operated it since its inception in 1885 and gave it its current name in the early twentieth century. It has, to a lesser but still marketable degree, the same sort of ties to the past that Jim Beam has that allow it to stake a claim to heritage and family.

Wild Turkey, however, is of two minds about taking this route. In the past three or four years, Wild Turkey has radically altered its branding, making it something of a redheaded stepchild by comparison to its cohort. Some of the newer ad campaigns, such as the “Wild Turkey Honeys”<sup>39</sup> and “Give ‘Em the Bird”<sup>40</sup>, are racier than most other bourbon ad campaigns, though still fairly tame compared to other liquor commercials, as detailed above. Perhaps indicative of this shift is the state of the Wild Turkey visitor center. Much of what welcomes visitors is in line with what is presented at its closest peer, Jim Beam: a large porch, an old house, a play area for children, some Ripy family snapshots. The tour is much the same (indeed, they all are), but the Ripys are referenced with less reverence and the product is emphasized more than the process.<sup>41</sup> The gift shop also represents a departure—gaudy shot glasses sit alongside more staid cut glass tumblers. Much of the distillery is inaccessible and it is undergoing substantial renovations; what direction they will take their presentation in next remains to be seen.

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<sup>39</sup> *Wild Turkey Honeys: January*. 2010. Photograph. Lawrenceburg, KY.

<sup>40</sup> Wild Turkey. Advertisement. *Wildturkey.com*. Wild Turkey. Web. 6 Dec. 2011. <wildturkey.com>

<sup>41</sup> Wild Turkey Distillery Tour." Kentucky Bourbon Festival. Wild Turkey Visitors' center, Lawrenceburg, KY. 17 Sept. 2011. Address.

Bardstown's Heaven Hill Distillery is the next logical rung in the ladder from manufactured authenticity to manufactured artifice in bourbon tourism. This distillery is the one that makes the most of its storied forebears, Elijah Craig, Evan Williams, T.W. Samuels, and the like. The identity of the brand relies heavily on these characters largely because Heaven Hill has virtually no legitimate claim on the heritage they claim. The first structure on this site was built in 1934 by five Jewish brothers from New York. The Shapiras and their descendents have carefully managed the corporate image of Heaven Hill; they immediately hired a Beam as the master distiller to lend their product credibility, purchased the rights to the names of the aforementioned Craig, Williams, and Samuels, and went to work establishing their company as "family owned and operated." Ironically, Heaven Hill does fit the bill for the authenticity to which they aspire: they do things the traditional way under the guidance and approval of someone who has been at this a long time. Their savvy about concealing their outsider status has paid off; the distillery's narrative of a recent foundation by non-Kentuckians has been almost completely subsumed.

The visitors' center, which is spacious and well-designed, helps with this. The video all visitors watch helps to collapse time and space (for example, the original Williams distillery was sixty miles north of this one and founded about one hundred fifty years before) and the artifacts in the museum help to support the (often erroneous) conclusions visitors draw. After a few minutes looking at the interactive exhibits and well-maintained curiosities, it is easy to become confused as to how, with whom, where, and when Heaven Hill came to be. This distillery is catering to a different demographic than some of its competitors-- many of the bourbons produced by Heaven Hill are inexpensive, though some are among the best on the market. The tour experience and

gift shop reflect this; visitors may take fifteen, thirty, sixty, and ninety minute tours and the gift shop sells branded memorabilia at every price point.<sup>42</sup> It is an egalitarian experience, friendly and accessible for a vast swath of visitors; it should come as no surprise that this is one of the most-visited stops on the Trail.

Four Roses Distillery, located in Lawrenceburg relatively near to Wild Turkey, is where authenticity truly begins to break down. Founded in the late 1800s (even their official literature cannot agree on an exact date), the story of Four Roses is complex and a little confusing. Currently owned by the Japanese liquor conglomerate Kirin, the Four Roses distillery has been owned by a variety of interests over the past eighty years. Most of its market is in Asia and Europe and has been for some time.<sup>43</sup> The distillery has two factors alternately pushing and pulling it between the central category of the particular taxonomy used here and the more artificial one; it occupies its own liminal space that is reinforced by its presentation to tourists.

On one hand, the distillery uses antebellum imagery to bolster its sense of time and place. The origin narrative of the name involves an admittedly implausible legend about Southern belles, corsages, and country picnics; the official website goes so far as to use stock photos of Vivien Leigh as Scarlett O'Hara as the embodiment of the alleged belle for whom the brand is named.<sup>44</sup> The legend upon which the brand is built is contentious at best (much like their murky foundation dates)—what is remarkable about

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<sup>42</sup> Heaven Hill Distillery Tour." Kentucky Bourbon Festival. Heaven Hill Visitors' center, Bardstown, KY. 16 Sept. 2011. Address.

<sup>43</sup> Risen, Clay. "Domestic Whiskey's Best Kept Secret - Clay Risen - Life - The Atlantic." *Theatlantic.com*. The Atlantic Monthly, 7 May 2009. Web. 05 Dec. 2011.

<<http://www.theatlantic.com/life/archive/2009/05/domestic-whiskeys-best-kept-secret/16629/>>.

<sup>44</sup> Kirin. "The Legend." *Fourroses.us*. Four Roses Distillery, 2011. Web. 07 Dec. 2011.

<[http://www.fourroses.us/the\\_legend](http://www.fourroses.us/the_legend)>.

the confusion is that, by their own admission, this corporate legend dates back the turn of the century at the earliest.<sup>45</sup>

On the other hand, the company takes a step toward manufacturing its own brand with its justification for its inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. They contend not that liquor history was made at their distillery nor that anything particularly important came to pass there, but that the Spanish Mission-style architecture is distinctive enough to warrant protection.<sup>46</sup> In this way, Four Roses takes a step toward arguing for a created importance and edges toward Maker's Mark and Woodford Reserve. The visitors' center and tour highlight this discomfort with their murky past. The center itself is very small and lacks the exhibits and artifacts seen at many of the other sites are simply absent here. The tour focuses on the consistency for which the brand is famed and the uniqueness of the built structures around the campus; in the absence of a mascot or a founding family, they rely on the space and product to tell the story for them. Even though the color schemes and buzzwords are the same, the overall sense of place and history is substantially diminished.

Maker's Mark is where a careful observer can see the holes in the fabric of authenticity begin to show in earnest. Founded in 1954 by Bill Samuels, Sr., the distillery is on the site of a defunct operation previously known as Burke's Distillery. Though the Samuels are longtime Kentuckians and distantly related to the Heaven Hill Samuels, they lack the pedigree of the Beams and their ilk. This was a family operation for just thirty years before selling to progressively larger corporations; it is currently owned by a large and diverse company called Fortune Products. For the outset, this has been a

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<sup>45</sup> Four Roses Distillery Tour. " Kentucky Bourbon Festival. Four Roses Visitors' center, Lawrenceburg, KY. 17 Sept. 2011. Address.

<sup>46</sup> Four Roses Bourbon. Advertisement. *Bourbon Review* Fall 2011: 78. Print.

premium brand, unlike the humbler bootlegging narratives of some of their competitors; their first slogan in ad campaigns in the early 1960s was, “It tastes expensive...and it is.” It lacks the quaint historical background, but unlike Heaven Hill, it does not make an attempt to create one but rather revels in the fact that it has always been aspirational and fancy. Self-conscious branding has always been central to the Maker’s Mark identity—the red wax appeared on their very first bottles. This aggressive marketing helped to make it the brand the world’s most recognizable and requested bourbon.<sup>47</sup>

That branded identity is foundational to the presentation of the distillery to tourists. The drive to Loretto is picturesque in and of itself, but the Maker’s Mark property is beautiful; the landscaping is wild yet restrained and covered bridges have been built and aged to transport tourists over the small creek that allegedly provides water for the liquor production. Every external wall is painted the company’s signature soft black, each roof and accent is crimson, and all the walls and floors are either blonde wood or painted a warm off-white. No detail is spared, and the presentation is immaculate but overall gives the impression of a working model of a distillery rather than a distillery itself. There is a cursory nod to Burke’s Distillery in the form of a plaque outside the original structure of the site, but history is not the focus of the tourist experience at Maker’s Mark. The glamorous visitors’ center is more of a gift shop and tasting lounge; it has low lighting and a clubby feel to entice visitors to purchase scores of branded products. Instead, the climax of the tour is dipping a bottle into the brand’s signature red wax. The tour does not emphasize the narrative of the founders most likely

