

# Your Heritage Will Still Remain: Racial Identity and Mississippi's Lost Cause

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## Review

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**Goleman, Michael J.** *Your Heritage Will Still Remain: Racial Identity and Mississippi's Lost Cause*. University Press of Mississippi, \$65.00 ISBN 9781496812049

"The Lost Cause, and white Mississippian adherence to its doctrine," argues Michael J. Goleman, "has done more to unify conservative Mississippians than any amount of pseudo-ethnic homogeneity or regional patriotism that swelled during the sectional conflict and Civil War" (131). He earns this conclusion by devoting the first two of his six chapters to the politics of the 1850s and the secession crisis and the third to the war years, in each of which he points out divisions within the state that white Mississippians tried to resolve by stressing conflict with northerners. Goleman invokes group identity theory, and especially the works of social psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner, to present the vilification of northerners as the construction of an "other" that offered a basis for coherent state character. The Lost Cause transformed that identity by aligning former Confederates with white northerners as heirs to the American legacy of a heroic civil war, establishing African Americans as the principal "other" for a more profound and durable white Mississippi identity.

This structure sets Goleman on the unenviable task of surveying state political culture from 1850 to 1877 in his first five chapters, which total one hundred pages. He brings some style to the undertaking, beginning each chapter with the perspective of lawyer Greene Callier Chandler, but the syntheses can be frustrating. The two chapters on the crucial turning point of Reconstruction, in which redeemers started "using blacks, rather than the North, as the out-group" (106), are particularly unsatisfying at some points. Goleman describes the fundamental issue as immediate black access to "the perks of citizenship" (71), a flawed conceptualization of the meanings of freedom. He does not introduce the Black Codes until their nullification or the murderous white supremacist violence until the federal response. Moreover, Goleman's design leaves only one chapter for the post-Reconstruction elaboration of the Lost Cause, which is

nominally his main theme. He does not try to supplant Sally Leigh McWhite's informative 2003 dissertation on memorial organizations and initiatives in Mississippi. Goleman focuses instead on historical writing in the state from the end of the war to the early twentieth century. The section mobilizes extensive reading, quotation by quotation, though the only work it examines as a whole is Jefferson Davis's familiar *Rise and Fall of the Confederate Government* (1881).

The most striking feature of Goleman's work is his decision to end the book around 1910 with Mississippi on the verge of a remarkable cultural ferment. Brief references to the Delta blues notwithstanding, Goleman's readers cannot see William Faulkner and other stars of the state literary firmament emerging soon. This book describes a different Mississippi. Its claim that Lost Cause writers "crafted a positive national identity of Mississippians" (121) would have been news not only to H. L. Mencken but also to those white Mississippians who emphasized the strangeness and isolation of their home even as they made it an increasingly vital part of America. That achievement depended on a collective memory more supple than what Goleman acknowledges in asserting that "the Lost Cause legend persists, nearly untouched, over a century later" (131) and involved recognition of African Americans in terms not fully reducible to an "out-group." *Your Heritage Will Still Remain* adds to the line of scholarship on white supremacy and regional reconciliation centered on David Blight's *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (2001), but perhaps its most important contribution is the discussion it invites about the relationship between the Lost Cause as a political formula and a creative resource.

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