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<sup>47</sup> Dashevsky, Evan. "The Art of Bourbon." *Smoke Summer 2010*: 31-33. *Evandaneshevsky.com*. Evan Dashevsky. Web. 4 Dec. 2011. <<http://evandashevsky.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/MakersMark.pdf>>.

because he, his son, and grandson are still alive and working at Maker's Mark, thus undermining any sense of history that remains. The overriding message of the experience at this distillery is that heritage takes a backseat to the future, and that the future is going to be very sophisticated and polished.<sup>48</sup>

The final distillery on the Kentucky Bourbon Trail is the one of meteoric rise and dubious connection to history and place. Woodford Reserve, which has been since its inception a subsidiary of Brown-Forman, a Louisville-based alcohol interest, was founded in 1996 in Versailles, a small town in Bourbon County. To be clear, the distillery itself is among the oldest (production began on the property in 1797), but it changed ownership dozens of times and ultimately lay fallow between 1971 and 1996 when Brown-Forman began to produce this particular label as a superpremium option to compete with Maker's Mark. Like Maker's Mark, Woodford Reserve does not have a bootlegger mascot, but unlike any of the other labels, their first (and to date only) master distiller, Chris Morris, is unrelated to any of the legendary bourbon families, even tangentially. Furthermore, Woodford Reserve is the only bourbon on the Trail that ages its barrels in something other than a brick warehouse, opting instead to age theirs in limestone buildings that are artificially heated by steam, a fact that does not sit well with some members of the bourbon establishment. Woodford Reserve is without a creation myth, without a mascot, without history, and even lacks traditional means of production, yet manages to sell an authentic experience to tourists, just not the same authenticity. Woodford Reserve's entire marketing strategy is predicated on the notion that new is better—rather than attempt to conceal the fact that they artificially hasten

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<sup>48</sup> Maker's Mark Distillery Tour." Kentucky Bourbon Festival. Maker's Mark Visitors' center, Loretto, KY. 16 Sept. 2011. Address.

the aging process of their bourbons, for example, they celebrate it under the guise of progress and as a hallmark of their brand. Tour guides tout the unconventional means of production and recent foundation as what makes Woodford Reserve first among equals on the Trail.

Like its nearest relative, Maker's Mark, the drive to Woodford Reserve is long, windy, and scenic. Because both of these organizations had the opportunity to select their own land, they could do so to maximum effect. The grounds of the distillery look different than the others, namely due to the limestone aging warehouses that are unique to this particular operation. The visitors' center and the accompanying tour cost five dollars, another element unique to the Woodford Reserve tourist experience that adds to the exclusivity that Brown-Forman seeks to stoke around this label. The spacious interior features sparse and precise exhibits that are light on artifacts and text. The gift shop contains expensive mementos such as branded Lacoste polo shirts and glossy gourmet cookbooks. There is also a small restaurant helmed by a French chef; he offers lessons for one hundred seventy-five dollars each. Rather than trying to be accessible, Woodford Reserve offers snob appeal to a certain kind of tourist. Whether or not the five dollar admission fee deters some visitors is immaterial and perhaps even desirable; their target audience is the New South elite, a far cry for the democratic experience at Jim Beam or Heaven Hill.<sup>49</sup>

The Kentucky Bourbon Trail highlights a plurality of interpretations of bourbon production and history despite the relatively uniform nature of the promotional materials and tour experiences. Though both Jim Beam and Maker's Mark make use of

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<sup>49</sup> "Woodford Reserve Distillery Tour." Kentucky Bourbon Festival. Woodford Reserve Visitors' center, Versailles, KY. 17 Sept. 2011. Address.



the same promotional materials, and Four Roses and Wild Turkey eschew elaborate origin stories, and Woodford Reserve and Heaven Hill have nearly identical layouts, there are critical differences in the ways they seek to engage their audiences. Authentic, traditional experiences are at a premium for many, and each finds its own way to deliver on that goal. Though some of the misdirection used by guest centers and tourist brochures are troubling and at times, deliberately misleading, none are so egregious as to present a source of tension with tourists or even historians; a visitor who listens attentively will be able to spot the difference between “family owned and operated” and “family owned and operated for seven consecutive generations.” Ultimately, the Trail creates a valuable source of revenue in communities where tourist dollars are at a premium; furthermore, these tourist dollars are uncontroversial and timeless. The Kentucky Bourbon Trail, with its myriad and multiplying renditions of the spirit’s origin, provides a sense of the region, its history, and its most famous export regardless of which spaces a visitor chooses to experience.

### III. KENTUCKY FRIED COLONEL: CREATING AND PERFORMING THE SOUTH THROUGH CHICKEN

Both at home and abroad, McDonald's is the ultimate symbol of American food. According to the company website, McDonald's currently operates over thirty-one thousand franchises in one hundred ninety-one countries.<sup>50</sup> By comparison, Kentucky Fried Chicken is a mom-and-pop operation; it has a mere five thousand outfits in just ninety countries.<sup>51</sup> What does the average consumer know about McDonald's, though? Who is its founder? Where did it begin? What makes a Whopper different than a Big Mac? In this respect, Kentucky Fried Chicken has the market cornered. Around the world, people know that fried chicken comes from Kentucky and is prepared by a man in a white suit using his very secret blend of eleven herbs and spices. McDonald's represents a generic America (and is represented by a red-haired clown), but Kentucky Fried Chicken is rooted in place and history. While McDonald's is anchored in artifice, Kentucky Fried Chicken can trace its heritage to one of the most recognizable men in the world.

Harland David Sanders was born in Henryville, Indiana in 1890. He dropped out of school in the sixth grade and worked a number of odd jobs for a quarter century before settling down in Eastern Kentucky in 1929 and opening a roadside service station

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<sup>50</sup> Conan, Neal. *50th Anniversary of McDonald's*. NPR Talk of the Nation. Recorder Ira Flatow.

<sup>51</sup> "Kentucky Fried Chicken." YUM! Brands. [www.kfc.com/about](http://www.kfc.com/about)

along Route 25. At various points, he practiced law without a license, practiced medicine without training, sold insurance, and patched tires.<sup>52</sup> In short, this was not a man born to be a restaurateur, but rather one who knew how to play whatever role was foisted upon him to great effect.<sup>53</sup> He began serving fried chicken at his Corbin, Kentucky service station in 1930 at the age of forty as something of a sideline to make a little extra money from hungry travelers, though it was another decade before he became the Colonel. The “original” Kentucky Fried Chicken was a Shell station with six chairs around a round table.<sup>54</sup> Word of his fried chicken spread (in no small part thanks to fellow Kentuckian and food writer Duncan Hines, who included the restaurant in the 1939 edition of *Adventures in Good Eating*); before long, the service station had become the sideline.<sup>55</sup> “Feathers flew” as he “pluck[ed] and scald[ed]” dozens (and later hundreds) of chickens daily in his family’s basement.<sup>56</sup>

In 1939, a fire laid waste to the original service station; Sanders managed to save three-fifths of the restaurant by cutting away the flaming kitchen and allowing it to burn, effectively containing the grease fire. He reopened the restaurant on the Fourth of July, 1940; this time a motel took the place of the service station and the entire outfit was rechristened Sanders’ Cafe. The new restaurant and motel had several then-novel features like an open kitchen and a model room. Sanders’ personal emphasis on hospitality and cleanliness took shape around this new space. This restaurant exists today and is still functioning. On the site of the Sanders’ Café is a small museum

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<sup>52</sup> Howorth, Lisa "Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Foodways" *Harland Sanders* Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press. 2007.

<sup>53</sup> Smith, Andrew "Encyclopedia of Junk Food and Fast Food" *Sanders, Harland*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press. 2006.

<sup>54</sup> *Biography: Colonel Sanders*. Directed by John Griffin. Produced by Kevin. Burns 60 Minutes. A&E Network, 1998. Film

<sup>55</sup> Smith, 236.

<sup>56</sup> Herbert, Wally. Interview by Kirsten Schofield. *Interview with Wally Herbert*. Unpublished, 29 Sep. 2011.

commemorating what is colloquially known as “where it all began.” Located on the main drag of the still-small town of Corbin, the Kentucky Fried Chicken Museum is one of the area’s most prominent tourist attractions. A model motel room similar to the one set up by Sanders remains, as does a model open kitchen. Amidst the models are several display cases of Sanders/KFC memorabilia as well as about three dozen tables. In the adjacent room is a modern, working Kentucky Fried Chicken outlet. The clientele of this particular restaurant is an unusual blend of locals on their lunch break, casual tourists who have emerged from the nearby Cumberland Gap National Park and come to the museum/restaurant by happenstance, and hardcore pilgrims, some of whom have come a great distance to see what is, in fact, a mere replica of the place where it really did all begin.<sup>57</sup>

After the fire that necessitated the building of the new Sanders’ Cafe, Sanders also began experimenting with a different, faster, safer way to make chicken and invented a method that is the industry standard today: the pressure cooker. His new chicken required no brining or marinating, cut cook time down substantially, and, most importantly, contained the hot oil. The eleven herbs and spices for which he became famous became codified, and all of them were in the breading, not the brine. This was not simple tweak of methods, but an important breakthrough that shaped the future of fast food. Though the image he put forth during his lifetime and beyond was that of a simple man who did not know much about anything,<sup>58</sup> this was nothing short of a major development in food science.

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<sup>57</sup> Schofield, Kirsten. *Visit to the Sanders Cafe Museum and Restaurant*. 6 Mar. 2012. Traveled to the museum in Corbin, Kentucky. 688 Us Hwy 25 W, Corbin, Kentucky.

<sup>58</sup> "Was Colonel Sanders a Foodie?." *Boston Globe*, 4 Nov 2011, sec. Editorials <http://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/editorials/2011/11/14/colonel-sanders-foodie-kfc/3vfsIoiViqRV0snfrQJwZM/story.html> (accessed Nov 27, 2011).

Unfortunately, the advent and rise of Colonel Sanders' chicken was contemporaneous with the advent and rise of Dwight D. Eisenhower's interstate system. The early 1950s saw I-75 open through Corbin, obliterating traffic along Route 25. As stated above, Sanders was nothing if not an innovator; he saw the writing on the proverbial wall, shut up his shop, and hit the road to peddle his method and, for the first time, himself. He began franchising his method for cooking chicken in 1952 as a mere menu item at extant cafeterias; he did not require anything other than his pressure cooker technique be used and his recipe be honored. The very first franchise was sold to Pete Harman, a Utah businessman; Kentucky Fried Chicken was first served outside Corbin, Kentucky, in a restaurant called the Do Drop Inn just outside Salt Lake City. The rest of the menu consisted of other comfort foods, but the chicken soon became the star. So successful was the Do Drop Inn after the addition of chicken to the menu that Harman was able to open a second and third location. He eventually came to own two hundred thirty-eight Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurants throughout Utah, Colorado, and much of the Rocky Mountain region.<sup>59</sup> Harman, a more experienced restaurateur, helped Sanders package his product for better franchising opportunities to great success; indeed, it was he who came up with the name and the idea of putting Sanders' image on the signs.

In the next eleven years, six hundred Kentucky Fried Chicken franchises opened across America. Most of these franchises were simply the same handshake deal Sanders

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<sup>59</sup> Haraldson, Tom. "Pete Harman: KFC's Secret Weapon." *Davis Clipper*, Aug 2005, [http://davisclipper.com/view/full\\_story/161918/article-Pete-Harman---KFC-s-secret-weapon](http://davisclipper.com/view/full_story/161918/article-Pete-Harman---KFC-s-secret-weapon) (accessed Nov 30, 2011).

made with Harman—a nickel to Sanders for each piece of chicken sold.<sup>60</sup> His original goal was to make ten thousand dollars a year, enough to keep him comfortable in his old age. By 1964, he was able to sell his nascent chicken dynasty for two million dollars to Louisville businessman John W Brown.<sup>61</sup> Brown had a talent for scouting unique food personalities and recognized something broadly marketable in Sanders’ brand.<sup>62</sup> He helped to crystallize it, and the self-styled colonel stayed on as a spokesperson for the company until his death 1980. When he died at the age of ninety, Colonel Sanders was the second most recognizable person in the world—no small task for an uneducated boy from central Indiana.<sup>63</sup>

How did this Harland Sanders go from guileless Hoosier to “quintessential Southerner” in a matter of a decade?<sup>64</sup> It should be said that Colonel Sanders was as much as Southerner as he was a colonel. He was neither of these things,<sup>65</sup> but made himself the quintessential representation of both through clever and persistent

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<sup>60</sup> According to Herbert, the last of these so-called handshake deals expired long after the Colonel’s death, with some ending within the last ten years. Herbert, W. Interview by Kirsten Schofield. *Interview with Wally Herbert*. Unpublished, 29 Sep.

<sup>61</sup> A mere seven years later, the same Brown sold the company to food and alcohol conglomerate Heublein for 274 million dollars. Colonel Sanders died feeling cheated out of a sizeable sum and became more of a liability than an asset in his last years when he became outspoken about this and other perceived slights. Herbert, W. Interview by Kirsten Schofield. *Interview with Wally Herbert*. Unpublished, 29 Sep.

<sup>62</sup> The Colonel was certainly Brown’s greatest success. Others, like Ollie Gleinchenhaus, were less profitable but built on the same principles. Kenney, Ray. "John Brown's Buddy." *Time*, 28 Aug 1978, <http://0-web.ebscohost.com.umiss.lib.olemiss.edu/ehost/detail?vid=2&hid=107&sid=261eb195-b7ce-4fb1-9816-b66357f42390%40sessionmgr112&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWwhvc3QtbGl2ZSZyY29wZT1zaXRl#db=aph&AN=53811190> (accessed Dec 1, 2011).

<sup>63</sup> This is according to the official biography found on the Yum! Brands official site for the brand, KFC.com. In the survey mentioned above, he was edged out by another Kentuckian, boxer Muhammad Ali. "Kentucky Fried Chicken." YUM! Brands. [www.kfc.com/about](http://www.kfc.com/about)

<sup>64</sup> Howorth, Lisa "Encyclopedia of Southern Culture: Foodways" *Harland Sanders* Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press. 2007.

<sup>65</sup> Colonel Sanders was not a military colonel, but rather an honorary one. Depending on the biography consulted, he either never served or was briefly a non-combat private. The commonwealth of Kentucky has an honorary society called the Kentucky Colonels, and from this Sanders’ took his title. The governor names Kentuckians who have done a service to the commonwealth ‘colonels.’ Colonel Sanders was awarded his title in 1939. To give the reader an idea of the burden of service required of a colonel, other noteworthy colonels include Johnny Depp, Rosemary Clooney, and the author of this paper.

marketing. His choice of Kentucky, rather than generally the South, as the base of his identity was shrewd; like the styling of bourbon mascots before him, he was free of the baggage of a plantation owner from the Confederacy proper. Though he cultivated the bearing of such a person, the border state element of his public face insulated him from the burden of Southern history, solidly identified with the cultivated South of popular imagination.

With his white suit and military title, he looks the part of a man you could respect and trust. As he stands over the deep fryer, the audience gets the impression that he is directly overseeing every aspect of production. The consumer is implicitly told that the product is wholesome; it is branded as a product you can trust. There is oversight and concern, and both of these emanate from a kindly old man in a spotless white suit. The persona he crafted was “somewhere between Santa Claus and your favorite uncle,” and was “nearly magical” in its ability to put people at ease and create familiarity, but keep them at the dignified distance one gives to a fictional character.<sup>66</sup>

Though credit is due to Harman and Brown for their help, this was, first and foremost, Harland Sanders’ creation. From the outset, he maintained tight control over his image and that of his burgeoning corporation. “There was a plan in place,” says Wally Herbert, a historian who has worked closely with YUM! Brands for more than a decade, though it was one of image rather than finance. Though he did not have a clear business plan, Sanders had a high degree of self-awareness from the outset; despite being “just a man who liked to dress up like a colonel,”<sup>67</sup> he stuck to the script he wrote

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<sup>66</sup> Kentucky Fried Chicken. *Memories of the Colonel*. Wav. This was a gift from Shirley Topmiller, Sanders’ personal assistant for three decades. It is unpublished and undated, but was produced circa 2005.

<sup>67</sup> Schlosser, Eric and Charles Wilson. *Chew on This*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. 2006. p. 28.

for himself with tenacity. In an era in which the idea of branding oneself was entirely unknown, the Colonel created and performed an entire character, complete with catch phrases, values, and personal flourishes, that he could act out for profit for the rest of his life. This matters for several reasons: the creation and protection of the Colonel Sanders brand is what propelled Kentucky Fried Chicken forward in the fast food race, the image of Colonel Sanders directly and indirectly impacted the way non-Southerners see the American South, and the Colonel Sanders character was the first in a now-long line of so-called professional Southerners to find success and credibility in commercial foodways.

In 1963, the virtually-unknown Sanders appeared on the scripted quiz show *What's My Line*, which has panelists ask people with interesting jobs yes or no questions about their work. He is introduced by means of cue card as the “owner of a Southern fried chicken chain” because his corporation and image was not well-known enough to guarantee recognition by a national audience. This is one of the first times the Colonel character is articulated publically and the performance is immaculate. This appearance predates the purchase of Kentucky Fried Chicken by Brown and his associates; this is Sanders’ own invention come to life.

The Colonel strides on screen in his trademark white linen suit and black string tie, announcing that he is from Shelbyville, Kentucky. Within moments, one panelist declares him “a Southern gentleman.” Kentucky bluegrass, Southern hospitality, and mint juleps are worked in to the questions. Everyone has bought the act; Sanders’ rendition of the South is immediately recognizable to the panel and audience. Colonel Sanders makes reference to himself as a colonel each time he can mention it. His accent is thickly Appalachian; he pronounces no ‘g’s’, employs numerous “see here”’s, and



pronounces “sure” in the way indigenous to Corbin and its neighboring counties (more like “shore”).<sup>68</sup> After his profession has been revealed, he emphasizes the difference between his product and other fried chicken: his is *Southern* and from Kentucky, and its eleven herbs and spices make it superior and unique. Although he had yet to appear in a Kentucky Fried Chicken commercial, the Harland Sanders who appears on *What’s My Line* was already The Colonel.

From the start, Sanders packaged himself as a Southern gentleman, almost a relic from another time. He whitened his hair and signature goatee long before his hair grayed and walked with a cane because he believed people liked imagining him as a grandfatherly figure; 1963, when this spot was shot, was during the years in which he was walking unaided in private settings and bleaching his hair to facilitate this image.<sup>69</sup> Much of the biographical information he gives during this spot is false as well; for example, he describes Shelbyville as being “about ninety miles” from Louisville and in the “central western” part of the state. Ignoring the lie he tells about where he is from, neither of these facts is accurate. Shelbyville is approximately thirty miles from downtown Louisville, an area not generally considered Western Kentucky. As with any performance, the facts are irrelevant. Ignoring, for a moment, all the other performative aspects of this segment, it becomes clear to a close observer that biographical truth is secondary to protecting the branded character. The rural origin myth is as important a component to the archetype of the Southern gentleman that Colonel Sanders has adapted and expanded upon. Harland Sanders the man understood that the truth of his factual back story was insufficient for the character he was trying to create and

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<sup>68</sup> *What’s My Line?* Prod. Mark Goodson. Perf. John Charles Daly and Harland D. Sanders. CBS, 1963. *Youtube.com*. Youtube, 18 Feb. 2009. Web. 29 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wk4Eq8IcQMk>>.

<sup>69</sup> Herbert, Wally. Interview by Kirsten Schofield. *Interview with Wally Herbert*. Unpublished, 29 Sep.

supplemented the truth with something more palatable for an audience craving the South. A late-middle-aged, able-bodied Midwesterner was not what consumers wanted; they wanted a dignified Southern grandfather, and he was willing to be that man.

Also relevant is the way the panelists react to his performance. They are taken with his elegance, yet unable to make any of the more negative stereotypes about Southerners stick. "You're too beautiful to work," the first woman enthuses, admiring his suit. A few hackneyed jokes about horsemeat are thrown around, but the Colonel is too tidy for that to apply. They try again with a few cracks about louche drunkards and plantations, but the clean-living Colonel is not quite dandyish enough to play into that stereotype. Though contemporary viewers see the Colonel as a stereotype now, at the time, he stood alone. He was neither Jed Clampett nor Rhett Butler, and that gave the panel pause. It is not the case that Southerners were not used as marketing tools prior to Colonel Sanders, but it is the case that these Southerners were problematic for one reason or another and eventually became unusable as a result. Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben both predate Colonel Sanders, as did myriad mascots of the white dandy or hillbilly variety. Following the Civil Rights Movement, these characters became unusable as manifestations of their products. Advertisers began to shy away from mammies and plantation owners for fear of invoking harmful stereotypes about slavery in an effort to stay current and to court the growing capital of black Americans. Colonel Sanders, sober and suited, is almost above these stereotypes. Though he is white, he does not hearken back to a glorified plantation era, nor is he an offensive caricature of lower-class whites. Because he introduced this character so late in the era when these mascots were acceptable, he did not have a lot of backpedaling to do to sanitize his image and make it marketable. In this way, yet again, Harland Sanders the man helped to insulate himself

from obscurity by accurately predicting the way the social and fiscal climate would swing.

In the late sixties and into the seventies, Colonel Sanders appeared in the majority of Kentucky Fried Chicken commercials that aired around the world. A commercial that aired beginning in 1969 shows Colonel Sanders sitting in a rocking chair in a country home. He tells the viewer he would be “mighty proud, mighty proud” for his chicken to grace the dinner table. He calls the youngest daughter and the mother “honey” and drops in a “lookathere” for effect.<sup>70</sup> In another commercial, he stands over one of his “boys” as the young man batters and fries drumsticks.<sup>71</sup> His accent, in these commercials, is less Appalachian than in his appearance on *What’s My Line*; it is more of a generic, rootless Southern accent, like the ones commonly heard in films, with long the long “i” pronounced as more “ah” than “eye.”<sup>72</sup> He has had some coaching for his new role, particularly vocally, but nothing of substance has changed. Although his accent is inconsistent across commercials, everything else remains utterly constant. He never deviates from his trademark suit,<sup>73</sup> nor from directly addressing the audience. His initial characterization was good enough to remain effective. At this point, he is no longer walking without the use of a cane nor coloring his beard to seem more venerable. The fiction is edging closer in to reality. He breaks the fourth wall, locking eyes with the viewer and extolling the virtues of his Kentucky-fried chicken. The guileless

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<sup>70</sup> Kentucky Fried Chicken. Advertisement. *Kentucky Fried Chicken Commercial- 1969*. YouTube, 3 Feb. 2007. Web. 29 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pwURoueDzFo>>.

<sup>71</sup> Kentucky Fried Chicken. Advertisement. *KFC Commercial, Late 1970s*. YouTube, 19 Mar. 2007. Web. 30 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k0jB7NJ87Js>>.

<sup>72</sup> Graham, Allison. "White Women, Blood Pollution, and Southern Sexuality." *Framing the South: Hollywood, Television, and Race during the Civil Rights Struggle*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2001. 19-53. Print.

<sup>73</sup> From 1960-1980, he never appeared in public in anything but a white suit. Ozersky, John. "KFC's Colonel Sanders: He Was Real, Not Just an Icon." *Time Magazine* 15 Sept. 2010. Web. <<http://www.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,2019218,00.html>>.

Midwesterner's performance is so compelling that not even the top marketing executives of the day could improve upon it appreciably. He is still the same man audiences met on *What's My Line?* more than a decade prior.

As was mentioned before, Colonel Sanders was the first of a new kind of food icon: a personal brand. Sanders acted as a mentor to another fast-food icon: Dave Thomas, founder of Wendy's Hamburgers. Though not a Southerner, Thomas, too, became a brand unto himself. Thomas' first Wendy's was initially a Kentucky Fried Chicken, and many of Sanders' technical systems carried over into the Wendy's model as well as the marketing strategy of working himself into the corporate branding (e.g. "Dave's Bacon Cheeseburger"). In a 1997 interview for *POV* Magazine, he paints a clear picture of what it was like working with him.

"Why would he dress up in a funny-lookin' suit and vest and mustache and goatee...he was very charming. He won you over...but he used to chew me out. He'd cuss me out. He didn't want people dumping his chicken...he wanted you to ladle out from the pot. It was not better, but he said if I was going to use that system, then 'don't ever talk to me again.'...You couldn't really reason with him...he was very demanding...he was a man of quality, but when he left the office, no one moved a muscle until he got back."<sup>74</sup>

Thomas also notes that Sanders was very conscious of the enduring image of his company and himself, controlling it with an iron fist. "To know about fried chicken, you have to have been weaned and reared on it in the South. Period," says food writer John T. Edge.<sup>75</sup> Sanders was aware of the clout The Colonel had with consumers, but also aware of the tenuousness of his representation; everything was riding on the exact

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<sup>74</sup> "When I Was 25." Interview by Joel Enguardio. *POV* Feb. 2000. Print. Tape recording of this interview was accessed via YouTube on 29 November 2010 at the following URL:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f7u8HjdvUpk&playnext=1&list=PL76C3813E1B2B04C8&index=4>

<sup>75</sup> Edge, John T.. *Fried Chicken: An American Story*. New York: Putnam. 2004. p 24.

facsimile of the South he had engineered and acted out. He needed each and every franchisee to stay on message and to perform the “weaned and reared” role he had written for them. Says Thomas:

“His image was powerful. The farther you got away from Kentucky, the better off that name was. People are like, ‘what is Kentucky?’ Kentucky fried chicken was more important, more fascinating, more intriguing in Ohio than it was in Kentucky.”<sup>76</sup>

Sanders was committed to maintaining the image of himself as a The Colonel, and by extension, the reputation his company enjoyed as a homespun, small-town operation even as it grew to gargantuan proportions. After he was bought out in 1964 and consigned to the position of mascot, he vocally opposed measures that were enacted to make the company more profitable and turn more units.

“That friggin’ ... outfit .... They prostituted every goddamn thing I had. I had the greatest gravy in the world and those sons of bitches—they dragged it out and extended it and watered it down that I’m so goddamn mad.”<sup>77</sup> He voiced his concerns vocally and colorfully until his death in 1980, disheartened by what he saw as a betrayal of the values he had promoted during his brief ownership of the corporation.<sup>78</sup> This is remarkable in two ways: these outbursts represent rare fissures in his performance of a genteel, viceless gentleman while simultaneously reinforcing them. Harland Sanders the man was a progressive businessman as was discussed above. He was food science innovator and a forward-looking man as it related to technology, but the image he chose

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<sup>76</sup> Thomas, Dave. Interview with Joel Enguardio.

<sup>77</sup> [a](#) [b](#) Ritzer, George (2004). *The McDondaldization of Society*. New York: Pine Forge Press. p. 64.

<sup>78</sup> An executive at the firm that owned KFC at the end of his life, Heublein, recalls a board meeting Sanders attended in the late 1970s. As various strategies for making the gravy more consistent and easier to prepare were discussed, Sanders grew enraged, finally shouting, “Don’t fuck with the gravy!” The president of the corporation replied that they had purchased the gravy for two million dollars and would do with it what they pleased. Sanders attended no further meetings of substance. Haner, Scott. Interview with Kirsten Schofield. Unpublished. 20 Nov. 2010.

to profess as himself was unrefined, simple, and wholesome. These late-life tantrums that spoke against extenders, additives, and shortcuts undergird that image. It is as if the only thing that could bring Sanders to break with manners and convention is a perceived slight to the honor and honesty of his product.

Even after his death, Kentucky Fried Chicken continued to use Colonel Sanders as its corporate mascot, although they began to diversify their strategies. In a manner of speaking, the Colonel used from 1980 onward is truer. Although he is not a living, breathing person but rather a cartoon or an impersonator, Colonel Sanders is now what Harland Sanders long tried to portray. The character Sanders is now crystallized and perfect, but also openly the fiction he always was.

Beginning in the 1980s and continuing to the present day, the overwhelming majority of print and television ads feature families, with the emphasis landing squarely on fried chicken being the ideal family meal. Most of the shots are of mothers bringing home a bucket of fried chicken to their children, and announcing how wonderful it is to “feel so good about a meal.”<sup>79</sup> Others refer to it as a “Sunday meal” on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, etc. The commercials emphasize how wholesome the food served at Kentucky Fried Chicken is compared with their competitors; the implication is that this is how food ought to be: traditional, unfussy, and something you would be proud to serve your family.<sup>80</sup> The Colonel, in illustrated or animated form, appears alongside the name card as an assurance that nothing has changed; despite the passing of Harland Sanders, Colonel Sanders and all he stands for is alive and well. The uncultured yet decent image Harland Sanders created in the 1950s is still marketable today.

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<sup>79</sup> Kentucky Fried Chicken. Advertisement. *It's So Nice To Feel So Good About a Meal- 1979*. YouTube, 29 Oct. 2009. Web. 29 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZNI1wgSuqr0>>.

<sup>80</sup> Kentucky Fried Chicken. Advertisement. *Jason Alexander- KFC Commercial, 2002*. YouTube, 29 Oct. 2009. Web. 30 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7yOVJ38CU2o&feature=related>>.

Kentucky Fried Chicken has also sought to reinforce its image as a Southern company by sponsoring NASCAR vehicles and including retooled Lynard Skynard songs in television spots. Some franchisees in non-Southern parts of the United States have voiced concern about a few of these moves, but the overwhelming number have found them effective in strengthening the brand; abroad, these campaigns have been among their most successful in recent memory.<sup>81</sup> In conjunction with its consistent use of families, tradition, and the Colonel in their advertisements, Kentucky Fried Chicken remains a Southern company even though its primary markets are now in India and China.<sup>82</sup> So successfully did Harland Sanders brand his company that thirty years after his death, people the world over have integrated a clear picture of Kentucky, and moreover, the South, into the collective consciousness. Colonel Sanders' South is home to fresh fried chicken, traditional values, and men in summer suits, then, now, and forever. These images exoticize the South, and fried chicken is its emissary to foreign lands. Many foreigners with only the barest grasp on American geography readily link the two. It is integral to the success of Kentucky Fried Chicken to maintain this image, otherwise there would be no difference between the Colonel's Original Recipe Popcorn Chicken and the rootless, placeless Chicken McNugget. It is the South, not the eleven herbs and spices, that sells the chicken, and the unwavering image of Colonel Sanders as the archetypal and ideal Kentuckian.

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<sup>81</sup> Herbert, W. Interview with Kirsten Schofield. Unpublished. 28 September 2011.

<sup>82</sup> Adler, Carlye. "Colonel Sanders' March on China." *Time Magazine* 17 Nov. 2003. Web. 30 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,543845,00.html>>.

#### IV. OUR LADY OF THE DEEP FAT FRYER: THE POST-RACIAL, NEW MEDIA

##### MAMMY<sup>83</sup>

Americans love a feel-good, Horatio Alger story. Rags to riches is an integral part of the way Americans define themselves; through hard work and determination, anyone can achieve anything. Enter Paula Deen. In her own words, she embodies the American Dream.

“...the American Dream is alive and well...you can be an imperfect person and still end up with so much fun in your life you can hardly stand it. I’m prayin’ that if even one of you gets some inspiration from the way my own American dream turned into reality, it’ll be worth playin’ true confessions here.”<sup>84</sup>

In more specific terms for those who have not read her memoir (cited above), the story of Paula Deen is one of many years of hard work followed by sudden, meteoric fame. In 1989, Food Network personality was a single mom struggling to raise two young sons and suffering from paralyzing agoraphobia. She had been a cook at the Best Western’s hotel restaurant and a bank teller at a branch in downtown Savannah, but that was not enough to support her family following her divorce. To help supplement her income and

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<sup>83</sup> A note before beginning: This is the first exploration of an academic nature of Paula Deen. Because she is a dynamic entity consistently in the news and is currently a very divisive figure, certain elements of her story cannot be examined here. Further studies could explore some of her legal battles, the eventual outcome of her diabetes drug endorsement (at the time of writing, her diabetes has just been announced), or her use of social media throughout both of these events. Unfortunately, there simply is not time nor space to address all elements of her shifting public face in this work.

<sup>84</sup> Deen, Paula, and Sherry Suib. Cohen. *Paula Deen A Memoir: It Ain't All About the Cookin*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007. Print. p. 3.



conquer her fear of being outside her home, she decided to open a lunch cart, going office tower to office tower selling hot meals to busy executives. As her business expanded, she set her eyes on opening her own restaurant. On the first day of lunch service at her Savannah restaurant, The Lady and Sons, she was overdrawn at several banks and had “not a dime to [her] name.”<sup>85</sup> <sup>86</sup> She managed to get her doors open, and from there, anyone with cable knows the story. Her Southern home-style cooking became a staple of historic Savannah and led her to meeting innumerable influential people, including John Berendt, the author of *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, a classic of the true crime genre set in Savannah. He introduced her to his contacts at the then-new Food Network and from there, her operation exploded. The Food Network offered Deen her own program in 1999, and her brand has expanded to include two more television programs, a role in a major film, a line of kitchenware, furniture, five cookbooks, a magazine, endorsement deals, and even her own brand of flour. All three television shows are shot in her Savannah home’s vast kitchen, replete with Viking appliances, Calphalon pots, and Japanese knives. One thing is certain: Paula Deen has come a long way from her days owing money all over town. She is, by her own admission, the archetypal American success story.

Deen is famous for two things: her exaggerated Georgia drawl and her aggressive use of butter. Big, brassy, and sassy, Deen is equal parts Blanche Devereux and Granny Clampett with a good measure of “bawdy” trashiness thrown in for good measure.<sup>87</sup>

Though she makes near-constant use of sexual innuendo, her overall bearing is

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<sup>85</sup> Deen, Paula H. Introduction. *Paula Deen's Kitchen Classics: the Lady & Sons Savannah Country Cookbook and the Lady & Sons, Too!* New York: Random House, 2005. 176. Print.

<sup>86</sup> Deen, Paula, and Sherry Suib. Cohen. *Paula Deen A Memoir: It Ain't All About the Cookin.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007. Print. 2.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

desexualized, like the black mammies before her. Though white, she calls to mind the association involuntarily. Her humble beginnings as a poor white person in the rural low country of Georgia are pertinent; poor, rural Southerners remain the last social group in the American landscape that popular culture can caricature and lampoon without repercussion and she willingly plays into this. Her down-home turns of phrase and unthreatening food made her an overnight success on the Food Network. She is probably the most recognizable personality on the cable channel currently, and the story she is selling is that of the South.

*Paula's Home Cooking*, her first program on Food Network, was not the first show on the channel that focused on Southern food. Beginning in 1994,<sup>88</sup> Cajun chef Emeril Lagasse hosted several different programs on the network; he was the Food Network's first real star. With his warm stage presence and catchy taglines ("BAM!" and "kick it up a notch"), he was a runaway success. Though both were popular with viewers, with their outsized personalities and emphasis on a sense of place, Lagasse differs from Deen in a fundamental way. He is a professional chef who went to culinary school at Johnson and Wales University, trained with famed chef Paul Prudhomme, and owned several white-tablecloth restaurants. The recipes he prepared on *Emeril Live* and *Essence of Emeril* call for ingredients that an amateur chef may not have on hand. Some of them are very difficult; his signature shrimp etouffee is an all-day affair with over thirty ingredients.<sup>89</sup> Noted food authority Anthony Bourdain says it best: "...compared to who's on Food Network now, he looks like [seminal cookbook author and French chef

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<sup>88</sup> It should be noted that, while Lagasse specializes in Cajun cuisine and displays somewhat confusing regional signifiers, he is originally from Massachusetts.

<sup>89</sup> Lagasse, Emeril, dir. "EMO120- Emeril Live." *Emeril Live*. FoodNetwork. New York City, New York, 2002. Television.

Auguste] Escoffier. In retrospect, that was pretty distinguished stuff compared to what that network's doing now.”<sup>90</sup>

The character that Paula Deen’s marketing team has created for her to play has some basis in her actual nature, but has taken on the qualities of a caricature as her fame grows. The Food Network’s homepage for Deen sums up her schtick like this:

“With small-town life as her inspiration, Paula Deen brings uncomplicated and delicious home cooking to a series dedicated to the American traditions. Whether it's her stories or her recipes from her country kitchen, Paula has always had a gift for lifting spirits.”<sup>91</sup>

Deen has been framed as a likeable everywoman, the down-home Southern grandmother viewers in Oregon wish they had. While standing in front of a crowd of several hundred women who had styled their hair and makeup much like her Deen herself agreed with this assessment. When asked directly, she stated:

“I think people see me and really relate to me. I’m like them. They see me cooking and it just reminds them of someone who used to cook for them and really loved them. It reminds them of home.”<sup>92</sup>

Indeed, the tags for her cooking on the Food Network website are “Southern” and “comfort food.” Her on-screen kitchen is studded with knickknacks. A large fireplace in the background is always blazing. She is always feeding guests to her show heaping

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<sup>90</sup>Anthony Bourdain's Guide to Food Television." Interview by Paula Forbes. *Eat Me Daily*. Eat Me Daily, 12 Mar. 2009. Web. 24 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.eatmedaily.com/2009/03/anthony-bourdains-guide-to-food-television/>>.

<sup>91</sup> Food Network. "Paula's Home Cooking: About." *Food Network - Easy Recipes, Healthy Eating Ideas and Chef Recipe Videos*. Food Network. Web. 29 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.foodnetwork.com/paulas-home-cooking/index.html>>.

<sup>92</sup> Schofield, Kirsten. *Paula Deen Book Signing at Square Books*. 19 Oct. 2011. Attended a book signing and spoke with the author. 100 Courthouse Square, Oxford, Mississippi.

portions of hashbrown casserole, meatloaf, and peach cobbler, ignoring their protests of having just eaten.<sup>93</sup>

Throughout her tenure at Food Network, Deen has been promoted as a Southern cook, and why not? Her legend was built on the collard greens, hoecakes, and fried chicken at The Lady and Sons. Her restaurant today bears little in common with the one she personally operated. Though once considered one of the tastiest restaurants in Savannah, it is now loathed by locals and for good cause. A man who could best be described as a carnival barker stands outside the restaurant, encouraging people to shout “BUTTER!” and “Y’ALL!” and helping them to queue up, sometimes for hours at a stretch. Tourists still flock to The Lady and Sons, but Savannahians give it a wide berth.<sup>94</sup>

When Deen joined the Food Network, she started as a somewhat generic Southern cook, but her offerings have become progressively more deep fried and her g’s have become increasingly scarce as the network adds more shows, cookbooks, and endorsements. Her character has become less dignified as she becomes more celebrated. In an early promotional spot, Paula explains what makes her cooking show special:

“...[it’s] a wonderfully light, fun, family show that involves traditional recipes that are easy to follow...They have no barriers. No matter what race, religion, or culture, everyone loves my cooking. Turnip green, collard greens, all those Southern vegetables. But you can get some of those in the North now... No exotics, I don’t go for exotic. I am not a chef. I am a cook. A graduate of Irene Paul’s Cooking School. That’s my grandmother.”<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Deen, Paula, prod. "Get Cookin' With Paula Deen: Meatloaf." *Get Cookin' With Paula Deen*. FoodNetwork. New York City, New York, 2009. *Get Cookin' With Paula Deen: Meatloaf*. YouTube, 9 Sept. 2009. Web. 27 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AFc6KPGfVs8>>.

<sup>94</sup> REFERENCE TRIP TO SAVANNAH

<sup>95</sup> This spot is undated, but appears to have been shot in approximately 2003-2005, based on Deen’s appearance and general trends in her marketing strategy. Paula’s Home Cooking. Advertisement. *Food*

In the two and a half minute advertisement, Deen does not say “y’all” a single time. To the uninitiated, this may not seem like much of a feat, but in her current iteration, this would not be possible. Deen says “y’all” and “lookathere” and “gimme some-a that yum-yum!” dozens of times per episode. For comparison, her Smithfield Ham commercials that are currently airing contain three y’alls in each thirty second advertisement.<sup>96</sup> To be clear, Deen has a Southern accent that she came by honestly, a Low Country accent that is non-rhotic but closer to what Americans consider an “English” accent than the Hollywood-approved *Gone with the Wind* one, but it has grown more exaggerated and more generically Southern as she becomes less a person and more a personality. Furthermore, the recipes she puts forth have become less Southern (and certainly less low country; it is rare to see her cook with the rice and seafood indigenous to her region) and more ridiculous, playing on notions of what non-Southerners believe Southerners eat.

Another example of this manufactured and baseless Southern-ness comes in her cookbooks. Her first cookbook, published in 1998 when she was merely a restaurateur in Savannah, has an entire section devoted to salads and vegetables, the majority of which are still in their original, fresh forms.<sup>97</sup> Many Southern dishes are fresh and light and feature garden-fresh vegetables, and Deen celebrates that in her work. The foreword to this particular cookbook was written by the ultimate Yankee transplant, the

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*Network - Easy Recipes, Healthy Eating Ideas and Chef Recipe Videos*. Food Network, unknown. Web. 30 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.foodnetwork.com/videos/paula-deen-chefography/24102.html>>.

<sup>96</sup> Smithfield Ham. Advertisement. *Youtube.com*. YouTube, 3 Sept. 2008. Web. 1 Dec. 2010. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJfSF0S11Y4>>.

<sup>97</sup> Deen, Paula H. "Vegetables and Sides." *The Lady & Sons Savannah Country Cookbook*. New York: Random House, 1998. Print.

aforementioned writer John Berendt. The South-fixated *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* author describes her as a “steel magnolia” stating that she is:

“...an irresistible example of that extraordinary phenomenon of Southern womanhood...She is appealing and gracious but possessed of an unfailing survival instinct—a necessary character trait or a Southern cook to make it.”<sup>98</sup>

Berendt paints a picture of a very dignified woman who is wholly different from her Northern counterparts. In no way is she a cartoon character, but the very paradigm of all that makes the South great and distinct. Indeed, it was much on his word that she became an icon of Savannah (and the South at large); he encouraged all his friends to visit her restaurants should they go to Georgia.<sup>99</sup>

After a few seasons on the Food Network, she wrote a second cookbook, *The Lady and Sons, Too!*. These recipes have more butter, are more likely to be fried, and are much more meat-and-potatoes based. The vegetable section is shorter, and there is quantifiably more cheese.<sup>100</sup> The introduction begins with the word “y’all.” The handwritten inscription for the volume used for this paper, she writes, “Happy cookin’, Staci!” Her marketing team recognized in the space of months that the Paula Deen the Brand was most viable as a hillbilly character with easy, comforting recipes and a countrified demeanor. They distilled the most Southern-seeming elements of her cooking (butter, cream, whole milk, and a deep fryer) and began to market those images aggressively. Non-Southerners ate it up, crowning her “the queen of Southern cooking” and the “butter queen.”<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid, xxv.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, xxiii.

<sup>100</sup> Deen, Paula H. "Vegetables and Sides." *The Lady & Sons Too!* New York: Random House, 2008. Print.

<sup>101</sup> "Paula Deen on Thanksgiving, Her Blood Pressure, and the Butter Scene in Last Tango in Paris." Interview by Erik Spitznagel. *Vanity Fair Online*. Vanity Fair- Conde Nast, 24 Nov. 2010. Web. 27 Nov.

Her most recent volume, *Paula Deen's Southern Cooking Bible*, continues this trend: the foreword begins with and is peppered liberally with “y’all”s, the chapter titles (like those in her memoir) feature dropped “g” titles (e.g., “Gettin’ Started”), and nearly all of the recipes in the salad section are more along the lines of mayonnaise- or jello-based concoctions than baby greens and cherry tomatoes. Each recipe comes prefaced with a short anecdote about it, and these, too, are written in a strongly colloquial fashion.<sup>102</sup>

The Food Network has realized that they have a product people want to buy. Paula Deen has become a multi-million dollar brand, and she is recognizable to consumers across the country as a symbol of the deep-fried South. Her name has become synonymous with comfort and home; the tagline for her furniture line is “bring comfort home.”

Because of her success, her producer, Australian Gordon Elliott, has signed on a coterie of like-minded chefs: the aforementioned Georgians Pat and Gina Neelys, oversized and outspoken Southern transplant Big Daddy Aaron McCargo, and the young West Virginian bride of Billy Joel, Katie Lee Joel.<sup>103</sup> On the strength of the brand she has built, these cooks became stars, simply copying her persona and reappropriating it for their own shows. By extension, the names Neely, Big Daddy, and Katie Lee have also become synonyms for sincerity, comfort, and home.

Since she was consistently branded as a Southern commodity, she has been integrated into the collective consciousness as genuine, unaffected, and homey. The

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2010. <<http://www.vanityfair.com/online/oscars/2010/11/paula-deen-on-thanksgiving-her-blood-pressure-and-the-butter-scene-in-last-tango-in-paris.html>>.

<sup>102</sup> Deen, Paula H., and Melissa Clark. *Paula Deen's Southern Cooking Bible: The Classic Guide to Delicious Dishes with More than 300 Recipes*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011. Print.

<sup>103</sup> "The Man Behind Paula Deen." Interview by Nicki Gostins. *Slash Food*. AOL, 19 Apr. 2010. Web. 30 Nov. 2010. <<http://www.slashfood.com/2010/04/19/the-man-behind-paula-deen/>>.

products she peddles promise that they will be unthreatening (“no exotics”), unchallenging, and unchanging. By using her Southern character as her primary identifier, audiences trust her in a way that they could not trust Emeril Lagasse. Lagasse was a man who made complex Southern food, but Deen is a Southerner who makes some food. The difference there is subtle, but tangible. Because she is a Southerner first and a cook second, her food becomes intrinsically linked with place. Her liberal use of “y’all” and much-publicized use of butter bakes the South in to every last bite of her cobbler.

In light of recent circumstances, it is important to note and discuss the nature of her recent controversies as Paula Deen is currently a brand and, to a lesser extent, human being under siege. Briefly, Deen announced on NBC on 17 January 2012 that she had developed Type II diabetes and simultaneously announced her endorsement of a diabetes drug called the Novo Disk. Though she was diagnosed more than three years prior, she has kept her diabetes a secret from the press. “I wanted to wait until I had something to bring to the table,” she offered, by way of a pun-y explanation.<sup>104</sup> She stated she had no intention of changing the way she cooked in any meaningful way;<sup>105</sup> in the announcement, she told Al Roker, “I’m your cook, not your doctor. You are going to have to be responsible for yourself.” This statement is one she has repeated consistently throughout press engagements in the last few months, and one that has invited

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<sup>104</sup> Moskin, Julia. "Paula Deen Says She Has Diabetes." *Nytimes.com*. New York Times, 17 Jan. 2012. Web. 17 Jan. 2012. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/18/dining/paula-deen-says-she-has-type-2-diabetes.html>>.

<sup>105</sup> She has stopped drinking as much sweet tea and begun to go on walks after meals, the lone allotments she has made for her condition.



substantial mockery from noted food personalities like *No Reservations* star Anthony Bourdain and Beard Award-winning chef John Currence.<sup>106</sup>

This was a watershed moment for the public persona that is Paula Deen and she performed her character as perfectly as Colonel Sanders did on *What's My Line?* There has been substantial outcry from the food establishment that she handled the situation poorly and is not setting a good example for diabetics and pre-diabetics by continuing to cook and eat as though her insulin levels were normal, and indeed that is the case. Most doctors would recommend against eating the way she does and at such volume. To someone observing her cultivated persona, however, the reaction on her part was a foregone conclusion. Though she is a dynamic person, interacting with the world and changing over time, the character she portrays is flat and static. Think back to the adjectives listed in the introduction that are the touchstones of Southern marketing campaigns: unchanging, wholesome, virtuous, simple. Were she to have changed her diet or public face, she would have risked rupturing the foundation upon which it has been built. Variation is unacceptable, as are complicating factors or admission of wrongdoing. The success of her mattress and home furnishings lines are as predicated on butter and sugar as her banana pudding.

The secondary scandal of the Deen universe is a lawsuit alleging racial and sexual harassment by Deen to a former employer of one of her companies. According to court documents, Deen allegedly stated that she “told [the plaintiff] she wanted a “true Southern plantation-style wedding” and, using the epithet, suggested African Americans that would “wear long-sleeve white shirts, black shorts and black bow ties, you know in

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<sup>106</sup> Rao, Vidya. "Deen: Diabetes Won't Change the Way I Cook." *MSNBC.Com*. MSNBC, 17 Jan. 2012. Web. 20 Jan. 2012. <[http://bites.today.msnbc.msn.com/\\_news/2012/01/17/10173727-paula-deen-diabetes-diagnosis-wont-change-how-i-cook](http://bites.today.msnbc.msn.com/_news/2012/01/17/10173727-paula-deen-diabetes-diagnosis-wont-change-how-i-cook)>.

the Shirley Temple days, they used to tap dance around... Now that would be a true southern wedding, wouldn't it? But we can't do that because the media would be on me about that."<sup>107</sup> Additionally, the plaintiff alleges that she was sexually harassed by Deen's brother, Bubba, and that complaints regarding his behavior went unaddressed. While the nature of the allegations and the intent of the plaintiff seem highly suspect and are, as of this writing, unresolved, the actual outcome and objective are immaterial. The fact that the lawsuit has been filed at all is indicative of the total success of her marketing campaign. Because Deen's portrayal of a consistent, unchanging South is so complete and so believable, the plaintiff believed she had a suit that could stick, that the press would also consider plausible. Though it seems extremely unlikely that a woman with so much media coaching would make so explosive an offhand remark to a relatively new employee, the notion that a woman of her age and social class *might* make such a remark is indeed conceivable. Deen's perfect portrayal of Paula Deen the character is what allows allegations such as these to have a day in court. Accusations like these could not and would not be brought against her Yankee counterpart, the Barefoot Countessa Ina Garten; no one can imagine those words escaping someone like the well-to-do, genteel Garten's lips, though they seem like something someone like Deen, raised poor in the midcentury South, *might actually say*. In both instances, the overwhelming comment from the general public is that they do not care that Deen lied about her status as a diabetic or that she may or may not have used racial epithets in the workplace—internet commentators on CNN and MSNBC, cited above, have uniformly stated that they

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<sup>107</sup>Faussett, Richard. "Paula Deen Accused of Condoning Sexual Harassment, Racial Discrimination." *Los Angeles Times* [Los Angeles] 5 Mar. 2012. Print.

like her, relate to her, and do not much care about her racial politics or irresponsible actions surrounding her health.

The success of the Paula Deen brand is dependent on Deen's consistent performance of Paula Deen the character. As a result, the organizational support system that undergirds it is carefully guarded, much like the Colonel Sanders brand before it. Despite the overwhelming emphasis on hospitality and geniality that her marketing team has sought to foster, her organization is nearly impenetrable. While researching for this paper, I made numerous attempts over the course of two years to get in touch with Deen. Inquiries at the Food Network went unanswered, and emails to the "Questions?" account found on her personal website were largely ignored. One representative from Paula Deen did return an email after approximately six weeks. From there, several dozen emails were exchanged, each stating that no one would of import within the organization would have time to speak with me for at least a eighteen months. I sought Deen out myself, finally meeting her in the fall of 2011 in Oxford, Mississippi. After telling her about my project, she encouraged me to get in touch with her for an interview, but when I did so, her representatives informed me that this was impossible and I had misinterpreted our interaction.

So closely monitored is Deen's public face that even major news outlets seeking comment on important stories struggle to get her organization to respond, as if the façade of Deen is so fragile she cannot be trusted to speak on the record without heavy coaching. CNN Eatocracy editor Kat Kinsman's article about Deen in the wake of her recent health and legal scandals contains similar gaps; the Deen camp was unwilling to

comment.<sup>108</sup> This particular reticence on the part of Paula Deen's organization to talk with academics and journalists is interesting because both Kentucky Fried Chicken and the myriad bourbon distilleries profiled here were more than willing to give near total access when requested. The reasons for this press-shy approach are twofold. First and foremost, the personae in question at these other firms are deceased; no current gaffes in this age of social media are documented. It is likely that the Colonel Sanders or Jim Beam camps would be nearly as silent were these men alive today. Secondly, none of the mascots mentioned above, in their forms as actual people, were lightning rods for hot-button issues during their lifetimes, as Paula Deen the woman is. This sort of organizational secrecy begs the question of how tenable these characters are in an era of constant scrutiny; it seems that they are not, though only time will tell. Deen is perhaps the last of the real person-based mascots; cartoon characters and well-designed logos, after all, rarely invite public backlash of this magnitude.

The Deen marketing machine, despite these setbacks, remains one of the strongest in the current advertising landscape. The selections of product endorsements (Novo Disk aside) are uniform, supporting the general image of Deen as a homemaker and rural Southerner. With each successive "y'all" that is artificially slipped in to her scripts, she becomes more authentically Southern in the popular imagination. She is selling the South first and cookbooks second.

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<sup>108</sup>Kinsman, Kat. "Paula Deen: From the Frying Pan into the Firestorm." *CNN.com* 10 Mar. 2012. Online.

V. EATING UP THE SOUTH: THE IMPLICATIONS OF SOUTHERN PERFORMANCE  
IN FOODWAYS

During the 2008 presidential election, vice presidential candidate and then-governor of Alaska Sarah Palin was quoted at a campaign stop in Greenville, North Carolina saying:

“[John McCain and I] believe that the best of America is in these small towns that we get to visit, and in these wonderful little pockets of what I call the real America, being here with all of you hard working very patriotic, um, very, um, pro-America areas of this great nation.”<sup>109</sup>

Though she was given several opportunities to correct this sentiment, Palin went on to define other parts of the country as “real” America and “pro” America. Other locations that were deemed “real” included southwestern Virginia<sup>110</sup> and Elon, North Carolina. Though this was seen by the McCain camp as an embarrassing gaffe, Palin’s sentiments reflect a shift in the American conscience regarding region. The South, with its enduring symbols of distinctiveness, has increasingly been seen as being more authentic, more genuine, and more traditional than the rest of the country. In some contexts, this is framed as backwardness, but for marketing purposes, it becomes a selling point. The South becomes a bucolic fairy land for firms wishing to emphasize the quality and authenticity of their goods. Even the official line from the Food Network conflates

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<sup>109</sup> Eliperin, Juliet. "Palin's Pro America Remark: Extended." Weblog post. *TheWashingtonpost.com*. Washington Post, 17 Oct. 2008. Web. 1 Dec. 2010. <<http://voices.washingtonpost.com/44/2008/10/palin-clarifies-her-pro-america.html>>.

<sup>110</sup> JLP. "McCain Camp Says Northern Virginia Is Not "Real" Virginia." Web log post. *ABCnews.com*. ABC, 18 Oct. 2008. Web. 1 Dec. 2010. <<http://blogs.abcnews.com/politicalpunch/2008/10/mccain-adviser.html>>.

country with Southern and Southern with American.<sup>111</sup> By adopting a drawl, referencing an Alabama childhood, or even simply placing the word “Southern” in front of a product name, the thing being advertised increases in emotional value. What was before a pecan dessert is more appealing when marketed as Southern pecan pie. It goes from being a nice thing to serve to being something that was always served, generation in and generation out; a Southern pecan pie has a heritage that a simple pecan pie cannot have.

Using the tools discussed throughout this study—the cream/red/black color schemes, the old-fashioned font choices, the cultivated, rootless accent of promoters, the references to family homesteads, the down-home recipes—dozens of companies have struck marketing gold. Cracker Barrel, Popeye’s, Bojangle’s, Claire Robinson, and countless others have picked and chosen elements of this identity to create the consumer trust. While this is good for business and for the individuals profiting from these performances, it ultimately reinforces a fiction that actual Southerners are obligated to perform for each other and for the outside world and is actively contributing to the breaking down of unique regional identities across the South. If Harland Sanders failed to champion Appalachian foodways in favor of a pan-Southern cuisine, these things fade from local view and are never given their due in popular culture. If bourbon and sweet tea are the cornerstones of liquid Southern culture, they can mandate enjoyment from Southerners who may otherwise prefer an orange juice. Because these characters have performed an invented identity, the invented South has supplanted the actual South and a rich cultural landscape replete with distinct regional identities, cuisines, and modes of expression have been obligated to transition to more generic renditions of themselves.

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<sup>111</sup> See quotation on p. 49.

Ultimately, the created South has become Real America. Through assertive and consistent marketing, the South has become a consumer good, and one that is trusted and preferred. As regional distinctions fall away in other parts of the country and indeed the world, the South stands in for old-fashioned America. Goods that have long advertised themselves as Southern are now fundamentally American in a very nationalistic way. Buying these goods is an act of American identity, and a nod to a time long past. The South, as a packaged product, stands for honesty, tradition, and home. With the force of decades of fortification, advertisements tell you that when you buy Southern, you buy American. Nothing could be more patriotic than eating fried chicken and mashed potatoes and drinking a mint julep. By choosing Southern, y'all are choosing America.

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